

Hymn Meditation – “Blessed Assurance” Galatians 1:11-24 and I John 1:1-10 July 14, 2019

In Christian theology there’s something known as “apologetics” – which I’ve always thought a bit odd, even unfortunate, since obviously, its root is “apology.” Apologetics comes from the second meaning of its root however – it’s an honest defense of our faith, not regret about having faith. There’s a place for apologetics in Christianity, and I’m grateful for believers today and through history gifted with the intelligence and eloquence to practice it.

A religion needs its defenders - people who can explain correctly even if not always convincingly what Christians believe and correct misperceptions that might prevent people from coming to faith in Jesus. Getting the basics of the faith down is the reason Martin Luther wrote his catechisms – so folks could understand and explain their faith in a simple and proper way – thus having assurance of what it is we mean when we say “I believe.”

Fanny Crosby was not an apologist however – even if she understood the Christian faith quite well. Ms. Crosby through her music wanted only to be an evangelist, to bring people to Christ by describing the Jesus that lived in her. If you forgive my choice of words, evangelists and apologists are altogether different animals - same goals, different means. Evangelists don’t explain the faith – they radiate faith. Apologists describe what believing in Jesus Christ means – evangelists describe what he means to them, and then invite you to find out for yourself.

Jesus said to a “doubting Thomas” *“blessed are those who have not seen, and yet believe.”* Fanny Crosby likely never saw anything of a physical nature in her life –so her perception of things could not have come from what she saw – beauty and ugliness all were formed without the aid of sight. There are things within us that may be aided by what we see – a sunset or an orchid in bloom that elicit gratitude or a hungry or dying person that awakens compassion – but gratitude or compassion can exist without seeing too. Jesus knew that was how it would be for virtually everyone who ever called themselves a Christian – they’d believe something, a Savior whom they’d never seen – and think him beautiful and compassionate and a lot more!

John the disciple of Jesus got that message and did precisely that – he wrote not to explain Jesus in his letters but to describe his joy knowing Jesus. Paul wrote plenty of “apologetics” – think the book of Romans - but in Galatians initially anyway he’s all about how Jesus changed him. That’s what the evangelist does – what Fanny Crosby songs do. Some complained her songs were too sentimental – *“religious saccharine”* they called them. But such is the gift the poet/evangelist brings to the church – they write of feelings because they know, as we ought – that feelings are real too. Some things just have to be believed...to be seen.

At the age of 8, Fanny wrote a poem about her blindness. Later in life she said *“I thank God for my (blindness). If perfectly earthly sight were offered me tomorrow I would not accept it. I might not have sung hymns to the praise of God if I had been distracted by the beautiful and interesting things about me. How blessed I am that when I get to heaven the first face that shall ever gladden my sight will be that of my Savior.”* Fanny’s is quite a story, and her gift to the church is quite a song. Singing it, let’s make it our story too.

