



An Enlightened Church

by Ray L. Straub

“Christianity is plagued with hypocrisy,” accuse the critics. We hear it often, and it hurts. Such an indictment would not be near as painful if it were not true!

Critics recognize good ideals in the Christian religion, but they see little practice consistent with these goals. Platitudes floating endlessly from mouths above pulpits are met with widespread agreement, but little adherence to the suggestions proposed. Everyone recognizes a good sermon, but hardly anyone follows the advice they compliment.

Christianity is not poetry; it is a dynamic! It is not an academic belief, but a motivating conviction. It is not a gentle invitation to cooperate, but a compulsion to conform.

Many who claim to be enlightened must not know the nature of light, at least not as Jesus described it. Those who are enlightened should not grope like

those in darkness. Too many of those who criticize fail miserably to provide any light of their own. They sense a problem and then unwittingly proceed to compound it.

A group of neighborhood children among whom I was numbered discovered a large antenna on the roof of a home a bit more than a block from our homes. The apparatus belonged to a ham radio operator. We were unfamiliar with such a hobby. Some of our group recognized its similarity to short-wave radio equipment.

It was during World War II. All we could think of was that a Nazi spy lived there and was sending short-wave radio messages. One had to be on guard because it seemed that Nazis were everywhere. It would necessitate heroes such as us to expose them.

A courageous member of our group mustered enough nerve to go to the door and do some questioning. When the door opened in response to his ring, he sud-

denly realized he was not up to being a Nazi-fighter, so he turned and ran without saying a word. “The lady looked both German and suspicious, though,” he declared.

Our suspicions were confirmed! Heroes have a sense of timing that demands the utmost in sacrifice when occasion demands, and we had one such. He was determined (a day or so later, as we continued to plot the progress of our exposure) that he would ring the doorbell and stand there to ask questions, even if it meant he would be wounded or killed for his country. We were awed by his courage and from across the wide street and out of the line of gunfire, we watched him approach the front door.

He rang. A lady answered. They pointed to the aerial, then to the two wires going into a basement window. The two-minute conversation seemed endless, as we feared for the life of our brave patriot.

He returned to us alive and

confident. His report only confirmed our previous conclusions. "I asked her what the short-wave equipment was for," started our hero with his strong, deeper-pitched voice, "and all she could do was stutter about her husband being interested in radio."

"He's interested in radio, all right," we mimicked with growing, righteous anger, "interested in spying on our neighborhood."

We had the proof we needed. With our thorough investigation accomplished we called the city police to report. They assured us they would take care of it. We had visions of our pictures on the front page of the newspaper, showing us as spy-hunters, decked with metals and wreaths. The newspaper never contacted us.

This same bread of childish heroism is prevalent today, but it is manifest in those who should be old enough to know better. There are too many cures to illnesses that have not been accurately diagnosed. This is true on the part of unenlightened Christians as well as their critics. Everyone aspires to be some kind of hero without bothering to determine whether or not they are attacking a bona fide enemy. Too many are like we children were in attempting to wipe out an imaginary Nazi spy nest. In carrying on a battle against an enemy that exists mostly in their imagination, they become no more than an annoyance. Even with sincere motives some scoot around like little cars with rubber bumpers and no headlights.

We need light. Pious platitudes springing from errant premises only add to the fog. Much is blamed on lack of communication, but communication is of value only when the communicant has something worth telling.

Jesus said to His disciples, "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid" (Matthew 5:14 RSV).

To get the full impact of this analogy, it helps to consider the spectacle of a metropolis on a hill. It is not often that cities are located on hills because valleys near rivers and shaded areas are more fertile to invite settlers. Those living in parts of countries with high altitudes are aware of the great distance that the lights from cities glow at night.

Cities are seen from greater distance due to more candlepower and because pollutants in the air reflect light. There is no way to hide such a municipality.

Jesus said that the purpose of light was to shine. "Nor do men light a lamp and put it under a bushel, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house" (Matthew 5:15 RSV). Recognizing this purpose, Christians are to be as conspicuous as a city located on a hill.

What does it mean to be enlightened, and how is this light sent out?

To most churchgoers, these questions seem elementary. They could answer quickly that light is another expression for doctrinal accuracy. When one learns that he should observe Sabbath instead of Sunday; that he should cease eating unclean meats; that he should begin tithing; that he should cease observance of Christmas and Easter; recognizes that the soul is not immortal; that the wicked do not suffer torment everlastingly, that one can be lost even after accepting Christ as His Saviour if he deliberately chooses to do such; that Jesus was in the tomb a full three days and three nights; that the redeemed will be on earth during the Millennium, and other such doctrines, he has light. These churchgoers would answer that emitting light is teaching these truths.

There is no question but what God's Word is a source of light. "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path" (Psalm 119:105). "The unfolding of thy words gives light; it

imparts understanding to the simple" (Psalm 119:130 RSV). "To the law and the testimony; if they speak not according to this word it is because there is no light in them" (Isaiah 8:20).

Too often glib talk expresses willingness to accept the Scriptures as final authority, but attitudes contradict the claim. For instance, a segment of the Christian world which reaches into many denominations includes the historic liturgical churches, is claiming a more intimate relationship with God based upon ecstasy. They imply that such experiences accompanied by speaking in tongues, is evidence of the full indwelling of the Holy Spirit and a nearness to God that can come no other way.

The Bible will not support these conclusions. All too often, when a decision is forced, these people will rely on the emotional impact of their experience to be stronger evidence than the support they can cite in the Scriptures.

The error in their reasoning is obvious. It is naive to consider that ecstasy must always be religious. It is equally naive to conclude that an ecstatic prayer, though more emotional, is more meaningful to man or God. This suggests that God prefers communication through emotions rather than the intellect—an unenlightened concept, to be sure!

The light the Bible gives on this matter is that ecstasy is self-induced enlightening and generally unbecoming in group worship. Too many participants in this hysteria are adverse to this light, and they will not accept it even when they cannot defend their practice Biblically.

Jesus is Light. He was the Word made flesh. "In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it" (John 1:4, 5 RSV).

"Again Jesus spoke to them,

saying, "I am the light of the world; he who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (John 8:12 RSV). This verse introduces the only effective way that we can allow light to glow through us—to walk after Christ.

It matters little what we know; it matters everything what we do. In Paul's defense before King Agrippa, he reports his commission to go to the Gentiles, "To open their eyes, that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me (Jesus)" (Acts 26:18 RSV).

From this text it has been concluded that conversion is twofold: (1) to turn from darkness to light, i.e., from theological error to doctrinal accuracy, and (2) from the power of Satan to God; i.e., to stop sinning and do works of righteousness. It would appear doubtful from the reading of other passages that any such separation was intended. Turning from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God are one and the same process. One cannot be accomplished without the other.

"If we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another and the blood of Jesus Christ, his Son, cleanseth us from all sin" (1 John 1:7). It is this walk in the light that provides cleansing from sin.

Jesus is that Light. It is he who follows Jesus who will not walk in darkness. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid. This is true not merely because the city possesses light bulbs but because they are connected to a source of power, and that power is turned on. To have knowledge is to possess potential, but to do what is right is to be hooked up to a Source of Power.

Light is emitted by performing deeds of righteousness. This is the truth concerning light

that is too often overlooked. Consequently, our testimony is weakened and our light is dim. Stress on doctrinal accuracy is good, because the Source of light is the Word read and the Word Incarnate. This is a good beginning. It is like screwing in a light bulb. There can be no light without the necessary equipment.

This, however, is not letting our light shine. Beyond knowledge there must be a dynamic. Practically everyone has, at some time or another, been fooled by a light bulb that looked operative but was dead, and, conversely, by some that looked burned but would shine nicely when tested.

An instrument to give forth light is no good at all unless it is capable of converting power to light. Knowledge is frustrated when there is lack of obedience.

"Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for God is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

"Do all things without grumbling or questioning, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as light in the world, holding fast the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain" (Philippians 2:12-16 RSV).

To have light glow in us is to allow God's will to be operative in us. Too many sit back with satisfaction knowing God's will is known by us. This is not good enough. *It must be at work in us!*

"Let not man deceive you with empty words, for it is because of these things that the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not associate with them, for

once you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord; walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), and try to learn what is pleasing to the Lord" (Ephesians 5:6-10 RSV).

It is misleading and catastrophic to conclude that to know about God is to be acquainted with Him; to understand a Bible teaching is following the Will of God; that doctrinal accuracy is righteous living.

How tragic to conclude that a comprehension of basic Bible truths offsets tendencies to grumble, complain, gossip, display jealousy, backbite and otherwise behave aggressively toward others.

Light grows progressively more effective as darkness deepens. A Christian displays his value under testing. A live bulb and a dead light bulb may look the same on a self, or in a socket—until the electric current is turned on. Light bulb testers were invented because the eye cannot always detect the good from the defective.

"For it is the God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

"But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies" (2 Corinthians 4:6-10 RSV).

It is our knowledge of the nature of light that will provide us with the ability to let it shine. A light that will not shine is a sham, the same as a knowledgeable but undisciplined hypocrite!

Our respect for the Source

of light, the written and Incarnate Word; our discipline to follow through in doing what we have learned is true, good, and right; and our persistence to continue through severe testing, will make us that visible city set on a hill. Divine Power turns our lights on.

"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your father which is in heaven" (Matthew 5:16).

THE SEARCH FOR SECURITY

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with fear. It was the voice of his little three-year-old son calling, "Daddy, where are you?" As he glanced up from his sandy bed, he saw his only child toddling between the rails toward the bridge and the on-rushing train. Already the bridge trembled with the approach of the great train. Should he leave his post of duty and save the son he loved with all his heart, or should he sacrifice his only child and save the lives of hundreds of people who knew nothing of their danger? There was but one choice that he could make, and he made it. His decision was one of a moment. The train passed on its way without the passengers realizing the great sacrifice that loving father had made that they might live.

Our loving Heavenly Father saw a world lost in sin and headed for ruin and He knew that He must give His only begotten Son full of grace and truth, that men might be saved. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). Sweet peace and security is near to every one of us.

Like the father gave his son that hundreds on that train might live, God gave Jesus Christ His Son that we might live also. Christ says, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and

are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

Come and let us go up to the house of God and learn what security means. "Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doing from before mine eyes, cease to do evil; learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow. Come now, let us reason together, saith the Lord, though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson they shall be as wool" (Isa. 1:16-18).

"The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest

a table before me in the presence of mine enemies; thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever" (Psalm 23).

If we trust in the Good Shepherd we find peace, and nothing can harm us.

"He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in Him will I trust. He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust; his trust shall be thy shield and buckler" (Psalm 91:2, 4). As the song goes, "Under His wings I am safely abiding; tho the night deepens and tempests are wild. Still I can trust Him, I know He will keep me; He has redeemed me and I am His child. Under His wings, under His wings, Who from His love can sever?"

Dwarf Trees

A pine tree, no more than three feet high, growing out of a shallow dish—it sounds incredible, but Japan is famous for her dwarf trees. They look exactly like their larger counterparts. Their small trunks are gnarled and twisted. The pine needles are perfect but smaller.

Or it may be a maple tree, with tiny autumn-tinted leaves . . . or a rose-bush with wee petals. The secret of this miniature beauty is in the roots. The young plant is put into a small dish, and from time to time, taken out and the roots trimmed. The plant grows in beauty and naturalness, but it cannot grow larger than its roots permit.

Actually, it is pitiful to see a tree that could be tall and majestic, cramped into this small size. Yet, some Christians are like these dwarf trees. They have the potential to grow tall and stately, a person with whom the Lord could be pleased. But instead they are miniature Christians. They are fine, as far as they have grown, but their roots are cramped. They have not followed the Scripture to "take root downward, and bear fruit upward" (2 Kings 19:30).

The secret of all growth, is not to have your roots cramped. Reach out into the things of the Lord, into His Word, into Christian service, into a greater interest in missions, that you may be, not a dwarf Christian, but a full-grown one.—*Dorothy C. Haskins*