

WHERE ARE GOD'S ANGRY MEN?

by Ray D. Altman Jr.

Much is being said in our day about the push-button age, producing the soft American way of life. The nation's leaders are becoming alarmed about our flabby muscles. This is the age of "eating and drinking, and making merry". The age when, if you refuse to be a party to an undisciplined pattern of living, you are called an odd ball, an old foggy, an escapee from a museum.

But I am more deeply concerned lest we be found weak in the most vital part of our lives—the spiritual. J. Wesley Bready states: "John Wesley and Karl Marx are two of the most influential characters of modern history. Wesley's crusade represents the epitome of spiritual power; Marx's crusade, the epitome of material force. Will the Master Evangelist defeat the Master Materialist? Will our world today choose Christ?"

"John Wesley and George Whitefield, and others, in an age of incredible apostasy and decadence, spearheaded a movement which, by reviving faith and creating character values, did more than anything else in modern history to initiate and sustain that which we know of as 'Democracy' throughout the English speaking world. In a very real sense, therefore, Wesley and the transforming 18th-century Spiritual Awakening, of which he was the center, represent the Great Divide of Modern History. They re-established the moral and spiritual foundations upon which the British and American Democracies were reared and sustained. Our freedom, consequently, was born of, and nurtured in, Faith." — Faith and Freedom, J. Wesley Bready, 1952, Light and Life Press.

Martin Luther is said to have told of a dream he once had concerning Satan and his evil co-workers. He dreamed that Satan scheduled a world-wide convention at which every "fallen angel" gave a report of his activities since the last such gathering. One reported: "I saw a caravan of people crossing the desert, so I caused a fierce sand storm to engulf them and bring about their deaths." "So what," replied Satan; "the most of those people were people of faith, true believers in God, and they were saved, and, therefore, were not added to our kingdom." Others reported and were received with disinterest on the part of Satan and the others, until one came forth with this to say: "O Prince, for many years I have been watching one of God's sincere followers. I have been gently rocking him to sleep, and have finally succeeded in causing a spiritual stupor to engulf him, and I have come away and left him sleeping." With that Satan and all the angels of hell broke forth in loud applause, and with fiendish glee shouted for joy.

"America was born," avowed President Coolidge, "in a Revival of Religion. Back of that revival were John Wesley, George Whitefield, and Francis Asbury." Has this spiritual stupor overtaken us? Has one of the "fallen angels" been rocking America to sleep spiritually? Has this great nation which was founded upon Biblical standards of vital Christianity, and nurtured in faith in the living God, fallen asleep?

Lecky, historian of the eighteenth century, says, "Wesley saved England from the horrors of French Revolution. But really Wesley achieved something far greater than that. In an age when skepticism was dominating the intellectual life, and when the slave-trade was poisoning the economic life, and when indifference, place-seeking, and corruption were characteristic of the nation's clergy, he saved the Anglo-Saxon Civilization from inevitable moral and spiritual collapse."

When I read the daily papers I am reminded of England before the Eighteenth-century Awakening. Lecky again says, "The master curse of England's social life The King's Highway

was the vitiating influence of the liquor traffic." Never, until after the Evangelical Revival had touched the hearts of the multitudes, did any semblance of redemption from this curse appear. Wesley opposed the liquor traffic relentlessly, and to those who dared to suggest the gain in royal revenue from the sale of it, he would say, "You would sell the flesh and blood of your country-men to raise revenue?"

In Wesley's "Rules of the Society of the People called Methodists" we read: "It is therefore expected of all who continue therein, that they should continue to evidence their desire for salvation, first . . . by avoiding evil in every kind; especially that which is generally practiced, such as . . . drunkenness; buying or selling spiritous liquors, or drinking them."

If John Wesley were here to read the newspaper article which I hold in my hand, he would once again start out as one of "God's angry men" to preach 43,000 sermons, to consider "the whole world as my parish," calling men to repentance, crying out against the "master curse" of any nation's social life—the liquor traffic.

The caption of this article reads, "Methodists Are Asked to Ease Their Views on Total Abstinence." The article was written by Chester V. Chambers, a member of the Methodist Ohio Conference Board of Christian Social Concern, one division of which deals with temperance and general welfare. The recently-named chairman of the Temperance Division agrees with the position of Mr. Chambers, the article further states.

One point of Mr. Chambers' six-part advocacy, after deciding that indulgence in alcoholic beverages should not disqualify a person from membership on the church's official board, is that "Nominations for leadership be based on 'total Christian witness.'" In other words, don't mention the fact that the person drinks if he doesn't beat his wife or live in open sin (other than drinking).

Another point then states, "Proclaim vigorously the church's position on total abstinence as the most Christian response to the alcohol problem." In plain language, tell the people that they are Christians even though they drink (point 1), but that they are not "most Christian" (best or good Christians) if they do (point 2).

I am afraid that if the church of Jesus Christ were to follow Mr. Chambers' advice, she would become as a "blind guide." "The blind leading the blind, both church and people would fall into the ditch." And America would be in the very position of eighteenth-century England. The preachers were mere "place-seekers"—they were profane and quite often too drunk to officiate at any of their sacred offices. Gin-shops were advertising "drunk for one penny, dead drunk two pence—free straw"—that is, to sober up on. Only when God touched and transformed individuals was this "social cancer" arrested.

Where are God's angry men today? We are only fooling ourselves and helping to populate hell when we insist that our churches become more like the world lest we offend someone. God commands, "Come out from among them, and be ye separate." The churches are to be guideposts, landmarks, lighthouses to point men the way to Eternal Life. How can she guide men if she walks in the same paths, on the same level with them?

It seems that many of God's messengers have become as "reeds shaken in the wind," clothed in the soft raiment of self-indulgence. What America is listening for is the "Thus saith the Lord" of the early prophets voiced from twentieth-century men of backbone and integrity. Where are God's angry men?

—The Free Methodist