

Penetrating the Mystery

by John Whittle

I would like to share with you some of the good things of this ministry—called UNION LIFE—into which we have been drawn. “Union Life” is an expanded awareness of *what* is—not the sudden acquisition of something we did not have before! It means more than our personal awareness of a realized union, and a rich fellowship with those who are similarly enjoying this liberation—it also means a union with all who are born of the Spirit. All born of the Spirit are in union, but many have not yet become aware of what they have in Christ. Our unfettered fellowship with them is of great importance.

It is unavoidable that we have a distinctive characteristic in the eyes and ears of others, but I am convinced that we must play this down as much as possible. Differences indulged too far produce unnecessary barriers which hinder our ministry to others. Yet let us be fully alive to our primary difference: the *penetrating of the mystery*, the very heart of the Gospel. This brings us from the primary enjoyment of the *historic Christ* to the recognition of the *indwelling Christ*, out to the broad planes of the *universal Christ* who fills all things and has all things in His control.

Our first lift in consciousness is *from guilt to acceptance*; the second is *from separation to union*; the third is *from being redeemed to being redemptive*. This is the expanding awareness of the work of the Holy Spirit which, of course, is another way of expressing the three stages of 1 John Two—children, young men, fathers. The child stage is *I at the foot of His Cross*; the young man or adolescent stage is *I upon the Cross* in total identification with Christ in the ending of the reign of independent or illusory self; the father stage is the consciousness of being raised to walk in newness of life for one purpose—to *carry a Cross*.

In this latter awareness we happily receive ourselves back again and live, without fear, the normal life which is now *He* living in us. But this also includes the earlier realizations of the historic Jesus and the indwelling Christ, and does not replace them as if they were done with!

The carrying of a Cross is not my “job” for the world, but the recognition that “*the dying of the Lord Jesus*” (2 Cor. 4:10) is a spontaneous ministry carried on in me, often in the most humble and obscure circumstances. It is costly, but the cost is lost in the glory of love.

The three-fold stage of spiritual expansion is brought together by Paul in Philippians 3:10: “*That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings.*” This is a beautiful statement as to how we move from initial understanding, to what the Hebrew letter calls “adult understanding”—from *milk drinkers* to *meat eaters*.

Until we get settled, we move between *agony* and *ecstasy*. Especially painful are the relationships which threaten to be broken by our progress into a fuller experience of union. The legalities of Christianity are sometimes hard to break. But we have to find our way through and learn to be free on the inside from all those who would try to hold us back—though we are never free from loving them.

It is necessary to realize our glorious duality—the absoluteness of duality—because a sense of union which does not include an awareness of duality is superficial and can easily lead us to slip into a sort of “spiritual humanism.” A heightened awareness of God’s transcendence deepens our sense of union and liberates us just as our adoration of God fulfills a need and enriches our lives.

A lovely statement about Christ is, "*He is the Beyond in the Midst.*" This expresses, as nearly as possible, the inexpressible. To quote another favorite passage of mine from C.S. Lewis' last book: "He is always both within us and over against us. Our reality is so much from His reality as He, moment by moment, projects into us. The deeper the level within ourselves from which our prayer, or any other act, wells up, the more it is His, *but not at all the less ours, rather, most ours when most His.*" This sums up the truth of "Not I, but Christ," in our every action. We are most ourselves when we are most aware of His otherness.

Jesus carefully and adoringly preserved the duality: "*I and My Father are one,*" and "*The Father who is in Me, He does the works,*" and so on. He did not say, "The Father has replaced Me," or "I have replaced the Father." Beautiful and absolute. Hence, we are saved from the confusion of a false oneness. And yet as we live, it is Christ living.

Sometime ago, I was to give a series of talks in a church. In presenting me, the pastor said that it was his wish that the talks be to God's glory. In response to his introduction, I had the temerity to say that I had come to *glorify man!*

Of course, I had ample opportunity to explain my meaning to the congregation in the four talks I had with them. I called their attention to the statement in' Romans 8:30: "*Whom He justified, them He also glorified.*" I pointed out that God's glory is well secured when justification is believed and experienced.

But what does it mean to be glorified? Is it the body that is glorified? No. It is the spirit of man in the here and now. The fruit of justification is *union*. Read Christ's word in the beautiful prayer of John 17:22,23: "*And the glory which you gave me I have given them; that they may be one, even as We are one; I in them and You in Me.*" So the glory which is a present experience is to have an awareness of a union with the God within through the indwelling of His Christ. But notice how with all the "I, I, I" of Jesus' statements about Himself, He was, in the inner awareness and background of His life, preserving an absolute recognition of duality: "My Father, who is greater than I . . ."

Sometimes, in our exuberance and enthusiasm about our own new sense of union we go to an extreme and claim that Christ is the author of our deviations—our sins. We may even say that our deviations are Christ acting in us!

But Christ cannot sin, nor does He lead us into sin. We momentarily act independently of Him and then, upon recognition of our deviation, return immediately to the abiding sense of our union.

God overrules—that is a glorious fact. Of course, in a deeper sense there is no power that is *not* God in action; but it is the *misuse* of God's power which causes the deviation. Christ is not the author of any such misuse. So let us not fool ourselves. Heresy lurks behind this idea.

Our happy calling is that of all believers—to be manifestations of a Person and not propagators of a movement. We do this, firstly, by a life in the growing freedom of an expanded awareness of who and what we are, and secondly by the clear expression of a Scriptural basis for our experience, which keeps us in true balance. The outer word is but the reflection which catches our attention and turns us in upon the living Person and glory within.

We know that God is bringing many into a few freedom—a freedom that it not a mere concept, but a Person. We probably have to die to UNION LIFE as we do to many things and situations. Out of that, resurrection life will come for many.

We move on, then, making our minor mistakes, but assured that He uses everything to good account. I read a line of a poem recently which moved me deeply. Speaking of the river of life, the poet said:

*Its strength is builded of weakness:
Its right is woven of wrong.*

So, nothing is lost! What a comfort to look back upon areas of our lives which were painful or unsatisfactory, and see now how God was accomplishing His good purposes even there. He is the great transposer, from the minor key to the major. The same majestic words that were spoken to Mary apply also to us:

“The power of the Most High will overshadow you so the Holy One to be born will be called the Son of God” (Luke 1:32).