

# The Becoming of the Spirit Who Was Not Yet as the Consummation of the Scriptures: REFLECTIONS and NOTES<sup>1</sup> on the REVELATION of the ECONOMY of GOD in the GOSPEL of JOHN

by John Pester

*Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes into Me, as the Scripture said, out of his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water. But this He said concerning the Spirit, whom those who believed into Him were about to receive; for the Spirit was not yet, because Jesus had not yet been glorified. (John 7:37-39)*

On the last day, the great day, the consummate day of the Feast of Tabernacles, the consummate feast in the Jewish calendar, the Lord Jesus stood and cried out to those in attendance, speaking both emphatically and enigmatically about the consummation of the scriptural revelation of the economy of God. In the Lord's seemingly simple call, He unveiled the consummate goal of the economy of God, which is at the very center of the divine revelation in the Holy Scriptures.<sup>2</sup> According to the Lord's word and John's subsequent interpretation of the Lord's speaking, the Scriptures consummate in a union of God and redeemed humanity, a union that is manifested through an intrinsic, organic abiding in the divine life that mirrors the fellowship within the Triune God and extends that fellowship to include all of those who believe into Him. In this union there is a continuous dispensing of the divine life, which the Lord characterizes as rivers of living water that flow out from the believers and which John associates with the Spirit who was not yet. Both the union and the dispensing of the divine life are the issue of an economical process involving the incarnation of the Word and the resurrection and glorification of Christ, which consummates in the becoming of the Spirit who was not yet. As the Scriptures indicate, the becoming of the Spirit who was not yet is the consummation of the economy of God.

According to the Lord's cry in John 7:37-38, the availability of rivers of living water is revealed in Scripture; it is something spoken in the Scriptures. Curiously, however,

there are no verses in the Old Testament that speak of rivers of living water flowing forth from one's innermost being, and there are few verses that even reasonably track the Lord's words. Scholars have searched for them, but ultimately, most only cite references that imply the general thought contained in the Lord's cry.<sup>3</sup> The Lord, therefore, is either wrong or He is speaking more broadly of an intrinsic emphasis in the Holy Scriptures.<sup>4</sup> When the apostle John, who presents Jesus Christ as God the Savior coming as life to propagate Himself,<sup>5</sup> offers a clarification of the Lord's words, his interpretation is equally enigmatic. The Lord cried out, "Come to Me," but John reports that the Lord spoke concerning the Spirit. The Lord spoke of rivers of living water, but John refers to the Spirit who was not yet. And just as scholars struggle to locate verses that even implicitly refer to the Lord's words, they also struggle to explain John's interpretation: Translators often supply the word *given* after the phrase *was not yet*, and theologians often assume that John is merely making oblique reference to the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost.

In order to understand the Lord's cry in verses 37 and 38 and John's interpretation in verse 39, it is important to see that two levels of interpretation are operating within the span of just these three verses, one by the Lord and one by John. In His word concerning rivers of living water, the Lord unveils, by way of interpretation ("as the Scripture said"), the consummation of the scriptural revelation of the economy of God. And in his word concerning the Spirit who was not yet, the apostle John unveils, by way of interpretation ("but this He said") the economical process that consummates the scriptural revelation of the economy of God.

Apart from understanding the economy of God, particularly as it pertains to the incarnation of the Son, in whom there was life (1:4; 5:26) and who came in order to make the divine life available to humanity through His redemptive death (3:15-16; 5:21, 40; 10:10; 12:24), it is easy to

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overlook the significance of the Lord's cry. As a consequence of this, His words often are relegated to the status of metaphor. And apart from a further understanding of the economy of God, particularly as it pertains to the glorification of Christ, through which the divine life was imparted into redeemed humanity, it is easy to overlook the economic significance of the phrase *the Spirit was not yet*. As a consequence of this, John's words often are treated as an unintended elision in need of theological clarification.

To accept the words as they are in the text is understandably difficult. But within the context of the economy of God, the words of the Lord and John reveal the consummation of this economy in the becoming of the Spirit who was not yet.<sup>6</sup> It is altogether fitting, therefore, that this revelation occurs in a divinely ordained setting of consummation, that it comes through a consummate declaration by the Lord Himself, that it reflects the consummate framework for scriptural interpretation, that it depicts the consummate experience of the believers, that it points to the consummate unveiling of the Triune God, that it speaks of the process that consummates this economy, and that it foreshadows the corporate consummation of God's economy in the New Jerusalem. John 7:37 through 39 ultimately reveal that the Scriptures speak of the consummation of God's economy. And since these verses speak of a consummation, they also speak of the economic process that accomplished this economy, a process involving both the entrance of the Triune God into history through the incarnation of the Son and His continuing presence in history through the resurrection and glorification of Christ as the Spirit who was not yet.

### The Consummate Setting: The Feast of Tabernacles

The Lord's revelation of this economic consummation occurs within the consummate setting of the Feast of Tabernacles. Of the seven God-ordained feasts recorded in Leviticus 23, the Feast of Tabernacles is the final feast in the Jewish sacred calendar. It is also the final feast of the three that God specifically charged all Israelites to journey to Jerusalem to celebrate in order to display and maintain the unity of the people of God. The timing of the feast and the requisite use of tabernacles or tents both allude to a consummation. The timing of the Feast of Tabernacles coincided with the final harvest of the produce of the good land.

After the full harvest of their crops, the Jewish people observed the Feast of Tabernacles to worship God and enjoy what they had reaped (Deut. 16:13-15). Hence, this feast signifies the completion, achievement, and success in man's career, man's study, and other matters of human life, including religion, with the joy and enjoyment thereof. (Recovery Version, John 7:2, note 1)

In a setting that displayed the fullness of human achievement, the Lord stood and spoke to the intrinsic longing within all of humanity for satiation, realizing that humanity's thirst can be satisfied only by the eternal life of the Triune God. Our longing for God cannot be satisfied with human things that perish when used (Col. 2:22); true satiation can come only from a divine and eternal source. The Lord spoke of this reality when He referred to rivers of living water which would come out of the innermost being of those who believe into Him.

The Lord's word concerning the innermost being of the believers alludes to the requirement that the children of Israel dwell in temporary tabernacles or tents during the seven days of the feast. This requirement speaks not only of the history of the children of Israel, but also of the importance of dwelling places in the economy of God.

God ordained the Feast of Tabernacles so that the children of Israel would remember how their fathers, while wandering in the wilderness, had lived in tents (Lev. 23:39-43), expecting to enter into the rest of the good land. Hence, this feast is a reminder that today people are still in the wilderness and need to enter into the rest of the New Jerusalem, which is the eternal tabernacle (Rev. 21:2-3). Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob also lived in tents and looked forward to this eternal tabernacle (Heb. 11:9-10), in which there will be a river of water of life proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb to quench man's thirst (Rev. 22:1, 17). At the end of such a feast, which had such a background, Christ cried out the promise of the rivers of living water, which will satisfy man's expectation for eternity (vv. 37-39). (Recovery Version, John 7:2, note 1)

The ultimate consummation of the economy of God involves the mutual dwelling of God in humanity and humanity in God. God initiates this indwelling by regenerating the human spirit through faith in Christ (John 3:6). The regenerated human spirit is the innermost being of which the Lord spoke (Eph. 3:16; 1 Pet. 3:4); it is central in His creation of humanity and in His progressive unfolding of His economy. Zechariah 12:1 reveals that the formation of the human spirit is ranked with the creation of the heavens and the earth. Isaiah 66:1-2, which says, "Where then is the house that you will build for Me, / And where is the place of My rest? / ... To this kind of man will I look, to him who is poor / And of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word," reveals that the human spirit was formed for the purpose of obtaining a dwelling place for God. The dwelling place that God seeks is the regenerated human spirit of redeemed humanity (Eph. 2:22).

The dwelling place that humanity seeks is one that is eternal in the heavens, not one made with hands (Psa. 27:4;

2 Cor. 5:1). This dwelling place is God Himself, not the mythologized heavenly mansions of popular Christian teaching.<sup>7</sup> As the father of faith, Abraham's search for a city of divine origination points to the believers' longing to dwell in God (Heb. 11:10). Just as the Lord became flesh and tabernacled among us, "we are still dwelling in tabernacles, in booths. Eventually, the present, portable tabernacles will become a solid one—the New Jerusalem" (Lee, *Leviticus* 491), which is the consummate picture of the mutual indwelling of God and of redeemed and glorified humanity.

What is remarkable about the Lord's declaration on the last day of the feast is how closely it tracks the reality of the consummation of the types portrayed in the Feast of Tabernacles. The use of tabernacles during the feast ultimately points to the believers becoming the many abodes of God through the mutual abiding of God in humanity and humanity in God (John 14:2; 15:4-5). The issue of our mutual abiding in Christ, who is the reality of the good land, is the bearing, manifestation, and enjoyment of much fruit, which is the harvest of the good land. Consequently, the Lord's declaration that rivers of living water would flow out of the innermost being of those who believe into Him is a consummate indication that the satisfaction of humanity's need is intimately linked with the satisfaction of His need for a dwelling place. The Lord's word in John 7:37 and 38 indicates that the seeking God in Isaiah 66:1 and 2 has, in fact, found a place of rest within the tabernacles of redeemed humanity and that a continuous supply of living water, satisfying both God and humanity, issues forth from this mutual abiding. It is left to John, in his subsequent interpretation of the Lord's declaration, to clarify that the mutual rest and supply of God and humanity depend upon the economical becoming of the Spirit who was not yet.

### **The Consummate Declaration: The Lord's Cry on the Last Day, the Great Day**

The Lord's declaration was consummate in its timing and content. While the Scriptures reveal His presence at the Feast of Tabernacles, it selectively records only the words He spoke on the last day, the great day of the feast. The Bible is silent on what He said and did during the earlier part of the week of the feast, but not on what he said and did on the consummate day. What He may have said and done during the week are part of the "many other things which Jesus did," which we will not fully know until a later time (John 21:25; 1 Cor. 13:12). John does not

record them because they were not pertinent to the believers' understanding of and entrance into the consummation of God's economy. What was pertinent, he recorded.

The recorded cry of the Lord came at the end of the feast on its consummate day, and His words relate to the fulfillment and consummation of the Scriptures. His insertion of the phrase *as the Scripture said* points to the fulfillment of a promise contained in the Scriptures, and given that there is no verse in either the Hebrew Masoretic text or the Greek Septuagint text that reflects the content of the Lord's cry, a broader understanding of the word *Scripture* must be considered. There are numerous examples in the New Testament of the Lord quoting specific verses from the Old Testament, indicating His knowledge, insight, and even ability to apply the spiritual essence of specific passages to the circumstances that He encountered in His ministry on the earth. When He was tempted in the wilderness by the enemy, for example, He responded twice, saying, "It is written" and then quoted Deuteronomy 8:3 and 6:13. He also responded, saying, "It is

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said" and then quoted Deuteronomy 6:16 (Luke 4:1-13). When the chief priests and scribes questioned his authority, the Lord responded with a question, "Have you not even read this Scripture" and then quoted Psalm 118:22-23 (Mark 12:10). He was aware of both the text and the spiritual content and thrust of the Scriptures; consequently, when He cried out on the consummate day of the consummate feast and appended the modifying clause *as the Scripture said*, He was making neither an uninformed nor a frivolous reference to the Scriptures. He was stating, as He always did, truth, but truth of such a momentous nature that He associated the theme of His cry with *Scripture*. The Lord's word did not refer to an individual verse in the Scriptures but rather to the intrinsic, thematic revelation of God's economy, the hermeneutic kernel, contained and conveyed throughout the totality of the Scriptures as it was available to and understood by Jesus at the time. His cry called specific attention to His economic being and His economic becoming as the means for the fulfillment of God's eternal intention to be joined with redeemed humanity. Consequently, when the Lord spoke of the consummation of His eternal intention on the

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consummate day of the Feast of Tabernacles, He properly associated the interpretive framework of His utterance as the essence of the Scriptures.

### The Consummate Interpretation: The Economy of God as the Framework of the Scriptures

All of the Lord's recorded references to Scriptures in the Gospels, whether specific or general, were references to the Word of God contained in the Old Testament because this was the text available to Him at the time.<sup>8</sup> While the New Testament presents the same intrinsic revelation of God's economy with greater clarity,<sup>9</sup> its content was not included in the hermeneutic framework employed and identified by the Lord as *Scripture*. John's subsequent interpretation of the Lord's word, as it applies to the Spirit who was not yet, however, reflects this hermeneutic framework and imbues his New Testament writings with the same intrinsic revelation. Thus, the interpretations of both the Lord and John in John 7:37-39 are developed within a hermeneutic framework that unifies the Old and New Testaments, a framework that the Lord denoted as *Scripture*.

As mentioned earlier, the first level of interpretation, associated with the Lord's use of the word *Scripture*, is not based on an exact citation from the Old Testament. In *The Gospel according to John: A Theological Commentary*, Herman N. Ridderbos states, "What Scripture passage is meant here is hard to say...Nowhere can we pinpoint a text that bears any resemblance to the words quoted here" (274). According to S. H. Hooke, in "The Spirit Was Not Yet," the Lord's speaking is a "reference to an unspecified word of 'Scripture'" (377). He then offers several suggestions for possibly locating this unspecified word in the books of Ezekiel, Isaiah, and Proverbs.

It is, however, more in accordance with the symbolism which we have been tracing out if we consider the evangelist<sup>10</sup> to have in mind the symbolic scene in Ezek. xlvii, where the prophet sees the life-giving waters issuing from the Temple, the new Temple of his vision...

It is also possible that the logion itself may refer to the words in Isa. lv. 1, "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters"; or again, with Origen, we may see in the logion a reference to Prov. v. 15 and ix. 4. (377-378)

It is clear, however, that many scholars are frustrated by and unsatisfied with attempts to associate the Lord's word with a specific citation in the Old Testament. They, consequently, broaden the parameters of their search to include a matrix of connected thought. In *The Gospel according to John*, D. A. Carson illustrates this tendency:

What is often overlooked is that, even under the first

interpretation, it may not be necessary to hunt for a text that narrowly describes streams of water flowing from the believer. Scripture may be cited to ground *the entire matrix of thought* found in vv. 37-38: *i.e.* we may need to look for a passage that is related to the Feast of Tabernacles, and that looks to the promise of the Spirit in the messianic age and the consequent blessing on the messianic community, not for a passage that describes water flowing from someone's belly. (325-326)

Even though Carson focuses on a "matrix of thought," the matrix is still confined to the range of verses associated with a specific subject in the Old Testament. Merrill C. Tenney, conveying B. F. Westcott's considerations, employs this broader hermeneutic approach in *John: The Gospel of Belief*, stating, "Westcott in commenting on this passage says: 'The reference is not to any one isolated passage, but to the general tenor of such passages...taken in connection with the original image'" (135). The passages most commonly considered for their general tenor tend to be prophetic passages in the Old Testament that speak of God's promises. Given that the Lord's words in John 7:37-38 speak of the fulfillment of a promise, this tendency is understandable. Drawing upon this broader hermeneutic approach, Ridderbos cites Calvin's consideration of a connected thought that extends beyond a selected range of verses to an entire category of writing in the Old Testament. He cites from Calvin's commentary on the Gospel of John: "Christ is not pointing to any particular passage of Scripture, but takes a testimony from the common teaching of the prophets" (274).

Tenney discusses a range of hermeneutic approaches, beginning with a consideration of specific verses and concluding with the suggestion that the most productive approach to understanding the Lord's use of *Scripture* may come through the consideration of a general concept, one that is untethered to a specific verse or even to one specific portion of the Old Testament.

John stated that this appeal of Jesus had a background in Scripture. The word "Scripture" (*graphe*) invariably referred to the Old Testament when it was used elsewhere in the Gospel, and usually to some definite passage. Nevertheless these identical words, "from within him shall flow rivers of living water" (38), cannot be located anywhere. Many passages such as Zechariah 14:8, Joel 3:18 (4:18 in the Hebrew text), Ezekiel 47:1 ff., and Psalm 46:4, 5, contain references to refreshing streams, or to living water; but no one is the exact counterpart of Jesus' words. It may be that Jesus was referring to the concept of living water in the Scripture rather than to any one specific portion. (134-135)

If scholars look beyond a specific verse, a specific range of verses, or even a category of Old Testament books, such as

the books of prophecy, toward a concept such as living water, which was the focal point of the Lord's word in John 7:37-38, a question should be asked: "Is there a divine concept that can subsume all others in the Scriptures?" We must be willing to consider this question; to reject it without some reflective consideration is equivalent to assuming that the Scriptures are nothing more than a random collection of unconnected thoughts, devoid of any connecting thematic thread.<sup>11</sup> Although the word of the Lord is contained in "rule upon rule; / Line upon line, line upon line; / Here a little, there a little" (Isa. 28:13), we should not assume that the Triune God does not have an economy that He wills to make known (Col. 1:27).

Given the Triune God's desire to make Himself known, the only question that remains is whether or not the Lord's promise of rivers of living water expresses the central thought of God and, consequently, the central thought of the Scriptures, or whether it is a tangential element. The apostle John answers this question by extending the concept of living water from the Old to the New Testament in his interpretation in 7:39 and by employing it throughout all of his New Testament writings. Throughout the Gospel of John, the Epistles of John, and Revelation, John focuses exclusively on the dispensing of the divine life of the Triune God into His redeemed, regenerated, transformed, and glorified tripartite elect. This organic, economical identification of the believers and the Triune God is at the core of the Lord's reference to living water flowing out of our innermost being. What the Lord identifies as Scripture, John develops in the Scriptures.

When he writes about the believers' economic identification with the Triune God, John consistently employs the symbology of numerous Old Testament types, specifically the types of the tabernacle and offerings.<sup>12</sup> As a consequence, he routinely links the revelation of God's intention in the Old Testament with its realization in the New Testament. The defining proof of the centrality of the dispensing of the divine life as rivers of living water can be seen in John's final vision in Revelation, the vision of the New Jerusalem. The New Jerusalem is a sign of the mutual indwelling of God and redeemed humanity. At the innermost center of this organic city, a river of water of life flows out from the throne of God and of the redeeming Lamb. This flow supplies the city and sustains a continuous production of fruit borne by the tree of life for the mutual, consummate enjoyment of God and humanity in the fellowship of the divine life.

So when the Lord spoke of rivers of living water and subsequently identified this thought with the word *Scripture*, He was not making a casual stylistic reference to an obscure verse in the Old Testament. Neither was He referring to a matrix of thought contained in a range of verses or in a category of books; rather, He was speaking from within the consummate framework for the interpretation of the Scriptures, and in so doing, He identified this interpretive framework as the essence of the Scriptures.

### The Consummate Experience: Rivers of Living Water Flowing Out of the Mingled Human Spirit

Although interpretation is at the center of John 7:37 through 39, it is important to understand that the Lord and the apostle John do not interpret for the sake of teaching alone or even for objective, doctrinal clarification. Rather, both utilize the interpretive framework of the economy of God to bring the believers into a subjective, mutually shared, and organic experience of the economy of God. As such, their words point to a consummate experience within the economy of God involving the

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dispensing of the divine life of the Triune God into humanity. The significant verbs in the Lord's cry point to a subjective experience: *thirsts, come, drink, and believes*; the subjects point to a mutually shared experience: *anyone, him, he, and Me*; and the objects point to an organic experience: *innermost being and rivers of living water*.

In *The Kernel of the Bible*, a book devoted to presenting fundamental points related to the economy of God, Witness Lee succinctly summarizes the consummate experience spoken of by the Lord: "The church is a living constitution of the Triune God who has been wrought into our humanity" (160). The church is composed of all those who have believed into Him, who have received Him, and who are being inwardly constituted with the divine life of the Triune God. This inward constitution begins with the human spirit being born of the Spirit for the believers' regeneration (John 3:6); it is sustained and advanced by partaking of the Lord for the believers' transformation (6:56-57, 63; Rom. 12:2); and it will consummate with the redemption of the body for the believers' glorification in the future. The subjective operation that operates in us

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with power for our regeneration and transformation will be fully manifested in our glorification (Col. 1:29; Rom. 8:21-23, 29-30). This operation will eternally manifest itself as a river of living water flowing out of the eternal, living constitution of the Triune God and redeemed humanity, as depicted by the New Jerusalem. Even now, however, these rivers flow when we walk in spirit because our regenerated human spirit contains life and, in fact, is life (Rom. 8:10). Therefore, when the believers drink of the water that He gives, they receive the Giver Himself, and He becomes in them a fountain of water springing up into eternal life (John 4:14).

Our innermost being is our human spirit which has been regenerated with the divine life of the Triune God. It is possible for living water to flow out of our regenerated human spirit because our spirit is mingled and organically joined to the Lord (1 Cor. 6:17); our spirit is one with the Lord who is the Spirit (2 Cor 3:17).<sup>13</sup> In essence, our human spirit has been joined to the source of living water, and in this mingling it has become a source of living water. The Bible does not provide metaphysical details about how the human spirit and the divine Spirit have become one spirit; it merely states the fact. But facts with faith are enough because an entrance into the divine economy is always afforded when divine facts are substantiated by faith (Heb. 11:1).<sup>14</sup> The Bible assuredly says that we are joined to the Lord as one spirit (1 Cor. 6:17), that the Spirit witnesses with our spirit (Rom. 8:16), that the strengthening of our inner man, our human spirit, comes through the Spirit (Eph. 3:16), that we are in spirit because the Spirit of God dwells in us (Rom. 8:9), that the hidden man of our heart is our spirit (1 Pet. 3:4), and that our spirit is the dwelling place of God (Eph. 2:22).

**T**he Lord's words in John 7:37 and 38 indicate that God's economy is an experiential and enjoyable consummation. We can come to Him and drink of the river of His pleasures, which gladdens the house of God and abundantly satisfies us with the fatness of His house (Psa. 36:8; 46:4), because our innermost being, our human spirit, has been joined to the Lord in accord with His eternal intention as revealed in the Scriptures. While His declaration concerning rivers of living water is monumentally significant, His declaration that we can know this reality in our experience is even more astounding. The thirst of humanity is a thirst for experience, and the only experience that ultimately satisfies is the experience and enjoyment of the Triune God Himself. And so Jesus stood and cried out.

### **The Consummate Unveiling: The Spirit Who Was Not Yet**

Even though the Lord stood and cried out, He did not explain. In verse 39, however, the apostle John interprets the phrase *rivers of living water*, saying, "But this He said

concerning the Spirit, whom those who believed into Him were about to receive; for the Spirit was not yet, because Jesus had not yet been glorified." Even in his interpretation, however, John only declared; he did not explain. Consequently, it has been left to scholars to offer many considered interpretations of the apostle John's word in verse 39. Most of their interpretations, however, do not demonstrate much understanding in the economy of the mystery, because the economy of the mystery rarely enters into the considerations that frame their understanding. John's sole motivation for adding verse 39, however, seems to be to consummately unveil the Spirit who was not yet as the very means of entering into the economy of God. Without revealing the becoming of the Spirit who was not yet as the consummation of the process of God's economy, and correlatively, without revealing that the Spirit who was not yet is the consummation of the economical Trinity, the believers' experience of and entrance into God's economy would be obstructed by fallen and natural concepts concerning what constitutes true worship (John 4:23). Simply put: *In order for believers to experience and more fully enter into the economy of the Triune God, we need a rudimentary understanding and appreciation of the Triune God as an economical Being; John provides this necessary service by faithfully declaring, "But this He said concerning the Spirit."*

Natural religious thoughts, whether they reside in the minds of the moral or the immoral (John 3:1-13; 4:7-24), simply cannot grasp the divine thought that God desires a mutual, enjoyable fellowship with redeemed humanity in the divine life (1 John 1:3). To see this, we need a spirit of wisdom and revelation (Eph. 1:17). In the absence of revelation, the normative concepts that inform natural views of humanity's relationship with God are fearful obeisance, awestruck wonder, and objective, reverential distance from God.<sup>15</sup> How very different from the thought within the Triune God, whose ways are higher than ours! Just as it is impossible for us to fully grasp how the persons of the Divine Trinity mutually abide in one another, it is equally impossible for us to fathom all the things that God has prepared for us in His economy, especially our abiding in Him and He in us (1 Cor. 2:9; John 15:4; 17:21-23).

John spoke of the Spirit who was not yet because redeemed humanity needs to know and hear that the Triune God can be experienced. Without the becoming of the Spirit who was not yet and without a rudimentary appreciation of this reality, would we know to come to Him and drink so that rivers of living water could flow out from our mingled innermost being, ushering in the consummation of Scriptures?<sup>16</sup> For the sake of our entrance into this consummate experience, for the sake of our faith, John added his interpretive word to unveil the Spirit who was not yet as the means for effectuating the economy of God within those who are thirsty and desire to come to

Him and drink. Given the believers' need for some minimal perception of the economy of the mystery (Eph. 3:4), it is regrettable that many translators strip the phrase *was not yet* of its economical impact by adding the word *given*. It is equally regrettable that many scholars then hurriedly gloss over the verse or explicate it with principal reference to the word *given* rather than to the text itself because of what seems to be inherent textual difficulties.

### The Translation of Was Not Yet

The word *given* or some variant that conveys the thought that the Spirit will be given is added to almost every translation of the phrase *was not yet*, even though scholars readily acknowledge that “‘given’ is inserted by the translators” (Govett 323). In “‘The Spirit Was Not Yet,’” S. H. Hooke speaks of three common manuscript variants and forthrightly suggests a reason for their inclusion—an apparent contradiction between John’s words that the Spirit was not yet and numerous references to the Spirit’s existence and presence in both Old and New Testaments prior to the resurrection of Christ.<sup>17</sup> The three variants include the addition of the word *given* to modify *was not yet*, the addition of the word *Holy* to modify *Spirit*, and the addition of *Holy* and *upon them* to modify both *Spirit* and *was not yet*. He states, the “three most important variants...all bear witness to the perplexity which the apparent paradox of the best-attested text caused in the minds of the scribes,” but he adds that “there can be little doubt that the original text read, ‘The Spirit was not yet’” (372-373). The Anchor Bible, edited by Raymond E. Brown, is one of the few translations that closely follows the best-attested text by not adding the word *given*.<sup>18</sup> The Anchor Bible renders verse 39: “Here he was referring to the Spirit which those who came to believe in him were to receive. For there was as yet no Spirit, since Jesus had not been glorified” (319). Despite these rare instances, *given* is almost universally appended because it is difficult for scholars to contextualize the phrase when their framework for interpreting the Scriptures is not informed at least by a minimal perception of the economy of the mystery.

### The Exegesis of Was Not Yet

It is difficult to separate translation from exegesis because translation decisions ultimately impact upon the exegesis of a text. Incapable of making sense of the phrase as written by John, scholars build most of their exegesis around a discussion of the word *given* rather than on the phrase *was*

*not yet*. It is almost as if translators and scholars willingly concede that the apostle John may have been sloppy at best or simply wrong at worst in this instance, even though they would not deny the inspiration of the Spirit in his writings. F. F. Bruce, for example, acknowledges a lack of textual support for the emendations, but he allows them to stand and then lets these emendations further impinge upon his overall exegesis of the passage. He states,

The best attested reading of the second-last clause of verse 39 is simply “Spirit was not yet”. This does not mean that the Spirit did not yet exist; we have seen him active already (e.g. in John 1:32). It means that the Spirit was not yet present in the form which Jesus promised, or (as RSV has it) “as yet the Spirit had not been given”—i.e. to the followers of Jesus. (182-183)

Once the word *given* is accepted, scholars quickly turn their attention to ascertaining the time of the Spirit’s being given. In *John, Beloved Disciple: A Survey of His Theology*, Robert L. Reymond sums up the prevailing view that John is referring to the giving of the Spirit on the day

Given the believers’ need for some minimal perception of the economy of the mystery, it is regrettable that many translators strip the phrase *was not yet* of its economical impact by adding the word *given*.

of Pentecost.<sup>19</sup> Reymond states, “‘For not yet was [the time of the] Spirit,’ who could not come until Jesus had been ‘glorified’. His time was contingent on the glorification of Jesus. He came at Pentecost” (72). In his *Commentary on John’s Gospel*, Frederic Louis Godet elaborates on the time of the Spirit’s being given, stating,

Until the day of Pentecost, the Spirit had acted *on* men both in the Old Covenant and in the circle of the disciples; but He was not yet *in* them as a possession and personal life. This is the reason why John employs this very forcible expression: “*The Spirit was not*,” that is, as already having in men a permanent abode. (639)

Godet’s exegesis restricts the theological implications of the phrase *was not* to redeemed humanity; i.e., he directs the force of the meaning in the phrase to those who have not received the Spirit in full and within. While the clause immediately preceding *was not yet* speaks of the believers receiving the Spirit, John clearly fixes the focus of *was not yet* on the Spirit Himself and the new economical reality of the Spirit, as ushered in by the glorification of Jesus.

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The believers who come and drink from Jesus receive and flow out the Spirit, but this Spirit is not just the Spirit of God in the Old Testament or even the Holy Spirit in the New Testament. This is the Spirit who is present only after the economical process of Jesus' resurrection and glorification has been completed, and this is the Spirit who possesses and imparts, as rivers, all of the processed experiences obtained and attained by Christ through His incarnation, human living, death, and resurrection.

In his commentary on the Gospel of John, Robert Govett further removes the exegesis of verse 39 from its intended economical moorings by suggesting that the word *Spirit* is not even a reference to the third of the Divine Trinity but rather to the manifestation of spiritual gifts on the day of Pentecost: "John then is speaking of the supernatural gifts, which are in several places called 'spirits'...The words before us mean then—'No abiding gift of the Spirit was ever bestowed till on and after Pentecost'" (324). Other scholars find exegetical significance in the impact of the Spirit's being given, rather than on the timing or on the supernatural aspect of spiritual gifts. Woodhouse illustrates this in his article "Hard Sayings—IX":

More importance lies in the intimate relationship between Christ and the Spirit. The latter's work, in the whole of the New Testament, depends upon and follows that of Christ. The Spirit tries to focus attention upon Christ, his life and teaching, a point reiterated in the Johannine writings.

...A new thing had come into the world with the Incarnate Son's advent, but the Spirit could not bear adequate witness to this phenomenon until it had taken place...

An analogy from fields of human endeavor may help us to discover the meaning of the phrase before us. It might be said of a certain games player that he had not "arrived" till a certain specific season or game;...He was "unknown". The making of this statement need not necessarily imply that the...sportsman had done nothing before such an occasion. It rather means that the flowering of his skill and genius only appeared in its fullness by means of or at the time of a particular achievement or achievements. (311)

Within Woodhouse's notion that *given* may be analogous to the Spirit arriving at a point of fuller recognition for His role in focusing attention on Christ, his words convey a faint hint of economical separation between the second and third of the Trinity that is just not present in John's writing. For Woodhouse, when Christ completes the "arriving" action, the Spirit is separately acknowledged as having "arrived," but for John, the Spirit who was not yet is the economic realization of Jesus, who now is economically

available as the Spirit of Jesus Christ. Raymond E. Brown points out the economical orientation of John's word in his exegesis of verse 39 in the Anchor Bible:

*There was as yet no Spirit.* Some manuscripts and versions seek to soften the impact of this, e.g., "the Spirit was not yet *given*" or "not yet *on them*." Probably the scribes saw a theological difficulty, as if John were saying that the Third Person of the Trinity did not exist before Jesus was glorified in passion, death, and resurrection. But a gospel statement such as this is not concerned with the inner life of God; it is concerned with God's relation to us. (324)

Brown correctly points out that John is not making a statement about the immanent Trinity, that is, the Triune God as He is in Himself in His intradivine, eternal being, but rather a statement about the economic Trinity, that is, the Triune God as He is in His salvific, self-communicating "relation to us." Most of the consternation among translators and scholars about verse 39 is an issue of not clearly seeing this distinction in John's writing, and by subsequently assuming that John is suggesting "that the Third Person of the Trinity did not exist before Jesus was glorified in passion, death, and resurrection." There can be little doubt that the word *given* is supplied as a corrective because translators assume that John is speaking of the immanent Trinity. The same can be said of scholars whose exegesis turns more on an examination of the word supplied by translators rather than on the words supplied by John. In "Christ, the Spirit, and Glory," Kerry S. Robichaux makes this point in his effort to focus attention on the economical signifiers that are present in verse 39. He writes, "Perhaps the reason commentators across the ages have found difficulty in John 7:39 is that they have only casually considered the senses of the words *the Spirit* and *had been glorified* and have therefore brought to them concepts that are foreign to John's very particular use of them" (13). In fact, if we understand John's words within the economical context of his distinctive ministry, it is possible to move beyond the apparent "perplexities," "difficulties," or "paradoxes" that are assumed to be present in verse 39.

### *The Writing of Was Not Yet*

John's particular use of *the Spirit* and *had been glorified* are a reflection of the unique focus of his written ministry. In addition to the narratives of the Lord's ministry in the Gospels, the revelation contained in the New Testament largely hinges upon the ministry of Paul and John. In historical terms, the ministry of Paul preceded the ministry of John, and in spiritual terms, the ministry of John sustains and supports the ministry of Paul. Based on Paul's word in Colossians 1:25, concerning his completion of the word of God, and on John's introduction in Matthew 4:21 as a mender of nets, Witness Lee effectively characterizes

Paul's ministry as a completing ministry and John's as a mending ministry. In order to appreciate John's word in 7:39, it is important to see that his speaking is in line with Paul's teaching concerning the economy of God. In a footnote to 1 John 1:1 in the Recovery Version of the Bible, Witness Lee writes,

Paul's ministry was to complete the divine revelation (Col. 1:25-27) of God's New Testament economy, that is, the Triune God in Christ as the life-giving Spirit producing the members of Christ for the constituting and the building up of the Body of Christ, that the Triune God may have a full expression—the fullness of God (Eph. 1:23; 3:19)—in the universe. Paul's writings were completed around A.D. 67. Paul's completing ministry was damaged by the apostasy preceding and following his death. Then after a quarter of a century, around A.D. 90, John's writings came forth. John's ministry was not only to mend the broken ministry of Paul but also to consummate the entire divine revelation of both the Old Testament and the New Testament, of both the Gospels and the Epistles. In such a ministry, the focus is the mysteries of the divine life. John's Gospel, as the consummation of the Gospels, unveils the mysteries of the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. John's Epistles (especially the first), as the consummation of the Epistles, unfold the mystery of the fellowship of the divine life, which is the fellowship of God's children with God the Father and with one another. Then John's Revelation, as the consummation of the New Testament and the Old Testament, reveals the mystery of Christ as the life supply to God's children for His expression and as the center of the universal administration of the Triune God.

In *The Gospel of the Spirit: A Study in the Fourth Gospel*, Ernest Cadman Colwell and Eric Lane Titus also speak of the link between Paul's revelation and the content in the Gospel of John. Colwell and Titus state that John's sources were "Paul's letters and the Synoptic Gospels...Consequently, Pauline ideas are read back into the mind of Jesus" (42-43). They further state:

The evangelist's use of sources is illustrated further by his treatment of Pauline ideas. It is very generally held that Paul's letters are an important source for the Gospel of John...

The areas of dependence have been presented ably elsewhere so that for purposes of this study it will be necessary only to indicate them without argument. They

are (1) the concept of the Spirit, (2) the idea of the new creation, (3) the resurrection emphasis. (47)

In order to understand the economical context of the Spirit who was not yet, it is worthwhile to note that Colwell and Titus stress John's dependence upon Pauline ideas, especially as they relate to the "concept of the Spirit." In two remarkable comments, they speak of the thematic link between John's descriptive term of the Spirit and Paul's economic term for the Spirit. In regard to *living water* in 7:38, they write, "The term 'living water' is equivalent to life-giving Spirit (cf. 5:21; 5:25; 6:63; 1 Cor. 15:45)" (128), and in regard to the coming of the Spirit, which is an issue of Christ's economical process of death, resurrection, and glorification, they conclude,

By virtue of the descent of the Spirit, Jesus is the sole possessor of the Spirit. It is, as it were, compressed and concentrated in him. It is not so much that Jesus *possesses* the Spirit as it is that Jesus *is* the Spirit. He [John] is particularly attracted to those passages in Paul which have to do with an emphasis on spirit. Behind the Nicodemus

In verse 39 John focuses the attention of the believers on the relationship between Christ and the Spirit in the process of the Triune God's economic self-communication of Himself to redeemed humanity.

story seems to be the great emphasis of 1 Corinthians 15 on Christ as "life-giving spirit." For this writer, the words of Paul, "The Lord is the Spirit," are literally true of the Jesus who lived among men. (137-138)

The Spirit that John points to in verse 39 is the economical Spirit that Paul portrays throughout his writings. Like Paul, John does not focus his writing on the immanent person of the Spirit in the Divine Trinity but rather on the Spirit as He has been made economically available through the Triune God's self-communication. John's Spirit who was not yet is Paul's last Adam who became a life-giving Spirit in resurrection (1 Cor. 15:45), which was His glorification; John's Spirit who was not yet is also Paul's Lord who is the Spirit, the Lord Spirit (2 Cor. 3:17-18). In verse 39 John is not speaking about an event in time or even an event of great impact and meaning; rather, he is focusing the attention of the believers on the relationship between Christ and the Spirit in the process of the Triune God's economic self-communication of Himself to redeemed humanity. And in so doing, he draws upon Paul's teaching concerning the economy of God, mending what was lost by

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affirming its essence after all who were in Asia turned against Paul nor stood with him (2 Tim. 1:15; 4:16-17).

### *The Economy of Was Not Yet*

The essence of Paul's teaching is the economy of God, which involves the dispensing of the divine life of the Triune God into the tripartite being of redeemed humanity for the building up of the Body of Christ, the church, as His eternal dwelling place for His eternal expression. By revelation this economy was made known to Paul (Eph. 3:3), and he was given a unique charge to enlighten all concerning it (v. 9). Toward this end, grace was given (Rom. 12:3, 6; 15:15; 1 Cor. 3:10), grace that enabled him to labor more abundantly in a stewardship of grace (15:10; Eph. 3:2), a ministry that supplied the Lord as grace (1 Cor. 16:23; 2 Cor. 13:14; Phil. 4:23). He did not present doctrine but rather imparted healthy teaching (1 Tim. 1:10; 2 Tim. 4:3; Titus 1:9; 2:1), utilizing spiritual words to impart spiritual things (1 Cor. 2:13), particularly words of life that contained and imparted the organic element of the life of God in a ministry of the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:6, 8). In his overall ministry Paul reveals that the life of God has been made available to humanity through an economical process involving His entrance and continuing presence in human history through the incarnation, human living, death, and resurrection of Christ (2 Tim. 1:10).

Paul's ministry centers on the believers' experience of the divine life.<sup>20</sup> This experience is rooted in the believers' economic identification with God, who is able to dispense, to flow out, His life because, axiomatically, He is an organic, dispensing Triune Being.<sup>21</sup> This is possible because even in His immanent Triune being, God is also an economical Triune Being. Paul's focus on the dispensing of the eternal life is more prominent in the ministry of John<sup>22</sup> because of the need to mend and recover what was lost. The economy of God is the essence of John's ministry because it was the essence of Paul's, and it is the essence of Paul's because the dispensing of the divine life is an axiomatic reality within the immanent, economic being of the Triune God. When the Triune God took counsel among Himself, saying, "Let Us make man in Our image" (Gen. 1:26), the revelation of His economy was still hidden within Him, but through the incarnation of the Son and the becoming of the Spirit who was not yet, the economy of the mystery has been revealed and the eternal life has been made available.

The Revelation of God carries in himself the life of God.  
This is the content of the revelation.

...The life which resides in him is essential, elemental life.  
It is not subject to death any more than God is subject to death. Through belief the individual appropriates this life for himself. On this account he too becomes victorious

over death. Eternal life is therefore endless, but endlessness is not its primary characteristic. The emphasis must be placed on its quality. The believer comes to share in the life of his god and gains for himself the same benefits. (Colwell and Titus 174)

In any discussion of the meaning of eternal life, a distinction must be made between the common understanding that eternal life is just a matter of timelessness, as in *life everlasting*, and the biblical understanding that eternal life is the divine, organic essence of God Himself. The divine life is the uncreated life of God, "which not only is everlasting with respect to time but also is eternal and divine in nature" (Recovery Version, John 3:15, note 1). Colwell and Titus similarly associate eternal life with God Himself: "The nearest approach to a definition of eternal life comes in [John] 17:3: 'This is eternal life that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent'" (172). By pointing to the link between the divine life and the resurrection of Jesus, Colwell and Titus help to forge an understanding of the believers' economic participation in the divine life and the relationship between our participation and the economical becoming of the Spirit who was not yet:

The individual who believes in Jesus participates in this eternal life: "Whoever lives and believes in me shall never die" (11:26). In fact, he becomes divine. While this emphasis may be due partly to the Greek idea of *apotheosis*, it is also, and perhaps largely, due to the Christian experience of the resurrection. (16-17)

It is possible for believers to participate in the divine life because the divine life contained within the shell of Christ's humanity was released through His death and imparted through His resurrection (1 Pet. 1:3). Paul reinforces this understanding of the believers' participation in the economy of God by writing of the last Adam (speaking of His death) who became a life-giving Spirit (speaking of His resurrection) (1 Cor. 15:45). John reinforces it by writing of the Spirit who was not yet (speaking of the process of His death) because Jesus had not been glorified (speaking of the process of His resurrection). The Spirit who was not yet is the economic issue of the Lord's death and resurrection, because the crucified Jesus was glorified in His resurrection. The Spirit, as the issue of God's economy, is activated in our experience by faith in Christ. "When the individual believes on Jesus, 'out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water' (7:38), and, the evangelist adds, Jesus said this about the Spirit which was yet to be given. Thus, Jesus as life-giver is Jesus as spirit" (Colwell and Titus 172).

The significant phrases that John employs in verses 7:37 through 39 in support of Paul's teaching concerning the economy of God are profoundly economic in nature. In

regard to the believers, *come, drink, believe, and receive* all speak of an economic response within the believers to hearing the word of the truth, the gospel of our salvation. *Rivers of living water* refers to the axiomatic capacity of the Triune God to communicate His very life and nature to those who believe. *The Spirit was not yet* refers to the economic becoming of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, the life-giving Spirit, and *had not yet been glorified*, speaks of the economic process of death and resurrection that makes the dispensing of the divine life possible. In considering the translation and exegesis of verses 37 through 39, it is clear that the economic impact of John's writing has been diminished, and with this diminishment, it is much more difficult to see the obvious—the process that enables the Triune God, as an economic Being, to communicate Himself, first as the incarnated Word but ultimately as the Spirit who was not yet.

### The Consummate Process: The Economical Trinity in the Resurrection and Glorification of Jesus

The economy of God involves a process. This process reflects the eternal good pleasure of His will (Eph. 1:5), and it is carried out in, by, and through the economical Being and economical becoming of the Triune God, particularly as these are demonstrated through the incarnation, human living, death, and resurrection of Christ. In this process the Triune God is more than an objective, acting Agent; He is intimately and personally involved. The process of God's economy involves what He does because of what He is: He is organic, dispensing, and three yet one in His being, and so He organically dispenses Himself by virtue of being three yet one. In His economical process the Word first became flesh through incarnation and lived a perfect human life, qualifying Him to be the Lamb of God: the Son came with the Father by the Spirit to make the divine life of the Triune God available through His redemptive death. The last Adam in the flesh then became a life-giving Spirit, the Spirit who was not yet, through resurrection and glorification: the Spirit came as the Son with the Father to impart the divine life of the Triune God that had been made available by the redemptive death of Christ. In this process all things are out of Him, through Him, and to Him (Rom. 11:36), and all things cohere in Him (Col. 1:17).

The involvement of the economic Trinity in the incarnation of the Word is a well-considered and attested subject. Although we cannot specify how the Word became flesh, Christians evince no qualms in their profession of this

point, especially since the Son's incarnate, economic activity is an essential prerequisite for the accomplishment of redemption. The involvement of the economic Trinity in the resurrection and glorification of Jesus, however, is a much less considered and attested subject. And ironically, because we equally cannot specify how the last Adam became a life-giving Spirit, the Spirit who was not yet, Christians evince many qualms in their discussion of this point, even though the Spirit's post-resurrection economic activity is an essential prerequisite for the application of the Son's accomplished redemption.

It is interesting to note that ability to only obscurely see the economical process of the incarnation makes it an item of "faith," but the ability to only obscurely see the same economical axioms in operation in the process of the resurrection and glorification of Jesus makes it an item of "heresy." This may say as much about our "faith" being tradition as it does about our understanding of truth (Mark 7:13). Of the three axioms of the immanent and economical Trinity, only one—the acknowledgement that there is an organic component inherent within resurrection—is

The process of God's economy involves what He does because of what He is: He is organic, dispensing, and three yet one in His being, and so He organically dispenses Himself by virtue of being three yet one.

readily acknowledged in relation to the resurrection and glorification of Jesus. In short, all Christians acknowledge and affirm that Jesus rose from the dead, that He was made alive. Few, however, are able to see that the operation of the principle of resurrection within the believers depends upon the organic dispensing of the divine life that was released and imparted through the resurrection and glorification of Jesus. Even fewer realize that the axiom of three yet one, the axiom of identification, of being distinct but not separate, is central to the resurrection and glorification of Jesus and to the subsequent dispensing of the divine life into those who believe into Him. The third axiom, however, is at the center of John 7:37-39.

The revelation of the Spirit in John 7:37-39 confirms the axiomatic principles of the immanent and economic Trinity. When the Lord spoke of rivers of living water and John identified these rivers as the Spirit, the axiomatic principle of God being an organic dispensing was confirmed. And when the Lord spoke of rivers of living water in relation to Himself and John identified these rivers as the Spirit, these same words confirmed the

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axiomatic principle of God being distinct, but not separate. Robichaux speaks of this identification in “Christ, the Spirit, and Glory,” saying,

The Lord offers Himself as the quenching drink, yet declares that His way to quench thirst is ultimately to install rivers of living water into the innermost being of His believers, which rivers are, by John’s authority, the Spirit. How is it that the believers come to the Lord to get their thirst quenched and yet enjoy the Spirit as the rivers flowing in their being unless Christ and the Spirit are somehow identified? (12)

John’s identification of the Spirit who was not yet with the resurrected and glorified Jesus is not a deviation from the line of the Triune God’s economical involvement in human history; it is the extension and consummation of that line because through this process the axiomatic principles of the immanent and economic Trinity are actualized in time for the sake of the producing of a mutual dwelling place of God and humanity.<sup>23</sup>

The phrase *the Spirit was not yet* should not be viewed as a hard saying; rather, it is the proof that the economic Trinity, as impacted by the resurrection and glorification of Jesus, has become consummately available to humanity. John’s characterization of the Spirit in the Gospel of John is conceived and presented in “dynamic and functional terms” (Colwell and Titus 13). John does not present the role of the Spirit in relation to His immanent existence but in relation to the economic experiences that need to be compounded into His being in order to mediate and convey the divine life to redeemed humanity. His identification of Christ and the Spirit, even Christ as the Spirit, consequently, must be understood within the context of God’s self-communicating process, which John clearly points to when he says, in retrospect, “The Word became flesh” and when he says, in anticipation, “The Spirit was not yet” (1:14; 7:39).

*Not yet* implies the consummation of a process that is essential to the believers’ participation in the divine life and for their economic identification with the Triune God. Robichaux stresses John’s economic emphasis and its relationship to the consummate process of the becoming of the Spirit who was not yet.

We should never say of the Spirit of God, as the eternal third of the Divine Trinity, that there was a time when He was not. But like John, we should say of the Spirit, as the glory and reality of Christ the Son within the believers, that He was not yet before Jesus had been glorified. As to His eternal existence, the Spirit of God always is and does not change. But as to His role in time in the divine economy to glorify the Triune God by bringing Christ into the believers, the Spirit underwent change in the same

sense that the Son underwent change in becoming a man, in living a human life, in dying, and in resurrecting, and was thus not yet before Jesus Himself had completed that process. (“Christ” 13)

To bring the divine life of Christ, even Christ Himself, into the believers is the economic function of the Spirit who was not yet, and this function is dependent upon the economic identification of Christ and the Spirit, and the incorporation of the experiences of the God-man Jesus into the Spirit. It is in this sense that the Spirit entered into a new existence, one that prior to Jesus’ glorification was not yet. In “The Spirit Was Not Yet,” S. H. Hooke develops this point and effectively links the Spirit who was not yet with the life-giving Spirit.

Never until the Son of Man had ascended up where He was before, and the last Adam had become a life-giving spirit, had it been possible for the Spirit to enter into and become the life of the believer, producing in him the life of Jesus, as Paul says, “That the life of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh” (II Cor. iv. 11). Hence before it was possible for the Spirit to be spoken of as given, it was necessary to establish the fact that a new thing in the divine economy had come into existence as the result of the glorifying of Jesus. The Eternal had entered into Time, and in the order of time-experience it could be said that the Incarnate Word had assumed a new form of existence in becoming a life-giving Spirit, and that, correspondingly, the Spirit had assumed a new mode of existence in virtue of which he could become the life by which the whole of the new creation lived with the life of him who is the beginning of the creation of God. (380)

The new mode of existence that Hooke speaks of in relation to the Spirit points to a consummation of the process of God’s economy. His use of the term *mode* should not be read as a reference to or endorsement of the heretical teaching of modalism. Rather, he is speaking of a new authorization and capacity within the Spirit, the authorization and capacity to give life, which was newly endowed within the Spirit through the economical process of Jesus’ incarnation, human living, death, and resurrection.

In the Old Testament the Spirit could brood and fall upon, but only in the New Testament, following the glorification of Jesus, could the Spirit give life, and even become rivers of living water within humanity. This is not to say that the desire to give life was not present within the Triune God from eternity; it was. But with the fall of humanity into sin, God could not give life to sinful humanity without violating His own righteousness. In this sense, His authority was restricted and His capacity was limited. This is why the way to the tree of life was barred by cherubim and a flaming sword (Gen. 3:24). Only with the satisfaction of God’s righteous requirement could the law of the

Spirit of life in Christ Jesus become operative in the believers, so God sent His Son in the likeness of the flesh of sin to condemn sin in the flesh (Rom. 8:2-3). The death of Christ removed the restriction placed upon God by His righteousness, and He could fulfill the promise of eternal life, which He Himself promised (1 John 2:25). The efficacy of Christ's redemptive death has been compounded into the Spirit, so when the Spirit is received, redemption is applied and made efficacious in the experience of the believers. Thus, it is possible for life to be given.

**A**s an organic person within the Trinity, the Spirit has always had life, and the fellowship of this life has continuously flowed within the immanent and economic Trinity, but the capacity to give this life and to bring others, that is, redeemed humanity, into this fellowship is entirely dependent upon the becoming of the Spirit who was not yet through the resurrection and glorification of Jesus, the last Adam, the life-giving Spirit. This is the particular economic relevance of the modifier *life-giving* for the word *Spirit*. But equally important is the word *Spirit*, for apart from the Spirit, the life of the Triune God could not be given. It is the Spirit of reality who imparts all the things of Christ into us. In the Spirit's economic identification with Christ, He receives from Christ and declares what He has received to the believers and even into the believers (John 16:13-15). He receives the effectiveness of Christ's death and applies it to the sins and sin of repentant believers for their forgiveness and justification, and He receives the power of Christ's resurrection and applies it to the believers for their regeneration and growth in the divine life. Without the identification of Christ and the Spirit, there is simply nothing for the Spirit to declare, just as the Son only declares and glorifies the Father.

The proof that the authorization to give life has been inaugurated and the capacity to give life has been effectuated in the Spirit is the indwelling and mingling of our regenerated human spirit with the divine Spirit. Prior to the incarnation, human living, death, and resurrection of Jesus, these economic functions within the Triune God, as they applied to sinful humanity, were dormant. But the becoming of the Spirit who was not yet released these dormant capacities and extended them into redeemed humanity, consummating the economic realization of the economic Trinity and enabling the promise of life to be fulfilled (2 Tim. 1:1).<sup>24</sup>

When John speaks of the glorification of Jesus, he is not

simply referring to the death and resurrection of Christ, the limit of the notion that many commentators apply to the text. Rather, he is referring to a glorification that makes Christ real and available in the believers, so that He Himself can first quench their thirst and ultimately flow forth from their innermost being in a way that manifests God and glorifies Him. The Spirit, in this sense of the term, certainly was not yet when Jesus spoke, for Jesus Himself had not yet passed through all that He must to be all that He would be to His believers. And Jesus could not be all that He would be until He had been glorified, for His glorification means precisely His passing through death and resurrection and His coming into the believers as the Spirit of reality for their living. (Robichaux, "Christ" 13)

**T**he vital role of the Spirit of reality in the believers' living can be seen in the central importance of the life being given at every stage of our growth and maturity. Life is imparted by the Spirit to regenerate our human spirit (John 3:6), bringing us into the fellowship of the Triune God and making our spirit life (Rom. 8:10); life is impart-

**The proof that the authorization to give life has been inaugurated and the capacity to give life has been effectuated in the Spirit is the indwelling and mingling of our regenerated human spirit with the divine Spirit.**

ed when our mind is set on the Spirit, renewing our mind for the transformation of our soul and making our mind life (v. 6); and life is imparted into even our mortal bodies by the Spirit who dwells in us (v. 11). The believers can pass through this process of life because the last Adam became a life-giving Spirit through the resurrection and glorification of Jesus. Through the becoming of the Spirit who was not yet, the Spirit can be received as living water, and the Spirit can flow out of the believers as rivers of living water. The experience of this flow produces a wonderful, corporate consummation that confirms the economic speaking of the Lord, the economic interpretation of John, and the economic issue of the believers' experience of the economy of God.

### **The Corporate Consummation: The New Jerusalem as the Mutual Dwelling Place of God and Humanity with Rivers of Living Water Flowing Out**

The image of rivers of living water flowing out of the innermost being of the believers is portrayed by John as a personal reality in John 7:37-39 but as a corporate

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consummation in Revelation 21 and 22. The consummate image in the Scriptures is a tabernacle, that is, an abode, that has been enlarged into a corporate dwelling of God in humanity and humanity in God—the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:3, 22). At the center of this city, out of its innermost being, there is a river of water of life that flows, watering and supplying all with the spiritual riches of the divine life: “He showed me a river of water of life, bright as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb in the middle of its street” (22:1). This river, “whose streams gladden the city of God, / The holy place of the tabernacles of the Most High” (Psa. 46:4), speaks of a corporate consummation of the divine economy. F. F. Bruce points out the connection between John 7:38 and Revelation 22:1:

“As the scripture has said, ‘Rivers of living water shall flow from his inmost being.’” But where exactly does scripture say this? ...The fulfilment of these...lies plain for all to read in John’s description of “the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb” (Rev. 22:1). (Bruce 182)

There is much that can be written about the parallels between John 7:37-39 and Revelation 21 and 22,<sup>25</sup> but it is enough to point out the obvious in order to assert the centrality of the becoming of the Spirit who was not yet as the consummation of the Scriptures: The content of the consummate cry of the Lord on the consummate day of the Feast of Tabernacles mirrors the depiction of the New Jerusalem, which is the consummate sign in the Scriptures, the final vision. Both images mutually reinforce the other as being the thematic center of the Scriptures. The innermost being of the believer is a tabernacle, an abode, which mirrors the New Jerusalem as an enlarged tabernacle and temple, a city of life. Both images mutually speak of an organic abiding of God in redeemed humanity and redeemed humanity in God. In both images there is a supplying river at its very center; thus, both speak of an eternal dispensing of the life of the Triune God that sustains both God and humanity in a fellowship of the Spirit. And in both images there is economic identification, in the former, Christ, the Spirit, and the believers are joined as one in the flow of the divine life out from one’s innermost being, and in the latter, Christ, the Spirit, and the believers are the content and constituents of the corporate city.

There is a final parallel—perhaps the most striking: Like the Lord, this city is still calling out, crying out, to those who thirst to come and drink: “The Spirit and the bride say, Come! And let him who hears say, Come! And let him who is thirsty come; let him who wills take the water of life freely” (22:17). Just as the dwelling place of God and humanity has been enlarged through the becoming of the Spirit who was not yet, His call has

been enlarged, coming now from both the Spirit and the bride, the redeemed believers, who have been incorporated with the Triune God into an enlarged dwelling place, and who now, as one, proclaim and extend an invitation to the thirsty to partake of the organic dispensing of the divine life because the Spirit who was not yet has indeed become. Let him who is thirsty come! **AFC**

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>In the concluding footnote to a previous article, “Understanding, Appreciating, and Experiencing the Mystery of God: Reflections and Notes<sup>1</sup> on the Economy of the Mystery,” I pointed to the need for the church to extend its “consideration of the economy of God beyond the incarnation and toward its operation in the resurrection of Christ as the life-giving Spirit” (35). To a great extent this requires a deeper consideration of the operation of the economic Trinity as it relates to the post-resurrection status of the Spirit, whom the creeds identify as *the Lord, the Giver of Life*. It is not possible to embark upon such a consideration, however, if the Spirit is viewed as being unaffected or as remaining outside the sphere of the operation of the economy of God. When I speak of being unaffected, I do not mean uninvolved, for the Spirit is quite active in the ongoing economic activity of the Triune God. Rather, I am suggesting that there is a need to consider the economic impact of Christ’s resurrection and glorification upon the Spirit, who extends the operation of the Triune God in human history. This extended operation of the Triune God involves something new about the Spirit, just as the incarnation involved something new about the Son because of His “entry into history” (La Cugna 220). What is new about the Triune God in the resurrection of Christ is the consummation of His being, as realized through the becoming of the Spirit who was not yet. This becoming, properly viewed, is the consummation of God’s economy, and it potentiates this consummation within the inner being of those who, through His mercy and grace, have been brought into the fellowship of the Triune God.

<sup>2</sup>When God reveals Himself to humanity through the Scriptures, it is almost exclusively for the purpose of revealing His economical move to humanity. The Triune God reveals what we need to know in order that we may enter into His economy. All of the Scriptures, therefore, should be viewed as God’s selective revelation of His purpose, His economy, to humanity. The believers’ experience of revelation, consequently, always occurs within the context of His economical move and for the purpose of advancing His economical move. The revelation of the Father to Peter was a revelation of the incarnated Son as the anointed One to carry out His eternal purpose to build the church (Matt. 16:16-18). Later, revelation was given to Paul for the purpose of bringing both Jews and Gentiles into the Body of Christ to eternally manifest the multifarious wisdom of God through the church (Eph. 3:3-6, 9-10). It should come as no surprise, therefore, that the unveiled and interpreted references to the Lord, the believers, and the Spirit

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in John 7:37-39 would involve a deeper presentation of God's economy for the purpose of entering into this economy. We can come to Him and drink precisely because the Spirit who was not yet has been processed and consummated and now is the Spirit of Jesus Christ (Phil. 1:19).

<sup>3</sup>Many of the authors cited in this article frankly acknowledge this point, alternating between consternation and interpretive possibilities. Raymond E. Brown, for example, in his commentary in the Anchor Bible, pointedly asks, "*What passage of Scripture is cited in vs. 38?...* The words quoted in John do not reflect exactly any one passage in MT or LXX, and so commentators have had to use a certain ingenuity in tracking down passages that are at least similar" (321). He goes on to point out some of the ingenious efforts, saying,

Those who think of the believer as the source of the water often suggest Prov. xviii 4: "The words of a man's mouth are deep waters; the fountain of wisdom is a gushing stream." Isa lviii 11 is worth considering as background; there God promises the Israelite of eschatological times, "You shall be...like a spring of water whose waters fail not." (321-322)

D. A. Carson states, "The exact Scripture reference here is disputed" (325), and Robert Govett notes,

Where the Scripture makes such a promise I cannot say, and others seem as greatly puzzled. Some point to Zech. xiv. 8. But that speaks of living waters going out from *Jerusalem*, and not from the believer's bowels. That promises it also of a day to come, and tell us into what seas the waters shall flow. Isaiah xxxii. 1, 2, seems nearer. But they apply to Christ in person. (323)

<sup>4</sup>Coming as I do from the vantage point of a believer, I accept the latter. The account of the Lord's life in the Gospels, however, attests to both His knowledge of the Scriptures and to the power of His interpretive abilities. As a young child advanced in wisdom and stature, He sat in the temple, respectfully listening and questioning the teachers of the Scriptures, amazing them with His understanding and answers (Luke 2:46, 52). At the beginning of His public ministry He attended to the public reading of Scripture and declared the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophetic utterance, specifically applying it to Himself (4:21). And after His resurrection He clearly explained to the disciples on the road to Emmaus, "beginning from Moses and from all the prophets," the things in all the Scriptures concerning Himself (24:27). It is interesting to note how the Lord's interpretation of the Scriptures in turn becomes Scripture. This same process is acknowledged by Peter concerning the writings of Paul (2 Pet. 3:16). In principle, all of our speaking for and our speaking forth of God should interpret spiritual things with spiritual words, bearing the mark of having been taught by the Spirit (1 Cor. 2:13).

<sup>5</sup>This brief encapsulation of the subject of the Gospel of John is taken from Witness Lee's introduction to the Gospel of John in the Recovery Version of the Bible.

<sup>6</sup>John 7:37-39 is a beautiful example of the consummation of God's economy as it is revealed in these verses. Out of John's innermost being, both his words and those of the Lord flow out together, each mutually sustaining and reinforcing the other, and each supplying life to those who believe and who are willing to come to Him. Their words are mingled words of spirit and life (6:63).

<sup>7</sup>The mythology of heaven can reach such absurd proportions that some Christian teachers find an imperative need to assure us that even our particular pets will somehow make it to heaven to provide us with comfort and enjoyment, as if God would not be sufficient to this cause. The contrast between this kind of leaven and the reality of the biblical revelation of the New Jerusalem is comprehensively covered in the April 2000 issue of *Affirmation & Critique*, available online at [http://www.affcrit.com/archives/ac\\_00\\_02.html](http://www.affcrit.com/archives/ac_00_02.html).

<sup>8</sup>While all of the Lord's recorded words in the New Testament bear the subsequent imprimatur of Scripture, all of His contemporaneous references to Scripture are rooted in either the phrasing of Old Testament verses or in the overarching theme of God's economy, which is first glimpsed in the Old Testament in Genesis 1:26, which speaks of man being made in the image of God to exercise His authority. This reality is made possible only by partaking of the divine life as symbolized by the tree of life and by being continuously supplied with the river of His pleasures that flow from Him as the fountain of life (Rom. 8:29; 1 Cor. 15:49; 2 Cor. 3:18; Col. 3:10; Heb. 6:4; 2 Pet. 1:4; Psa. 36:8; John 4:10; 1 Cor. 12:13). It is a testimony of His perfect humanity that He restricted His identification of what constituted the Scriptures to what was recorded in time and available to Him in time, even though He was God manifested in flesh, the inspiring Author of the Scriptures Himself.

<sup>9</sup>In the New Testament, the revelation of the mystery, which in previous ages was hidden in God is made known to the apostles and prophets in spirit (Eph. 3:9, 5), and thus there is greater clarity. It is more accessible because the Triune God Himself in His economy is now accessible by redeemed humanity (2:18). To know and experience the revealed God is to know and experience the revelation of God.

<sup>10</sup>Hooke incorrectly attributes the use of the word *Scripture* to John because he recorded it, when it should have been attributed to the Lord who spoke it. As a consequence of this oversight, Hooke suggests that the unspecified word may be the Lord's earlier speaking in John 4:14, saying, "The possibility may be considered that the 'Scripture' in the evangelist's interpretation of the logion in vii. 38 might be the word of Jesus in iv. 14, 'The water that I shall give him, shall be in him a spring of water springing up into eternal life'" (377).

<sup>11</sup>To assume that there is no connecting thematic thread or to reject the connecting thread once found is fraught with danger (1 Tim. 1:19; Rom. 16:17; 1 Tim. 1:4), especially when the Lord emphatically declared that the Scriptures in their totality testify only of Him (John 5:39).

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<sup>12</sup>Witness Lee's *The Fulfillment of the Tabernacle and the Offerings in the Writings of John*, published by Living Stream Ministry, is an excellent resource about John's use of the tabernacle and offerings as types of Christ, especially in their relationship to the economy of God.

<sup>13</sup>Space does not allow for a fuller treatment of the mingled spirit. This subject is covered in greater detail in "The Mingled Spirit" in *Affirmation & Critique* II.4 (October 1997): 39-46. This article is available online at [http://www.affcrit.com/archives/ac\\_97\\_04.html](http://www.affcrit.com/archives/ac_97_04.html).

<sup>14</sup>The Bible does not provide scientific details about how God formed humanity from the dust of the ground or metaphysical details about the two natures in the one person of Christ for this same reason because faith is not predicated upon a self-initiated, volitional act that follows an objective consideration of facts and/or apologetic arguments. Rather, the precursor to faith is hearing, not understanding (Rom. 10:17; Gal. 3:2). Knowledge and understanding come after regeneration as the mind is renewed (Col. 1:9; 2:2; Rom. 12:2).

<sup>15</sup>While 1 Timothy 6:16 speaks of God dwelling in unapproachable light, we should not be too quick to assume that this means that God desires to be distant and apart from humanity, especially when God views redeemed humanity as being in Christ, the object of His highest delight. There are simply too many verses which indicate that the redeemed can approach Him, draw near to Him, and even be one with Him. Considerations of sin in relationship to God's righteousness create a separation between God and humanity, but considerations of grace in relationship to the satisfaction of God's righteousness through Christ's redemptive death bridge this separation.

<sup>16</sup>Similarly, it can be asked, "Without the Word becoming flesh and without a rudimentary appreciation of this reality, would we know to come to Him in faith for the forgiveness of sins?" The condemning power of the law leaves every unregenerate person without excuse. All know that all have sinned. Both sin and God's complete condemnation of sin leave humanity without hope (Eph. 2:12). Only the sinless blood of a perfect man could satisfy God's righteous requirements, and only by knowing that God became a man in the person of Christ, who lived a perfect human life and who willingly allowed Himself to be led to slaughter as the Lamb of God, would we know that the sin of the world can be taken away and subsequently have the boldness and assurance of faith to come forward to God (Heb. 10:19, 22).

<sup>17</sup>Woodhouse provides an excellent example of exegesis that is bound by the assumption that there is contradiction at the core of verse 39. Once this assumption is accepted, his exegesis veers away from John's economical presentation and embarks upon a search for plausible ways to soften the seeming contradiction.

This phrase, if taken literally as it stands in the A.V., presents two very great difficulties: (a) it rules out the activity of the Third Person of the Trinity in the world

before the Incarnation; (b) it contradicts several O.T. statements or makes them very hard to interpret, e.g. "The spirit of God moved over the water".

In dealing with the passage we have two choices: one is to deal with these two difficulties, but the more obvious method is to ask whether it need be taken literally. (310)

Woodhouse posits a solution to this hard saying by asking whether or not we need to take the phrase *was not yet* literally. In his consideration of the phrase, he rejects the need for a literal reading and offers, instead, a rhetorical explanation. His focus on the difficulty of explicating the phrase *was not yet*, however, obscures the fact that John's emphasis in verse 39 is on *the Spirit*. Given this emphasis, a more productive method of exegesis would be to determine whether or not John is employing the term *the Spirit* literally or otherwise. Woodhouse assumes that the term *the Spirit* is a literal reference to the Spirit of the Old and New Testaments, while at the same time assuming that the phrase *was not yet* need not be read literally. Since we cannot avoid the presence of the Spirit in the Old and New Testaments prior to the glorification of Jesus, Woodhouse's assumption about the term *the Spirit* is understandable. If, however, we confront this difficult saying by recognizing that the economical Trinity, rather than the immanent Trinity, is the object of John's consideration, a more productive inquiry could be advanced by reading *was not yet* literally. A literal reading of *was not yet* would require a more nuanced, non-literal reading of the term *the Spirit*, non-literal in the sense that John's words would have to be viewed as unveiling an aspect of the Spirit that literally was not present prior to the glorification of Jesus. In "Christ, the Spirit, and Glory," Robichaux lays the predicate for such an approach by confirming that "at issue in any of the Spirit's designations, both in the Old and New Testaments, is not the eternal existence of the Spirit but His economical role" (8).

The best starting point for such an examination would be to note that John speaks of a connection between the Spirit and the glorification of Jesus, rather than the glorification of the Son or the Christ. The becoming of the Spirit who was not yet is related to the consummation of the economical process of the incarnation, human living, death, and resurrection of Jesus, the unique God-man, who possesses divinity by virtue of being the Word which was in the beginning and who possesses humanity by virtue of becoming flesh and tabernacling among us. John aptly declares that "the Spirit was not yet" because the economical processes involving Jesus had not yet been consummated through the economic events of His death and resurrection.

<sup>18</sup>As does the Recovery Version of the Bible.

<sup>19</sup>Some suggest that John may also be referring to the Lord's appearing and breathing into the disciples in John 20:22. See Woodhouse and Brown.

<sup>20</sup>References to *life* in the ministry of Paul are numerous and central in their emphasis. Some representative verses

include Romans 1:17; 5:10, 18; 6:4; 8:2, 6, 10-11; 2 Corinthians 3:6; 4:10-11; 1 Timothy 6:12; 2 Timothy 1:10; and Titus 1:2; 3:7. In his role as a completing minister, Paul covered many topics, including Christ, the church, the law, faith, the gospel, the Body of Christ, and the divine economy itself, but all of these and many others revolve around the centrality of the dispensing of the divine life.

<sup>21</sup>The matter of the axiomatic being of the Triune God is developed with great clarity in Robichaux's "Axioms of the Trinity." The particular statement in this current article is derived from the following quotation:

*Father, Son, and Spirit* point to important aspects of God that should affect our faith in and appreciation and enjoyment of God. That God has chosen to reveal Himself to man through these terms indicates at least three things concerning Him: 1) that above all He is an organic Being; 2) that by virtue of His organic identity He is eternally three and yet one; and 3) that as an organic Being He exists as an eternal dispensing. (7-8)

<sup>22</sup>Representative verses concerning the divine life in the writings of John include John 1:4; 3:15-16; 5:39-40; 6:47, 63; 10:10; 17:2-3; 20:31; 1 John 1:2; 2:25; 4:9; 5:11-12, 20; and Revelation 2:7; 21:6; 22:1, 14, 17.

<sup>23</sup>Given the need for a deeper understanding of the process that enables the economic Trinity to transform sinners into living stones and fully incorporate them as the many sons of God into Himself as the real Bethel, the house of God (John 1:42, 51; 1 Pet. 2:5), the mending ministry of John is the most helpful in this regard generally, and John 7:37-39 is the most helpful particularly.

<sup>24</sup>In a footnote to John 7:39, Witness Lee summarizes the economical process of the Spirit's becoming.

The Spirit of God was there from the beginning (Gen. 1:1-2), but at the time the Lord spoke this word, the Spirit as the Spirit of Christ (Rom. 8:9), the Spirit of Jesus Christ (Phil. 1:19), was not yet, because the Lord had not yet been glorified. Jesus was glorified when He was resurrected (Luke 24:26). After Jesus' resurrection, the Spirit of God became the Spirit of the incarnated, crucified, and resurrected Jesus Christ, who was breathed into the disciples by Christ in the evening of the day on which He was resurrected (20:22). The Spirit is now the "another Comforter," the Spirit of reality promised by Christ before His death (14:16-17). When the Spirit was the Spirit of God, He had only the divine element. After He became the Spirit of Jesus Christ through Christ's incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection, the Spirit had both the divine element and the human element, with all the essence and reality of the incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection of Christ. Hence, the Spirit is now the all-inclusive Spirit of Jesus Christ as the living water for us to receive (vv. 38-39). (Note 1)

<sup>25</sup>The central importance of the New Jerusalem as a sign of the consummation of God's economy is the focus of departmental articles in *Affirmation & Critique* under the subject of "Aspects of the New Jerusalem." I refer our readers to these more detailed discussions.

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