

# Publishing Editor's column

**T**HE APOSTLE PAUL exhorts in 1 Timothy 2:1,2 that we should pray for those in authority, "that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty". Is this something that we regularly do in our public and private prayers? Have we become so used to living in a society that tolerates all religions that we take it for granted? When the Apostle Paul wrote those words, religious tolerance was by no means the norm, and there was every reason to pray for it. Christadelphians in some parts of the world are in a similar position today, others are in a position analogous to that of nineteenth-century Christadelphians, when to proclaim the Truth was legal but liable to attract much opposition.

For those of us who do live in very tolerant societies another issue arises: Can there be too much toleration? Over the years in Britain there has been a stream of anti-discrimination legislation aimed at protecting women, racial minorities, religious minorities and homosexuals from discrimination. The same applies to most, perhaps all, other countries in the Western world. Our freedom is thus enshrined in legislation; we cannot be discriminated against because of our beliefs. However, this legislation brings dangers with it. What society wants these days is tolerance of all lifestyles and all beliefs, and we are supposed to respect this. There is no right and wrong any more, and consequently to stand up for particular beliefs as being right and others wrong, and to claim that God has set certain standards of behaviour, is not what society wants of us.

There are, of course, limits to what is permissible still; behaviour which harms others is still illegal. However, this only applies to the behaviour of individuals towards others. The same freedom of speech we enjoy also permits all kinds of evil things to be broadcast, published or disseminated over the Internet, despite the obvious fact that greater freedom in this direction has been paralleled by growing crime and social problems and that surely there is a connection between the two. Here is an area where there is too much toleration. Also, though anti-discrimination legislation still permits criticism of particular beliefs or ways of behaviour, there is a fine line between what is legal and what is regarded as discriminatory. The police and other authorities seem at times to go beyond what the politicians assure us the law is intended to do.

Just how far will things go in the anti-discrimination field? Will it become illegal to follow Bible teaching forbidding sisters to preside and speak in our ecclesial meetings? Will it become illegal to follow Biblical teaching on same-sex relationships and bar those involved in such practices from membership? Perhaps so, but we do have one powerful ally, the Roman Catholic Church. We point to the strong influence the Roman Catholic Church still has today, even in Protestant countries. Maybe this has worked to our benefit in view of its opposition to the ordination of women and to homosexuality, although of course this fact does not diminish our abhorrence of its teaching and its blood-stained history of persecution.

The sheer volume and complexity of legislation today makes it impossible to enforce it fully, and sometimes it is unclear as to how it should be applied. This is the case regarding the sort of issues here. To take an example, when legislation came into force allowing same-sex partnerships to be registered in law, it appeared that individuals working for local authorities in registration offices would lose their jobs if as a matter of principle they were not prepared to register such partnerships. Yet I read recently of legal action being taken by a woman claiming the right to be excused from doing this on the grounds of her Christian principles and apparently succeeding under anti-religious-discrimination legislation. This case illustrates the complexity and uncertainty that exists in our legislation-ridden society.

Another issue is our separation from the world. It is tempting to join with others whose beliefs we do not generally share in order to stand up for some issue that is important to us, but we must remember our duty to be separate. We have used legislation to our advantage to gain exemption from military service, but using it to gain rights is a rather different issue.

We live in a world so complex that it can often be difficult to know what to do for the best. "Be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves" is what our Lord commanded the twelve (Mt. 10:16), and Paul said, "See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise" (Eph. 5:15). Applying ourselves to the Word and praying about these issues are required in order that we might know where we stand when the sort of issues discussed here come up in our lives.

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