

Travailing in Birth: Christ in You

by David Orton

<http://lifemessenger.org/travailing-birth-christ/>

My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth
until Christ is formed in you

Galatians 4:19

Christ being formed within us is the *sine qua non* of Christianity.

It is the true apostolic burden and the essential ingredient of the spiritual life.

Without it we are reduced to either merely a religious or rationalistic code—to "*a form of godliness*" (2 Tim 3:5). It is significant that the word here for 'form' (*morphosis*) according to W.E. Vine refers to "a form or outline, ...an outward semblance" only. Whereas the word 'form' (*morphothe*) from the text above (Gal 4:19) "refers, not to the external and transient, but to the inward and real." It refers to the inner-change caused by Christ's own indwelling presence.

This is what the human heart hungers for and was created to enjoy. Anything less becomes a yoke of bondage. This was the point of Paul's apostolic plea to the Galatians. Seduced by another gospel they had come under the rules and traditions of mere men, depending on human effort and will-power to achieve spiritual ends, to bring pleasure to God. They had forgotten that "*what is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit*" (Jn 3:6); that without the presiding presence of Christ in the heart all that can be produced is dead works.

More than salvation

Surely, this is where we find today's church. This is not to deny our strong evangelistic emphasis of "receiving Christ", but unfortunately this is where it all-too-often stops. Paul's birth pangs for the Galatians had a time element: "*until Christ be formed in you*". Now, they had already been saved—they had already received Christ. Even so, the apostle travailed in birth for the fully formed character and presence of Christ to be manifest in their hearts; for their inner-life to be conformed to the very image of Christ himself. This is more than salvation. He laboured in the Spirit, longing for the Galatians to move through the full process of gestation from conception to maturity and birth. The Greek word *formed* is in the subjunctive mood, which is the mood of possibility and potentiality. The process, in other words, may or may not occur, depending upon circumstances. Rather than bringing forth a greater manifestation of Christ it is possible, as the prophet said, to give "*birth to wind*" (Isa 26:18).

The contemporary church — a phantom pregnancy

Much of the movement and noise of the contemporary church has not been conceived by the Spirit. In fact, much of it is a 'phantom pregnancy'. For what is conceived of God will come to birth: "*Shall I bring to the time of birth, and not cause delivery?*" says the Lord. "*Shall I who cause delivery shut up the womb?*" says your God" (Isa 66:9). The reason we're not seeing spiritual breakthrough in the Western church is that we are enamoured with the works of the flesh. Much of our activity has been conceived through our own skills and training, through our own planning and strategy.

Surrendering to Christ within

Something therefore must happen if we are to see heaven-sent revival touching down in our cities and the transformation of our communities. Again returning to our text, the Greek word 'formed' is also in the passive voice. This means that if Christ is to be formed within us we must yield as the willing recipients of an action from God. It is not our networking, our programming, nor our church activity; not even our praying that will bring to birth the world-transforming revival of our dreams! It is surrender in humility to intimacy with the Father and the travail of Christ being formed within us until, as Peter says, "*the daystar arises in our hearts*" (2 Pet 1:19).

Now, how does this happen except by the Spirit. Christ as the light-bearer (or daystar) is revealed in our hearts through the

Holy Spirit. Jesus promised that, *"He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you"* (Jn 16:14). This inner revelation of Christ does not come from *"flesh and blood"* but from the Father (Mat 16:17). It is hidden from the *"wise and intelligent but revealed to babes"* (Lk 10:21). This is more than mere knowledge *about* God. No amount of theological information, human effort, or church involvement will ever bring us to this hidden knowledge *of* God. It is revealed only to babes—to the humble in spirit, who in meekness receive *"the engrafted word"* (Jas 1:21).

So, the condition that releases the formation of Christ within is surrender—the surrender of our will and our way. And even this is a work of the Spirit. It was only through relying in humility on the *"eternal Spirit"* that Christ could offer himself to the Father (Heb 9:14). This is the same Holy Spirit who, in a moment of time, overshadowed an obscure Hebrew girl, implanting a divine seed and bringing forth a miracle named *Emmanuel* – God with us – the incarnate Son of God.

God the Holy Spirit, in our time, is again looking for a womb—for hearts that can, in humility, surrender to the seed of a prophetic destiny, that like Mary can say, *"Be it unto me according to your word"*; hearts that through surrender resist the seduction of human works—of instant results and worldly success; that can say to the Lord, *"No matter what it takes – the loss of reputation, of prestige or position – whatever it is, use me to bring forth your Son, to display your glory in the earth"*.

"For this purpose I have come to this hour"

Jesus faced the temptation of instant results—not only in the wilderness temptation, but also in the invitation of the Greeks. They had come to Jerusalem to celebrate the feast, but through the representation of Philip and Andrew, also most probably bearing an invitation to take his ministry to the great schools of Athens – surely this was God – wasn't this the fulfilment of his destiny, to be a light-bearer to the Gentiles! Surely God was enlarging his ministry! This was his opportunity, his day in the sun! But his response was instructive. With great pathos Jesus responded:

23 And Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. 24 Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. 25 Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. 26 If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him.

27 "Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? But for this purpose I have come to this hour.

John 12:23–27 ESV

The Greeks who had come to Philip saying, *"we would see Jesus"*, would now only be able to see him with the eyes of revelation. They had sought to know him *"after the flesh"* (2 Cor 5:16), through their natural reasoning and curiosity, but now they would have to know him after the Spirit. And this was only to be realised through Christ's laying down of his own life—the grain of wheat falling to the ground. This was to be followed by those who desire to see him and know him: *"If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there shall My servant also be"* (Jn 12:26a). Like Christ, for this purpose we have come to this hour. Only through the paradox and agony of the cross, do we realise our destiny as we willingly lay it down.

This was Paul's understanding when he cried out:

10 that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; 11 in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

Philippians 3:10–11 NASB

Only by being hidden in the *"cleft of the rock"*, covered as it were by the hand of God will we, like Moses, see the glory of the Lord (see Ex 33:18-23). This life of *hiddenness* is the *"way of the cross"*. It is only through a deep identification with Christ's death in the laying down of our life – our dreams and our dearest hopes – that we will truly and ultimately enjoy the Father's reward and the full glories of resurrection life. As Jesus promised, *"if anyone serves Me, the Father will honour him"* (Jn 12:26b).

"Christ in you, the hope of glory"

This is the reality of *"Christ in you, the hope of glory"*, the unveiled mystery of the ages which is now manifested in us (see Col 1:24-27). It is the power of the indwelling Christ and is our guarantee of glory. As Christ is formed within, through the surrender of all that we are, we move to ever increasing levels of glory. To the degree we surrender and see him with the eyes of revelation, to that degree we are changed into his image and into his glory:

And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

2 Corinthians 3:18 ESV

The manifestation of the corporate Christ

Now, where is all this leading us? To the manifestation of the *"corporate Christ"* (see Eph 1:22, 23; 2:14, 15; 3:1-10; Col 3:10, 11). Just as Mary surrendered to the divine seed within her, bringing forth the incarnate word, again in this hour, the sound of travail is being heard as the Spirit of God calls forth the *"corporate Christ"*—a church attaining to the fullness of the stature of Christ (see Eph 4:11-13). The failures and disgraces of two millennia of Christian history will pale into insignificance compared to the unsurpassed glory of what is imminent. As Christ is formed within each one of us, we are rapidly approaching a turning point in history when the earth will see an unprecedented display of God's glory.

The precursors to this are now being heard in the massive cry of intercession that is going up from this generation. It is heard in the voice of the bride and the Bridegroom—in the voice of worship (the bride) and of the prophetic (the Bridegroom). It is seen in the present increase of the supernatural, of healings, and of the miraculous.

With all of this there is a shift in the spirit happening right now—there is an acceleration of God's purposes so that it will be said of this generation,

7 Before she was in labor she gave birth; before her pain came upon her she delivered a son. 8 Who has heard such a thing? Who has seen such things? Shall a land be born in one day? Shall a nation be brought forth in one moment? For as soon as Zion was in labor she brought forth her children.

Isaiah 66:7-8 ESV

There need not be any further delay. In *"one moment"* God can do it. He can bring forth the manifestation of his Son in the earth that will sweep the nations with his power and glory.

In fact, the whole of creation is anxiously longing for the *"manifestation of the sons of God"* (Rom 8:19). This is not some club that can be joined. There is no church, movement, or group that can lay claim to this. It is the universal church ultimately coming to maturity, to the fullness of the stature of Christ. And this will only happen as we individually and corporately enter the travail of Christ being formed within us; for we with *"the whole of creation have groaned and suffered the pains of childbirth until now"* (Rom 8:22). This is the time for greater manifestations of Christ's presence to be realised in and through us. It is the hour to lift our voices in travail as we cry to heaven for Christ to come forth.

Acknowledging there are various schools of interpretation, this in my view, is the woman of Revelation 12. Clothed in the sun – the symbol of the Father's glory, she stands on the moon symbolising Christ and his finished work, and is crowned with twelve stars signifying apostolic order – she is seen in deep travail. In her crying out, she gives birth to a son. Again this is not some esoteric *man-child company* of super-spiritual initiates, but it is the climactic manifestation of Christ through his church in history. A church filled with glory, without spot or blemish (see Eph 5:27)—an interceding bride that gives birth to an unparalleled display of Christ's power over sin, Satan, sickness, and ultimately death.

With the whole of creation, let a cry be heard again in Zion. May it rend the heavens as we travail in birth crying, *"Thou mighty Christ come forth in me"*.

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