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the Clergy and People of London and Westminster; On Occasion of the Late
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Title: A Letter from the Lord Bishop of London, to the Clergy and People of London
and Westminster; On Occasion of the Late Earthquakes

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Release date: August 6, 2008 [eBook #26204]
Most recently updated: January 3, 2021

Language: English

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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK A LETTER FROM THE LORD
BISHOP OF LONDON, TO THE CLERGY AND PEOPLE OF LONDON AND
WESTMINSTER; ON OCCASION OF THE LATE EARTHQUAKES ***

A
LETTER
FROM THE
LORD BISHOP
OF
LONDON,
TO THE
CLERGY and PEOPLE
OF
London and Westminster;
On Occasion of the Late
EARTHQUAKES.

LONDON:
Printed for JOHN WHISTON in *Fleetstreet.*
MDCCL.

[Price Three-Pence.]

TO THE
CLERGY and Inhabitants
OF THE
Cities of *London* and *Westminster*.

My Brethren and Friends,

THE Relation I stand in to you, is a daily Call upon me to consider the spiritual State of these great Cities; and tho' I doubt not but GOD has many faithful and chosen Servants among you, yet the general View of the Wickedness and Corruption that abound, and are spreading far and wide, gives me, and must give to every serious Christian very painful Reflexions: It is hardly possible to think of the History of Providence, recorded in Holy Writ, and the many Examples of Divine Justice exercised, sometimes in punishing, sometimes in utterly destroying wicked Nations, or Cities, without being sensibly affected with Apprehensions for ourselves: But more especially have we Reason to fear, when we see the *Beginning of Sorrows*, and the Displeasure of the Almighty manifested in the Calamities we suffer under, and in the Signs and Tokens given us to expect a far more dreadful Judgment.

It is every Man's Duty, and it is mine to call upon you, to give Attention to all the Warnings which God in his Mercy affords to a sinful People: Such Warning we have had, by two great Shocks of an Earthquake; a Warning, which seems to have been immediately and especially directed to these great Cities, and the Neighbourhood of them; where the Violence of the Earthquake was so sensible, tho' in distant Parts hardly felt, that it will be Blindness wilful and inexcusable not to apply to ourselves this strong Summons, from God, to Repentance.

Thoughtless or hardened Sinners may be deaf to these Calls; and Little Philosophers, who see a little, and but very little into natural Causes, may think they see enough to account for what happens, without calling in the Aid and Assistance of a special Providence; not considering, that God who made all Things, never put any Thing out of his own Power, but has all Nature under Command to serve his Purposes in the Government of the World. But be their Imaginations to themselves, the Subject is too serious for trifling; and calls us off to other Views.

If we consider the general Government of the World by God, and upon what Reasons and Motives he acts, when he brings Calamities and Plagues upon any People: Or if we recollect from History sacred and profane, what State and Condition with respect to Religion and Morality, the People were in, who have been Examples of Justice: And then compare our own Case with the general Reason by which Providence acts, and with the Circumstances of those by whose Example we ought to take Warning, we shall soon discover whether there be just Reason for our Apprehensions. If those who have been destroyed by Fire from Heaven, or swallowed up by the Earth were *Sinners*, and we are *righteous*, let us fear nothing, nor be dismayed though the *Foundations* of the Earth be removed: But if our Consciences tell us, that we have sinned after their Example, what Consolation is there to be had against the just Expectation of suffering after their Example also?

The same Conclusion will arise from a Contemplation of God's general Providence; which tho' it is not daily exerted in punishing all Men, or all Vices that deserve it; yet is always armed with Power to stop outrageous Wickedness; and he has told us in his holy Word, what we may expect from his Justice, when we are grown hardened and obdurate against his Mercy.

Upon these Principles let your own Case be examined: But who shall be your Accuser? Shall I? God forbid, *My Heart's Desire and Prayer to God for you is, that you may be saved*. Hear me then with Patience, not as your Accuser, but as your faithful Servant and Monitor in Christ Jesus, warning you to flee from the Wrath that is to come.

Had this Part of the World had less Knowledge and less Light, they might have some Excuse, and some Hope that God would wink at the Times of their Ignorance: But they have had the Light, and have loved Darkness: The Gospel of Christ in which all the

Goodness and Mercy of GOD are display'd through the Redemption purchased by the Blood of Christ; in which the Aid and Comfort of the Holy Spirit of GOD is offered to all who diligently seek it; in which the Hopes and Fears of Eternity are display'd to guard us against the Temptations of Sin; has been not only rejected, but treated with a malicious Scorn; and all our Hopes in Christ represented as Delusions and Impositions upon the Weakness of Men. How has the Press for many Years past swarm'd with Books, some to dispute, some to ridicule the great Truths of Religion, both natural and revealed. I shall mention no particular Cases, there is no need for it; the Thing is notorious. I wish the Guilt in this Instance was confined to the Authors only, and that no body else was answerable for it: But the Earnestness with which these Books were sought after, the Pleasure and Approbation with which they were received, are too strong Indications of the general Taste to be dissembled; and the Industry used to disperse these Books at home and abroad, and especially to our Plantations in *America*; to which great Numbers, and at a great Expence have been conveyed; are Proofs of such Malice against the Gospel and the Holy Author of it, as would not be born even in a *Mahometan* Country. In this Branch of Trade, this great City beats all the World; it is become even the Mart for Infidelity.

It required no great Sagacity to foresee what the Consequence would be of the Pains taken to unsettle all Principles of Religion. Infidelity and Immorality are too nearly allied, to be long separated; and though some have pretended to preserve a Sense of Virtue without the Aid of Religion, yet Experience has shewed that People who have neither Hopes nor Fears with Respect to *another* World, will soon abuse *this* by indulging the worst of their Passions, and will not regard Man, when once they have learn'd to disregard GOD.

Whether this be our Case, let every Man judge by what he hears and sees; by what, indeed, he *must* hear and see, if he lives amongst us. Blasphemy and horrid Imprecations domineer in our Streets, and poor Wretches are every Hour wantonly and wickedly calling for Damnation on themselves and others, which may be ('tis much to be feared) too near them already. Add to this the Lewdness and Debauchery that prevail amongst the lowest People, which keeps them idle, poor, and miserable, and renders them incapable of getting an honest Livelihood for themselves and Families; the Number of lewd Houses, which trade in their Vices, and which must at any rate be paid for making Sin convenient to them; and it will account for Villainies of another Kind, which are growing so fast as to be insupportable, and almost incurable: For, Where is the Wonder that Persons so abandoned should be ready to commit all Sorts of Outrage and Violence?—A City without Religion can never be a safe Place to dwell in.

The unnatural Lewdness, of which we have heard so much of late, is something more than brutish, and can hardly be mentioned without offending chaste Ears, and yet cannot be passed over entirely in Silence, because of the particular Mark of Divine Vengeance set upon it in the Destruction of *Sodom* by Fire from Heaven. Dreadful Example!

But these Vices are so enormous, that 'tis to be hoped the Generality of our People are not guilty; I hope in God they are not, I trust they are not. But how unhappy is it for this Country, that there should be any Ground even for Suspicion that these Vices are growing to be common!

But to go one Step further—

When Men, not content with indulging their own brutish Passions, take Pains to corrupt others, they act with such cool and diabolical Malice, as outdoes former Examples, and seems to be a Challenge to the Power and Justice of God—Have not all the Abominations of the publick Stews been opened to View by lewd Pictures exposed to Sale at Noon-day? Have not Histories or Romances of the vilest Prostitutes been published, intended merely to display the most execrable Scenes of Lewdness; Lewdness represented without Disguise, and nothing omitted that might inflame the corrupt Passions of the Youth of the Nation! What was the Encouragement for Men to dare giving such an Affront not only to the common Sense, but to the common Law of the Country? Was it not the quick Sale these Pictures and these Books had? And is not this a deplorable Circumstance, and sad Instance of the corrupt Disposition of many among us?

Is it to be wondered at, after so much Pains taken to corrupt the Religion and Morals of the People, that they should be indisposed to attend to any thing serious, or that they grow sick of Religion, which has no Comforts for them; that they fly from the Church and crowd to the Playhouse: That they are tired of themselves, and their own Thoughts, and want to lose themselves in Company from Morning to Night? It is this unhappy, unsettled State of Mind that has introduced a Kind of general Idleness among the

People, and given Rise to almost infinite Places of Diversion in and about this Town; it were well if they were Places of Diversion only; but they are often Places for carrying on worse Business, and give Opportunities to the Profligate to seduce the Innocent, who often meet their Ruin, where they only came for Pleasure—While I was writing this I cast my Eye upon a News-Paper of the Day, and counted no less than fifteen Advertisements for *Plays, Operas, Musick, and Dancing*, for Meetings at *Gardens*, for *Cock-fighting, Prize-fighting, &c?* Should this Paper, (as many of our News-Papers do) go abroad, what an Idea must it give to all the Churches abroad, of the Manner in which *Lent* is kept in this Protestant Country? What our Saviour said to the *Jews* upon another Occasion, *You have turned the House of Prayer into a Den of Thieves*, may with a little Variation, be applied to Ourselves, We have turned this Season appointed for serious Reflexions, and Humiliation of Body and Spirit, into a Time of Mirth and Jollity, of Musick, Dancing, and riotous Living.

How far this Spirit of Indolence and Idleness has gone, and to what Excess, may be seen in all Orders among us; friendly Visits for Conversation are become insipid Things, and are degenerated into Meetings for Gaming, where People hardly known to each other, are invited by one Tye only, the Love of Play: Which seems now to be, not an Amusement or Diversion, but a serious Business of Life, and one would think a *necessary* one, by seeing how some Children are trained up to it.

There is a great and a grievous Evil among us, which naturally springs from the Disorders beforementioned: I mean the great Increase of Popery in this Kingdom. When Men have lost all Principles of Religion, and are lost to all Sense of Morality, they are prepared to receive any Superstition, whenever the Decay of Health, or the cross Accidents of Life revive the Fears of Futurity; which may be stifled, but cannot be extinguished; such Persons not able to digest the wholesome Food of Repentance, by which their spiritual Condition might be gradually mended, greedily swallow the high Cordial of Absolution, which like other Cordials gives some present Ease, but works no Cure. And with respect to People of a serious and religious Turn of Mind, the manifest and almost general Contempt, or at least Neglect, of the Duties of Religion gives a great Advantage to the Emissaries of *Rome* to impose on their Weakness, and to persuade them that they can have no Hopes in the Religion of a Church, where Religion itself is hardly to be found.

Lay these Things together; and what more your own Observation and Reflexion may furnish, and much more they may furnish; and then ask your Heart, whether you have not Reason to fear, that God will visit for these Things. If your Heart misgives you, and forebodes the Time of taking Vengeance for these Iniquities to be drawing near, consider further, how graciously you have been dealt with by having had Warning of your Danger; and remember that the long *Sufferance of God is a Call to Repentance*.

It is purely for the Sake of this Reflexion, that I now address myself to you: I have no Pleasure in laying open the Shame of my Country, or in exposing its Nakedness either to Friends or to Foes; and when I consider my own Situation, 'tis a Prospect void of all Comfort to me to see the Condition of the People, over whom I have a Charge; and, God knows my Heart, these Considerations are a Pain and Grief to my Mind.

But, let us not despair; there is still one Remedy left, and whatever Reason we have to condemn ourselves, yet of this we may be sure, that God has not *forgotten to be gracious*. To him then let us turn, with hearty Repentance for our Sins; and with a Resolution to do, each of us in his proper Station, what lies in our Power to stem the Torrent of Iniquity which threatens our Ruin.

As to You my Brethren of the Clergy, who share with me the Care of the Souls in these populous Cities, let me exhort You, (though I trust you want not to be exhorted) to awaken the People, to call them from the Lethargy in which they have too long lived, and make them see their own Danger. Speak to them, *perswade them as knowing the Terrors of the Lord*.—Speak to their Hearts and Consciences with such Plainness as becomes the Ministers of the Gospel; tell them in *Season and out of Season, that unless they repent, they must perish*. If the Warnings we have had are a Call on the People to Repentance, remember they are still stronger Calls on us, to *preach* Repentance, and to discharge the Duty we owe to God and his Church, and to the Flock of Christ, over whom we are placed. May this Work of God prosper in our Hands!

I should be wanting to the Duty I owe to the highest as well as the lowest, should I omit on this Occasion to remind those who are entrusted by their Country, with the Government of these populous Cities, how much the Welfare of the People depends upon the faithful Execution of the Law. I pretend not to accuse *them particularly* of Neglect, a *general Neglect* of this Kind is one of the worst Symptoms of the Time; every Man is left to do what is right in his own Eyes, one would think *there was no King in*

Israel. Could the vile abominable Pictures of Lewdness have been offered to Sale in the most frequented Parts of the City; could Books for the Instruction of the Unexperienced in all the Mysteries of Iniquity have been publicly cried in our Streets; had not the Laws, and the Guardians of the Laws, been asleep?—But surely it is high Time to awake; and to let People once more know, (what seems to be almost forgotten) that Laws are made for the *Punishment of Wickedness and Vice, and for the Maintenance of true Religion.*

Government is a great Trust, and the Powers of it are not intended merely to do Honour to those who have them, but must be used for the Good of the Community. This is a Truth sufficiently known, it has been founded in the Ears of the Nation, without Ceasing; but the Misfortune is, that this Doctrine has been applied so constantly to the *Supreme* Magistrate only, that those who have *subordinate* Powers derived from his Authority, forget, or are not accustomed, to make the Application to themselves. And yet surely, there is not a Constable but has, in Proportion to the Power the Law gives him, a Trust reposed in him in Behalf of his King and his Country: Those who are in higher Offices, have still greater Reason, as more depends upon the due Exercise of their Authority, to be watchful for the Community. The Good of Society must be influenced by their Conduct and Example, one Way or other. Great Officers of Justice cannot be *useless*, without being *pernicious*.

If a Regard for the Publick is not a Motive strong enough in this Case, let every Magistrate consider that there is another of infinite Importance to himself; for if all Power be the *Ordinance* of God, He will undoubtedly demand an Account of the Exercise of it: And who is he, that has so little to answer for on his own Account, as willingly to subject himself to be answerable for the Sins of others, which either by his Encouragement, or his Connivence he makes his own? Pardon the Freedom of this Address; I honour and reverence *your* Office, and I hope I give you no Occasion to despise *mine*.

Next to those in publick Offices of Power and Trust, the Happiness of the Publick depends upon those who have the Government in private Families. Here it is that the Youth of the Nation must be formed, and if they are suffered to be corrupted in their Religion or Morals before they come into the *World*, there is little Hope that the *World* will reform them. All wise Men, Legislators, and Princes, have acknowledged, not only the Use, but the Necessity of an early Education to form the Mind, whilst tender, to the Principles of Honour and Virtue; and what is more, the wisest of all, the Writers inspired by the Holy Spirit, have required it as a Duty from Parents, and as Part of the Obedience they owe to God: Even our Unbelievers have seen how far Religion depended on this Care; and under a Pretence of maintaining the Liberty of the human Mind, and guarding it against early Prejudices, they have endeavoured to persuade the World, that Children should be taught nothing of Religion, but be left to form Notions for themselves. They have had but too great Success, and we begin to see the Fruits of it. The Children of this Age, grow soon to be Men and Women, and are admitted to be Partners, and Witnesses to the Follies and Vices of their Parents. Thus trained and educated, when they come to be Masters and Mistresses of Families, they answer fully what was to be expected from them; they are often a Torment to each other, and to themselves, and have Reason to bemoan themselves for the Indulgence shewn them in their early Days.

Would you see the Effects of this Education in all Orders among us, look into the many Publick Assemblies; sometimes you may see Old Age affecting the Follies of Youth, and counterfeiting the Airs of Gaiety; sometimes Men lying in wait to seduce Women, and Women to seduce Men; and even Children seriously employed at the Gaming Table, as if their Parents were concerned to form them early to the Taste of the Age, and were afraid that they should not soon enough, of themselves, find the Way to their Ruin.

Look near Home: See the Temptations of this Sort which surround these Cities, and are indeed so many Snares to catch your Sons and Daughters and Apprentices. Can you look on, and be unconcerned? For God's Sake, and for the Sake of your Children and your Country take the Courage to act like Parents and Masters of Families: Reformation must begin in private Families; the Law and the Magistrate can punish your Children when they become wicked; but it is you, who must make them good, by proper Instruction and proper Government. If you suffer them to meet Temptation, where Temptation is sure to meet them, never complain of him who corrupts your Child, you are the Corrupter yourself; to you he owes it, that he is undone. And perhaps there is not a more provoking Circumstance, nor a greater Call for Divine Vengeance on a wicked Nation, than this; that the Youth are prepared and brought up to inherit all the Vices of their Fathers, which cuts off all Prospect of Reformation; and stands as a Bar between us and Mercy.

On you therefore, Fathers and Mothers, your Country, and the Church of God call for Assistance; your Endeavours may go a great Way towards saving us, and this wicked Generation may be spared, for the Hope of seeing the next better.

In a word, let every Man, whatever his Station is, do his Part towards averting the Judgments of God: Let every Man reform himself, and others as far as his Influence goes: This is *our* only proper Remedy; for the dissolute Wickedness of the Age, is a more dreadful Sign and Prognostication of Divine Anger, than even the Trembling of the Earth under us.

To our own Endeavours, let us add continual and fervent Supplications to the Almighty, that he would *spare us, and not deal with us according to the Multitude of our Sins*; that he would give us the Grace of Repentance, and open our Eyes to see, before it is too late, *the Things which belong to our Salvation*.

May the God of all Mercy hear you, in this Day of your Distress! To his Protection, and the Grace of our Lord *Jesus* I earnestly recommend you. I am,

Your Affectionate Brother, and

Servant in Christ Jesus,

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