

H Y M N S

On Knowing the Lord as the Spirit

During an intimate conversation with His closest disciples on the night in which He was betrayed, the Lord Jesus prepared them for His imminent death. He explained that He had not spoken these things earlier, "because I was with you," but that He was now going to return to the Father who had sent Him (John 16:4-5). His words of encouragement were, "It is expedient for you that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Comforter will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you" (v. 7). In the context of John 14 through 16, and in the further light of the writings of the apostle Paul, the coming of the Comforter was the coming of the Lord Himself in another form—as the Spirit who gives life (see "The Processed and Consummated Triune God" in *A & C*, Vol. I, No. 2, p. 13ff). The disciples were about to experience a momentous transition in the way in which their Lord would be with them. He had been with them physically. Now He would be in them spiritually as the Comforter.

When Watchman Nee composed the above hymn, he used the writings of John and Paul as a backdrop for his musings. He ponders with profound expression on the meaning of the Lord's transition from flesh to Spirit, not only for the disciples at that time, but for all of His believers throughout the centuries. Through death and resurrection, He changed His form from that of a man in the flesh who tabernacled among us (John 1:14) to that of the life-giving Spirit who now dwells in us (1 Cor. 15:45; Rom. 8:9-10). The hymn is an intimate and contemplative

discourse of a believer with his Lord; the believer contrasts his knowing the Lord as a man whom he could see, feel, and touch with knowing Him as the Spirit, unseen yet known more deeply, more intimately, as One who dwells within.

The first stanza seems to refer to that long portion in John 14 through 16. The writer says, in effect, "Lord, You knew that as long as You were still a man in the flesh I could know You only in a shallow way. So You came as the Spirit to make Yourself known within my human spirit." This is the unique revelation of God's New Testament economy. Based on this economy, Paul pointedly declares, "We, from now on, know no one according to the flesh; even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him so no longer" (2 Cor. 5:16). To many Christians, not knowing the Lord according to the flesh seems to be a lamentable loss. Actually, it is our surpassing privilege as New Testament believers to know Him according to the Spirit, because we can know Him deeply, genuinely, and

even inherently only in the Spirit.

Stanza 2 further contrasts the Jesus who was physically touched by His disciples in the Holy Land and the Lord who is now the Spirit to be inwardly joined to His present-day followers: "In flesh Redeemer mine Thou art; / As Spirit now my Comforter." To enter into a living relationship with His chosen people, the Lord took two steps. First, the Word who was with God and who was God,

- 1 Lord, Thou didst know when in the flesh,
As such I'd know Thee shallowly;
Then as the Spirit Thou didst come
Within my spirit, known to be.
- 2 In flesh Redeemer mine Thou art;
As Spirit now my Comforter.
The outward touch has passed away
For inward union worthier.
- 3 Because Thou art the Spirit now,
Thyself revealing ceaselessly,
Within my spirit I may know
Thy presence and reality.
- 4 I know Thy life surpassing far
The knowledge Thy disciples had,
Although they walked and lived with Thee,
When Thou on earth in flesh wast clad.
- 5 Because Thy Spirit dwells within,
How real, O Lord, Thou art to me;
Not touched, yet more reliable,
Not seen, yet loved more fervently.
- 6 Thy Holy Spirit deep within
Supplies Thyself as righteousness,
As holiness, redemption full,
As wisdom and as fruitfulness.
- 7 Thy Spirit in my spirit now
Supplies Thyself, unites with me,
Thus I am all the time myself
And constantly am also Thee.

became flesh (John 1:1, 14). He first became flesh with blood in order to take away the sin of the world as the Lamb of God (v. 29). Without blood, He never could have accomplished our redemption. This is the judicial and objective aspect of knowing Him. Yet He took a second step in order to become our indwelling Comforter (cf. 14:16-20). He took this second step by becoming the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45). This is the organic and subjective aspect of knowing Him. As long as He was in the flesh, He could only be with us; however, after He had taken the second step, He could dwell within us. "The outward touch has passed away / For inward union worthier."

Stanzas 3 through 6 detail some aspects of our organic salvation by which we come to know more deeply the Christ who now indwells our spirit, including His presence and reality, His life, His deeper intimacy with us, and His unsearchable riches as our supply. Thus, we know Christ by our experience and our enjoyment of Him.

"Within my spirit I may know / Thy presence and reality." Because He is the indwelling Spirit, we can experience Him ceaselessly. Although the disciples walked with Him for three and a half years, His unveiling of Himself to them was limited by time and space. They could know Him only through His direct speaking and working in His physical presence. But the indwelling Christ whom we enjoy is not only real and living. He is also constantly available and instantly ready in our every situation. The disciples also were limited in their ability to interpret His meaning and intention because of their natural concepts and understanding which were often under the blinding of the satanic influence (cf. Matt. 16:21-23). Because He was not yet the indwelling Spirit, the Lord was unable to touch the inward parts of the disciples to unveil them so that they could behold His glory. Although they saw Him with His face shining as the sun and His garments becoming as white as the light (17:2), it was only for a brief moment in time. But we behold Him day by day with an unveiled face. The light shining from His face is shining in our hearts and illuminating the knowledge of the glory of God moment by moment. And as we are beholding, we are not limited to an awe-inspiring physical appearance; this light is penetrating into the center of our being to change us metabolically into the same image (2 Cor. 3:18; 4:6). We know not only His presence, but even more we know His reality!

We also know His life, "surpassing far / The knowledge Thy disciples had, / Although they walked and lived with Thee." John tells us that the disciples beheld and touched the One who is the eternal life (1 John 1:1-2). Their eyewitness account is a reassurance to every believer of the validity of His life. But the testimony of the apostles has a far more profound goal—the bringing of all their hearers into the same fellowship, into a mystical participation in

that eternal life (vv. 3-4). Eventually, John strongly affirms, "He who has the Son has the life" (5:12). We not only behold the life, handle the life, listen to the life; we have the life—we possess it, partake of it, and enjoy it! Hence we experience this life in a way far surpassing what the first disciples enjoyed. This wonderful Christ has now become our life (Col. 3:4).

Based on the dynamic experience of the Spirit who now dwells within us, we have a surpassing intimacy with Him. "Not touched, yet more reliable, / Not seen, yet loved more fervently." Some may consider, "How wonderful to have been John, the disciple "whom Jesus loved...reclining on Jesus' bosom" (John 13:23). Indeed, John's testimony in his Gospel is filled with references concerning his deep and intimate relationship with the Lord. Yet our experience is more reliable—it can never be severed by time or space. And our love is more fervent: "Jesus Christ; whom having not seen, you love; into whom though not seeing Him at present, yet believing, you exult with joy that is unspeakable and full of glory" (1 Pet. 1:7-8). In our spirit we have become mingled with Him (1 Cor. 6:17). We fellowship with Him in His sufferings, we enjoy Him in His resurrection, we labor together with Him as His fellow workers, and we exult in Him with joy that is unspeakable and full of glory!

The indwelling Spirit also supplies us with the multifaceted riches of Christ, that is, with Christ Himself "as righteousness, / As holiness, redemption full, / As wisdom and as fruitfulness." Paul told the Corinthian believers, "But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became wisdom to us from God: both righteousness and sanctification and redemption" (1 Cor. 1:30). But these are only a few of the unsearchable riches of Christ that are in "the Spirit of Jesus Christ" to be our bountiful supply (Phil. 1:19). His humanity, His divinity, and all of His attributes and virtues are now continually, even intrinsically, available to us in this all-inclusive supply!

The final stanza of this outstanding hymn concludes with a striking declaration: "Thy Spirit in my spirit now / Supplies Thyself, unites with me, / Thus I am all the time myself / And constantly am also Thee." In Galatians 2:20 Paul declares that it is no longer he who lives but Christ who lives in him. In Philippians 1:21 he says, "For to me, to live is Christ." At this point in his experience, the apostle's oneness with the Lord was so comprehensive that his living was the Lord's living. When Christ died on the cross, we all were crucified with Him (Gal. 2:20). When He was resurrected, we were also resurrected; when He was seated in the heavenlies, we also were seated with Him (Eph. 2:5-6). He and we have one life and one living. This is the consummation of the organic union between the Lord and His believers. Having been grafted into Christ, we partake

of His divine life and nature. Hence, we live a life which is just Christ Himself, not by our natural or religious nature but by His divine nature which has been implanted into our being and is now spreading in us to constitute

us with Himself. By this operation of God within us, we become an extension of Christ Himself living the divine life out through our human life. Hence, "I am all the time myself / And constantly am also Thee."

by Gary Kaiser

An Organic Anthem

One can hardly think about the Protestant Reformation without bringing to mind as well Luther's cherished hymn of spiritual battle and divine protection, "Ein' feste Burg is unser Gott" ("A mighty fortress is our God"). Luther wrote what was to become the de facto Protestant anthem probably in 1527 or 1528, after hard years of pestilence and personal suffering. His hymn vividly bears the struggle that he endured and the rescue that he enjoyed. For what Luther hoped to convey—the prevailing victory of God in Christ over all spiritual foes—there is scarcely another hymn written with such great feeling and content. Generations of Christians, Protestant and Catholic alike, have found the same solace in singing this hymn that Luther enjoyed in writing it.

Here we offer a hymn that somewhat echoes the great reformer's, not so much in content as in insight. However, the insight of this hymn regards God not in His ability to protect us but in His intrinsic existence as He comes to reach us. While Luther speaks metaphorically of God as a fortress, this hymn speaks of God as He is actually, a mighty flowing-out. In His eternal existence, God is a flow, a mutual interpenetration and

(Tune: "A Mighty Fortress is Our God")

- 1 A mighty flowing-out is God,
He flows throughout the ages.
And so to flow Himself to man
He comes to us in stages;
Yet still one God is He,
One flow eternally;
His stages pave the way
To flow through man today,
And now He flows within us!
- 2 In the beginning wondrously,
God is the flowing river,
The river to convey the tree,
Himself as life deliver.
And at the end the same,
The river doth remain,
God in the Lamb doth flow,
The tree prevails to grow,
And God flows on forever.
- 3 God flowed Himself into a man,
The man we call Christ Jesus.
He gave up His own life for man
And God's own life releases.
Though Satan did his best
To put God's flow to rest—
He had Him crucified
And cruelly pierced His side—
But out came blood and water!
- 4 The blood and water flowed from Him,
In streams of pure salvation.
The blood brings cleansing from all sin;
Water, regeneration.
And now the Spirit flows,
Brings God where'er He goes.
All he could do, the foe,
Was just release the flow.
And God just keeps on flowing.

coinherence of Father, Son, and Spirit. In His economy, He is even more obviously a flowing-out, and His economy is more precisely what this hymn speaks of. God's economy is not merely to rescue perishing man from eternal perdition but also to enliven and transform man into His own glorious image, and to this end God comes to man in Christ as the Spirit. Throughout the Bible God's coming to man is typified as the flowing of a river. This hymn celebrates such a flow, a flow that is God Himself, a flow that manifests itself in Christ Jesus, a flow that brings God to His elect, a flow that runs through and fills the believers, a flow that ultimately brings the redeemed and regenerated elect to the New Jerusalem for eternity.

Stanza 1 introduces God as this mighty flowing-out and declares that His actions in human history are a flow of Himself to humanity. His flowing-out is in stages. Subsequent stanzas speak of God's flowing in incarnation, of His flowing in His marvelous death, and of His flowing as the Spirit into the believers. Yet the one God is one flow eternally. The incarnation and

death of the God-man is not the action of just the Son nor is the regeneration of God's elect the action of

just the Spirit There are not three flows among humanity, but one flow from eternity, one action of one God in Trinity. And all that God has done in incarnation, human living, death, and resurrection paves the way for Him to come to man as the eternal flow that He is. today we His believers enjoy not merely His forgiveness and acceptance but profoundly what He is in His own being, the flowing in His Trinity—"And now He flows within us!"

The Bible begins and ends with a river and a tree. In the Garden of Eden, God's original paradise (Gen. 2:8, LXX), the outstanding features are the tree of life and a river that issues from the garden to water the surrounding lands. The tree of life and the river become strong motifs in the Bible and are used to typify God coming in His economy to reach man. For example, the Lord Jesus presents Himself as the true vine with the believers as His many branches (John 15:1). He also promises that the Spirit will be in the believers as rivers of living water (John 7:38-39). Ultimately, the Bible concludes with a heavenly city coming down to earth (Heb. 12:22; Rev. 21:2), the enlarged Paradise of God (Rev. 2:7), and in that city the outstanding features are again the tree of life and a river of water of life (22:1-2). The writer of this hymn captures this panorama of the Bible in stanza 2. Based on the later revelation of the Scriptures, he identifies the river in Genesis with the flowing God from eternity. But an even greater insight ensues: The river conveys the tree. We can hardly see this in Genesis, but based on the picture in Revelation 22, where the tree and the river are consummated, the river does indeed convey the tree: "And on this side and on that side of the river was the tree of life" (v. 2a). The picture in Revelation 22 expresses the divine fact that the Spirit conveys Christ to those who would receive Him, and both Christ and the Spirit come to man as life, as the tree of life and as the river of water of life. The river conveys the tree to deliver God as life to man. This one intention of God persists throughout time and into eternity. Even our fall cannot derail God's economy. Instead, God flows in our Lamb-Redeemer, the tree prevails, and God flows on forever. The introduction of the Lamb in this stanza hints at our need for redemption, and that hints at our fallen condition. The next two stanzas more fully show how redemption is the flowing-out of God for our full salvation.

In stanza 3 the incarnation is viewed as a flow of God into man. "The man we call Christ Jesus" was actually God flowing among the human race. As a man Christ was able to offer up His human life as the perfect sacrifice for the sins of mankind. "He gave up His own life for man/And God's own life releases." The life delivered up is different from the life released. The life Christ gave up is His human life, which in the original Greek of the

New Testament is the *psychē*-life (Mark 10:45; John 10:15; 1 John 3:16); whereas the life He released is His divine life, which the Greek New Testament refers to as the *zōē*-life (John 10:10; Eph. 4:18; 1 John 5:20). On the one hand, the Lord laid down His own life by His own authority (John 10:17-18); on the other hand, His death was the result of the enemy's violent attack. Here again this hymn echoes Luther's great work by evoking the cosmic battle that focuses on the man Christ Jesus. Satan's tack was to frustrate and ultimately stop the progress of God's economy by doing away with the God-man. He did not realize, however, that it would be by the taking away of Christ's human life that Christ's divine life would be released to all mankind and God's full salvation would be effected. The writer of this hymn captures the full import of Christ's death in the graphic account of Christ's body being pierced after He died: "But out came blood and water!" (John 19:34). This final act of cruelty, inflicted on the dead body of our Lord, provides a vivid symbol of God's full salvation, which the hymn writer develops in stanza 4. In the death of Christ, God yet flows, now "in streams of pure salvation." Christ's death, implied by the blood, accomplished our redemption (Eph. 1:7; Heb. 9:12); while the divine life, which was released in His death and is signified by the water, issued forth for our regeneration. The washing water of regeneration is applied to us by the Holy Spirit, whom God poured out richly upon us through Jesus Christ (Titus 3:5-6); thus, the regeneration of every believer is the rich flowing-out of the eternal Triune God. The Spirit is the reaching of that flow that "brings God where'er He goes."

This hymn concludes with the ultimate blow to God's enemy, the declaration that even his activities against God's economy are for God's economy. To his great shame, he must admit that "all he could do, the foe,/Was just release the flow." Luther's great hymn lauds the Christ who battles and defeats the enemy of God, whose cruel hate is directed against the saints. This hymn lauds the Christ who takes upon Himself the decisive blow from that enemy in accord with a divine counsel that causes even such opposition to work for the good of God's economy (1 Cor. 2:7-8; Rom. 8:28). We should not miss the experience that Luther had of God being a mighty fortress to us. In truth, we are "in Christ," and He is our eternal refuge (Psa. 46:1; 91:2; Heb. 6:18). But we should not miss the experience of the deeper truth that Christ is in us. Now as the glorified Jesus, He flows within us as rivers of living water (John 7:38). Out from eternity He has flowed into us to bring us unto eternity. Obstacles have and will come, but He as the eternal flow prevails; God just keeps on flowing.

by Kerry S. Robichaux