

Preface

The phenomenon of family murder is a particularly horrifying fact of South African life. The papers regularly shriek out the graphic details of the latest of these horrors - filling the reader with a sense of outrage and unspeakable sadness.

The present issue of *Koers* is dedicated to a study of this phenomenon with special reference to the South African context. The different articles highlight different aspects of this evidence of social breakdown. The phenomenon has been studied qualitatively by a team of the HSRC, and some of their findings are reported here. Studying family violence is, as reported by Schurink, a particularly sensitive matter, and as emerges from other studies in this issue, the cases which make it to the papers would really seem to be the proverbial tip of the iceberg.

From the mythical figure of Medea to the South Africa of the nineties the phenomenon is investigated and reasons and causes sought. The involvement of various social and other agencies is also investigated - in view of the fact that it is suggested that in South Africa the family murderer is "most likely a white, male Protestant in his thirties" (Pretorius-Heuchert), the church might logically be expected to be more creatively involved in the possible prevention of this type of destructive behaviour. The role of the church is therefore investigated and assessed.

In a country with higher than 'normal' levels of psychopathology among the white population the role of psychiatry is obviously crucial, even though it is suggested that the family murderer will not display very obvious psychopathology. The role of psychiatry at various levels (of prevention) is discussed.

The editorial board of *Koers* would like to see this extended contribution to the study of this phenomenon as in some way contributing towards the resolution of a problem which compounds the impression of a South African society ravaged by violent death.

The Editor

