

Minister's Message – April 2013

Domestic Violence

'This community says NO to domestic violence' is written on a road sign at the entrance to the suburb. Domestic violence is a major social problem. *The Age* (4 March 2012) carried the headline 'Domestic violence our biggest law and order issue'. It is said to cost the nation \$3.4 billion a year, but how can we put a dollar cost on this problem. Most violence, and in fact most homicides, occur within a domestic setting. Much of this violence goes unreported, but advocacy groups are calling women to speak out and get help. Some states have laws with severe penalties and are fast tracking domestic violence cases in the courts. New groups are reminding us that men are also victims of domestic violence, although only half as often as women.

It is not clear if domestic violence, or more precisely 'intimate partner abuse' (IPA) is increasing, because statistics are lacking, but it appears this way from the media. An overview paper published by the policy department of the Federal Government in 2011 admits that the study of this problem 'is complicated by the many different kinds of intimate and family relationships and living arrangements present in Australian communities'. On one hand our society celebrates the variety of 'living arrangements' that people choose, but arrangements not ordained by God will have problems.

One of Mr Lionel Murphy's achievements in Government back in 1975 was his Family Law Act, which included a 'no fault divorce' clause. This was supposed to give women the freedom to leave abusive husbands. But it seems moving out does not free them from abuse. Another law allows victims to take out Apprehended Violence Orders (AVOs), but is this stopping abuse and violence? Coincident with Murphy's Law was the women's liberation movement and the devaluing of legal marriage. *De facto* living together became common.

In the overview paper referred to, alcohol and drug abuse were cited as major factors in domestic violence. We totally agree. But it made no mention of divorce; despite the statistic that ex-partners are the greatest abusers (36% *cf.* 10% for current partners). Would not less ex-partners mean less abuse? In other words, would not the promotion of legal marriage and a lower rate of divorce improve the situation, along with a reduced consumption of alcohol and drugs?

Another factor mentioned in reports is 'gender equity'. I think this means 'gender disruption'. Gender equality for many means gender identity. They see no distinct roles for the man and the woman in marriage. But equality does not mean identity. It is this confusion that leads to problems. It is this departure from the Biblical teaching that is bringing problems. The Bible teaches equality but not identity. Women have their role just as men have theirs. Men cannot take the woman's role of child bearing and women should not be taking the man's role as head of the family. It is true that many men are failing in this role, but what is needed is education and encouragement, not so called 'gender equity'.

The Age newspaper article already referred to ended by asking the question 'How did it get this way? Is there a deeper problem within our culture that contributes to violence against women? Indeed there is! That problem is a departure from the standards found in the Bible, the handbook of our Creator. God said a man will leave his father and mother and cleave to his

wife. It also says a woman will submit to her husband and a man will love his wife as he loves his own body (Genesis 2:24, Ephesians 5:22f). Although sin is ever present, the problem of domestic violence will be greatly reduced if we pay heed to the directions found in the Bible and live together as husband and wife, respecting each other and loving each other as God intended.

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