

Wind Who Makes All Winds That Blow

Thomas H. Troeger

Faith in God awakens us to the wonders of existence that fill our lives moment by moment but that most of the time we take for granted. Consider, for example, our breath. Until we suffer a medical ailment that makes our breathing difficult, we breathe in and out, in and out, and never give it a thought. All our attention is focused elsewhere. Yet this simple physical action is sustaining us, making possible everything we do. And what have we done to earn this gift of breath? Nothing.

The biblical writers were keenly aware that breath is a gift from God. God breathes into Adam's nostrils "the breath of life." Our breath is set in motion by the wind that blows over the deep at creation, the wind that Christ, playing on the fluid meaning of *pneuma* (Greek for both "spirit" and "wind"), describes as blowing "where it chooses" (John 3:8).

The hymn text "Wind Who Makes All Winds that Blow" is an expression of wonder at the elemental primacy of the motion of air, and at the subsequent dynamism of both the material and mental world: "gusts" and "gales" parallel "stirrings in the mind's deep caves." All of this movement proceeds from the "Wind *who* makes all winds that blow." The aspiration required to sing or say "who" is an onomatopoeic hint of wind. The personal pronoun also reminds us that the source of kinetic vitality is not an impersonal *primum mobile* but rather the deep personal cause and core of all being, God, to whom we can pray directly "aim your breath with steady power/on your church, this day, this hour." The prayer is not a supplication for an individual, but is a Pentecostal invocation on behalf of the body of Christ.

Just as our ancient forebears were in touch with the pure wonder of breath, so too they understood fire as a gift. The warmth and light of flame in a world without electricity had a spiritual impact upon our ancestors that we only occasionally glimpse around a campfire or hearth in winter. When cast iron stoves were first invented, some people wrote against their use because they feared the imaginative stirrings occasioned by gathering around visible tongues of flame would atrophy.

The second stanza of the hymn attempts to capture the elemental primacy of fire as an expression of Spirit. And again there is a paralleling of examples—"suns," "beacons," and "shining truth"—which give witness to the Spirit as the source of all

Wind who makes all winds that blow,
gusts that bend the saplings low,
gales that heave the sea in waves,
stirrings in the mind's deep caves—
aim your breath with steady power
on your church, this day, this hour.
Raise, renew the life we've lost,
Spirit God of Pentecost.

Fire who fuels all fires that burn—
suns around which planets turn,
beacons marking reefs and shoals,
shining truth to guide our souls—
come to us as once you came:
burst in tongues of sacred flame!
Light and Power, Might and Strength,
fill your church, its breadth and length.

Holy Spirit, Wind and Flame,
move within our mortal frame.
Make our hearts an altar pyre.
Kindle them with your own fire.
Breathe and blow upon that blaze
till our lives, our deeds and ways
speak that tongue which every land
by your grace shall understand.

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reality. The concluding line of stanza two reinforces the invocation of stanza one: the prayer is for the whole church, not the isolated individual.

Indeed, it is not until the final stanza that the hymn finally alludes to our sense of private identity, "our mortal frame." But even the personal plea to make "our hearts an altar pyre" turns into a prayer for "that tongue which *every land*/by your grace shall understand." The hymn thus redefines our individual experience of the Spirit, placing it in the context of the church and global community.

To invoke the "Wind who makes all winds that blow" and the "Fire who fuels all fires that burn," through the incantatory beat of lines of seven, is to call upon the Divine in ways that reconnect us to primal realities of the Spirit and the church's communal need for the renewing action of God's presence. ■

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