

HOUSEWIVES UNDER SIEGE

By Chris Warton

'Then they (the older women) can train the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no-one will malign the word of God' (Titus 2:4)

I am heartily sick of hearing my wife being insulted. She gets it from every side. Unconscious critical comments from friends and acquaintances; being quietly ignored by magazines and programmes supposedly representing women; and the direct criticism and insult from individuals and the media. You see, my wife is one of the nobodies of the 20th century: she is 'just a housewife'.

The western world of the 1980's has become obsessed with the idea that the only way a woman can be happy, fulfilled and productive is to have a 'career'. By career is meant 'working for a salary'. None of the myriad of vital social functions that women have traditionally performed on a voluntary basis are worthy of today's woman. She is emancipated! In particular she is 'emancipated' from her home and family.

Of course the successful career woman can have a family — but note — she is a successful career woman with a family, not a successful homemaker with a career! When will we wake up and realise that housewives are among the most important members of our society? It is they who pour all the hours of love and careful training into our children. They are the ones who make the homes that are the building blocks of the society. They are the ones who should provide the care and attention for the ill, the infirm and aged of the community. They are the ones who perform the numerous little jobs that give the society richness and quality, such as helping others with problems, showing hospitality or decorating home and church.

The assault on the role of the housewife is an issue which, as Christians, we should take very seriously indeed. The Christian home is vital to the advancement of the Lord's Kingdom. If our homes are weak and diseased, not only are we seriously compromised in our daily lives, but our children will be permanently scarred. Repeatedly the Scripture warns us of the importance of child-rearing and commands us to be diligent in it.

But today the family is under attack — and the fiercest thrust is aimed at the one who makes the home, the housewife. If we as God's people do not defend our godly housewives, if we succumb to worldly pressure in this area, then the consequences to the Church of God will be far-reaching. If children are not brought up in the 'training and instruction of the Lord', then we must expect every generation to be a pioneer mission field, and our own children to be the pagans inhabiting it.

Am I exaggerating the problem? Not at all. Consider the average young woman of today. How rare it is to find one who wants to give her life to making a home and raising a family. Again and again we hear of the career wishes of young women — with a family only as an afterthought. Even those who do desire to be housewives are embarrassed to talk about it.

Now I am not suggesting that some women should not pursue a career, or that training for a career is wrong for young women. My concern is that the career of

housewifery is uniformly ignored or looked down on, though it is the single most important career in our society. In the prevailing situation, young women avoid their responsibilities to children and home by 'getting out to work' as soon as possible. Alternatively if they stay home, they feel as if they are 'losing out' and wasting their gifts; they are second class citizens.

This second situation is not only a problem in that it leads to unhappiness; it also leads to poor housewives. If you are constantly led to believe that your job is of no significance, simply a waste of time, it will become boring and you will do it less and less effectively. If you are repeatedly told that your job shows that you are a failure — then you will fail at your job. The tragedy is that being a housewife is the most vitally important career any woman could ever have. The diligent housewife is not a failure, but someone to be admired. Perhaps the women we should see as failures are those who fail at this most important of roles, and feel that they need another career to 'fulfill' themselves.

Please note that I am not criticising women who genuinely have to work. Many impoverished families are supported by women who go out to work, not by choice but by force of circumstances. It is a tragedy that they are poor, and a tragedy that they have to work in that way. Such women are to be admired, but we must not make them a model for all women.

Again, I am not criticising those whose home responsibilities are small, perhaps because they have no children or whose children are grown. Their work for secular or spiritual organisations may be most valuable. My concern is for those who voluntarily, or under social pressure, neglect their families and then regard themselves as superior to career housewives. They are certainly not superior.

If you are angered by my apparently critical comments about career women in this article, please remember that housewives face similar comments all the time. I am simply seeking to defend those to whom we owe more than we possibly imagine.

Godless Thinking Dominates The 20th Century World.

The thinking of today's world is primarily godless. The attitudes and aspirations of the average man or woman in the street come not from the Scriptures but from sinful human thought, particularly as that thought is orchestrated by the father of lies, the devil himself. It is not surprising that those who don't believe the Christian message think this way — it is the way of the world. The tragedy is that many professing Christians think the same way, and accept ideas that are quite contrary to the Scriptures.

The devil 'was a liar from the beginning'. Most of his propaganda is lies, though often there is enough truth in it to make it look respectable. But why don't people spot the lies that are propagated today? I believe Adolf Hitler was the one who said, "If you tell a lie often enough people will come to believe it to be the truth." Let's look at some of the lies.

Every Woman Needs A Career, But Being a Housewife Is Not A Career.

We constantly hear about the 'career woman'. She has been trained for her job —perhaps at university. She earns a growing salary and puts all her energy and intelligence into advancing her career, aiming for a position of status. She is good-looking, well-dressed and has a quick, active mind. She is to be admired. In contrast the housewife has no career.

Who says she doesn't have a career? She has a vitally important role quite superior to numerous occupations which amount to little more than glamorized boredom and dressed-up mindless repetition.

Being a housewife is a career in the fullest sense of the word. The good housewife even has a growing financial income: her care and encouragement is of great value to her husband in his work — his promotion may be the direct result of her loving support. In addition many capable women find ways of making money in the home. Consider the woman of Proverbs 31.

Intelligent Women Need The Mental Stimulation Of A Career.

How often does one hear: "Oh, I could never just stay at home. Having been to university I need the mental stimulation of a career." What nonsense! If such women were really that intelligent they would have realised that they are simply repeating the ideas of a foolish and godless society.

The majority of jobs are far from continuous mental stimulation. Almost every job becomes routine after a while, since the bulk of the work must be repeated many times. A doctor's work, for example, involves seeing numerous patients with very similar complaints. There is indeed mental stimulation — but much of the time is spent in sheer repetitive hard work.

By contrast a housewife's life has the potential to be a very varied and interesting occupation. Within the one job she has tasks of schoolteacher, social worker, chef, book-keeper, interior decorator, lover and a wide variety of other roles. There can surely be no other career that offers such a variety. There is much routine work — but there are constantly new challenges. A schoolteacher for example, generally teaches children of a similar age-group — infants, primary or secondary. A mother with a growing family will deal with children of *all ages* as they grow up!

As far as intellectual stimulation is concerned there is ample opportunity for intellect of the highest level. And if things become routine she can make time — *in working hours* — to study anything she likes. In contrast, can you imagine what the average boss would say if his secretary took off an hour or two each morning to work on a correspondence university degree?

My wife is qualified in both law and social work, and worked for a while in both professions, yet she finds being 'just a housewife' a far superior occupation.

If a woman finds that being a housewife lacks mental stimulation, it may well be because she lacks the initiative or intelligence to provide mental stimulation for herself. Some people will find much stimulation for themselves in almost any task. Others have to be constantly stimulated from outside. If you are the second sort of person it is nothing to be proud of.

Before we go further, why do I use the old word 'housewife' and not the new word 'homemaker'? Because housewife is a perfectly good word. The reason we look for another is because it has become somewhat

derogatory — 'just a housewife' -- and some women are ashamed of it. So we look for another word to replace it, but soon that word too will become associated with a second-rate occupation.

Those who are ashamed of their job want to change its name to something better. But if there is nothing to be / ashamed of, why change it? I'm happy to be called a doctor — and the name has been used for hundreds of years! You must *never be ashamed of the title housewife*. If it is yours, then it shows that you have the courage and gumption to fulfil your responsibilities and do a vital job when others are rushing after the crowd to find 'stimulation'.

I'm Not The 'Housewife' Type.

Many women avoid this role because they see themselves as a different sort of woman. They believe that some are suited to it and some are not, that it is pointless to try and be something you are not. Some women genuinely want to be housewives but fear that they will not be successful because they believe they are the 'wrong type'. Both of these groups of women wrongly assume that there is only a specific type of woman who can be a housewife.

The media have created a stereotype of what a housewife should be and these women now think that housewives are all the same. But they most certainly are not.

Are you gifted with artistic talent? Then your home may be a place of particular beauty. Are you rather disorganized but gifted as a 'people person'? Then your children have the rare privilege of your personal ministry, to say nothing of those you invite into your home. Are you a gifted organiser? Your efficiency at home may save you a lot of time that you can use to arrange all sorts of activities from your home.

If your home is your particular career, you can write your personality all over it in capital letters. Housewives with different gifts create widely different homes, each with its own delights and blessings, according to the woman's gifts. I can think of very few other careers that offer the same freedom of opportunity to express one's personality, where a woman can really be herself. So forget the mythical idea of a 'housewife type'.

You Don't Need To Be Trained To Be A Housewife — Any Fool Can Be One.

Because of our distorted views of education, we have the strange idea that to be trained for an occupation somehow makes you a superior human being. We may spend years training for a career that requires little more than enthusiasm and common sense. Many people are grossly 'over-trained' and 'over-educated' for their work, and become frustrated as a consequence.

Consider the housewife who says that she doesn't need to be trained; most housewives are not trained and that is a serious failure of our homes and schools. They need training just as much as anyone else. We all laugh about the bride who can't even boil an egg — but it's a serious matter. She has not been trained for real life. The fact that she can quote Virgil or expatiate on abstruse theories in sociology is irrelevant. Indeed it is typical of modern society to train people in silly details and to ignore the important practical issues of life.

Titus 2:4 tells older women to 'train the younger women to love their husbands and children'. Doing her job well

is love in action, but a housewife must be taught practically *how* to do it well. The traditional and obvious place to do that is in her mother's home, but since in most cases that training is very limited, we need to consider further training.

Perhaps the older women in the church could organise home-making courses for young single and newly married women. Basic cookery, budgeting, household hints, home decorating, child development, how husbands think and numerous other things need to be understood. If young women realised just how many things go into being a good housewife, perhaps they would find the career more attractive. Anybody can cook — but it takes skill and training to be a good cook. Anyone can change a nappy — but many of today's 'brilliant career women' demonstrate a total lack of wisdom and understanding as mothers.

Contrary to popular belief there is quite enough content in the career of housewifery to fill a university degree course in the subject!

Being A Housewife Is A Boring, Unglamorous Occupation.

That is exactly what the propaganda tells us. The cartoon housewife wears shapeless clothing and flat slip-on sandals. She always has a scarf over her hair and never wears make-up. She is bored, boring and unattractive.

What nonsense! How many housewives do you actually know who are like that? None of my friends have such wives. I find my wife most attractive and very stimulating to talk to.

No, the 'boring housewife' image is quite unlike the average housewife. It is propagated by feminists thinking women to degrade those who stay at home. In fact, I believe the devil is behind it. There is no better way to destroy a nation than to smash its families — and that is exactly what today's 'emancipation' of women is doing.

Perhaps some housewives are not stimulating people, but you can't blame their career if they as people are just boring and unattractive. On top of that it is hard to maintain one's appearance and self-esteem when faced with such a barrage of negative propaganda. It is not housewifery that is the primary problem, but rather the criticism of those who despise it.

Going to work provides an opportunity to dress well, but the housewife has similar opportunities. Is your husband not worth looking attractive for? The way you dress when he comes home is a surprisingly important element in your relationship.

At Work I Meet Interesting People — I Can't At Home.

Some of us enjoy mixing with a lot of people and the relative loneliness of a home may be a problem. The housewife can, however, plan her life accordingly. She is not tied to the home as she might be to a desk at work. She can spend time with friends or join a Bible study group. Perhaps, indeed, her loneliness may be the spur to a valuable ministry. There are many lonely people around us — elderly people, other housewives, students far from home—who would be so grateful to share her home and her time. Her loneliness may be a call to a quiet pastoral or personal evangelistic ministry, to say nothing of the friends she might find. Besides, a housewife has the unique opportunity of creating interesting people — her own children!

Being A Housewife Leads Nowhere. I Want To Do Something With My Life. I Want To Have Something To Show For It.

It would do us all good regularly to read the book of Ecclesiastes. Solomon shows again and again the vanity of a worldly life. It is not wrong to desire to use our lives productively and to achieve something, but we must be careful of the direction we take or we will waste our lives and become very disillusioned.

Our reason for being is to glorify God and to fulfil His purpose for us. He made us. He owns us. He has the right to tell us what to do. Having designed us He knows what we will do best and where we will be most fulfilled.

Marriage and home-making is God's will for most women. They have been designed for it, given gifts for it and instructed in Scripture how to go about the task. If that is the course God wants you to take, and you choose to go off after something more 'glamorous' or 'productive', then don't be surprised if things work out badly — both spiritually and in every other sense.

Who says a housewife's career leads nowhere? Certainly not the Scriptures or our everyday experience! What does the average working woman have to show for her life? When she leaves her job, how long will she be remembered? By contrast consider the godly and 'successful' mother. Will her children remember her when they have left home? Of course! She will see in them the fruit of her labours: their spiritual maturity, and strong, healthy personalities.

'Her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her: "Many women do noble things, but you surpass them all. Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised. Give her the reward she has earned, and let her works bring her praise at the city gate." Proverbs 31:28-31

Most of all, when 'careers' lie in the dust of ages, the woman who has done what God desires will eat the fruit of her labours through all eternity. Let the dead go and make a career of burying their dead. You have a life to live!

The Housewife's Role Is Unimportant. Anyway, I Can Be A Perfectly Good Wife And Mother In The Evenings. It's Not The Amount Of Time You Spend With Your Children, It's The Quality.

What a grossly inadequate view of motherhood and wifehood. How low has our esteem fallen for this vital group of people! Motherhood has become a part-time occupation — an afterthought which deserves only the dregs of our time. If this happens out of financial necessity it is a tragedy, but when it is proudly proclaimed as a woman's 'right' it is an abomination.

If the Lord in His goodness has given you children, then they are yours to bring up with loving care. To do the task properly requires all the wisdom, skill and time that you can possibly find. It is not a part-time job — it is a career in the fullest sense of the word.

"But the day-care centre has fully trained staff who can give my child more than I could."

If a stranger who has twenty or more children to look after can give your child more than you can, then you are an utter failure as a mother and as a woman. Your

child wants to sit on your knee, feel your hug, hear your words of affection, grow through your personal discipline and character training.

Some women have no choice — they must put their children in day-care centres while they work because of poverty, widowhood or divorce. We must pray for God's mercy on such children. But if our children are sacrificed on the altar of a successful career and woman's rights, then it is utter selfishness and irresponsibility.

The problem in the West is not unemployment but over-employment. Many women are trying desperately to take a man's role, the result is a considerable shortage of *real* women.

I'm Not Prepared To Spend My Day Changing Dirty Nappies And Scrubbing Floors.

Perhaps this is closer to the real reason why fewer and fewer women want to stay at home. Although it is extremely varied and provides all sorts of opportunities for creativity, the housewife's role is primarily that of serving others. Cooking meals, clothing the family, changing nappies and raising a family are, at heart, acts of servanthood. Today's woman (and man for that matter) serves nobody but herself. She asserts herself and advances her career, looking after "number one". If that is your attitude you should not ask yourself, "Am I a housewife," but rather, "Am I a Christian?" You see, all Christians are called to a life of service to others. It is not their shame but their glory. If our Lord and Master washed His disciples' feet then we should not be ashamed to do likewise. He said, *'You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord', and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them. John 13:13-17.*

The housewife has a varied and stimulating career requiring all her intelligence and personality, but it is the career of a servant. If she loves and serves the Lord of Glory she will not be ashamed of her role.

A Final Word To Husbands.

The subject of a housewife's role may appear to be of little importance to men, but on the contrary it is most important, for several reasons:

a) A woman's self-esteem is dependant to a considerable extent on the "feedback" she gets from those around her. (The same applies to men). Those who matter most to her are the most important in this regard. For this reason it is vital for a husband to encourage a wife constantly in her daily tasks. If we men believe the lies that the world throws at us and secretly wish that our home-making wives were successful career women, then we will subtly undermine our own homes. If your wife believes that you respect "career women" more than her it will destroy her. As "managers" and "heads" of our homes we must clearly understand the role and "job description" of each member in it. We are responsible before God to lead our wives into the right role.

b) Perhaps you are clear in your own mind that your wife's "homemaker" role is important. You now have a second task: You must *enthusiastically* and *repeatedly* tell her and show her *practically* how much you appreciate what she does. She works hard to serve you and your children. You should thank her again and again and again. It is no good saying, "Well you know that I like your cooking." Be specific, be positive, affirm her in every way you can. She needs *your* encouragement.

I know that when we men get home after a busy day at work we have little energy left to be positive. We feel like collapsing in a heap and saying nothing to anyone. Our wives however, may have made the effort to wash their hair and make themselves look really pretty *just for us*.

They are offering us something valuable. If we don't tell them how much we appreciate it we can really hurt them. How would you feel if you gave her a present and she ignored it?

You may say, "My wife doesn't try to look pretty for me when I get home." You probably never responded when she did, so she long ago gave up trying. You had better start taking notice of her.

c) As I have pointed out, our wives are faced with a constant stream of criticism from all directions, undermining their self-esteem as homemakers. We must counter that attack with encouragement. If we don't they will either leave home and pursue a career, or they will become discouraged, miserable and depressed. To a considerable degree your wife's success in the home depends on you. (If she wants to go out and work, is it because she doesn't feel appreciated at home? Think about it.)

d) In a more general sense we men must defend our women against Society's attacks. The Scriptural role of the husband is to protect, cherish and provide security for his wife. (*Ephesians 5:22-33*)

The militant feminist hates this role for men and vigorously opposes womanhood. The militant feminist is not to be obeyed, as she desires, but to be pitied. A woman who denies her womanhood but is unable to be a man is neither one nor the other. (What an identity crisis!)

To protect our wives we must fight the forces that attack them. We must oppose the anti-home propaganda. (On a large scale if we are in public ministry, or on a small scale if we are not.) Christian leaders should repeatedly emphasise the Biblical role of women. It's not enough to have a relevant Bible study once every two years — the media push their view daily.

Lastly, on a more personal level, perhaps we could change the way we talk. How about this for a comment in conversation with a colleague: 'Oh, your wife is only a doctor. It must be hard for you. My wife is a housewife — a real woman. She couldn't stand just going out to work. She needs the stimulation of a career where she can really expose and use her gifts and personality.'