

## 173 Lessons for us all

In Britain in this past week there has ended a criminal trial we wish had never been necessary. It turns out that two girls, aged 13 and 14 at the time, brutally murdered a vulnerable, defenceless woman named Angie, aged 39, in her home in Hartlepool in the north-east of England. Due to their young age the girls' names have not been released, and each girl has been given a "life sentence", with a minimum term of 15 years in prison.

Angie was known in her locality as having personal problems. Her family, neighbours and the Social Services realise they could have done more for her, and that probably applies to many of us when it comes to our involvement with any troubled folk in our own neighbourhoods. These days we are busy with our own concerns; we have a fear of getting sucked in and too involved in other people's problems; and we can easily think that needy souls living near us are probably receiving lots of help anyway. That was not so for poor Angie.

One central feature in the aftermath of this case is the absence of any reference to sin. Whatever else that is said, this deed was a foul sin in God's sight, and unless that fact is recognised at the start then the many other lessons that need to be learned will never tackle the real root cause - which is sin.

The sin involves more people than the two young murderers. That these girls were troubled themselves, and were living in care, excuses them not one jot, but does shine the spotlight on to their parents. Each of these girls has, or has had, a mother and a father: what of these four adults, who surely carry a major responsibility in the background to this murder?

I know very little of these parents and have no right to speak of this specific case, but from other similar cases over the years we are aware of common themes. Maybe the parental lives too are problem-filled - perhaps with a poor upbringing themselves, broken relationships, money worries, bad company, drugs, drink or crime - causing them to be wholly inadequate parents. Maybe with the rise of co-habitation and the decline of marriage, the notion of faithful, long-lasting relationships is foreign to such parents, so that Dad soon moves on to his next girlfriend with whom he fathers his next child, and Mum is left to cope with the children, perhaps by various fathers, and maybe with a new boyfriend settling in soon as well.

In such circumstances it is hardly surprising that lives become chaotic, with children learning very little about love, stability and a knowledge of right and wrong. The murder of Angie by these two young girls is still deeply sinful, for

which they rightly must carry the prime responsibility, but we see from this horror that the pall of sin spreads out from them, taking in their parents and others, and even in one sense all the rest of us too; for, like it or not, these two girls are a product, and a symptom, of who and what we have become as a society. Amidst the many necessary responses to this crime, heartfelt repentance should hold a central place.

Is our society in Britain not reaping what we have sown for decades? - with the various powers-that-be, such as in government, education and the media, wilfully turning aside from the Holy Bible that has so shaped our country?

Yet Almighty God started with Adam and Eve; He tells a man to leave his parents and cleave to his wife (Genesis 2.18-25). Christian marriage, given by God to be a lifelong relationship of love and faithfulness, remains the essential, basic unit of British society, and when it is downgraded, things go very wrong, very quickly.

Christian marriage is under sustained attack from the devil's side precisely because it is so crucial, notably by the promotion of casual sexual relationships and co-habitation. In both cases we see two precious divine gifts being deliberately hijacked, twisted, and then pushed as being true paths to personal happiness, when we see from experience that exactly the opposite is the case.

How we, as those seeking to serve as Christ's faithful sheep, whether we are single or married, need to stand up for Christian marriage by word and example! "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord" (I Corinthians 15.57 KJV).

Yes, under the Lord, even our lives can make a positive difference!

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