

An Almost Prophetic Warning

In 1787 Benjamin Rush addressed guests at the Young Ladies' Academy of Philadelphia about the purpose and goals of providing an American education to women in post-Revolution America. While he didn't use the words, his basic thrust was the old adage, "The hand that rocks the cradle will rule the world." That is, he believed women should be educated because their influence over men is so profound. If women were allowed to be ignorant, then men would be satisfied with ignorance. If women were educated, then the men who tried to impress them and the sons they bore would strive for educated maturity as well.

I don't know if I buy his line of reasoning completely, but I found one paragraph truly profound. Nearly 225 years ago, Dr. Rush warned:

I am not enthusiastic upon the subject of education. In the ordinary course of human affairs we shall probably too soon follow the footsteps of the nations of Europe in manners and vices. The first marks we shall perceive of our declension will appear among our women. Their idleness, ignorance, and profligacy will be the harbingers of our ruin. Then will the character and performance of a buffoon on the theater be the subject of more conversation and praise than the patriot or the minister of the gospel; then will our language and pronunciation be enfeebled and corrupted by a flood of French and Italian words; then will the history of romantic amours be preferred to the immortal writings of Addison, Hawkesworth, and Johnson; then will our churches be neglected and the name of the Supreme Being never be called upon but in profane exclamations; then will our Sundays be appropriated only to feasts and concerts; and then will begin all that train of domestic and political calamities.

While I can hardly claim that the downfall of our nation is contingent upon the education of one of the genders, I couldn't help but notice what he said the future would be if folks weren't educated properly. It smacked me right in between the eyes. I'm taking serious stock of my own standing in comparison to this warning. I encourage you to do the same. Look at what Dr. Rush feared would happen to our American culture. Then compare it to our present culture. Compare it even to your own life.

"Their idleness, ignorance, and profligacy will be the harbingers of our ruin." Twenty years ago, the theme song of my generation screamed, "I feel stupid and contagious; here we are now, entertain us!" Trying to answer a question and having trouble figuring out how to express the answer, the man, who after his suicide I once heard described as the leader of a movement on par with Ghandi and Martin Luther King, Jr., intoned, "I found it hard, it's hard to find... Oh well, whatever, never mind." That was 20 years ago. Ignorance? Idleness? Profligacy? Has it become any better since 1991? You tell me.

"Then will the character and performance of a buffoon on the theater be the subject of more conversation and praise than the patriot or the minister of the gospel." Walk through any checkout line. What buffoonery do we see on the covers of the tabloids? The love child of unmarried actors and actresses cause bigger headlines than the work of Gospel preachers. What's worse is the fact that even among Christians, entertainment gossip is more often discussed than Bible doctrine. Not to mention, many of us are far more comfortable talking about the private shenanigans of ungodly politicians than planning the means by which we can carry the soul-saving gospel to the lost. How many top 40 songs and funny lines from movies do we know versus how many scriptures we can recite? Ouch, this warning hits me where it hurts.

"Then will our language and pronunciation be enfeebled..." I certainly don't want to be involved in the European bashing that was common just following the Revolution. But whatever the source of the words, has our common language been enfeebled with the vulgar? When even Christians think nothing of texting "OMG" and other abbreviated profanities, it should cause us concern.

"Then will the history of romantic amours be preferred to the immortal writings..." I'm embarrassed to say that I'm not even sure who Addison and Hawkesworth are. I think Johnson refers to Samuel Johnson. What kind of stories enflame our imagination? It's not wrong to be entertained. However, I think we should consider that almost all reading, and entertainment for that matter, is, at the heart of it, about meeting ourselves and discovering who we are? What does our entertainment tell us about ourselves?

"Then will our churches be neglected and the name of the Supreme Being never be called upon but in profane exclamations." Do I even need to comment on our modern culture and its continued reference to the Supreme Being?

"Then will our Sundays be appropriated only to feasts and concerts." In our culture, there once was a time when Sunday was inviolate. Liquor was not even allowed to be sold on Sunday. Work was shut down. Everyone viewed that as the day to worship God. Even Little League took a day of rest. Today, even Christians justify recreational events as reasons to neglect the assembly of the saints on the first day of the week. Visiting family, reunions, once-in-a-lifetime concerts,

championship games, and even regular-old run-of-the-mill make up games take precedence over meeting with the saints because we can do that any Sunday.

I don't know about the "train of domestic and political calamities." However, it does seem to me that Dr. Rush was nearly a prophet. Our culture has gone down this path in spades. I fear that I have been following in lockstep behind it. What about you? How do you compare?

Ephesians 2:1-3 reminds me that Jesus died to redeem me from the course of this world. Dr. Rush has reminded me that I need to examine myself constantly to make sure I haven't jumped back on that path again, trying to sanctify what I once abandoned. Certainly, it is a matter of growth. But I know all too well that Satan doesn't always reveal himself as the roaring lion. Sometimes he comes as the soothing siren, lulling me into apathy and acceptance of my old ways.

We must be ever vigilant and watchful. The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak.

--Edwin L. Crozier