

Lucretia Mott

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It is time that Christians were judged more by their likeness to Christ than their notions of Christ. Were this sentiment generally admitted we should not see such tenacious adherence to what men deem the opinions and doctrines of Christ while at the same time in every day practise is exhibited anything but a likeness to Christ. My reflections in this meeting have been upon the origin, parentage, and character of Jesus. I have thought we might profitably dwell upon the facts connected with his life, his precepts, and his practise in his walks among men.

Humble as was his birth, obscure as was his parentage, little known as he seemed to be in his neighborhood and country, he has astonished the world and brought a response from all mankind by the purity of his precepts, the excellence of his example. Wherever that inimitable sermon on the mount is read, let it be translated into any language and spread before the people, there is an acknowledgement of its truth. When we come to judge the sectarian professors of his name by the true test, how widely do their lives differ from his?

Instead of going about doing good as was his wont, instead of being constantly in the exercise of benevolence and love as was his practice, we find the disposition too generally to measure the Christian by his assent to a creed which had not its sign with him nor indeed in his day. Instead of engaging in the exercise of peace, justice, and mercy, how many of the professors are arrayed against him in opposition to those great principles even as were his opposers in his day. Instead of being the bold nonconformist (if I may so speak) that he was, they are adhering to old church usages, and worn-out forms and exhibiting little of a Christ like disposition and character. Instead of uttering the earnest protests against the spirit of

proselytism and sectarianism as did the blessed Jesus--the divine, the holy, the born of God, there is the servile accommodation to this sectarian spirit and an observance of those forms even long after there is any claim of virtue in them; a disposition to use language which shall convey belief that in the inmost heart of many they reject.

Is this honest, is this Christ like? Should Jesus again appear and preach as he did round about Judea and Jerusalem and Galilee, these high professors would be among the first to set him at naught, if not to resort to the extremes which were resorted to in his day. There is no danger of this now, however, because the customs of the age will not bear the bigot out in it, but the spirit is manifest, which led martyrs to the stake, Jesus to the cross, Mary Dyer to the gallows. This spirit is now showing itself in casting out the name one of another, as evil, in brother delivering up brother unto sectarian death. We say if Jesus should again appear--He **is** here; he **has** appeared, from generation to generation and his spirit is now as manifest, in the humble, the meek, the bold reformers, even among some of obscure parentage.

His spirit is now going up and down among men seeking their good, and endeavoring to promote the benign and holy principles of peace, justice, and love. And blessing to the merciful, to the peacemaker, to the pure in heart, and the poor in spirit, to the just, the upright, to those who desire righteousness is earnestly proclaimed, by these messengers of the Highest who are now in our midst. These, the preachers of righteousness, are no more acknowledged by the same class of people than was the messiah to the Jews. They are the anointed of God, the inspired preachers and writers and believers of the present time. In the pure example which they exhibit to the nations, they are emphatically the beloved sons of God.

It is, my friends, my mission to declare these things among you at the hazard of shocking many prejudices. The testimony of the chosen servants of the Highest in our day is equally divine

inspiration with the inspired teaching of those in former times. It is evidence of the superstition of our age, that we can adhere to, Yea that, we can bow with profound veneration to the records of an Abraham, the sensualist Solomon, and the war-like David, inspired though they many have been, and I am not disposed to doubt it, more than to the equal inspiration of the writers of the present age. Why not acknowledge the inspiration of many of the poets of succeeding ages, as well as of Deborah and Miriam in their songs of victory of Job and David in their beautiful poetry and psalms, or of Isaiah and Jeremiah in their scorching rebukes and mournful lamentations?

These are beautifully instructive but ought they to command our veneration more than the divine poetic language of many, very many, since their day, who have uttered truth equally precious? Truth speaks the same language in every age of the world and is equally valuable to us. Are we so blindly superstitious as to reject the one and adhere to the other? How much does this society lose by this undue veneration to ancient authorities, a want of equal respect to the living inspired testimonies of latter time? Christianity requires that we bring into view the apostles of succeeding generations, that we acknowledge their apostleship and give the right hand of fellowship to those who have been and who are sent forth of God with Great truths to declare before the people; and also to practice lives of righteousness, exceeding the righteousness of the scribes and pharisees, and even of the chosen ones of former times.

The people in their childish and dark state, just emerging out of barbarism, were not prepared to exhibit all those great principles in the near approach to fullness, to the perfection that is called for at our hands. There is this continued advance toward perfection from age to age. The records of our predecessors give evidence of such progress. When I quote the language of William Penn, "it is time for Christians to be judged more by their likeness to Christ than their notions of

Christ," I offer the sentiment of one who is justly held in great regard if not veneration by this people, and whose writings may be referred to with as much profit as those of the servants of God in former ages; and we may well respect the memory of him and his contemporaries as well as of many not limited to our religious society, who have borne testimony to the truth.

It is of importance to us, also, to speak of those whom we know, those whose characters we have fuller acquaintance with, than we can have with such as lived in ages past, that we should bring into view the lives of the faithful of our generation.

Jesus bore his testimony--doing always the things which pleased his Father. He lived his meek, his humble and useful life--drawing his disciples around him, and declaring great truths to the people who gathered to hear him.

His apostles and their successors were faithful in their day--going out into the world, and shaking the nations around them. Reformers since their time have done their work in exposing error and wrong, and calling for priests of righteousness in place of vain forms. The bold utterances of Elias Hicks and his contemporaries aroused the sectarian and theological world in our day. Their demand for a higher righteousness was not in vain. Their examples of self-denials and faithfulness to duty should be held up for imitation. We overestimate those who have lived and labored in days long past, while we value not sufficiently the labors of those around us, who may have as high a commission as had their predecessors.

Let us not hesitate to regard the utterance of truth in our age, as of equal value with that which is recorded in the scriptures. None can revere more than I do the truths of the Bible. I have read it perhaps as much as any one present, and, I trust, with profit. It has at times been more to me than my daily food. When an attempt was made some twenty years ago to engraft some church dogmas upon this society, claiming this book for authority, it led me to examine, and compare text with the

content. In so doing I became so much interested that I scarcely noted the passage of time. Even to this day, when I open this volume, so familiar is almost every chapter that I can sometimes scarcely lay it aside from the interest I feel in its beautiful pages.

But I should be recreant to the principle, did I not say, the great error in Christendom is in regarding these scriptures taken as a whole as the plenary inspiration of God, and their authority as supreme. I consider this as Elias Hicks did one of the greatest drawbacks, one of the greatest barriers to human progress that there is in the religious world, for while this volume is held as it is, and, by a resort to it, war, and slavery, wine drinking, and other cruel, oppressive, and degrading evils are sustained, pleading the example of the ancients as authority it serves as a check to human progress, as an obstacle in the way of these great and glorious reformers that are now upon the field. Well did that servant of God, Elias Hicks, warn the people against an undue veneration of the Bible, or of any human authority, any written record or outward testimony. The tendency of his ministry was to lead the mind to the divine teacher, the sublime ruler, that all would find within themselves, which was above men's teaching, human records, or outward authorities.

Highly as he valued these ancient testimonies, they were not to take the place of the higher law inwardly revealed, which was and should be, the governing principle of our lives. One of our early friends, Richard Davies, attended a meeting of the independents, and heard the preacher express the sentiment that the time would come when Christians would have no more need of the Bible than of any other book. He remarked on this saying of the preacher, "Hast thou not experienced that time already come." Does not this imply, or may we not infer from this, that our worthy friend has experienced that time already come; was it a greater heresy, than that uttered by the apostle Paul, when he declared that those who had known a birth into the gospel, had no more need of the law? that they were under a

higher dispensation than were they who were bound by their statutes and ceremonies?

Let us also not hesitate to declare it, and to speak the truth plainly as it is in Jesus, that we believe the time is come when this undue adherence to outward authorities, or to any forms of baptism or of communion of church or sabbath worship, should give place to more practical goodness among men, more love manifested one unto another in our every day life, doing good and ministering to the wants and interests of our fellow beings the world over. If we fully believe this, should we be most honest, did we so far seek to please men, more than to please God, as to fail to utter in our meetings, and whenever we feel called upon to do so in our conversation, in our writings, and to exhibit by example, by a life of non-conformity, in accordance with these views, that we have faith and confidence in our convictions?

It needs, my friends, in this day that one should go forth saying neither baptism profiteth anything nor non-baptism, but faith which worketh by love, neither the ordinance of the communion table profiteth anything, nor the absence from the same, but faith which worketh by love. These things should never be regarded as the test of the worshipper. Neither your sabbath observance profiteth anything, nor the non-observance of the day, but faith which worketh by love. Let all these subjects be held up in their true light. Let them be plainly spoken of-- and let our lives be in accordance with our convictions of right, each striving to carry out our principles. Then obscure though we may be, lost sight of almost, in the great and pompous religious associations of the day, we yet shall have our influence and it will be felt. Why do we wish it to be felt? Because we believe it is the testimony of truth, and our duty to spread it far and wide. Because the healthful growth of the people requires that they should come away from their vain oblations, and settle upon the ground of obedience to the requiremings of truth.

I desire to speak so as to be understood, and trust there are among you ears blessed that they hear, and that these principles shall be received as the Gospel of the blessed son of God. Happy shall they be, who by observing these, shall come to be divested of the traditions and superstitions which have been clinging to them, leading them to erect an altar "to the unknown God."

In the place of this shall an altar be raised where on may be oblations of God's own preparing. Thus may these approach our Father in Heaven and hold communion with him--entering his courts with thanksgiving, and his gates with praise, even though there may be no oral expression. He may unite in prayer and in praise, which will ascend as sweet incense, and the blessing will come which we can scarcely contain.

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