



Why Not Become All Flame?

On Love, Light, and Fire and God, and Christ, and Us

Rev. Bill Haley
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O Gracious Light

(*Phos hilaron*, late 3rd cent.)

O gracious light,
pure brightness of the everliving Father in heaven,
O Jesus Christ, holy and blessed!

Now as we come to the setting of the sun,
and our eyes behold the vesper light,
we sing your praises, O God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

You are worthy at all times to be praised by happy voices,
O Son of God, O Giver of Life,
and to be glorified through all the worlds.

A Prayer

by John Henry Newman

“Dear Jesus, help us to spread your fragrance everywhere we go. Flood our souls with your spirit and life. Penetrate and possess our whole being, so utterly, that our lives may only be a radiance of yours. Shine through us, and be so in us, that every soul we come in contact with may feel your presence in our soul. Let them look up and see no longer us but only Jesus! Stay with us, and then we shall begin to shine as you shine; so to shine as to be a light to others. The light, O Jesus will be all from you. None of it will be ours; it will be you shining on others through us. Let us thus praise you in the way that you love best—by shining on those around us. Amen.”

Outline of our time together

Intro

An apology

Two assumptions

What is the point of this talk

What I hope for you

The thesis: As human beings in each of our own unique ways and places, our joy-full, wonder-full purpose through Christ is to burn with the fire of Divine Love and become flames of God's own being, shining God's own light wherever we are and go, our lives being used as God sees fit. *Put more simply, our vocation is to burn.*

Jesus—Incarnation of Divine Love, the Light

God—Divine Love

Us—Flames of Divine Love

The Holy Spirit—Fire of Divine Love

Some takeaways and resources

On Awe, Ineffability, and Silence

Tomas Halik, *I Want You to Be*:

- “God is – let us remind ourselves again and again – the depth of reality, which is for us that radically other absolute mystery, transcending not only everything we have ever known heretofore, but everything we could ever imagine. Those who have never experienced vertigo when contemplating that depth should probably avoid using the word God, because they are in danger of using it to mean simply the gods that we manufacture in our minds and treat as we like.
- “I believe . . . that without experiencing that vertigo, that sacred awe that also reveals to us our finiteness and imperfection, any talk of God, including the love of God, is barren. It strikes me that so many pious handbooks about love of God are terribly stuffy and full of sickly sentimentality and religious kitsch because their authors probably never experienced that fall into the depth of being, that wonderment at the non-self-evidence of the world’s being and of ourselves, that deafening crash as all our previous certainties and mental constructions collapsed, when the words and images that formed the glass in the window of our soul shattered, letting air and light flood in so powerfully that we close our eyes and gasp for breath.”

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel:

- “Our goal should be to live life in radical amazement.get up in the morning and look at the world in a way that takes nothing for granted. Everything is phenomenal; everything is incredible; never treat life casually.”
- “To be spiritual is to be amazed.”
- “Awe is more than an emotion; it is a way of understanding, insight into a meaning greater than ourselves. The beginning of awe is wonder, and the beginning of wisdom is awe. Awe is an intuition for the dignity of all things, a realization that things not only are what they are but also stand, however remotely, for something supreme. Awe is a sense for transcendence, for the reference everywhere to mystery beyond all things. It enables us to perceive in the world intimations of the divine, to sense in small things the beginning of infinite significance, to sense the ultimate in the common and the simple: to feel in the rush of the passing the stillness of the eternal. What we cannot comprehend by analysis, we become aware of in awe.” (from *Who is Man?*)
- “Our awareness of God is a syntax of the silence in which our souls mingle with the divine, in which the ineffable in us communes with the ineffable beyond us. It is the afterglow of years in which soul and sky are silent together, the outgrowth of accumulated certainty of the abundant, never-ebbing presence of the divine.” (from *The Sabbath*)

Wilfrid Stinessen, *The Holy Spirit, Fire of Divine Love*:

- “Negative theology means, and rightly so, that everything we say about God is insufficient, that no words are suitable for him, that he is always greater, and that, therefore, man’s proper attitude before God is silent worship.”

Notes

Scripture on Light and Fire

- **Genesis 1.1** In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, 2 the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. 3 Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light. 4 And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness.
- **Genesis 15.17** When the sun had gone down and it was dark, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces. 18 On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram
- **Exodus 3**, Moses came to Horeb, the mountain of God. 2 There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. 3 Then Moses said, “I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up.”
- **Exodus 13.21** God led the Israelites in a pillar of fire
- **Exodus 19.18** on Sinai, “YHWH descended on it with fire”
- **Exodus 24.15** Then Moses went up on the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain. 16 The glory of the Lord settled on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it for six days; on the seventh day he called to Moses out of the cloud. 17 Now the appearance of the glory of the Lord was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain in the sight of the people of Israel. 18 Moses entered the cloud, and went up on the mountain. Moses was on the mountain for forty days and forty nights.
- **Exodus 40.38** the Tabernacle was lit up with fire
- **Sirach 48.1** “In those days, like a fire there appeared the prophet Elijah whose words were as a flaming furnace.”
- **Malachi 3.2** “YHWH is like a refiner’s fire.”
- **Luke 2.9** “and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified”
- “The true **light**, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. What has come into being in Jesus was life, and the life was the **light** of all people. The **light** shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.” about Jesus in **John 1.3-5**
- John the Baptist re Jesus, **John 3.11** He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.
- “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me...will have the **light** of life.” Jesus in **John 8.12**
- “Believe in the light, so that you may become children of **light**.” Jesus in **John 12.36**
- **Matthew 13.43** The righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father
- “You are the **light** of the world...Let your **light** shine before others so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven..” Jesus in **Matthew 5.14-16**

- Jesus about John the Baptist: **John 5.35** "He was a burning and shining lamp and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light. 36 But I have a testimony greater than John's..."
- **Mark 9.2** (with Mt. 17.2) Jesus was transfigured before them, 3 and his face shone like the sun and his clothes became radiant, intensely white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. Mt. 17.5 While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!"
- **Luke 12.49** "I have come to set fire to the earth and how I wish it were already kindled."
- **Acts 2.2** And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. 3 Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them.
- "[In the midst of darkness], you shine as **lights** in the world." **Philippians 2.15**
- **Galatians 2.20** I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.
- **2 Corinthians 4.6** For it is God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness' who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ
- **2 Peter 1.3** His divine power has given us everything needed for life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. 4 Thus he has given us, through these things, his precious and very great promises, so that through them you...may become participants [ESV, partakers; GK, *theias koinōnoi physeōs*) of the divine nature.
- **1 John 1.5.** God is light and in him there is no darkness at all
- John's vision of Jesus in **Revelation 1.13**. "I saw one like the Son of Man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash across his chest. 14 His head and his hair were white as white wool, white as snow; his eyes were like a flame of fire, 15 his feet were like burnished bronze, refined as in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of many waters.
- **Revelation 21.23.** The city has no need for sun and moon, for the glory of God is its light and its lamp is the Lamb

Scripture on God's Love and Love

- **Psalms 136.**1 Give thanks YAHWEH, for he is good, or his steadfast love endures forever... for his steadfast love endures forever....for his steadfast love endures forever...
- **Ephesians 1.3** Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, 4 just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. [v4 MSG Long before God laid down the earth's foundations, he had us in mind, had settled on us as the focus of his love, to be made whole and holy by his love.] 5 He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, 6 to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.
- **Ephesians 3.14** For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, 15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, 16 that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, 19 and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.
- **1 John 4.7** Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. 8 Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. 9 In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. 10 In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. 11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. 12 No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.... 16 So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.... 19 We love because he first loved us.... 21 And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.
- **Romans 8.35** Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?... 37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.
- **Galatians 2.20** I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you.

Abide in my love....

Love one another as I have loved you.

John 15.9, 12

Notes

On God's Nature as Love, Divine Love

"Trivialization and abuse can lead us to forget that the claim that God is love is the radical claim of Christianity. It is radical not simply in the sense of being a shocking or explosive claim, but in the sense of lying at the root (Latin radix) of the Christian faith. In some sense, the entirety of things that Christians believe flows from this claim."

~Frederick Bauerschmidt

"This is all I have known for certain, that God is love. Even if I have been mistaken about this or that point, God is nevertheless love. If I have made a mistake it will be plain enough; so I repent – and God is love. He is love – not he was love, nor he will be love, oh no, even that future is too slow for me – he is love...Like spring-water which keeps the same temperature summer and winter – so is God's love. His love is a spring that never runs dry."

"Oh, marvelous omnipotence of love! But God who creates out of nothing, who almightily takes from nothing and says, "Be," lovingly adjoins, "Be something even in opposition to me." Marvelous love, even his omnipotence is under the sway of love."

~Søren Kierkegaard

"Out of the eternal freshness of his perpetually self-renewed being, the heavenly Father cherishes the earth and each human being upon it. The fondness, the endearment, the unstintingly affectionate regard of God toward all his creatures is the natural outflow of what he is to the core – which we vainly try to capture with our tired but indispensable old word 'love.'"

~Dallas Willard

"...Whether we realize it or not, our being is grounded in God's love. The generative love of God was our origin. The embracing love of God sustains our existence. The inextinguishable love of God is the only hope for our fulfillment. Love is our identity and our calling, for we are children of Love. Created from love, of love and for love, our existence makes no sense apart from Divine love."

~David Benner, *The Gift of Being Yourself*

“After a few months or years of repeating and relishing the words ‘God is love,’ you may again cry out with a sudden joy: ‘God is love!...I thought I understood it before, but I didn’t. My former enlightenment was only the beginning. Now I know that God is love.’ And so you will go on and on and on, living this extraordinary message about the love of God. It can never be exhausted; you will never reach the end. For this is the mystery of mysteries, the mystery that lies at the heart of the Christian faith.”

~William Johnston, Being in Love

“Who are we in our deepest origins? At bottom we are love because Love resides in our depths. We are made, in our depths, in the image and likeness of God, who is love and light...When we look at Jesus, we see human nature as it was intended to be. Fully human, fully divine. Jesus shows us what human nature is, what the Divine nature is.”

~Gordon Cosby

“Love is the greatest force in the universe. It is the heartbeat of the moral cosmos. He who loves is a participant in the being of God.”

~Martin Luther King, Jr. (1957)

Notes

The Book of Nature, God's First Book

"For what can be known about God is evident to them, because God made it evident to them. Ever since the creation of the world, his invisible attributes of eternal power and divinity have been able to be understood and perceived in what he has made."

Romans 1.19-20

Quotes below found in Barbara Mahany, *The Book of Nature*, and elsewhere:

- "God has two books: The Book of Nature or the Book of Creation, and the Book of the Word. Some will write of the revelation of God being Creation, Incarnation, and Scripture...however you slice it, Creation is God's First Book, and through it we can both see and learn of God with powerful revelation." (Bill Haley)
- One of the first bibliographers to put a name to the Book of Nature was Antony the Great, a third-century Egyptian Desert Father, who when asked by a curious visitor how he managed to be so learned with nary a book on a shelf, replied, "My book is the nature of created things, and as often as I have a mind to read the words of God, it is at my hand."
- St Augustine as well: "Some people, in order to discover God, read books. But there is a great book: the very appearance of created things. Look above you! Look below you! Note it. Read it. God, whom you want to discover, never wrote that book with ink. Instead He set before your eyes the things that He had made. Can you ask for a louder voice than that? Why, heaven and earth shout to you: "God made me!""
- Thomas Aquinas, 1200s, "It is thus that the paired-volume thinking came to be known, throughout the centuries, as the Two-Book theology, which holds that the presence of God is best apprehended through the tandem reading of creation—God's original sacred text—alongside Holy Scripture."
- Later, in 1615, none other than Galileo, in a letter to the grand duchess of Tuscany, wrote that "God is known first through Nature, and then again, more particularly, by doctrine," quoting Tertullian, a second-century Christian theologian, and hinting at an imperative to pair the two sacred texts, nature and Scripture.
- Theophan the Recluse, the nineteenth-century Russian Orthodox saint, declared creation a "holy book filled with uncountable and wonderfully different paragraphs."

- “Christ wears “two shoes” in the world: Scripture and nature. Both are necessary to understand the Lord, and at no stage can creation be seen as a separation of things from God.” (John Scotus Eriugena)
- “By means of all created things, without exception, the divine assails us, penetrates us and molds us” (Pierre Teilhard de Chardin)
- "The whole earth is a living icon of the face of God....I do not worship matter, I worship the God of matter, who became matter for my sake and deigned to inhabit matter, who worked out my salvation through matter. I will not cease from honoring that matter which works for my salvation. I venerate it, though not as God." (St. John of Damascus)
- “Every single creature is full of God and is a book about God. Every creature is a word of God. If I spend enough time with the tiniest creature, even a caterpillar, I would never have to prepare a sermon so full of God is every creature.” (Meister Eckhart)

Notes

On Light and Shining

“On the top of a mountain in Israel 2,000 years ago something very strange happened to Jesus. Jesus went up a mountain with his disciples Peter James and John, and glowed.

For a moment, Jesus let who he was shine through who he was, both God and a man, and the disciples were able to see it. Jesus was transfigured—which means to be changed into something even greater and more beautiful. The Greek verb here for ‘transfigured’ is metamorphoó, from which we get our English word metamorphosis.

Jesus changed, he became luminous, full of light, and because of that his clothes became, the text tells us in Mark 9 verse 3, “radiant, intensely white, as no one on earth could bleach them.” Matthew’s account tells us “his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light.”

If we want to understand what’s going on here, it’s an important distinction to make. Jesus clothes didn’t change, he did, and his clothes couldn’t contain the light, so they became really white because of his brightness. Imagine trying to hide the light of a 1000 watt bulb with a piece of canvas. The canvas becomes bright, but not on its own, but because of the light within it. Or hold up a piece of burlap to the full sun and see what you see. In the transfiguration, Jesus’ clothes didn’t change, he did.” (“Jesus’ Transfiguration,” from a sermon by Rev.Haley)



“Rank on rank the host of heaven spreads its vanguard on the way, as the Light of light descendeth from the realms of endless day, that the pow’rs of hell may vanish as the darkness clears away.” (From the hymn “Let all mortal flesh keep silence”)

“Sensible light shows things to our senses. The intellectual light is to manifest the truth which is contained in thoughts. But those who receive the spiritual or supernatural Light, perceive what is beyond all intellect. They participate in the divine energies and become themselves, in a sort, Light. When they unite to the Light they see with it in full all that is hidden from those who have not seen the grace of Light. The Uncreated Light is the Light where God makes Himself manifest to those who enter into union with Him.” (St. Gregory Palamas, AD 1296-1359)

“O Radiant Dawn, splendor of eternal light, sun of justice / Come, shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death.” (From O Oriens)

“Oh Gracious Light / So pure and bright / Dispel the darkness of our hearts / That by Your brightness we may know the light / Incarnate word / Grant that the light / Deep and kindled in our hearts / May shine forth and give us divine life.” (From “O Gracious Light” by the Brilliance)

Mother Teresa is well known for what she did, but the most profound thing about her for those she encountered was simply who she was. She emanated light. Her mere presence changed people... Malcolm Muggeridge was an atheist when he met her. He would later write, "Something of God's universal love has rubbed off on Mother Teresa, giving her homely features a noticeable luminosity." There it is, luminosity. Light. Shining. Luminous. Mother Teresa, and many others, have shown us that people can glow—because God lives inside them through Jesus.

- Jesus to Mother Teresa in 1946, "Come be my light"

"You are the light of the world – but only because you are enkindled, made radiant by the one Light of the world. And being kindled, we have got to get on with it, be useful. As Christ said in one of his ironical flashes, 'Do not light a candle in order to stick it under the bed!'" (Evelyn Underhill)

Epiphany Prayer

by Steve Garnass-Holmes

Beloved, you have revealed yourself to the world in Christ. Now reveal yourself in me.

May your grace shine in me.

May my love be a guiding star for others.

May my words and deeds show forth the reign of your mercy and justice.

With humility and generosity may I offer the gifts you have given me.

The treasure chest of my soul I open to you and to the world.

As magi knelt and honored you, I give you my life.

May I be a revelation of your strong, tender love, your astounding grace, your faithful presence.

Star of God, shine in me.

Notes

On Fire

“My nature is fire.” (Catherine of Siena)

“Someday, after mastering the winds, the waves, the tides and gravity, we shall harness for God the energies of love, and then, for a second time in the history of the world, man will have discovered fire.” (Teilhard de Chardin)

“Abba Lot went to Abba Joseph and said to him, “Abba, as far as I can I say my little office, I fast a little, I pray and meditate, I live in peace and as far as I can, I purify my thoughts. What else can I do?” Then the old man stood up and stretched his hands towards heaven. His fingers became like ten lamps of fire and he said to him, “If you will, you can become all flame.” [Joseph of Panephrisis, Joseph of Panepho, or Joseph the Anchorite was an Egyptian Christian monk who lived around the 4th and 5th centuries in the desert of Lower Egypt.]

“Set yourself on fire in the pulpit, and the whole world will come to watch you burn.” (John Wesley)

“God urges me constantly to make Him known and loved. I offer myself to Him for this, so that He may sacrifice and immolate me as His victim for the accomplishment of all His designs according as His love and good pleasure dictate.” (Mary Margaret Alacoque)

“Oh love that fires the sun keep me burning” (From “Lord of the Starfields” by Bruce Cockburn)

“The world is cold. Someone must be on fire so that people can come and put their cold hands and feet against that fire...The English word ‘zeal’ usually means intensity of action. But real zeal is standing still and letting God be a bonfire in you.” (Catherine Doherty, *Poustinia*)

“If a community is to be ablaze with visible power and love, it will be because some of us are personally aflame.” (Gordon Cosby, 1958)

"Throughout my life, by means of my life, the world has little by little caught fire in my sight until, aflame all around me, it has become almost completely luminous from within. ... Such has been my experience in contact with the earth—the diaphany of the Divine at the heart of the universe on fire ...Christ; his heart; a fire: capable of penetrating everywhere and, gradually, spreading everywhere." French Editor's Note to *Divine Milieu*, ‘At the end of his life the author reverted to *Le Milieu Divin* in two autobiographical works where he expands what he means by seeing him.’” (Teilhard de Chardin)

“Earth's crammed with heaven, And every common bush afire with God: But only [those] who see, take off [their] shoes; The rest sit round it, and pluck blackberries.” (From “Aurora Leigh” by Elizabeth Barrett Browning)

“O Living Flame of Love...” (John of the Cross)

“Lord, enfold me in the the depths of your heart and there hold me, refine, purge, and set me on fire, raise me aloft, until my own self knows utter annihilation.” (Teilhard de Chardin)

“I know why logs spit. I know what it is to be consumed.” (Winston Churchill)

“The Bible contains over 500 references to fire, 90 of them linking it directly with God. We are told that God in action is like a blazing fire. Fire is God's essential characteristic.” (Reinhard Bonnke)

“The Spirit is not content with burning only in the center of your being. He longs to illumine and inflame your whole being so that you not only have a fire within you, but you become entirely a living flame of love.” (Wilfrid Stinessen)

“Go forth and set the world on fire.” (attr. to St. Ignatius)

Notes

Blaise Pascal in his *Memorial*:

The year of grace 1654,

Monday, 23 November, feast of St. Clement, pope and martyr, and others in the martyrology.

Vigil of St. Chrysogonus, martyr, and others.

From about half past ten at night until about half past midnight,

FIRE.

GOD of Abraham, GOD of Isaac, GOD of Jacob

not of the philosophers and of the learned.

Certitude. Certitude. Feeling. Joy. Peace.

GOD of Jesus Christ.

My God and your God.

Your GOD will be my God.

Forgetfulness of the world and of everything, except GOD.

He is only found by the ways taught in the Gospel.

Grandeur of the human soul.

Righteous Father, the world has not known you, but I have known you.

Joy, joy, joy, tears of joy.

I have departed from him:

They have forsaken me, the fount of living water.

My God, will you leave me?

Let me not be separated from him forever.

This is eternal life, that they know you, the one true God, and the one that you sent, Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ.

“The religions start from mysticism. There is no other way to start a religion. But, I compare this to a volcano that gushes forth ...and then ...the magma flows down the sides of the mountain and cools off. And when it reaches the bottom, it's just rocks. You'd never guess that there was fire in it. So after a couple of hundred years, or two thousand years or more, what was once alive is dead rock. Doctrine becomes doctrinaire. Morals become moralistic. Ritual becomes ritualistic. What do we do with it? We have to push through this crust and go to the fire that's within it.” (David Steindhl-Rast)

“You are my eternal Father, but I am scattered in times whose order I do not understand. The storms of incoherent events tear to pieces my thoughts, the inmost entrails of my soul, until that day when, purified and molten by the fire of your love, I flow together to merge into you” (St. Augustine, *Confessions* 11.29.39).

On Union with God, Sharing God's Nature, Theosis

"The leaders of the ancient church speak regularly of salvation in a way that may sound strange to many evangelicals. In particular, they envisioned salvation as theosis, an ongoing process by which God's people become increasingly 'partakers of the divine nature', formed more and more in God's likeness. As the 2nd century theologian **Irenaeus** urged, 'Through his transcendent love, our Lord Jesus Christ became what we are, that he might make us into what he is.' The great 4th century defender of Jesus' divinity, **Athanasius**, put it even more forcefully: 'God became man that man might become God.'" (from James Payton, "Keeping the End in View: How the strange yet familiar doctrine of Theosis can invigorate the Christian life," *Christianity Today*, Oct 08).

"God wanted to be the Son of Man and he wanted men and women to be Sons of God."
(**Augustine**)

"God himself, the blessed God who is the giver of blessedness, became partaker of our human nature and thus offered us a short cut to participation in his own divine nature."
(Augustine, *City of God Book IX, chapter 15*)

"The only begotten Son of God, wanting to make us sharers in his divinity, assumed our nature, so that he, made man, might make us gods." (Thomas **Aquinas**)

"For the Word becomes flesh precisely so that the flesh may become word. In other words: God becomes man so that man may become God." (Martin Luther)

"God pours out Christ His dear Son over us and pours Himself into us and draws us into Himself, so that He becomes completely humanified (*vemzenschet*) and we become completely deified (*gantz und gar vergottet*, "Godded-through") and everything is altogether one thing, God, Christ, and you." (Martin Luther)

"Let us then mark, that the end of the gospel is, to render us eventually conformable to God, and, if we may so speak, to deify us." (John **Calvin**)

C.S. Lewis, in *Mere Christianity*:

- “The Son of God became a man to enable men to become sons of God.”
- “Every Christian is to become a little Christ. The whole purpose of becoming a Christian is simply nothing else.”
- “And now we begin to see what it is that the New Testament is always talking about. It talks about Christians ‘being born again’; it talks about them ‘putting on Christ’; about Christ ‘being formed in us’; about our coming to ‘have the mind of Christ.’”
- “A real Person, Christ, here and now, in that very room where you are saying your prayers, is doing things to you... It is a living Man, still as much a man as you, and still as much God as He was when He created the world, really coming and interfering with your very self; killing the old natural self in you and replacing it with the kind of self He has. At first, only for moments. Then for longer periods. Finally, if all goes well, turning you permanently into a different sort of thing; into a new little Christ, a being which, in its own small way, has the same kind of life as God; which shares in His power, joy, knowledge and eternity...”

“Whatever else I may have written, I think it can all be reduced to this one root truth: That God calls human persons to union with himself with one another in Christ.” (Thomas **Merton** in 1963, quoted in James Finley, *Merton’s Palace of Nowhere*)

“Modern religion focuses upon filling churches with people. The true gospel emphasizes filling people with God.” (AW **Tozer**)

“True faith means I live with God, I am one with God. I have come to know God and therefore I know that He truly is. God lives inside me and is victorious over death and I move forward with God. The entire methodology of the authentic Christian mystical tradition as articulated by the saints is to reach that stage where we become conscious of the reality of God within ourselves. Until we reach that point we simply remain stranded within the domain of ideas and not within the essence of Christian spirituality which is the direct communion with God.” (Father Maximos in Kyriacos Markides, *The Mountain of Silence*, p45)

“Let us rejoice then and give thanks that we have not only become Christians, but Christ himself!’ (St. Augustine) The hidden beauty of Jesus Christ is not only that he longs to live for you, it is not even that he lives with you or through you, but he actually desires to live in you and, we might dare to say, as you! ...

The Christian’s primary vocation is to ‘become God’.... This is the paradox of humanity’s divinization.

Because we are created in God’s own image and likeness, ‘becoming God’ does not abolish who we are but makes us who we have always been made to be. Our becoming divine is the sole purpose for God’s choosing to act outside of himself.

It is the goal of his choosing to create the universe and why he became human in Jesus Christ: to give us a share in his divine nature (2 Peter 1.4)...

‘God became man so that man could become God’ (St. Athanasius)”

Fr. David Meconi, *Union with God*

“The purpose of becoming a Christian It is NOT a conduct code or set of behaviors, that is, to simply behave like a Christian. It IS a change of being...it is to become a new person, the true person you were always ordained to be, and living then as a new creature, a ‘new creation’ in Christ.” It is **Paul** in Galatians...”It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me” It is Paul in Colossians 1.27 “[God made known] the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.” (Bill Haley)

“Divinization in no way implies the self-deification of man. On the contrary, divinization protects us from the primordial temptation to want to be like God (cf. Gen 3:5). What Christ is by nature, we become by grace. Through the work of redemption, God not only restored our human dignity as his image, but the One who created us in a wondrous way, has now made us partakers in his divine nature in an even more wondrous way (cf. 2 Pet 1:4).” (Pope Leo XIV)

“The feast of Christmas should draw the hearts of every child of God towards the furnace of divine love.....He became a creature, like ourselves, so that he would make us sharers in his divine nature.” (Fr. Kevin O’Sullivan, O.F.M.)

“Saint Basil the Great writes, ‘the energies are numerous and the essence of God simple and what we know when we say God is in fact His energies. We do not pressure to approach His essence. His energies come down to us, but His essence remains beyond our reach.’ Our Church Fathers tell us that although God is incomprehensible by nature, He comes in range of our experience by His energies. This means that He can be contemplated in things that point to Him.

“We find numerous references to grace and light and these are all what we term uncreated. They are manifested by God to sanctify and transfigure all that God has made. Saint Maximos the Confessor says, that “God has created us in order that we may become partakers of the Divine Nature, that we may enter into eternity, that we may resemble Him, that is, being deified by His grace through which all things were made.” The Divine uncreated light has the purpose of uniting the creation with God. It is a visitation from the future age to come and is often called by the Fathers the “light of the eighth Day.” This is the same light that Paul experienced on his way to Damascus. There are countless Scriptural references to Light: “God is Light” (1John 1:5); “I am the light of the world” (John 8:12); “the righteous shall shine as the sun in the Kingdom of their Father” (Matt 13:43). These cannot be understood as similes as numerous saints have Light as the Presence of Divinity.

“We can not know the essence of God, but we can experience his energies and be united with the uncreated light of God and through Grace be made like Him. This is the path to Theosis which is a fundamental teaching of the Orthodox Church.”

<https://stgeorgegreenville.org/our-faith/catechism/who-is-god/uncreated-energies>

“The mystics keep telling us that the goal of that prayer and the goal of that hidden life which should itself become more and more of a prayer, is “union with God.” We use that phrase often, much too often to preserve the wholesome sense of its awe-fullness. For what does union with God mean? It is not a nice feeling we get in devout moments. That may or may not be a by-product of union – probably not. It can never be its substance. Union with God means every bit of our human nature transfigured in Christ, woven up into his creative life and activity, absorbed into his redeeming purpose, heart, soul, mind and strength. Each time it happens it means that one of God’s creatures has achieved its destiny.” (Evelyn Underhill, “The Light of the World”)

Notes

What is the takeaway? What can I do...

- Dwell on how desperately God loves you...God's only intent in your direction is love
- Don't do anything in your devotional practice until you've let this lodge in your heart/mind. Get still enough to let this settle before you do anything...
 - *"You are with me, you are loving me, you are loving everything, you want to love everything through me"*
- Find a picture of Jesus that you like, make it prominent in your place of spiritual practice
 - look at him, see him looking at you with love
 - Christ Pantocrator; Rembrandt's head of Christ
- Begin experimenting with silence as prayer, a way of simply being with God in God's loving presence. Experiment with 5-10 minutes most days. If you're practiced with silence, go deeper.
- Tell God *"Whatever you're doing, I ask you, I plead with you, to keep doing it"*
 - Give God your "Yes"
- Ask, "Am I becoming more loving?"
 - confess where/when you are not...
 - ask for more grace to become more loving
- You can't make revelation happen...it's a gift for whom God chooses and why God chooses whom and when is a mystery. But you can create the context where revelation is more possible to happen (practices like silence, solitude, increasing freedom from sin, regularly partaking in the Eucharist, offering petitions driven by desire, learning to see differently)
 - And you can ask for it (Ephesians 3.14-21), *"God, show me yourself, reveal to me your Divine Love."*
- Get in touch with God's loving presence with you...light the candle, ponder the flame, ponder God, and ask God to light his fire within you.
 - Painting of St. Augustine
 - "O love that that fires the sun, keep me burning" (Bruce Cockburn)
 - "Go forth and set the world on fire." (attr. to St. Ignatius)

Resources to consider...

Books:

- *The Love That Is God*, Frederick Bauerschmidt
- *Awakening to the Contemplative Call*, Carl McColman
- Book IV in *Mere Christianity*, CS Lewis

Recent offerings from Bill Haley:

- “To Become Luminous” devotional recording and essay (<https://inthecoracle.org/2023/10/soundings-to-become-luminous/>)
- “O Radiant Dawn” essay (<https://inthecoracle.org/2023/12/soundings-o-radiant-dawn/>)
- “Your Own Little Liturgy” devotional recording (<https://inthecoracle.org/2024/01/your-own-little-liturgy/>)
- “Are You a Contemplative (or becoming one)?” devotional recording and essay (<https://inthecoracle.org/2024/02/soundings-are-you-a-contemplative-or-becoming-one/>)

For word buffs, check out:

- *luminous*
- *radiant*
- *diaphany*
- *pleroma*
- *theophany*
- *theosis*
- *epiphany*

From a Sermon by Rev. Bill Haley on John 17: 17-26

So, imagine that you're not a Christian and you ask me, “**So, preacher, priest...Why? What's the deep why of everything? Why are we here? What's the point? What's the purpose?**” And I would say...

Well, there is a God, really. There is a divine creator of all things, actually, a sentient creator of the universe, really. God's best name is “I am”, Simply “I am”, because God sums everything up. And the essence of this God is Love. Love is who God is, God is love.

This God is one, but God was never lonely, because in this one God there were and are three distinct persons, and before all things they loved each other with an infinite, intimate, and intense love, filled with joy. It was and is a divine community of love.

And because Love wants to love and love wants to be shared, out of overflow this great God created this planet out of nothing so that it could be a place where his love could be put on display and known and experienced. On this planet, this very real and tangible world that would come to be called Earth, God created people, people made in God's own image, so that they could be loved by him and love each other like him. God and these people would be in relationship together and with each other, marked by that same love that was infinite, intimate, intense, and filled with joy. People would be swept up into the life of God himself, and together they would all be a divine community of love. They'd be, to use a phrase from the Bible, we are meant to be "partakers of the divine nature", on this planet. Theosis.

People were made to participate in that same life and love that God had from the beginning of time, and so we were meant to take this planet and develop it into a place so marked by Love that everything would benefit and flourish and find great joy, and this God who is Love would be fully known and enjoyed, for his own joy too. And it'd be all real, all tangible, and actually seen and touched and felt.

That's the Why, that's why we're here, that's the point. Each of us are made in God's image so that we can be in a love relationship with God and love each other like he loves, and so together and individually we can join God's own good life that existed before time and will last forever, on this planet refined, recreated, and tangibly real. And by this the great invisible creator God will be known. He gets the glory, we get the joy. It's a life worth living.

And then you might say, "Well, that's all well and good Bill, but this planet sure doesn't feel like that now". And I'd say...

That's exactly where this man called Jesus comes in, and love keeps the center stage.

The very first people God created didn't want this life marked by love and sharing in God's life. They were influenced by embodied Evil, and they didn't do what God commanded—we call that sin—and sin and suffering and death entered the world and it's been like that every since, like falling dominoes, each one of us in our own ways choosing not to take God up on his desire to be in relationship with us. We all sin, you know that.

But Love wouldn't be stopped, so this creator God took on flesh, he really became a human being, in the person of Jesus 2000 years ago in Israel, and he came to a) fix the problem of sin by forgiveness and b) get the world back on track to becoming the place it was always meant to be, a place marked by Love. Jesus' mission was to make it possible again for us to have a love relationship with God, and to make the whole world a place where God's love would be known. He started the process, and he empowered his followers to keep it going, and one day Jesus will come back to earth to finish it.

Jesus' deepest desires are that people—you and me and everyone—can join the same life that he has forever and even now with his Father in heaven, that we would know that we are loved just as much as he is, and that the world would see and know that God is love. In this way God will be glorified, that is, revealed, and we get the love and the joy of divine life too, on this planet, for real, tangibly real.

And then you might say, “Nice, Bill, how do you know all this?” And I’d say...

“Because the Bible tells me so”...in John 17, where we can see what Jesus wants because he’s telling God his Father in heaven what he wants, and we get to listen in....

17 “Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. 18 As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. 19 And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth.

20 “I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, 21 that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. 22 The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, 23 I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. 24 Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.

25 “Righteous Father, the world does not know you, but I know you; and these know that you have sent me. 26 I made your name known to them, and I will make it known, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.”

~John 17

Notes