

# BOEHME FOR BEGINNERS

by  
Cynthia Bourgeault

*Jacob Boehme, the great German mystic, is renowned for his obscurity.*

*What's the best way to approach his work? Experientially.*

To

gain access to the complex and beautiful cosmology of Jacob Boehme there is, I think, one all-important secret: it is necessary to approach him with the same mind in which he received his mystical illumination.

It was in deep contemplative stillness that this German shoemaker, gazing at a pewter dish sparkling in the sunlight, was suddenly swept up in such a firestorm of unitive vision that "in one quarter of an hour I saw and knew more than if I had been many years together at a university."<sup>1</sup> Twelve years passed before he was able to fashion his cosmic revelation into words; even then they are — to borrow from e.e. cummings — "such great writhing words, as uttering overmuch, stand helplessly before the spirit at bay."<sup>2</sup>

To approach Boehme's teachings from a philosophical mindset simply won't work. His thinking moves in jagged leaps; in many places he contradicts himself as he grapples for concepts to express the truth grasped unitively, in one great gulp of higher mind.

Boehme is one of those underground geniuses of the Christian mystical path. He is read in virtually no seminaries of either Roman Catholic or Protestant persuasion, and even eminent contemporary theologians stumble over his name (one of my acquaintances refers to him as Jacob *Boheme*, as in *La Boheme*; in older versions his name is sometimes rendered as "Behmen"). His work is kept alive principally through the steady attention of the Christian Hermetic tradition, and through an ongoing handful of

devotees in the Christian mainstream, ranging from Angelus Silesius in the seventeenth century through Evelyn Underhill in the twentieth.

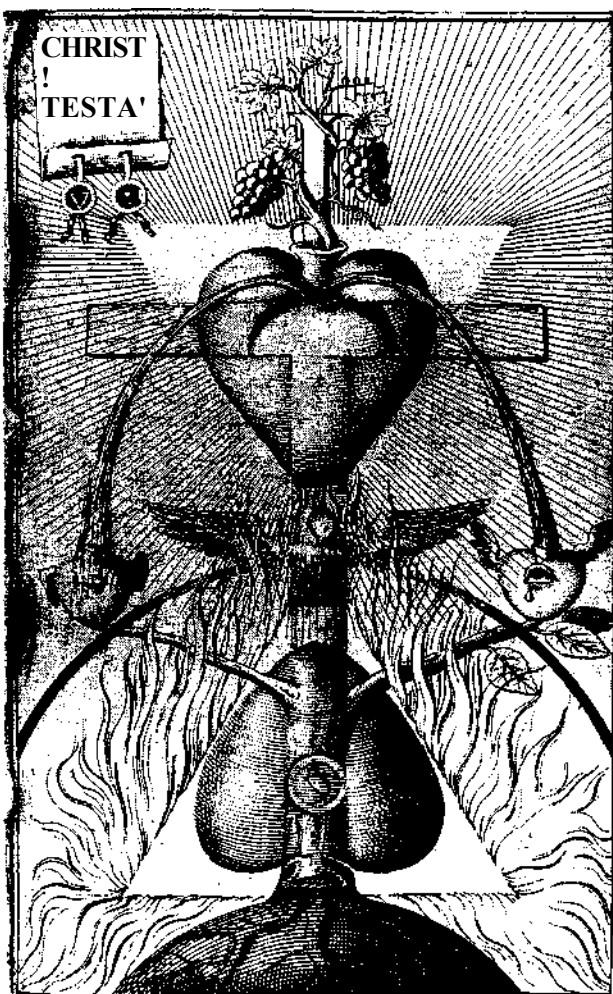
Boehme would doubtless have considered himself an unlikely bearer of such sweeping revelation. Born of peasant stock in 1575, near the town of Gorlitz in southeastern Germany, he was trained as a shoemaker, married the butcher's daughter, fathered four sons, and for most of his external life lived a stable and conventional existence. But inwardly, his brooding and dreamy nature was preparing to receive that overpowering revelation in 1600 and the twelve years of disequilibrium and spiritual seeking that followed it.

At last, in 1612, his first book, the *Aurora*, was completed, only to fall into the hands of Gregorius Richter, the chief pastor of Gorlitz, who attacked Boehme violently for heresy and maneuvered a decree forbidding him to write for five years. But his work continued to circulate among the Gorlitz intelligentsia, where it won him many admirers, particularly among the students of Hermetic philosophy and mysticism. In 1619 Boehme took up the pen again, and in the five years before his death in 1624 he completed all his major works.

I had long suspected that the contemporary meditational

# LOVE IS ITSELF THE TRIUMPHANT

ISSUE OF A PROCESS WHOSE  
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ARE IN DESIRE, PAIN, AND ANGUISH.



FROM BOEHME'S VON-CHRISTI-TESTAMENTEN, PUBLISHED BY JOHANN GICHTEL, 1642

practice of Centering Prayer, with its emphasis on interior stillness as a radical consent to God, might provide an experiential access point to Boehme's complex cosmology. Last summer I had the opportunity to test out this intuition with a group of experienced Centering Prayer meditators in British Columbia. The material in this article emerges largely from our group effort to find a way into the heart of Boehme's mystical illumination by the mode of direct experience. My hope is that GNOSIS read-

ers will feel intrigued to explore further along these lines, offer feedback, and refine as motivated.

In this project, I am in part attempting to rescue Boehme from that aura of arcaneness that is so intimidating to most readers. I myself felt drawn toward Boehme for many years (it turns out that one of his earliest English disciples, William Law, is a distant forebear of mine), but had always been warned that without extensive knowledge of medieval alchemy it would be useless to proceed.

The alchemical aspect is definitely there, and I suspect that initiated Hermeticists travel much further into Boehme than I. But Boehme's importance is not limited to this realm, nor is it accessible only within it. Boehme offers a remarkably unified Christian metaphysic, with cosmology and psychology reinforcing each other in a powerful transformative path. This path needs to be recovered and presented in a way that will invite more people to explore this powerful visionary, whose works, I believe, still hold the key to what inner Christianity is all about.<sup>3</sup>

For me, the significance of Boehme's work can be summed up at both a macrocosmic and microcosmic level in his deep understanding that will, desire, pain, and anguish are the raw materials through which something powerful and mighty is brought to pass. God is love, to be sure, but love is itself the triumphant issue of a process whose eternal, hidden building blocks are in desire, pain, and anguish. Thus these things are not to be feared or denied in my life but *transformed*.

And so I propose that we move from the known to the unknown, letting some familiar touchstones in contemplative practice provide a gradual ascent to Boehme's monumental cosmology.

### INTERIOR SILENCE

- 1. The student said to the master: "How may I come to the supersensual life so that I can see God and hear him speak?" The master said: "If you can sweep up for a moment into that in which no creature dwells, you can hear what God speaks."
- 2. The student said: "Is that near or far?" The master said, "It is in you. If you could be silent from all willing and thinking for one hour you would hear God's inexpressible words."
- 3. The student said, "How can I remain silent in thinking and willing?" The master said: "When you remain silent from the thinking and willing of self, the eternal hearing, seeing, and speaking will be revealed in you. . . . Your own hearing, willing, and seeing hinders you so that you do not see and hear God."<sup>4</sup>

These three little verses from Boehme's Sixth Treatise ("On the Supersensual Life") are the starting point for the experiential journey into Boehme. I am trusting that most GNOSIS readers will have an established meditation practice, and by whatever method can understand the difference between their own "hearing, willing, and seeing" and "the eternal hearing, seeing, and speaking."<sup>5</sup>

In his teachings on Centering Prayer, the Benedictine monk Thomas Keating characterizes these two states as "ordinary awareness" and "spiritual awareness." Ordinary awareness is our usual jumble of thoughts, impressions, and reactions, fueled by the self-reflective nature of the human

mind; the Buddhists call it "monkey mind." In spiritual awareness, the mind moves beyond its preoccupation with the contents of its own thinking and comes to a "resting in God." While the content might appear to be empty, one is actually present to a higher level of intensity, coherence, and purposiveness than is apprehensible through our normal modes of thinking. Spiritual practitioners discover that they can sometimes move globally from deep interior stillness to right action without the usual "downloading" into linear thinking. This is key to unlocking what Boehme means by being "in the will of God."

The first step into Boehme, then, is through the actual experience of that higher "hearing, seeing, and speaking" *in me*. This higher level is somehow more vibrant and vital, more charged with a purposive life; it can be mysteriously infused in us when we, in Annie Dillard's picturesque words, "do not waste most of our energy spending every waking minute saying hello to ourselves."<sup>6</sup>

### **THE RESIGNED WILL**

"True Resignation," the title of Boehme's Fourth Treatise in *The Way to Christ*, is perhaps the pivotal concept in all of Boehme's work — the tie that binds the simplicity of his spiritual path to the complexity of his cosmology. Again I have found that with some experiential understanding of what the "resigned will" is, it is possible to follow substantial parts of Boehme's cosmology intuitively, even if one's grasp of details fluctuates.

We wrestled hard in our British Columbia group to find better words for this idea. Many did not like "resigned," saying it sounded passive or despondent. The actual German is *gelassenheit*, which means something like "calm" or "letting go" — that is, "the calm will." It comes closer to the Buddhist concept of equanimity than to the contemporary Western stereotype of submissiveness.

This concept is not unique to Boehme, of course; it is at the core of the Christian mystical path. Traditional ways of describing this state (which goes so much against the grain of our contemporary self-assertive culture) have included "surrender" and "abandonment to divine providence."

Centering Prayer allows us to catch a more subtle undercurrent in this "true resignation" business. If we equate the "unresigned will" with Thomas Keating's "ordinary awareness," we can observe that perhaps the most striking characteristic of our ordinary awareness is that *it is always stirred up*. It loses itself in a constant stream of reactions, worry, and emotional considering ("How well am I doing?" "Are others appreciating me sufficiently?").

By contrast, the "calm" (*gelassenheit*) of spiritual awareness seems not so much a diminishment of self as a vastly expanded inner spaciousness in which the true self can at last come to birth. As Boehme writes, the secret of true resignation is this: "It does not kill you but makes you alive according to its life. Then you live, yet not you, but your will becomes its will."<sup>7</sup> There is a complete indwelling, so that the "eternal seeing, hearing, and speaking" becomes the functional core of your own being — "the life of your nature."

This idea gives a glimpse of the subtlety of Boehme's thinking and his skill in maneuvering around traditional Christian logjams. For Boehme, true resignation is not primarily a moral issue ("man's unruly will," as the theologians love to lament) but an *ontological* one: it lies in the nature of the mind itself, with its capacity for self-reflective consciousness. Boehme sees the mind as a kind of lens or magnifying glass that, in the freedom of the human will, can be turned in two directions. It can be held before the divine mind, so that it "magnifies the Lord," in the words of the ancient canticle, or it can be turned in so that it reflects and focuses on itself; it essentially becomes its own light.

Boehme rails in the Fourth Treatise: "We see in Lucifer, and also in Adam ... true examples of what self does when it receives external light as its own property so that it is able to enter into its own dominion in reason. One also sees [this] in learned men; when they get the light of eternal nature as their own possession, nothing results but pride."<sup>8</sup>

This is a crucial point for understanding Boehme. When one turns that lens inward, into self, the result is "multiplication" of desires, passions, wants, and the general frag-

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**SO THAT YOU DO NOT SEE**

**AND HEAR GOD . "**

mentedness of consciousness. This insatiable self (which Boehme calls "only an anxious and dry hunger")<sup>9</sup> frantically tries to mirror and view itself in being. Only when that lens is "resigned," held steadily up to reflect divine light, is there the possibility for the emergence of the true being of the soul, which is love. As Boehme writes in the Sixth Treatise:

The student said: "Dear Master! Tell me where does [love] dwell in man?" The master said: "Where a man does not dwell there it has its place in man." The student said: "Where is the place where man does not dwell in himself?" The master said, "That is the resigned soul brought to the ground. Where the soul dies to its own will and wills nothing more than what God wills, there it dwells. For insofar as the self-will is dead to itself, it takes for itself the place, where earlier the self-will sat. There is now nothing [there], and where nothing is, God's love works alone."<sup>10</sup>

It is clear how radically different this is from mainstream Christianity, where man is considered to be the interpreter of God's will. Endowed with reason, memory, and skill, he uses these to discern the will of God and plot and carry out a course of action.

For Boehme, it is very different. To be in the will of God, to be in the resigned will, is an immediate and direct opening, at an energetic level, to the Source of all being. It is a commitment *not* to turn the lens inward, *not* to break connection with that eternal "hearing, seeing, and speaking." This is to be in the will of God. The rest Boehme castigates savagely: "No work outside of God's will can reach God's kingdom. It is all only a useless carving in the great laboriousness of man. . . It is only a mirror of the contending wheel of nature where good and evil contend with one another. What good builds up, evil breaks down;

This text, from Boehme's Eighth Treatise ("Conversation between an Enlightened and Unenlightened Soul") is crucial for two reasons. It is the core of the actual spiritual practice by which the resigned will is activated. It also, I believe, holds the key which unlocks the "three principles of the divine essence," forming the heart of Boehme's cosmology.

Again students of Centering Prayer will have a practical head start here. The practice described in Boehme's text bears a strong resemblance to the "letting go" (or "open mind-open heart") practice developed by Thomas Keating's associate Mary Mrowzowski for the purposes of recognizing and surrendering the "emotional programs for happiness" — traditionally called "the passions," or, in Boehme, "the creatures."

This training, available to all advanced Centering Prayer



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and what evil builds up, good breaks down."<sup>11</sup>

Boehme's "will of God," then, is roughly equivalent to what the ancient Hebrews called the "righteousness of God": an energy-charged field, not an abstract moral template. One must find one's way to this energized willing and then abide within it, refraining from all action apart from it, from one's personal sense of merit, need, or desire.

The goal of this effort is not renunciation or penitence, but something infinitely more powerful. For just beyond the storms of personal chaos lies the profound indwelling power of love, the Source and true center. Boehme says, "If you find it you will come into the ground out of which all things proceed and in which they stand, and you will be in it a king over all the works of God."<sup>12</sup>

#### **THE SURRENDER PRACTICE**

*Here now is the right place for you to wrestle before the divine face. If you stand firm, if you do not bend, you shall see and perceive great wonders. You will discover how Christ will storm the hell in you and will break your beasts.*<sup>13</sup>

students, offers a three-step process combining modern "focusing" techniques with the traditional practice of "abandonment to the will of God." When a troubling emotion arises, one learns *to focus*, or sink into the emotion by experiencing it deeply and nonverbally in the body; *welcome* it, acknowledging that whatever feeling is going on within me in this moment can be endured and encompassed; and, insofar as possible, *let it go*.

Not long ago a friend of mine in Maine had an unexpected opportunity to work with this practice. Recently widowed and terribly afraid of her own grief, she sensibly scheduled an aerobics class at five o'clock, the time when she and her husband had always gathered by their hearth for the cocktail hour, a time of special closeness. But one evening a fierce storm came lashing in off the Atlantic, covered the roads with ice, and took out the power lines.

There she was, stranded with her grief. Terrified, she took the first step in the practice and sank deeply into the feelings, experiencing her anxiety, her grief, her agitation at being able to do nothing — simply seeing where these lived in her body. In the next step, she turned and began to whisper, "Welcome, grief . . . welcome."

"And then," she told me, "a quite extraordinary thing happened. The stranglehold of grief seemed to let go, and it was as if some new presence entered me. One moment I couldn't cope; the next I could. It was that simple."

"If you stand firm, if you do not bend," says Boehme — that is, if you bring your unconditional presence to this moment, no matter what its emotional content — "you will discover how Christ will storm the hell in you and will break your beasts." What Boehme both picturesquely and, I am convinced, completely literally describes as "Christ storming the hell in us and breaking our beasts" is a new empowerment, an infusion of spiritual strength, brought about by the process of surrender itself. Through our own anguished "creatures," rendered up, Christ is mysteriously activated at the core of our lives.

Those who take on this practice are well aware of its potency. It is the most powerful path I know for connecting the inner consent of meditational prayer with the outer requirement of unconditional presence in daily life, so that "prayer without ceasing" becomes a lived reality. But beyond this, the practice of Boehme's little versicle in daily life, if accompanied by a careful self-observation, yields us the experiential data to begin to penetrate into Boehme's complex cosmological universe.

Let's go back to my friend in Maine and attempt a more careful anatomy of her moment of "wrestling before the divine face." If one looks carefully, one can isolate three distinct components creating the emotional tempest within her. There is first of all the yearning for her husband. The second is a kind of *inner inflammation* caused by the realization that what she yearns for is unfulfillable; since the yearning cannot be satiated, it only grows stronger and more stinging within. The result, the third component, is the anguish: her emotional turmoil as the passion and its insatiability wrestle and writhe inwardly.

Into this matrix of turmoil comes a fourth component, introduced by the surrender practice itself. This "sinking down," in Boehme's words, or *surrendering into the emotion itself*, serves to activate some aiding force, a Christ light, born in the midst of the very materials of darkness. The turmoil is the necessary birthplace of the new calm; in some strange but indispensable way it furnishes the *fuel* for the transformation.

If you can clearly recognize these steps in the process, you will essentially have the gist of Boehme's "three principles of the divine essence."

### **THE FIRST PRINCIPLE** ~

In the intricate brilliance of his mind, Boehme asks the question which few have even conceived: How does one move from God at rest, from "the eternal, immense, incomprehensible Unity,"<sup>14</sup> to God the author of the multiple diversity that is our created, perceiving universe? What had to happen internally, in the depths of God, before that first *Fiat* could be spoken? Boehme leads us through a set of three principles, subdivided into seven properties (sometimes also called "forms"), which occupy the space between inaccessible and accessible light. They also remain present in our universe as the driveshaft of all temporal

processes, observable in our own strivings and in all created life.

*First Property.* Before anything can come into being, Boehme asserts, there must first be movement ("outflow") in the endless Unity of divinity. This is accomplished by creating an "unequal pressure" in the equilibrium of the divine will by the *concentration* of desire. As Boehme says: "The first property is a desirousness, like the magnet, viz., the compression of the [divine] will; the will desireth to be something, and yet it hath nothing of which it may make something to itself; and therefore it bringeth itself into a receivingness of itself, and compresseth itself to a something; and that something is nothing but a magnetical hunger, a harshness."<sup>15</sup>

This first property Boehme variously calls "hardness," "harshness," "sharpness," "sourness." The core component is yearning, "magnetical hunger."

*Second Property.* When there is unequal pressure, something begins to flow, as one observes in siphoning water, or in wind and weather systems. Boehme identifies this "drawing or motion in the sharpness"<sup>16</sup> as the second property, which he calls the "motion," the "stirring," and sometimes also the "sting" or the "astringency."

Here it is important to watch carefully what Boehme is saying. I have read several commentators who tend rather glibly to equate these first two properties with the classic spiritual dualism of affirming and denying. But the second property for Boehme is not, strictly speaking, the denying. Rather it comes closer to an inflammation, an *agitation* created in and through the very insatiability of the desire.

We have seen this in the situation of my friend in Maine. The first property would be the desire for her husband. The second, because of the inevitable frustration of that desire, is the *motion* (or in this case, the *emotion*), the fanning of the flames of the desire to unbearable intensity. It is a subtle point but an important one. In Boehme the second property is not so much opposing the first as rushing toward it, like a whirlpool being sucked down a drain. That whirlpool is the motion, the second property.

*Third Property.* This leads directly to the third property, which Boehme calls "the anguish." He explains: "For when there is a motion in the sharpness, then the property is the aching [or anguish], and this is also the cause of sensibility and pain; for if there were no sharpness and motion, there would be no sensibility."

This is perhaps *the* core point for understanding Boehme. What is born out of the struggle between desire and its insatiability is anguish. But this anguish is also, at the same time, *sensibility*, the capacity for feeling. Out of the "nothingness" of the original divine stasis, "somethingness" has been born. In this third stage, divine nature becomes perceptible to itself; the "somethingness" of *feeling* is created, the matrix out of which all else in the visible universe will be fashioned.

These first three properties, taken together, constitute the First Principle. Boehme calls it the "fiery" or "wrathful" principle and sees it as part of the eternal nature of God.

This has caused distress and confusion to many, who see Boehme straying into a kind of Zoroastrian dualism, in which the world is created by a lesser, "evil" God. But Boehme is saying nothing of the sort. Rather he is trying to describe an inevitable and lawful process by which nothingness comes into somethingness. The divine will must undergo a *compression into somethingness*, and this entails a passage through the "fiery" matrix of desire and its frustration; hence the core cosmological principle: "Desire is the ground of somethingness."<sup>17</sup>

The First Principle is a catalytic process, not a permanent moral outcome. One commentator has perceptively argued that this "dark underbelly" of the divine process was never intended to be manifested in the visible world. In a creation untouched by the Fall, it would have remained hidden, safely locked up within divine love.<sup>18</sup> Boehme reminds us, picturesquely, that "God himself hath withstood his own anger, and with the centre of his Heart, which filleth all eternity ... has broke [*sic*] the sting of the fierce wrath."<sup>19</sup>

### **THE SECOND PRINCIPLE**

Boehme calls the Second Principle "the light principle." It is wrath transfigured by love. From the anguish we move directly to *the fourth property*, which Boehme calls "the fire." He has two different sets of metaphors for visualizing this. The more accessible set imagines this property as a spark ignited by friction — the friction being precisely the anguished striving, "the wheel of contending," of the first three properties.<sup>20</sup> "For so," Boehme says, "the eternal delight becomes perceivable, and this perceiving of the Unity is called LOVE."<sup>21</sup>

I find this one of the most extraordinary sentences ever written. Whereas we rather glibly say that "God is love," Boehme sees this love as the first fruit of a dramatic, outrageous, transformative process. Through the audacity of compressing desire into the friction of anguish, the flint is struck by which God's nature can manifest outwardly, in the dimensions of love, which becomes the *fifth property*.

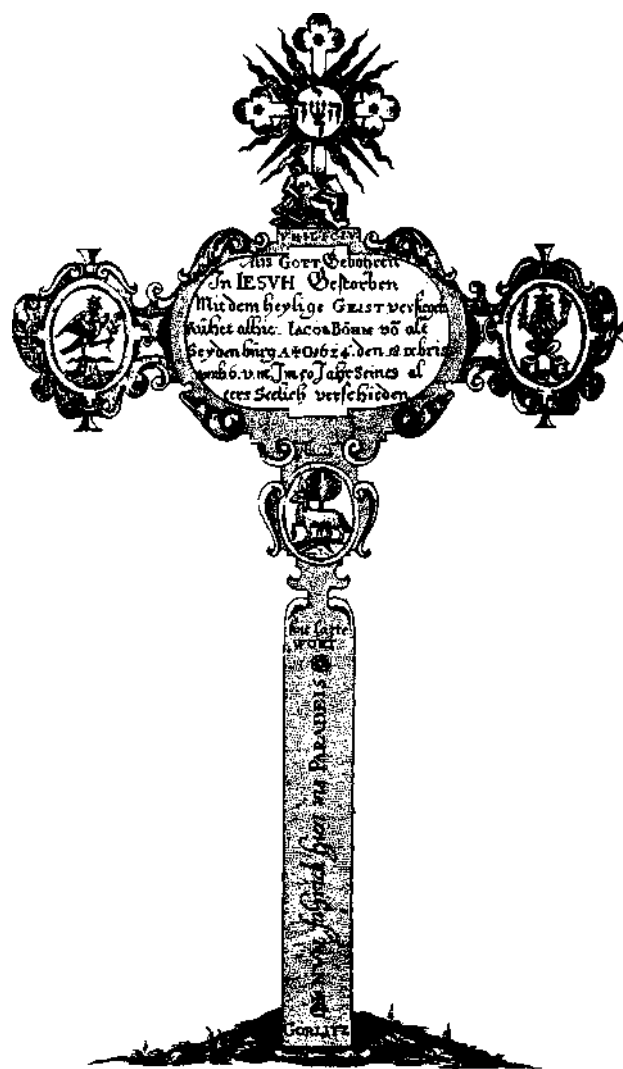
Love is for Boehme the perfect image or mirror (or "counterstroke") of the original Unity, *only now in the mode of perceptivity*, the ability to manifest itself through myriad and diverse forms of individual createdness, "so that there might be eternal play in the endless unity."<sup>22</sup> Thus the "holy element" is established out of which all creation will come to be. The fifth property quickly gives rise to the *sixth*, "sound" (the divine working word, or Logos, with which our usual biblical narrative begins); and the *seventh*, which Boehme calls "substance": the tincture, or individual quality of aliveness, of all that buds forth.

### **THE THIRD PRINCIPLE**

The Third Principle is the outward and visible universe. Boehme sees this visible world as a constant interplay of the First and Second Principles, and he reminds us that "the inward eternal working is hidden in the visible world and is always operative throughout it." And yet it is in the visible world that God creates and reveals himself in "the wonders" — love made manifest. In a lyric mo-

ment, Boehme calls himself "an instrument of God's Spirit, wherein He makes melody with Himself" and adds, "We are all strings in the concert of God's joy."<sup>23</sup>

As I said earlier, the significance of Boehme's work lies in the perfect melding of the macrocosm and the microcosm, the cosmic process and one's own spiritual path. In both, the journey passes through the same narrow spot: the transformation of anguish. Boehme's deep humanity, as well as his spiritual genius, lies in his understanding that will, desire, and pain are the raw materials through which something more wondrous is fashioned. Love is itself the



triumphant issue of a process whose eternal, hidden building blocks are in desire and anguish.

Thus, when "Christ storms the hell in me and breaks my beasts" in the moment of my own striving, I am recapitulating, within the material of my own life, the process by which love was first generated in manifest form. I participate, as it were, in the ongoing generation of the "out-flown" nature of God. Far from merely doing spiritual practice for my own self-improvement, I am participating in the "reciprocal maintenance" of the cosmos, in all three principles.

Moreover Boehme derives the soul from the First Principle, the wrath. This initially troubling attribution in fact contains an important insight for spiritual work. That impassioned, overidentified soul, that "false self," which so many spiritual writers roundly dismiss, is in fact the "ground and cause of motion" for my transformation.<sup>24</sup> That which is to emerge in me, Boehme says, will be a spark struck from that anguish, kindled from deep in the midst of my "beasts," and always, in some sense, bearing their transformed image and likeness. Hence my false self is not something to be eradicated so that my real self can emerge; rather it is my own *inner ground of becoming* from which I will bring myself forth when the flint is struck before the divine face.

In passing from the First Principle to the Second, a new dimension is introduced. The new thing produced, the spark struck from the flint, is a mirror of the old, but in a different dimension; it is a *counterstroke* of the old. The new "Love" is a counterstroke of the original "Unity," but now in the dimension of perception.

I have come to suspect that this same principle is at work in the striving between psyche and spirit in the human person. "Wholeness is born out of the acceptance of the conflict of human and divine in the individual psyche," writes Helen Luke in a passage I have been much taken with.<sup>25</sup> But this acceptance — and hence the emergence of the elusive "Real I" — is in fact a breaking forth into a new dimensionality of myself through my yielding. This makes the practice of surrender not at all a dreary exercise in acquiescence, but a bold participation in God's ongoing creativity in love. Only in resignation do I become truly fertile unto myself, the good ground of transforming love.

This realization in turn paves the way for the strongest rationale I have ever seen for the necessity of true resignation, for not remaining in the "satisfaction of the desires, or the creatures." For to remain in that place, to turn one's light only upon oneself is *to remain in one principle only* and hence to fail to germinate, which requires the interplay of two principles. Our task — or actually our supreme invitation — is to accomplish that counterstroke of ourselves: to give birth to "Real I," the child of both principles, who alone can carry back to God "the wonders thou hast wrought and found out here" — to the glory of his name and to our own imperishable joy.

Wherever these speculations may lead, Boehme remains for me first and foremost a spiritual master whose profound cosmology is in fact an ecstatic vision of creation's deepening transformation in love. Better than anyone I have read, he has "cracked the code" of the Christian mystical path, offering real answers in places where one had almost given up asking. And in his "three principles of the divine essence" he offers us a model in which the most intimate motions of our own self-discovery and healing have their origins in and flow back into the source of createdness itself. To remind myself that "desire is the ground of somethingness" is to forgive and embrace the dark moments of my own journey while recognizing that I am participating in the *upholding* of this somethingness, which

is none other than God himself — master, artist, lover — in pure delight, "tangling through this spun slime, to his nimbus bell cool kingdom come."<sup>26</sup> •

*Cynthia Bourgeault is a hermit priest in the Episcopal Diocese of Colorado. She divides her time between periods of solitude in her hermitage in Snowmass, Colorado, and occasional teaching forays in the Christian contemplative tradition,*

## NOTES

1. *The Confessions of Jacob Boehme*, ed. Evelyn Underbill (Kila, Mont.: Kessinger Publishing Co., n.d.), p. 41.
2. e.e. cummings, "It may not always be so..." in *Poems 1923-1954* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, & World, 1954), p. 61.
3. Probably the most accessible starting point for most readers is Boehme's *The Way to Christ*, in the Classics of Western Spirituality Series (New York: Paulist Press, 1978). This well-edited modern translation contains Boehme's nine treatises on the spiritual life, of which the Fourth, Sixth, and Eighth furnish the core material for this article. From here one enters the deeper waters of John Sparrow, Boehme's indefatigable seventeenth-century English translator. I would recommend proceeding with the *Clariss*, Boehme's short final summation of his most important revelations, followed by *The Three Principles of the Divine Essence*, *Forty Questions of the Soul*, and *The Confessions*. Boehme's most famous works — *Aurora*, *The Threefold Life of Man*, and the *Mysterium Magnum* — are among his most difficult and will yield their insights more readily if the above sequence is observed. All are available in facsimile reprint from Kessinger Publishing Company, P.O. Box 160-C, Kila, MT 59920.
4. Boehme, *The Way to Christ*, p. 171.
5. I find Centering Prayer particularly compatible with Boehme because of its emphasis on receptivity. In Centering Prayer one does not try to still the mind through concentrated attention (as on a mantra, one's breathing, etc.) but simply consents to "rest in God" by letting thoughts go as they arise. See my article "From Woundedness to Union: Thomas Keating's Centering Prayer," in GNOSIS #34.
6. Annie Dillard, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* (New York: Bantam Books, 1974), p. 202.
7. *The Way to Christ*, p. 180. This version actually reads, "Its will for your will is *its* will." I believe this is a mistranslation. The German text reads, much more simply, "*Denn dein Wille wird ihr Wille.*"
8. *Ibid.*, p. 114.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 236.
10. *Ibid.*, pp. 179-80.
11. *Ibid.*, pp. 123-124.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 179.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 240.
14. *Clariss*, p. 46.
15. *Ibid.*, pp. 15-16.
16. *Ibid.*
17. *Ibid.*
18. George Allen, introduction to Boehme's *Threefold Life of Man*, p. xxv.
19. *Confessions*, p. 143.
20. The other, more complex and alchemically influenced set is the imagery of water becoming "very meek" and "sinking down," which dominates Boehme's presentation in *The Three Principles of the Divine Essence*.
21. *Clariss*, p. 22.
22. *The Way to Christ*, p. 192.
23. *Confessions*, p. 164.
24. *The Way to Christ*, p. 192.
25. Helen Luke, *Old Age* (New York: Parabola Books, 1987), p. 95. See also my article "Meeting in the Body of Hope" in GNOSIS #42.
26. Dylan Thomas, "Poem on His Birthday," in *Collected Poems* (New York: New Directions, 1957), p. 193.