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W. W. Landrum, 1904

THE TRUE LIGHT THAT LIGHTETH EVERY MAN

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"That was the true Light that lighteth every man that
cometh into the world." John 1:9

The fourth Gospel, that of the beloved disciple, as
all know, is theological rather than biographical. It is
the gospel of Christ's divinity or, better, Christ's deity.

Modern theology is simply man's word about God's word.
Stars are one thing but astronomy an other; rocks are one
thing geology an other; flowers one thing botany an other.
Astronomy is a systematized attempt to explain the stars
and geology to explain rocks and botany flowers. So
theology is an attempt to explain the nature and activities
of our heavenly father as disclosed in nature, in the human
soul and in the Bible but preeminently in his "who is the
brightness of the father's glory and the express image of
his Person."

Theology, being man's word about God's word, is not and
cannot be stationary. "Our half century," to quote the
words of that great theologian Dr. Augustus Strong, "has

rediscovered the immanent God." He adds: "the theology of fifty years ago did not much deny God's immanence as forgot God's immanence." Our theology he continues, "has, as never before, since the times of the apostles, identified the Christ of the incarnation with the Logos of God through whom and unto whom all things were made and in whom all things consist. While the transcendant and unknowable God is the Father, the immanent and revealed God is Christ."

"No man hath seen God at any time: the only begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him."

May I put my interpretation of the text in this way? Before the Word took flesh in one man, He was already light in every man. Always and everywhere, from Eden to Calvary, Christ was intellectual light and moral light or reason and conscience of the whole human race just in so far as they acted in harmony with the divine plan and purpose.

That is a fine saying of Hudson Taylor concerning our Lord:

"If you do not crown Him Lord of all

You do not crown him Lord at all."

If then there be a spiritual universe, in that universe Christ is the Logos or supreme reason. He is the inspirer and illuminator of man in his intellectual being, the revealer to man of the divine character, the source of all science and development worthy of the name, the "harmonizer" as one has said "of knowledge and faith of reverence and research."

If this interpretation of the text be true, certain inferences inevitably follow, however startling they may be at first appear to us.

If Christ be "the light that lighteth every man coming into the world" then we must conclude that all the light there was in ancient philosophy came from Him. Call these enlightened pagans as you will "seekers after God" as some do or "outside saints" as some others, the fact remains that Christ was in them to some degree. Christ was in Socrates, Plato, Aristotle just in so far as they gave any light to their countrymen on what is morally worth while. More astounding still, all the light there was in ancient religions was reflected from the mind of Christ. Is this a dangerous assertion? Do you think, my fathers and brethren, that I stand in peril by conceding too much to systems in great part ignorant, erroneous, degrading and damning to human souls? Strike, but hear he. In all humility I dare say, on the authority of the text, if I am sound and sane in my interpretation, that if there be any good in Buddhism Christ put it there; any good in Confucianism, Christ put it there; any good in Mohammedanism, Christ bestowed it.

We give no countenance to heresy. We contend for "the faith once for all delivered unto the saints," no additions to it, no subtractions from it, no alterations in it, interpreted, after prayer and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and in accord with the latest and soundest scholarship,

We must maintain unquestioned orthodoxy. None the less, we may not be bigots. Moreover, if there be any good in those American sects which we are in honor bound to condemn, it is because Christ is the source.

God is immanent in Christ. Christ is immanent, however true may be our doctrine of native, hereditary and total depravity, in any speck of goodness on such a soul.

Who are men of light in poetry which we wish taught in our Christian schools and colleges? Jesus is not ranked among the poets, but there is no poetry of which He is not the inspiration. Shakespeare, Milton, Dante, Goethe, Browning, Tennyson, Longfellow, Whittier, Sidney Lanier. Among the bards there have arisen no greater than these, and these lit their lamps at the flame of Christ's heart.

Christ was no man of letters; that is to say, he did not attend Gamaliel's theological Seminary in Jerusalem. He wrote no books, no words of which we have any record, save in the sands before the fallen woman which a gust of wind might drive away. But to day where is there any literature except in Christendom?

No statesman was Christ, but the principles laid down in the sermon on the mount underlie all civilized constitutions and codes. Said Gladstone: "Talk about any questions of the day, there is not question that the gospel can not settle, no problem that it cannot solve."

No historian was Christ but his birthday is the center

of history, its philosophy and its interpretation. All time is reckoned by its relation to that supreme event.

No painter, no sculptor was Christ, no architect. And yet all art, whether visible on canvas or in marble or in the noble proportions of Romanesque or Gothic cathedral are the forthputting of his constructive genius.

No musician was Jesus, but all music draws its charm and magnetism from the love of which he was the incarnation. No orator was Jesus and yet never man spake as this man. It has been truly affirmed that "there has never been a flight of eloquence in the forum or on the hustings or on the field of battle, in pulpit or popular assembly which was not born aloft by his animating presence."

In one of our sweetest hymns we sing: "We would see Jesus, for other lights are failing." For salvation, for pardon, for sin, for justification, for sanctification, for adoption, for heirship of the heavenly inheritance, there is no sure certain and satisfactory illumination but that which streams from the supreme tragedy of the ages, the cross of Christ. Never may we abandon or modify or alter in any respect the meaning and worth of the crucified Redeemer. We by no means minimize our Lord, however, when we admit that the apostles were lights. Jesus said so. Some of the pre-Christian sages were lights -- Seneca, Marcus Aurelius, Epictetus. Indeed, why should we fear to declare that many men of modern science have been lights -- Franklin, Morse,

Edison, Pasteur, Marconi. Far different is Christ. Christ is the light. Christ is cosmical light. Other lights are borrowed. He is the original fountain. Other lights reveal dimly only a few things in some narrow space. Christ reveals all things fully through all regions of moral being. Other lights shone a little and like meteors went out. Christ burns on forever, the light of the world "The light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world." Jesus is the sun of righteousness coming through the shining gates of the Eastern sky to make the world radiantly beautiful and beautifully radiant in the smile of a loving God and Father of all mankind.

In a word, Christ's doctrines concerning God, man, salvation and immortality are fitted to call forth and satisfy the requirements of universal reason. Christ's precepts of faith, hope, love, and duty are for the universal conscience. Christ's provisions for peace and joy are for universal human needs attested by millions of saved souls in the unerring laboratory of personal experience begotten of the Holy Ghost.

"Back to Christ," our age is saying, not always for reasons we may approve, it is true, but back to Christ let us go. Christ alone, not always our creed, or church or denomination or our honored but errant fathers, is our Lord and King. "I am the light of the world," said Jesus He

that followeth me shall not walk in darkness. Christ when followed doctrinally, morally, spiritually, is always light and hope. He quickens intellect and the conscience and the whole spiritual being of his loyal and loving disciples.

"I can do all things," says the apostle, "through Christ which strengtheneth me." Nor is Paul the only witness to the efficiency of the Christ-filled soul.

My fathers and brethren, are we drawing on the infinite resources of our Lord in the hours when we feel our limitations and cry out in despondence who is sufficient for these things?"

What a comfort in the assurance that if Christ be with us and in us we can get on in all life's predestined tasks without eyes. Milton did it. Blind he was when the great epic poem of English speech arose from his inspired soul. George Matheson, perhaps the sweetest devotional writer of the last half century, was blind. You can get along without eyes. Fanny Crosby has been singing songs that have sung themselves into many hearts. Her life has been one long night of blackness.

No physical handicap can render useless an energetic disciple. If we have Christ, we can be handless but efficient. Some of you have seen a picture at the corner of which were written two Latin words "Pede Pinxit." "He painted it with his feet." We can work without hands.

We can get along without hearing. Beethoven could not

hear and yet his symphonies rival the notes of the celestial choir. We can get along without feet. Lord Chatham did and made the greatest speech of his life when carried into the House of Lords. We can get along without speaking, even women can do it. Remember Helen Keller, deaf, dumb, and blind. We can get along without health. Robert Hall, the great English Baptist preacher of the last century, never saw a well day. Mrs. Browning, says her biographer, for years and and years had scarcely one small breath of health and never till love came and kissed her on her lips and imparted a new vitality.

All these conditions, as we must admit, are untoward, but Christ can cause us to rise on our dead selves as stepping stones to noble things. "I came" he declared "that they might have life and might have it more abundantly." Where there is most life, there is the victory and our life is hid with Christ in God. We appropriate by heroic faith the bed rock forces of the universe "for all things are yours and ye are Christ's and Christ is God's."

Our mission and ministry, my brethren, is in part witness bearing. We are to "tell to all around what a Savior we have found." Perhaps it would be better to adopt the language of the old Negro, who, on being asked when he found the Lord, replied: "Boss, I never found the Lord; the Lord, he found me." Telling our own experience of divine grace, valuable as it is, will not suffice. We must warn those who despise and reject our testimony. "He came to his own and his own received Him not." Of that strange conduct Christ gives the

explanation. "This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world and men loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. Again he put it this way: "He that believeth on him is not condemned, but he that believeth not is condemned already because he hath not believed on the only begotten Son of God."

When we face unbelieving men we are to tell them that a rejection of Christ is a practical denial of universal truth. It is like denying some mathematical axiom as that a straight line is the shortest distance between two points. "He that willeth to do his will shall know of the doctrine." Where in all human history has any man ever tried the Gospel and found it unsatisfying? Who, on reviewing his past, in prospect of death ever repented that he had been a Christian? "Godliness is profitable unto all things, having the promise of the life which now is, as well as that which is to come." Here and now are demonstrated that faith is better than doubt or disbelief, hope than discouragement, love than hate, courage than cowardice, duty than disobedience, largeness of aim, ideal, and endeavor than littleness and selfishness of soul.

We must affirm unwaveringly that disbelief in Jesus Christ is to deny the supremacy of love. "God is Love." One or the other He must be. O my soul, which is He the God and Father of Jesus? Is he a despot or is he a kind and compassionate Father? Did I hear aright that "God so loved the world that

he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth on him might not perish but have everlasting life?" Never man loved as did this man who laid down his life for his enemies. Christ was and is love incarnate. What a crime it is to slight human love, a mother's love. How much more grievous to disregard God's love, Christ's love. It is nothing less than to seat hatred and selfishness on the throne of the universe and to bow down before them. It is to make malevolence the supreme being, it is to make the devil God.

Disbelief in Jesus is more. It is practically to deny the spiritual in man. It is the gospel of dirt. It is to glorify the flesh. It is to worship the body. It is to sink into animalism. It is to crumble into the dust of materialism. It is to perish in the grave without God and without hope. It is to dehumanize one's self. It is to diabolize one's soul.

Lovers of civilization, patriots who profess to love your country, let me warn you that denial of Jesus Christ is to stand in the highway of holiness, usefulness, and happiness and beat back the march of your race to enlightenment here and to Heaven hereafter. "There is no other name known among men or given under heaven whereby ye may be saved." "He that believeth on the Son hath life and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life but the wrath of God abideth on him." In the quaint blunt speech of Spurgeon: "You must turn or burn."

My brethren, what peace of mind comes to us as we have so many evidences to see and feel the sweet reasonableness of the religion of Jesus Christ. "In the beginning was the Reason and the Reason was with God and the Reason was God." We do not have to throw away our minds to save our souls. Jesus is the wisdom of God. He says: "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God with all thy mind." We do not have to throw away our minds or undervalue them after our souls are saved. In Christ is hid all the treasury of wisdom and knowledge.

Disciples we are in the school of Christ, pupils, learners, scholars, knowing only in part, realizing our imperfections and limitations but under the great teacher, present, loving, infallible, "the light that lighteth every man coming into the world," but chiefly, more satisfactorily and savingly the disciples who put their trust in Him and Him alone for present and eternal salvation.

At an entrance to an Austrian city, as I have read, there is a bridge on the parapets of which are twelve statues of our Lord. One represents him as the Sower, another as Carpenter, another as Physician. Others represent him as Pilot, Prophet, Priest and King. In the early morning the peasants begin to come in bringing their produce to market. They pause and worship the Sower. A little later come the mechanics. They pause before the Carpenter. Still later when the sun has climbed the heavens, the sick pouring out

of the city to seeking healing for the country air, pause before the Physician. Every class, every individual of every class, finds a satisfying Christ. Christ is adapted to the wants of every soul. There is not one of us here in this Convention, with all our diversities of nature and experience and activities, whom our Lord Jesus Christ cannot energize, make efficient, and sanctify to holiness and happiness.

"Thou O Christ art all I want;
All in all in thee I find.
Raise the fallen cheer the faint,
Heal the sick and lead the blind.

Thou of life the fountain art;
Freely let me take of Thee,
Fix thyself within my heart,
Rise to all eternity."