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Lords over God's heritage

"The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away," 1 Peter 5:14.

These words came before me when I read the story of the retirement of Cardinal Angelo Sodano, who is 92 years old. He is described as the Cardinal who 'sought a deal' to bury sex abuse documents, held by the Vatican, during the Irish 'Commission of Inquiry' into the abuse of children by Roman Catholic clerics some years ago.

A report in the 'Irish Times' continues: "Last year, prior to the visit of Pope Francis to Ireland, former president Mary McAleese revealed that Cardinal Sodano tried in November 2003 to secure, through her, agreement that Ireland would not attempt to access church documents in Commissions of Inquiry surrounding the handling of allegations of clerical sex abuse then underway.

Describing the encounter as 'one of the most devastating moments in my presidency', it occurred during a State visit to Italy when she had a private meeting with then Vatican secretary of state Angelo Sodano.

'He indicated that he would like, and the Vatican would like, an agreement with Ireland, a concordat with Ireland. I asked him why and it was very clear it was because he wanted to protect Vatican and diocesan archives. I have to say that I immediately said the conversation had to stop,' Prof McAleese said. 'I told him I thought it extraordinarily inappropriate and very, very dangerous to the church, if it was pursued,' she said".



The report further states that Cardinal Sodano "had been Vatican Secretary of State from 1990 until 2005 and succeeded then Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (now retired Pope Benedict XVI) as Dean of the College of Cardinals in 2005.

The Vatican said Cardinal Sodano was stepping down "because of his advanced age". The pope thanked Cardinal Sodano "warmly for the high service rendered to the College of Cardinals".

The rank hypocrisy of the Romanism is there for all to see and needs no explanation or words of elucidation.

Pope Francis and Cardinal Sodano - Two of a kind' !!

What 'Lords over God's heritage' these vile clerics consider themselves to be! They believe that they can do what they like, concealing sin and horrendous crimes against children and parents, simply to protect their 'good name'!

I might add that it never ceases to amaze me that someone like former Irish President, Mary McAleese, a Professor of Law in her time, cannot see that the 'Church' to which she remains loyal, despite her criticism of many of its senior clerics, is NOT the 'Church of Christ' but rather the 'Church of the Antichrist, a purveyor of soul-damning doctrines and the instigator of shame, misery and grief wherever she has spread her dark shadow!

There are so many like her in Ireland and across the world. It is heart-breaking to consider their misguided allegiance to and support of this system that is the author of their anguish and torment in time and of unspeakable terrors to come!

Now, when I say that the likes of Cardinal Sodano consider themselves to be 'Lords over God's heritage', they could not be more wrong. They are of the ilk of those referred to by the Saviour in John 10:1. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other



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way, the same is a thief and a robber." These clerics are indeed thieves and robbers. They have plundered Ireland's Roman Catholics financially and spiritually for centuries.

Elders beware!

However, Peter's warning was directed at true elders in the Church of God. His words remind us just how good men can abuse the divinely appointed office of the eldership through their greed and self-aggrandisement!

It is, sadly, not uncommon for God's servants to 'get above themselves'! I was reading just today of a man of God who forgot who and what he was and foolishly took upon himself duties and actions that were forbidden to him. He paid a dreadful price, of course, for none may tamper and abuse God's order!

I am referring to Uzziah, 2 Chronicles 26.

A good man

He was a good man. The Holy Spirit records of him: "He did that which was right in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his father Amaziah did. And he sought God in the days of Zechariah, who had understanding in the visions of God: and as long as he sought the LORD, God made him to prosper," verses 4-5.

Yet despite this, he acted most foolishly in later years. Verses 16-20 tell us: "But when he was strong, his heart was lifted up to his destruction: for he transgressed against the LORD his God, and went into the temple of the LORD to burn incense upon the altar of incense. And Azariah the priest went in after him, and with him fourscore priests of the LORD, that were valiant men: and they withstood Uzziah the king, and said unto him, It appertaineth not unto thee, Uzziah, to burn incense unto the LORD, but to the priests the sons of Aaron, that are consecrated to burn incense: go out of the sanctuary; for thou hast trespassed; neither shall it be for thine honour from the LORD God. Then Uzziah was wroth, and had a censer in his hand to burn incense: and while he was wroth with the priests, the leprosy even rose up in his forehead before the priests in the house of the LORD, from beside the incense altar. And Azariah the chief priest, and all the priests, looked upon him, and, behold, he was leprous in his forehead, and they thrust him out from thence; yea, himself hasted also to go out, because the LORD had smitten him."

He sought to set aside God's order and do that which his own mind and will told him would be a good thing! He was not of the priestly tribe. He had no authority to do what he sought to do, even though he was the king.

Today

So it is often done in pulpits and kirk session and presbytery meetings. Circumstances arise in which it is deemed wiser to set aside the directives of God and the counsel of His Word, and apply man's wisdom. Compromise and a shying away from any actions that may upset some whose favour is valued, is the result. Some 'patron' may be pleased with such a course of action, but not the Lord. Arousing the Lord's disapproval will cost a people dearly for 'without Him' we can do nothing!

Men take too much upon themselves when they foolishly act so. They are telling God that they know a wiser and better way to deal with the situation that has arisen than the way He has set forth in His Word.

Head covering

I recall it most foolishly stated that when new congregations are being formed it is better not to mention controversial issues such as 'women's head covering'! This was especially the thinking of some in North America and on new mission fields in years gone by. The result of that was to give the impression that head covering was really of no importance and what the Bible says about it may be set aside. Once that impression is given, it is hard to correct that error!



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Such folly was but man taking upon himself an authority that was not his. No one has the right to say that there are matters in God's Word which can be set aside and ignored. Such actions can only lead to trouble.

Just on the matter of head covering, it should be noted that Paul dealt with it in his first letter to the Corinthian church, chapter 11:1-17. Paul came to Corinth, Acts 18:1, about the year AD 56 (Ussher's Chronology). He wrote his first epistle about AD 59, a short time later.

In that letter he deals with a number of serious errors and division. The errors included the failure of some women to wear a head covering, indeed, he dealt with this issue before he came on to the awful desecrations that were taking place during the breaking of bread or the communion service as it is commonly called today! From this we should conclude that the women who did not cover their heads during worship were committing a serious offence. He calls such a failure a 'shame', verse 6 and uncomely, verse 13.

The exception rather than the rule

It is to be further noted that Paul says this in verse 16: "But if any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God." Here he is saying that in the churches outside of Corinth there was no such refusal by women to have their heads covered in worship.

The point being that this issue was not set aside as unimportant, but rather it is clear that this was taught and practised everywhere the gospel was preached. It should not be overlooked that the church with its many failings about which Paul says: "I praise you not, that ye come together not for the better, but for the worse. For first of all, when ye come together in the church, I hear that there be divisions among you; and I partly believe it. For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you," 11:17-19. This church which Paul refused to praise because of its many sins is also the church where some of the women were refusing to wear a head covering! That places this notion that head covering is not necessary in the house of God in very poor company indeed!

Proud man transgresses against the Lord

Yes, men can foolishly replace God's wisdom with their own and trouble soon follows. It follows for such a thing greatly offends God. God's servant Azariah the priest was correct when he challenged the king in the words: "It appertaineth not unto thee, Uzziah, to burn incense unto the LORD, but to the priests the sons of Aaron, that are consecrated to burn incense: go out of the sanctuary; for thou hast trespassed; neither shall it be for thine honour from the LORD God," 2 Chronicles 26:18. What Uzziah was seeking to do was a dishonourable thing, a trespass.

As is so often the case, proud man, when rebuked, gets very angry. "Then Uzziah was wroth," verse 19. He who is prepared to defy God and set aside His Law does not take well any rebuke from a fellowman! If he fears not the Lord in this matter, how dare a mere mortal challenge him! This was the thinking of Uzziah and indeed all who would follow in his footsteps. They take it ill when someone tries to tell them that their actions are wrong!

While he might threaten action against the priests, Uzziah had no means of resisting the Lord! "While he was wroth with the priests, the leprosy even rose up in his forehead before the priests in the house of the LORD, from beside the incense altar," verse 19. Just how serious a matter it was to replace God's Law with man's notions was seen within minutes of Uzziah offending. He was made a leper by the Lord!

In Corinth, the offences against the Lord brought down the Lord's judgment upon some Corinthian believers just as it did here upon Uzziah. "But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world," 1 Corinthians 11:28-32.



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Physical weakness and sickness, aye, and even death were visited upon some in Corinth. Ought this not teach us all that we cannot lightly set aside any of God's standards and commandments and the procedures and the moral guidelines our forefathers formulated in compliance with God's Word, just to avoid controversy and division or upset some institutions or organisations or parties who might take offence at our obedience of God's truth!

To do so generates controversy and division with the Lord with the most disastrous results. It is always better to offend men than offend God, in order to placate and humour men!

The old hymn, so familiar amongst us, says it all.

1. When we walk with the Lord
In the light of His Word,
What a glory He sheds on our way;
While we do His good will,
He abides with us still,
And with all who will trust and obey.

*Trust and obey,
For there's no other way
To be happy in Jesus,
But to trust and obey.*

2. Not a shadow can rise,
Not a cloud in the skies,
But His smile quickly drives it away;
Not a doubt or a fear,
Not a sigh or a tear,
Can abide while we trust and obey.

3. Not a burden we bear,
Not a sorrow we share,

But our toil He doth richly repay;
Not a grief or a loss,
Not a frown or a cross,
But is blest if we trust and obey.

4. But we never can prove
The delights of His love,
Until all on the altar we lay;
For the favour He shows,
And the joy He bestows,
Are for them who will trust and obey.

5 Then in fellowship sweet
We will sit at His feet,
Or we'll walk by His side in the way;
What He says we will do;
Where He sends, we will go,
Never fear, only trust and obey.

- John Henry Sammis (1846-1919)

Rev Ivan Foster (Retired)

23rd December 2019.