

Theology on *the Web.org.uk*

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes.
Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit
or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the
copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the
ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the
links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbadshaw>

A table of contents for *The Expositor* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expositor-series-1.php

THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD.

"I am the light of the world: he that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life."—JOHN viii. 12.

THESE are lovely words, and they shine with a still lovelier light when we read them in connexion with the circumstances under which the great Speaker spoke them.

In the morning which followed the nocturnal festivities that brought to a close the Feast of Tabernacles, we find Him return to the temple from His nightly asylum on Olivet. It was in the early morning, when the October sun was only rising. We know where He took His stand to address the people. Three courts had to be crossed in going inwards, up stair after stair and through gate after gate, towards the Most Holy Place. The outermost of the three was called the Women's Court. Along one side of it ran a row of treasure chambers for keeping sacred vessels, dresses, bullion, and other valuables of the temple. In front of these chambers, under the open sky, stood thirteen collection boxes in a row, inscribed with the several purposes for which the offerings of the faithful were to be applied. In the same wide court stood a couple of enormous gilded lampstands, with their sevenfold branching lights, around which a few hours before the festal crowd of merry-makers had danced and sung through the early night. The place wore a very different aspect now. The candelabra indeed are still there, but the lights are out. For the flickering yellow glare of oil lamps there is now the serene pure light of an autumn dawn, growing momently more strong as the sun, hardly yet visible, climbs over the shoulder of the Eastern hill to kindle the stones of the temple once more into beauty. Gone is the noisy crowd of last night. Many of the pilgrims are by this time setting out on their way back to their distant homes. The deserted court is quiet enough. Only groups of early morning wor-

shippers have arrived, and official frequenters who have business at the temple. Now therefore can the still small voice of heaven's wisdom be heard by such as are early at her gates, the voice which had been drowned last night in the revelry of a dance by torch-light. Now that the earthly fires are all burnt out before the sweet and solemn return of heaven's own sun, does Jesus gather the worshippers about Him in the Treasury and say: "I am the light of the world: he that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life."

This saying belongs to a series of magnificent utterances of Jesus respecting Himself, such as find no parallel on the lips of any other man. One after another, He appropriated in succession nature's chief emblems for Himself: the bread that endures, the living water, the pathway to God, the door to life, the true shepherd of souls; but before and above all these, the sun-light of the world. It is true, He need not have limited the emblem so much as He here does. He might have said, "I am light," not "the light of this world." In the primitive record we read that there was light before there was a sun. God is the absolute light, not centred into any sun, but filling all things with a glory too luminous and intense to find a fit emblem in creation. We confess the eternal Son to be "Light of light," the effulgence or forthshining to the creature of that unvisitable glory, "dark with excess of light"; and therefore the eternal Son might have said of Himself with equal truth, "I am light"—very light to all the worlds, and for ever. But He contracts His testimony. He speaks as the Son of man, the Saviour of men. It is His special relation to our evil obscured race which He has here in view, as born among us to be our Light-restorer, the Man who is a centre of illumination for all other men. The whole fallen family of mankind sat in moral night. His coming was the sunrise. His presence is the sunshine.

Even as thus narrowed, this claim on the lips of a Jew to be Himself the Light of the world was surely a most astounding one. Think how it disparaged the previous illumination of His countrymen! The vaunted history of His nation had been a history of Divine enlightenment. Jehovah had discovered Himself to Israel. As the Promiser of salvation and the Hope of holiness to men, God's express and chosen symbol had been light. In various forms had the Divine Presence been made luminous, visible, to the generations before the incarnation. The Old Testament is full of it. The whole conception of the chosen people is that of a tiny, inclosed spot, fenced from outlying pagan darkness, in which there shone through the centuries a sacred knowledge of God and of the way to God, not shared by any other people upon earth. Yet Jesus virtually declares all that previous illumination of the Hebrews to have been only like pale starlight, or like a candelabrum shining by night. Not till He came had day really dawned. I do not deem it an over-refinement to detect some hint of this in the Old Testament itself. So long as the Divine law still asked its due, and the way of peace with God had not been laid quite open, the symbol of the Divine Presence in Israel was never pure, simple daylight, never that sunshine which is gracious in its warmth and quickens all the earth into life. It was rather fire than sunshine: the light of a flame, a heat terribly candescent, with tongues of fire to devour and a central glow to scorch. At Eden, this symbol of God flickered like a flaming sword; to Abraham, it was a burning lamp; out of the bush, a fire of which the wonder was that it did not consume; from Sinai, lightning; and even within the veil, a consuming cloud, perilous to approach, because death lurked within its fiery glory. Everywhere the prominent emblem of that Old Testament illumination is rather the flame than the sunlight—flame, whose first business is to burn, and which

only in its burning lightens. In such significant guise did the personal God as yet appear to men who were still unreconciled. Or if there was, even under the pre-Christian time, some more kindly prefiguration of Christ as simply the Light that lighteneth every man, I question if there be any better than just that seven-branched candlestick of gold which Zechariah saw in his vision; the same which stood beside Jesus as He spoke, and which had lit up Jerusalem in the revelry of the previous evening. Such was that Old Testament economy of revelation. As a night-lamp it was perfect enough, sevenfold, set on high to lighten Judah; but at its best still no better than a lamp by night. Day was not come to the Hebrew saints, and they knew it. Theirs was a time for keeping of vigils and patient looking for the dawn. And the glory of the holy people lay just here, that they had a lamp to trim and sit by, under the promise of whose shining they might await the coming of One who was to be more than the consolation of Israel, even a light to enlighten the Gentiles. Emphatically He was, and He claimed to be, not Israel's lamp, but the world's sun.

Think too how this claim of Jesus set aside all the wisdom that was in the world before Him—the speculation, the science, and the reasonings of pagan thinkers about God and the universe. Men who have to live in the dark must strike some sort of light for themselves to see to live by, some earth-begotten spark, which will serve their turn in the absence of the sun. So, before Christ, and apart from Him, the nations have not been able to do without some scanty and faint conceptions of God, and destiny, and duty, and immortality—such broken rays as can be found in nature or in man's own being, eking out by painful and uncertain guesses as to the meaning of life, the *whence* and *whither* of human existence. These pale and dubious systems, theosophies, cosmogonies, and what not—such as

they are—are good only for the more cultured minds in heathendom ; they leave the mass of pagan populations in utter ignorance of God and of themselves, a prey to superstition and the fantastic fears that haunt the darkness. The coming of Christ to the ancient pagan world was like the opening of a window shutter in a long-closed, foul chamber, where man had groped for long amid the shadows in a gloom hardly broken by a taper. It lit up earth and heaven. It made men know God and themselves. It brought reason into their faith, hope into their religion. It gave assurance where there had been only guess-work. It translated them (in Paul's strong words) out of the realm of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son. God spake, and, lo, there was light !

Wonderful image for the greatest spiritual change this world has known ! A sun sent of God to rise upon our night, to shine for ever in our sky. How poor do last night's burnt-out tapers look in the pale, transparent dawn ! How feverish and unreal the trouble of the night when cool day brings back health to the eyes ! How sweet is the pure dayspring, when it comes flushing up the east, unloosing the tongues of nature, cooling the sick man's fever, making even mourners forget their weeping, and flooding the footsteps of labour with a true and equal light ! That is all a parable of the coming of Jesus to the world, or to each man's heart ! The calm truth there is in the sunlight, the hopefulness of its rising when it makes all things new, the brilliancy of its noon, its warming, kindling, quickening, gladdening virtue : all these I love to think of as pressed into the praise of our Lord Jesus. Let us thank Him for that word, “I am the Light of this world ! ”

It was, when He made it that day, an astounding, almost an incredible, pretension. Even when He went straight out from saying it and gave sight to eyes that had never seen, it was still almost more than men could credit. But

has not this astounding claim been magnificently verified ? Whatever mists or storms may have since wrapt about His gospel and at times shut out His light, can any thoughtful man deny that, ever since Jesus lived, He has continued to shine in history like a sun, or that to this hour He is the chief light that is risen above human horizon ? Take any of the cardinal vital questions for which men need answers, and blot out all that we have learned from the New Testament, and see what will remain to you for an answer !

The being and character of God, for example. Set aside what Jesus Christ has taught us of our Father in heaven, if you can ; go back, if you can, to try again the old pagan way to find out God, through science, reasoning, and guesses : what better result do you reach, what clearer or surer light have you, than a Greek philosopher or a Hindu pantheist ? If there dwells before the soul of even the humblest Christian child a conception of the great spiritual Father, as at once just and tender, as near and beneficent and helpful, as patient and generous and considerate and forgiving, as One to be wholly leant on, worthy to be loved with a noble, secure affection : from whom has that conception been learnt ? From whom but from Jesus Christ ? By simply discovering to us the Father as a real Person, who at once hates wrong and loves mercy, who is righteously gracious to every penitent, and ever beside us to aid in our contest with evil, as all that our conscience told us He must be to be just, yet more than our heart dared to hope He might be in His kindness—by simply (I say) unveiling the round, undistorted character of God through plain facts, Jesus has let in upon our souls a perfect flood of colourless, pellucid light. Set in this white light of God, we know where we stand, we see things as they are, we can tell with whom we have to do, and what it is He will do with us. We are rid of misconception. Our horizon grows wide ; we have an outlook into the clear heaven.

We know our sin, it is true, as we did not before; we are more ashamed of it, but we are less afraid of it than we were. We are freed from abject alarms, born of distrust and ignorance. We see now how man is just with God. We see how man is to go to God. Death is no more a thing of dread. All the world wears another look. Partial lights, half truths, mis-shapen terrors, obscurities, lies, impotence against evil, despair of good: these all take wing before the face of God, they flee before His light. In the noblest of heathen sculptures (the Apollo with the Bow) there lay hid a half-conscious prophecy: that prophecy has been fulfilled. Arrows of light from God have stricken to death the old serpent of falsehood; spiritual fear has fled away; and the spiritual vices of despondency and sloth have followed after it. In the new day that is begun, a warm, human love breathes like an air out of the heart of God into our own heart. Like sunshine on the plants, does the favour of our Father rest warm and constant upon every soul that will bask in it. Health comes back to the moral nature; and with moral health comes hopeful labour in the light, and self-respect, and grave cheerfulness, and calm, reasoning courage. These are the graces of the Christian day.

To each of us this change comes when we not only *see* the light, but *let in* the light, for its blessed warmth's sake, and its comfort and refreshment. When the heart opens itself up to Christ, how the icy distrust and enmity within give way and melt before Him! how the soil of our nature turns to softness, and the strength of the affections goes up in love and praise and dutiful service to our true Lover and King on high! how the daily life bursts out in kindly activities and lovely tempers, even as the spring ground is glad to kindle and to bloom all over when the spring sun warms it! There are cold, shady places, even in the Christian's land—corners of our territory that face the pole,

from which you cannot see your Saviour's face nor feel the heat of a Father's heart lying upon your own. Into such chill regions of experience it is well not to wander. It is doleful work there. That is a cheerless, and it is a fruitless, land. To abide in sunlight, one must follow the sun and one must face the sun. He of us who so follows Jesus shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.

J. OSWALD DYKES.

PERSONAL REMINISCENCES OF
CARDINAL NEWMAN.

IT is not without reluctance that I have undertaken, at the editor's request, to place on record sundry personal recollections of the great Cardinal who has passed away. He has, more than any one other man, influenced my own life and career, whether for good or for evil it is hardly for me to say. I was still a schoolboy when the appearance of his *Apologia* in bi-monthly parts first attracted my attention to him, and thenceforward I was more and more conscious of his influence, though I never saw him until ten or eleven years later. I recollect eagerly buying his *Grammar of Assent* on its first appearance—my copy was doubtless the first one sold in Oxford—and reading it with intense though somewhat perplexed interest. The Vatican Council was sitting at the time, and the theological atmosphere was murky with the papal infallibility controversy. I did not at that time, nor at any subsequent time, attach the highest importance to that. It seemed to me, what it seems now, an internal domestic question of the Roman Church, practically settled in the affirmative long ago, and a matter of expediency or policy whether it should be formally decided or no. But the *Grammar of Assent* went to the roots of the whole difficult question of dogmatic faith, and it was pleasant to note the writer's cheery treatment of it, as he