

The Main Cause of Our National Spiritual Degeneracy.

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It is already obvious to men and women of spiritual discernment and piety, in our day and generation, that even within their own lifetime there has been an unspeakably lamentable spiritual and moral degeneracy, backsliding, and even apostacy, when compared with the standard of vital godliness that prevailed in their youth. That standard itself was low compared with the piety that prevailed in our native land in former generations, while admitting, unhesitatingly, that the ideal Christian community did not exist even then. Nevertheless, it can truthfully and impartially be said of our generation, as of no other since the blessed Reformation, concerning the overwhelming majority of the people of our nation, from the highest to the lowest in social status, that they are “lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God,” both on Sabbath and week-day. What, then, is, in the main, the cause of this deplorable, Heaven-provoking, judgment procuring spiritual declension and degeneracy, with its inevitable fruit of widespread abhorrent immorality? The present writer does not for a moment hesitate to attribute this lamentable state of affairs in our national life to the widespread prevalence of an unconverted ministry in our pulpits.

It is clearly evident that it is not the lack of intellectual endowments or academic attainments in the pulpits of our native land that is the cause of the fact that Scotland, like England, and other nations within the orbit of so-called nominal Christendom, is a comparatively desolate spiritual wilderness. Scotland, rightly and properly, since the Reformation, insisted on an educated ministry in its pulpits, and, under God, the true Church of Christ owes a debt of deep gratitude to sanctified scholarship. The justly renowned Rev. Dr. Kennedy of Dingwall summed it up well, once and for all, when he said: “While I yield to none in insistence on the high standard of literary attainments hitherto required, by the Church in Scotland, of candidates for the sacred office of the ministry, there is one qualification for that office without which all other qualifications for it are worse than useless - namely supernatural regeneration.” Another worthy Scottish minister, contemporary with Dr. Kennedy, and supporting the latter's statement, added: “If we cannot have both together, then preferably let us have the godly

Heaven-called minister of comparatively mediocre abilities, with slender educational attainments, rather than the minister of profound intellect, with admirable scholarly attainments, learning, and erudition, but of questionable ambiguous piety.” This latter view is splendidly and aptly summed up in the reply of the great Dr. Owen to King Charles II, when the latter found fault with the learned divine for going to hear John Bunyan preach. “I am surprised,” said King Charles, “that a man of your learning would go to hear an illiterate tinker prate.” “May it please your majesty,” replied Dr. Owen, “give me the illiterate tinker's ability to preach, and I will gladly relinquish all my learning.” The foregoing balanced statements regarding an educated Christian ministry ought to be laid seriously to heart by all readers, as one now proceeds to discuss the most disastrous instance in church history, despite twentieth century enlightenment, of putting the cart before the horse, relative to this very subject.

What is transpiring in Scotland today, in this connection, is the fulfilment of the intelligent anticipation and deep penetrating spiritual discernment of the saintly Rev. Lachlan Mackenzie of Lochcarron when he declared: “ There is a generation of graceless ministers to arise in my native Scotland, when I am gone, who will be a plague in the land, like the plague of locusts in Egypt, and as that plague ate up all the vegetation in the land, so will this plague eat up vital godliness in Scotland.” The present writer feels perfectly assured that that intelligent anticipation of the future is now finding its sad fulfilment in current transpiring religious and ecclesiastical history in Scotland.

In my own schooldays in a secondary school, as before and since then, it was a common occurrence to see ministers of the various denominations, except the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland, going round the schools asking the headmaster about the intellectual equipment of certain schoolboys, regardless of denominational connection. These boys were interrogated regarding their future careers and choice of profession, when the interrogating ministers were told that such professions as school teaching and medicine were the choice, while others had not made up their minds. When it was then suggested to the boys that it would take a great financial burden off the shoulder of their, in many cases, comparatively poor parents, if they accepted a church bursary, the boys, generally speaking, were shocked that no mention was made of their being “born again” as an indispensable qualification for such a solemn calling, which they had not

hitherto dreamed of regarding as a mere profession. The objections of these boys were met by the ministers in such ill-advised language as: "Go you forward with your studies, and grace will come in its own time." To their lasting credit many of these brilliant boys, though dependent on poor parents, with a miserable pittance of a bursary, compared with the present day, were amazed at the thought and refused manfully and peremptorily to have anything to do with putting unholy unregenerate hands to the ark or service of the Lord. Others, representing various denominations, including some lamentably misled nominal Free Presbyterian boys, accepted the bursaries of these back-slidden denominations and their irresponsible ministers, with disastrous consequences to the spiritual life of our native land.

As a theological course, orthodox or heterodox, cannot alter human nature, or change the state of a guilty and condemned sinner to that of a justified believer, such boys and young men, however intellectually brilliant, knew nothing of what Rev. Dr. Chalmers called the "expulsive power... of a new affection," in other words, "the love of God shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost," who had already caused the light, which God commanded to shine out of darkness, to shine into the quickened soul of the newly-born believer, "to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." Without this saving, divine, supernatural, quickening, enlightening experimental knowledge "of the love of God shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost, through the Word of God, the natural man, however intellectually endowed and academically equipped, receives not the things of the Spirit of God, neither knows them, because they are spiritually or supernaturally discerned.

The result, therefore, is that this natural unconverted man, in the Christian ministry must set about justifying his existence as a minister, as distinguished from the Spirit-taught, Heaven commissioned, God-called minister, actuated with a single eye to the glory of God, for none take this holy sacred office to themselves, legitimately and scripturally, but "he that called of God. as was Aaron," even when he is otherwise supernaturally regenerated.

This natural unconverted man in the ministry in this process of self-justification becomes the greatest and most bitterly prejudiced enemy of the truly godly faithful minister of the Gospel. For instance, not being spiritually "born again" he

instinctively loves the things he loved before he took up a theological course, and assumed a ministerial garb, with the title "Rev.," and labels himself "broadminded, tolerant, liberal, moving-with-the-times," as explaining why he finds his greatest pleasure in pursuing all the carnal vanities, pleasures and frothy irresponsible frivolities, which the general unconverted world, "led captive by the devil at his will," delights in. The same graceless minister sneeringly pours all the ridiculing contempt of which he is capable on the true, faithful, spiritually-minded, consistent, and conscientious minister of the Gospel, thus creating a hatred in the hearts of his deluded followers against true believers and genuine Gospel ministers than would otherwise be the case. This is why these unconverted ministers delight in presiding as chairmen at secular concerts, and M.C.s at the carnal, indiscriminate mixed dancing which generally follows: "Regarding the Divine Commandments of the Moral Law of God as an outworn Jewish code of morals, these unconverted ministers are anxious abolish Scriptural Sabbath observance, and agree with infidel county and town councillors to introduce golf-playing, tennis; football and cricket-playing on God's Holy Day. They not only agree with such infidel councillors, but they are often its most ardent advocates, when otherwise generally they are "dumb dogs that cannot bark," when the enemy, instigated from Hell, is coming in like a flood. They are altogether guiltily ignorant and irresponsible, regarding the solemn question, "Watchman, what of the night?" Hence, a graceless ministry is the greatest curse and plague in a congregation, parish, nation, or generation, while a faithful ministry is the greatest blessing.

The present writer believes sincerely that the overwhelming majority of the ministers of the Church of Scotland are in the category of graceless unconverted ministers, as "by their fruits ye shall know them," whereas the majority of Free Church ministers, as revealed by the votes of their annual General Assemblies, that this state of matters in the Church of Scotland ministry, is not of sufficient importance and seriousness to debar them from Free Church pulpits. Indiscriminate exchange of pulpits is still the order of the day between these two denominations, as manifested clearly by the voting relative to the Overtures sent up to the Free Church General Assembly to end this. As the Most High has ordained to extend and establish His Church and Cause through human

instrumentality, generally speaking, so has Satan determined to extend and establish his dark kingdom through his human dupes.

It has pleased God, through the foolishness of preaching, not mere empty external ceremonies, to save them that believe, so that saving faith, in the main, comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God. The reading, but especially the preaching, of the Word, is the divinely ordained means. Satan, therefore, through human instrumentality seeks, by false doctrine, and unconverted ministers, to corrupt from the simplicity that is in Christ. Let the reader peruse such passages of Scripture as II Cor. 11th chapter, verses 2 and 3, and also verses 13-15, of the same chapter, and thus understand what is transpiring in the pulpits of Britain generally today, with a small remnant of godly faithful ministers, according to the election of grace.

While deploring mere loud, empty declamation in the pulpit, the present writer believes in the exposure and salutary Scriptural denunciation of prevailing heresies, false practice, and graceless ministers, from the pulpit of an evangelical ministry, after the manner of Christ, His Forerunner, and Apostles. “Ye scribes, hypocrites, Pharisees, how can ye escape the damnation of Hell?” and “Ye generation of vipers, who has warned you to flee from the wrath to come?” and lastly, “Thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord?” Who would dare to call this Divine, Scriptural, Apostolic language vehement and intemperate? While courtesy is commanded in Scripture, it is to be feared that false courtesy, like indiscriminate charity, is a great evil in our day. Godless, graceless, unconverted ministers, as blind leaders of the blind, cannot be too frequently exposed or too severely condemned as the enemies of the Cross of Christ, with Christian love and faithfulness as the actuating motives. “Do not I hate all those, O Lord, who hatred bear to Thee! “

There are two outstanding methods in our day, employed by Satan to undermine the Church and Cause of Christ in our nation, through human instrumentality, especially in the pulpit. The one is to obliterate the last vestige of distinction between the professing visible Church and the world that lies in wickedness. In this connection, as the Apostle introduced personal names to warn the Church, as when he said: “ Of whom is Hymenaeus and Philetus, who concerning the truth

have erred," so we must warn our native Scottish Highlands and Islands against such people as the Rev. Murdo Ewen MacDonald, M.A., who concerning the truth has erred in seeking to obliterate the last vestige of Calvinism, or the only saving doctrines of free and sovereign grace:- as systematized by Calvin, from the very soil of the Highlands and Islands.- He errs equally foolishly and un-Scripturally when he describes, as a heresy the religion that has no place for secular music, dancing, and general merry-making, and that would not allow a Harris (his native place) elder to get up on a platform to sing "The Eriskay Love Lilt," while the next day going round with the symbols at the Lord's Supper. Long, and for ever, may Harris, and all the Highlands, be kept from such spiritual and moral degradation, as would obliterate all distinction between the Church, and the world that lies in the wicked one.

The other outstanding method, employed by Satan, through human instrumentality, is to reduce the professed Christian ministry to the nadir of degradation in admitting condemned criminals to this holy and sacred office, as when recently, as widely reported in the Press, the Bishop of Ripon asked police permission to release a Church of England divinity student, serving a sentence for homosexuality, to be ordained to the Christian ministry. No wonder a daily newspaper in an editorial stated that "one would at least expect outward blamelessness in a candidate for the Christian ministry," while other degraded sections of the public Press lauded the bishop for his broadminded charity. The present writer concludes with the emphatic conviction that a general godless, graceless, unconverted ministry in our national pulpits, is Britain's greatest curse and plague today, and the main procuring cause of such national judgments as judicial blindness and heart-hardness. As only the Most High can make a true Gospel minister, let our praying readers wrestle earnestly, importunately, diligently, and perseveringly, that "the Lord of the harvest would send forth laborers into His harvest, for the harvest is plenteous," but the true, sincere, consistent, conscientious, and faithful labourers are very few.