

Concerning the Flowing of the Triune God Issuing in the Joining and Mingling of God with Humanity

- 1 O God, Thou art the source of life,
Divine, and rich and free!
As living water flowing out
Unto eternity!
- 2 In love Thou in the Son didst flow
Among the human race;
Thou dost as Spirit also flow
Within us thru Thy grace.
- 3 Though we in sin and wickedness
Went far from Thee apace,
Yet in the Son Thou didst redeem,
Bestowing life and grace.
- 4 Though we have often slighted Thee,
Thy Spirit often grieved,
Yet Thou dost still as Spirit come
As life to be received.
- 5 Thou as the Spirit in the Son
Hast mingled heretofore;
Thou wilt thru fellowship anoint
And increase more and more.
- 6 The love of God, the grace of Christ,
The Spirit's flowing free,
Enable us God's wealth to share
Thru all eternity.
- 7 The Father, Son, and Spirit—one,
So richly care for us;
Thy love with one accord we sing
And e'er would praise Thee thus. (*Hymns*, #12)

While all the hymns of the church should refresh and uplift the hearts of the believers into an appreciation and worship of our God, hymns should also be a rich source of teaching to enlighten and renew the mind and the understanding of the saints. Such hymns can be not only sung but also spoken in the meetings of the church (Col. 3:16; Eph. 5:19). When we speak the truths conveyed in these hymns to one another and sing them to the Lord, the Lord is able to infuse us—not only inspiring us with His sweetness, love, wisdom, and grace but also enlivening us with Himself as the rich source of life within us. As God's life enters into our being, He renews us and operates within us to enable us to live a life according to His divine purpose. Hence, to know, appreciate, and use the hymns of the church, we need to consider

thoughtfully and prayerfully the crucial points they express. In this way we learn to know and experience God intimately as the intrinsic reality in our Christian life and our church life.

The above hymn, written by Witness Lee, exalts God in His Trinity coming to be the ultimate experience of love and grace, reaching and saturating us with His flowing life. One of the most profound, meaningful, and life-altering facts unveiled in the Bible is the revelation of the Triune God coming to be life to us. It merits our conscientious, measured, and detailed consideration as we enter into the rich fellowship of this hymn. The Triune God has passed through a process—in His essence and in His economy He is one, eternal and immutable, and three. The Spirit, the consummation of the processed Triune God, flows the life of God into us and makes us His many sons. This divine process is the theme of the hymn sketched out for our enjoyment in singing and for teaching and admonishing one another (Col. 3:16).

The first two stanzas of the anthem sound forth praise to God as the source of life, who flowed out in the Son through incarnation into humanity, then flowed out as the Spirit through resurrection into redeemed humanity, and will for all eternity continue to flow as living water into His chosen, redeemed, regenerated, and transformed people. God's life flows as living water, indicating that it is a dynamic force operating to supply us with everything we need for our existence and satisfaction.

The theme of this hymn mirrors the central revelation articulated in the writings of the apostle John concerning the Triune God who communicates Himself into His chosen people through His economic move. John's Gospel, together with his further visions in the book of Revelation, reveals God's intrinsic being as the Father, Son, and Spirit in a comprehensive way and also shows His economical move in His Trinity, issuing in His ultimate goal—the New Jerusalem. God is revealed as the Triune God who dispenses Himself into man—the Father is the source; the Word is the Father's embodiment and expression in His incarnation to reveal God's person and to accomplish His redemption; and the life-giving Spirit is His consummate flowing out to reach humanity and to produce sons who become the materials for the building up of His house.

God's desire to flow Himself into man involves God's passing through a process. To speak of God's being processed may seem to some a contradiction to the statements in the Bible which clearly show that our God is uncreated, self-existing, immutable, and unchangeable in His eternal being. We readily accept the absolute validity of these terms as applied to God *in His essence*. He does not, has not, nor will He ever change in His fundamental nature and eternal attributes—His Godhead.

In terms of His purpose, His move on the earth, however, the Bible clearly shows us that God became a part of creation by entering into humanity through incarnation and opening the way for humanity to become the genuine offspring of God through resurrection. For the accomplishment of this dynamic purpose, He became a genuine man in the flesh, passing through human living for more than thirty-three years, and then passing through death and resurrection to become the life-giving Spirit for dispensing Himself into man (John 1:1, 14; 1 Cor. 15:45). These events in history clearly indicate that God has passed through a process to make Himself available as life to humanity.

In his Gospel, especially in chapters fourteen through sixteen, John reports that the issue of God's process is His dispensing of Himself into all of His believers that they may be built together to be the house of the Father, the vine tree of the Son, and the new child of the Spirit. This is God's New Testament economy.

Once we have recognized that God intends to dispense His life and nature into His chosen people to produce them as sons of God, we can consider the steps by which He has initiated and is completing His divine objective as portrayed in this hymn. The moving of God in His economy is richly imparted to us in the first two stanzas:

O God, Thou art the source of life,
Divine, and rich and free!
As living water flowing out
Unto eternity!

In love Thou in the Son didst flow
Among the human race;
Thou dost as Spirit also flow
Within us thru Thy grace.

God, the eternal, uncreated, and invisible source of everything as a flowing fountain, divine, and rich and free, has gushed forth through the incarnated Son as a spring to flow among the human race in His incomparable love to become man's unique satisfaction (John 4:14). In the Son He was time-related, visible, and touchable—the manifested image of the invisible God. This was a momentous point in the history of humanity—God

became a man and dwelt among the human race! Its significance is astounding.

But perhaps even more incredulous to the finite mind is the further flowing of our God in His continuing fellowship as the Spirit. In the Son we could know His ways, His acts, and His divine attributes manifested in human virtues. In the Spirit we are able to know Him more deeply and intimately, no longer simply according to the flesh. We now know Him as the Spirit in our spirit, uttering the cry, "Abba, Father!" (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6). He is now flowing into humanity and moving in humanity, becoming the energizing factor in His believers to will and to do all things for the working out of the divine salvation (Phil. 2:12-13). This flowing Spirit is the fulfillment of the Lord's promise that rivers of living water would flow out of the innermost being of all those who believe in the Son (John 7:37-39).

The third stanza points to the "life and grace" which have been given to us through the redemptive work of the Son. He came to carry out the Father's plan—a fact that is clearly revealed in the Gospel of John through the speaking of the Lord Jesus Himself; He repeatedly emphasized that He was sent by the Father and that He came to do the Father's will. He was absolutely one with the Father even to the degree that the Son's speaking was the Father's working (14:10).

For the accomplishing of the Father's will, He proclaimed that He came to impart life into those who receive Him. John announces, "In Him [the Word] was life, and the life was the light of men" (1:4). In John 10:10 the Lord cried out, "I have come that they may have life and may have it abundantly." The life of which the Lord speaks in these verses is the life of God, the divine life. And this divine life is just God Himself embodied in the Son. Hence, in his first Epistle John makes a firm assertion, saying, "God gave to us eternal life and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life" (5:11-12). This word corroborates the speaking of the Lord Jesus on the eve of His crucifixion: "I am the way and the reality and the life; no one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6). Life permeates the Gospel of John. It is the burden of the Lord expressed throughout the record. Yet apart from the Son we do not have life, even though we may search the Scriptures painstakingly (6:53; 5:39-40). God bestows life only in and through His unique Son.

It is also in the Son that He bestows grace. As we reflect on the testimony of John in his Gospel, the central place that grace occupies should strike us all. Regarding the pre-eminent position of grace in John's writings, Witness Lee writes,

We have seen that John's writings begin and end with the grace of God. John shows that when God became incarnated, that was grace coming. John 1:14 says that the Word became flesh, full of grace. Then verse 17 says that the law was given through Moses but grace came. This grace in John 1:17 is personified. Grace came when God came to be a man. John's writings end with grace as the consummation of the entire Scriptures (Rev. 22:21). (215)

A careful reading of the revelation in the Bible concerning grace leads one to conclude that grace—like life—is a wonderful person. Witness Lee continues,

Thus, John's writings begin with grace and end with grace....This indicates that in the accomplishment of His eternal economy, God commences it in His incarnation by coming to be a man as the grace to the believers. God came in the way of incarnation to us as grace. Hence, grace is the Triune God in His incarnation to be dispensed to the believers by the Father as the source, by the Son as the element, and by the Spirit as the application (2 Cor. 13:14). The source of grace, the element of grace, and the application of grace are of the three Persons of the Divine Trinity to be our everything. (205-206)

When we muse upon this hymn, we should have an increasing sense of gratitude to our God for His profound, unsearchable love to us in eternity past because He planned and purposed to bestow life and grace on us in the person of the Son, who came to be one of us and to be one with us. The hymn reminds us that in spite of our admitted "sin and wickedness," He came to give life and grace to us!

The contemplation of stanza 4 elevates our appreciation of His salvation by focusing our attention on the fact that even though we have often slighted Him, He still comes to us as the Spirit to be received into us as the very element of God's life. Now in the Spirit as the reality of the Son, we have been graced, receiving not only the forgiveness of all our offenses but much more the forgiving God Himself as our living constitution and full satisfaction. In the Spirit God applies all that He has willed as the Father and accomplished in the Son into His chosen believers.

Stanza 5 uncovers another of the Lord's outstanding accomplishments in the mystery of God's eternal economy—the mingling of God with man. Even though John does not use the term *mingle*, the reality of the divine intention is clearly addressed in the fourteenth chapter of his Gospel. On the eve of His crucifixion, the Lord seemed to be particularly burdened to impart to His followers a clear understanding of God's intention in His incarnation. He first made clear that He and the Father are one. The Father and the Son not only coexist; they

also coinhere—mutually abiding in one another (v. 11). While there is distinction, there is no separation in the Godhead. When we have the Son, we have the Father also. The Lord went on to reveal that He was going and that at the same time another Comforter was coming. It was necessary for Him to go; that is, it was necessary for Him to be crucified, not only to accomplish redemption but also to initiate the coming of the consummated Spirit, the Spirit who was not yet (7:39). When the Lord indicated that rivers of living water would flow in those who believe in Him, John interpreted this as a reference to the Spirit who "was not yet, because Jesus had not yet been glorified" (7:39). The glorification of the Son through death and resurrection was indispensable in order that the Spirit might come. In John 14 the Lord Jesus further affirmed that the Spirit's coming was His (the Son's) coming—"you know Him," He declared, "because He abides with you and shall be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I am coming to you" (vv. 17-18). The Spirit was *with* them in the person of the Son. He would be *in* them in the person of the Spirit. The Lord Jesus was going in His person as the incarnated Son; He was coming to them in His person as the life-giving Spirit (vv. 17-18; 1 Cor. 15:45). Thus, when He lives—when He rises from the tomb and lives in the resurrection life—the disciples will also live by the life imparted into them through the Spirit of resurrection (John 14:19).

But the most astounding assertion during His poignant discourse with the disciples on the night in which He was betrayed is verse 20: "In that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you." The Father and the Son were coinhering before the death and resurrection of the Son, but in that day—the day of resurrection—the disciples would be brought into this relationship of coinherence with the Divine Trinity! If the Lord had not spoken this, we could never have imagined such an astounding event. The Father in the Son as the Spirit has incorporated His chosen believers into Himself to mutually abide, He in them and they in Him!

Stanza 6 adopts the words of Paul in 2 Corinthians 13:14: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all." The hymn writer understood that as we enjoy the love of God, the grace of Christ, and the Spirit's flowing fellowship, we are enabled to share all the wealth of God for eternity.

Paul's Epistles fill out the riches sketched in this stanza. For example, when we carefully explore the context of Ephesians 1, we can comprehend that God is heading up all things in the universe in the person of Christ through the operation of the Triune God to produce sons of God. The Father plans (vv. 3-6), the Son expresses God and accomplishes redemption to carry out the Father's plan (vv. 7-12), and the Spirit applies the accomplished

redemption to the chosen ones, sealing and pledging them to complete the Father's purpose (vv. 13-14). Thus, in His economy the Father, Son, and Spirit operate to consummate His purpose. This purpose is sonship. In Romans we see that we are destined to become sons fully grown to inherit in Christ all that the Father is and has (8:16-17). In God's eyes we have already been glorified in the divine sonship: "Because those whom He foreknew, He also predestinated to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the Firstborn among many brothers; and those whom He predestinated, these He also called; and those whom He called, these He also justified; and those whom He justified, these He also glorified" (vv. 29-30).

This concept of sonship is introduced by the apostle Paul in Ephesians: "Even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world to be holy and without blemish before Him in love, predestinating us unto sonship through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will" (1:4-5). Paul speaks of sonship again in Romans 8:15 and Galatians 4:5. The King James Version of the Bible uses instead of *sonship* the term *adoption*, a fact that has regrettably left many believers with the concept that they have been "adopted" rather than "born again" into the family of God. Even though many Christians use the biblical phrase *born again*, many do not realize that we have been genuinely and "organically" regenerated with the life of God to become true sons of God. It is difficult to overestimate how essential it is to our normal Christian life that we know the meaning of the Greek word translated *adoption* or *sonship* in these portions of the Scripture. Kenneth S. Wuest in his *Word Studies* on Ephesians and Colossians addresses this issue:

We consider now the words "unto the adoption of children." The preposition is *eis*, which is sometimes translated "with a view to," signifying purpose or result. This marking out beforehand, this setting limits upon, this predestinating had in view the act of God adopting these selected out ones as children. The Greek word is *huiiothesia*, from *tithēmi*, "to place," and *huios*, "an adult son." Thus, the word refers to the act of God placing these selected-out ones as adult sons. Paul speaks of this in Romans 8:15 in the words "Spirit of adoption." The apostle here uses as an illustration the Roman practice of legally adopting a child, and thus not only bequeathing to him the material possessions of the one adopting, but also giving him his civil status. Thus God takes a believing sinner, regenerates him, and by means of this makes him His child (*teknon*, a born one). Then He takes this child and places him in a legal position as an adult son (*huios*). We thus become joint-heirs with Christ, having been raised to a civil status as adult sons, in which we become heirs of God, inheriting jointly with Christ all that He possesses as an heir of God the Father by virtue of His Sonship and work on the Cross. (36-37)

Since we have been brought into God's household as genuine sons of God—becoming children of God through the divine birth (John 1:12-13)—we are thus qualified to be "sonized" by the continuing act of God imparting His life into us until we become full-grown sons equipped to participate in the riches of Christ for all eternity (Rom. 8:14-17, 23). Our growth in the divine life should bring us into the transformation of our souls (2 Cor. 3:18), the conformation to the image of the firstborn Son (Rom. 8:29), and the transfiguration of our bodies to be made like His glorious body (Phil. 3:21). When this is accomplished, we will reach the stage of adulthood as sons of God, enabled then "God's wealth to share / Thru all eternity."

The final stanza sums up the excellent insight created by the contemplation of the divine riches which have been expressed throughout the hymn: "The Father, Son, and Spirit—one, / So richly care for us; / Thy love with one accord we sing / And e'er would praise Thee thus." His nurturing involves the Triune God's entire being. His tender care is complete and comprehensive, meeting every need within our being. He comes to us as the Father, Son, and Spirit to impart Himself as the full solution to every problem, the all-inclusive satisfaction to every want, and the ultimate fulfillment of every aspiration in the body, soul, and spirit of man. Our impoverished vocabulary is quickly exhausted in our vain attempt to describe the superabounding grace to us who through His mercy have believed on Him (1 Tim. 1:14). We can only respond with a deep sense of worship and praise—praise that is not limited to our personal worship. The praise that we express must ultimately be uttered in one accord with all our fellow believers who have received the dispensing of His rich grace and eternal life.

With one accord we sing. We must sing; we must release our praises and thanks to our wonderful life-flowing God who has not only given us eternal life, forgiveness of sins, and daily grace as our outward supply, but He has flowed His very life and nature into us, mingling with us, thus fulfilling His heart's desire in us. He has made us His house for His rest, and He has become our full satisfaction! Together we sing of His knowledge-surpassing love and enjoy the rich infilling of His life and grace until we as the church in maturity become all the fullness of God for His eternal expression (Eph. 1:22-23; 3:19).

by Gary Kaiser

Works Cited

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- Wuest, Kenneth S. *Word Studies in the Greek New Testament*. Vol. 1. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973.