

~Other Speakers G-L: Hymn Stories:

Author --J. Edwin Orr, 1912-

Music --Maori melody

Arranger --Norman Johnson, 1928-1983

Tune Name --"Maori"

Scripture Reference --Psalm 139:23, 24

"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" -1 John 1:9

The author of this hymn text, J. Edwin Orr, is widely known as an evangelist and as a noted scholar of the revival movements of history. He is presently the president of an organization known as the Oxford Association for Research in Revival or Evangelical Awakening, which is located in Los Angeles, California. This organization of church leaders from around the world is the out-growth of an annual conference begun in mid-1974 at Oxford, England, to further research and disseminate information in the field of Evangelical Awakenings. In addition to lecturing and holding workshops on this subject throughout the world, Dr. Orr is the author of a score of books, both popular and scholarly, with a circulation in English and a dozen other languages of more than a million copies, including a best-seller in the 1930's. During the 1970's, Mr. Orr wrote a new standard text each year. Since 1967, J. Edwin Orr has been a professor in the School of World Missions at Fuller Theological Seminary (presently professor emeritus), where he taught courses in the history of missions to career missionaries and evangelistic apologetics to theologues.

James Edwin Orr was born on January 12, 1912, in Belfast, Ireland, of an American father and a British mother. His education includes earned doctorates from universities in Europe, Asia, Africa, and America, including the Doctor of Philosophy from Oxford University and the Ed. D. from U.C.L.A. in 1971. He is a fellow of many learned societies. Dr. Orr also served as a chaplain in the United States Air Force in the Pacific from 1943-46. Since World War II, Mr. and Mrs. Orr have been California residents. In his many travels, Dr. Orr has visited a hundred and fifty countries, including the Soviet Union, and has been in two-thirds of the world's six hundred major cities.

Despite these numerous life-long accomplishments for God, J. Edwin Orr will no doubt be best remembered as the author of a simple, yet, one of the most challenging, revival hymn texts in all of hymnody. Dr. Orr recalls that he wrote the "Cleanse Me" text, in 1936, as a result of great inspiration during an intense movement of the Holy Spirit at the Easter, revival convention in Ngaruawahia, New Zealand. For some time prior to this Easter campaign, an attitude of unusual expectancy had been prevalent among these people. Prayer meetings spread throughout the city with much fervency, and intercession led to wide-spread confessions and reconciliations among the believers. The regular Easter Sunday tent meeting was so crowded that a midnight service had to be scheduled, and great numbers of unconverted students professed faith in Christ. The next night was given over to exultant testimony, with singing "such as one expects in heaven." The revival news soon spread throughout all of New Zealand and a similar revival spirit characterized later campaigns held in Wellington, Christchurch, Dunedin and Auckland.

Dr. Orr reports that as he was leaving New Zealand, four Aborigine girls approached and sang for him the beautiful Maori Song of Farewell:

"Po atu. rau, I moe a i ho ne; E haere ana, Koe ki pa ma mao; Haere ra, Ma hara mai ano Ki-ite tau, I tangi atu nei."

Mr. Orr was so impressed with the beauty of this Polynesian melody that soon afterward he wrote new verses to the tune on the back of an envelope in the post office at the little town of Ngaruawahia. Though the words were an out-growth of his New Zealand campaigns, the text was based on the familiar words of Scripture found in Psalm 139:23, 24:

"Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

Further campaigns by Dr. Orr throughout Australia in the 1930's, and later in nearly all of the English-speaking world, soon popularized this prayer hymn everywhere. During the 1952 campaign in Brazil, the Portuguese translation of the hymn was again instrumental in the spiritual awakening in that country.

The "Maori" tune has also been widely used with the secular ballad "Now Is the Hour," especially popular during the World War II years and throughout the 1950's.

Revival in Scripture, writes Dr. Orr, must be recognized as the work of God-"Wilt Thou not revive us again?" (Psalm 85:6) "Revive Thy work, O Lord!" (Habakkuk 3:2). Dr. Orr's concern for the present is stated in these words:

"Sad to say, the study of such remarkable movements of the Spirit has been neglected, and a humanist interpretation of evangelism was applied instead. The Oxford Association for Research in Revival has been remedying this situation in the hope that the people of God may be stirred to pray for yet another, worldwide awakening."

"It is the genius of the gospel that it is extremely personal. It centers in a Savior, not a system; in a Master, not a message; and calls me, not to a creed, but to Christ. Howard Crago

O BREATH OF LIFE

"O Breath of Life, come sweeping thru us,
Revive Thy Church with life and pow'r;
O Breath of Life, come cleanse, renew us,
And fit Thy Church to meet this hour.

"Revive us, Lord! Is zeal abating
While harvest fields are vast and white?
Revive us, Lord-the world is waiting!
Equip Thy Church to spread the light."
--Bessie Porter Head