

The Beauty of Holiness Is the Beauty of Divine Union

by George Ridout

Divine Union is a state of being where the soul is united with God, experiencing a deep sense of love, joy, and peace.

Scripture: Psalm 139:23, Isaiah 32:17, John 14:23, Galatians 1:15, Hebrews 4:10

Topics: "Divine Union", "Spiritual Formation"

Description

George Ridout preaches on the profound experience of Divine Union, where the soul is brought into a sweet and mysterious nearness and union with God, akin to changing its locality and experiencing a mystical reunion with the divine nature. The journey towards Divine Union involves various degrees such as Conversion, Effectual Touch of the Will, Passivity, Naked Faith, Mystical Death, and ultimately Union with God, leading to a complete absorption in God. Saints like St. Bernard and Madame Guyon exemplify the joy and depth of Divine Union, where the soul lives in God and experiences a transformative union with the divine.

Transcript

In Divine Union the soul is brought into a sweet and mysterious nearness and union with God. It would hardly be too much to say that the soul has, in some important sense, changed its locality. It has not only withdrawn its affections from the world, which separated it for so long a time from its Creator, but mounting upward, it experiences a mystical reunion, a most holy and

delightful mingling with the infinitude and blessedness of the divine nature. Not an extinction of our personality, for that would be a view false and pernicious; but a union, although the similitude gives but an imperfect idea of the reality, like that of the planets to the sun, which revolve in its attraction; and are not only bound to it by a strong and indissoluble tie, but are ever clothed in its light. The soul may be said, in the experience of this interior life, to live in God as well as with him. God is its center and its home; not only its sustaining power, but its encircling radiance. --Saint.

"Among the ideas relating to the Beautiful, " says one, "are order, proportion, harmony (or unity), grace, perfection. "

Union with God or Divine Union is one of the richest and deepest experiences of the soul.

Madame Guyon indicates the steps by which Divine Union is acquired thus:

First Degree -- Conversion.

Second Degree -- Effectual Touch of the Will.

Third Degree -- Passivity or Interior Sacrifice.

Fourth Degree -- Naked Faith.

Fifth Degree -- Mystical Death.

Sixth Degree -- Union with God.

When a soul has happily attained Divine Union by the perseverance of love, it is lost in God, and never leaves him. It ceases, says Augustine, to possess itself, in order to possess God alone; it cleaves to Him, is swallowed up and absolved in Him, as its center and in its repose. The Holy fire of Divine Love melts and dissolves it that it may flow into the heart of God. Of this it takes possession, there it fixes itself and abides as in its own dominion and never leaves it. There it is inflamed with divine fire; there it enjoys infinite delights and is at length formed into that which it loves. "

Among the saints of the ages perhaps, no one had a greater joy in God and in Divine Union than St. Bernard, of Clairvaux.

Reading recently the life of St. Bernard (by Storrs) we were profoundly impressed with the saintliness of this man of the Eleventh Century. He enjoyed a rich, spiritual illumination. His soul at times seems to have been lifted up on "heavenly pinions and made to partake in a degree of the inheritance of angelic purity. " Bernard enjoyed the sense of the Divine to such an extent that it was to him as "animating breaths coming from the gates of pearl, bringing exaltation and secret illumination and immediate and perfect insight into all Divine things which he expected to reach. "

Bernard, in one of his sermons, specifies in a mystical way three Divine touches of the soul: The first, at the feet of God where the soul embraces His mercy and truth. The second, at the hands of God when it turns with its might to His service in good works or gratefully receives from Him the gift of virtues. The third, from His mouth when, with celestial desire, the soul aspires to the hidden joys of the most intimate communion with the Divine mind.

The soul thus touched abstracts itself from all human things and divinely assisted, arises to direct contemplation of God.

Bernard's thought of a holy life is further expressed thus: "Even as the atmosphere when flooded by the light of the sun is transfigured with such clearness of light that it does not so much seem to us illuminated as to have itself become elemental light; so is it needful that in the holy, every human affection should, in some ineffable way, clear itself from itself and become inwardly transformed into the will of God.

Gregory the Great has touched upon a similar experience when he said: "A mind occupied with external desires will not glow with the fire of Divine Love; and no words will avail to inspire hearts to celestial desires which proceed from a cold heart. Nothing which does not burn itself can kindle flame in anything else. "

Such nearness to God makes the soul burn with holy love such as Bonaventura had when it was said of him: "His cheeks are furrowed with the courses made by frequent tears springing from his burning love of the wounds of his Saviour"

Spurgeon, the great London Gospel preacher, once said, "There is an upper realm of rapture, of communion, and conscious union with Christ, which is far from being the common dwellingplace of believers. All believers see Christ, but all believers do not put their fingers into the prints of the nails, nor thrust their hand into His side. We have not all the high privilege of John to lean upon Jesus' bosom, nor of Paul, to be caught up into the third heaven. In the ark of salvation we find a lower, second, and third story; all are in the ark, but all are not in the same story. Most Christians, as to the river of experience, are only up to the ankles; some others have waded till the stream is up to their knees; a few find it breast high, and but a few -- o how few ! -- find it a river to swim in. "

Charles Wesley expresses the longing of the believer for those higher and deeper things in the lines,

Thine, wholly thine, we pant to be; Our sacrifice receive: Made, and preserved, and saved by Thee, To Thee ourselves we give. Heavenward our every wish aspires, For all thy mercy's store; The sole return thy love requires, Is that we ask for more. For more we ask; we open then

Our hearts to embrace thy will; Turn, and revive us, Lord, again; With all thy fullness fill. Come, Holy Ghost, the Saviour's love Shed in our hearts abroad; So shall we ever live, and move, And be, with Christ in God.

The soul that has found the blessedness of divine Union has come to a cessation of its own works. (Heb. 4:10). A great transformation has taken place. Rest has taken the place of struggle; peace the place of turmoil, and the place of assurance and quietness has been reached. (Isaiah32:17, 18).

T. C, Upham well describes it in the following words:

"The soul that reposes itself always in God, has an inward sense of His love, of His lovingkindness and tender mercy, such as the heart wandering from God has no conception of. The sweet rest, the blissful repose of such a soul, cannot be expressed; it rests on the bosom of infinite, unchangeable love. Though removed from the object of its love in a natural sense, yet the eye sees, the ear hears. It sees the infinite mind, and reads the thoughts of love, numerous as the sands upon the seashore, recorded here. It feels the union with the Eternal, the Holy, the Blessed One.

Sacred Meditations

Away back in the centuries lived a saintly man -- Jan Van Rnysbroeck -- He devoted the latter years of his life to the deeper things of God. He gave this testimony:

"The soul that has stood in the presence of Christ experiences a great sweetness, which deepening, passes into that holy joy that is the yielding of the soul to the divine love. If every earthly pleasure were melted into a single experience and bestowed upon one man, it would be as nothing when measured by the joy of which I write; for here it is God who passes into the depths of us in all His purity, and the soul is not only filled but overflowing. This experience is that light that makes manifest to the soul the terrible desolation of such as live divorced from love; it melts the man utterly; he is no longer master of his joy. "

In "Revelations of Divine Love, " by Juliana of Norwich, the writer says:

"God is nearer to us than our own soul. He is the ground, He is the substance, He is the teaching, He is the teacher, He is the end and the meed for which every soul travaileth. Till I am one with Him, I may never have full rest nor bliss.

"The goodness of God is the highest prayer, and it cometh down to the lowest part of our need. It quickeneth our soul and bringeth it on life, and maketh it for to waxen in grace and virtue.

It is nearest in nature; and readiest in grace; for it is the same grace that the soul seeketh, and ever shall seek till we know verily that He hath us all in Himself enclosed. "

Divine Union And Spiritual Torrents

No one set forth more beautifully the virtues of the holy life than Madame Guyon, of France. She lived and died within the pale of the Catholic Church which persecuted her for her holiness and imprisoned her for her profession of grace. She wrote various books on Divine Union, etc. , and one of her most extraordinary books was called "Spiritual Torrents. " The thesis of her book may be briefly set forth as follows: "There are three classes of souls that may be compared to rivers flowing toward God as their ocean. "

1. Some moving toward Him sluggishly and feebly.
2. Some proceeding decidedly and rapidly.
3. Some advancing with headlong impetuosity.

Souls Of The First Class

"These advance slowly and feebly. They deal with the outward life, and are very dependent on out side sources of help. They are like pumps that give water only when worked. They are only able for service in conjunction with others. They have great desire to be always doing. At one time they do wonders, at another they only creep. They are easily discouraged, and are often scrupulous and fettered by their own 'ways. ' They are full of plans how to seek God and to continue in His Presence, but all this by their own efforts, aided by grace.

Souls Of The Second Class

"These are like large rivers which move with decision and rapidity, yet they are dull and sluggish compared with the impetuous torrent described later on. Souls of the second class a redrawn out of the first (the feeble rivers), gradually or suddenly, by God taking hold of them.

"These souls are so full of light and ardent love that they excite the admiration of others, for God seems to give them gifts upon gifts, graces, light, visions, revelations, ecstasies. Temptations are repelled with vigor; trials are borne with strength. Their hearts are enlarged, and they gladly make great sacrifices for God and souls.

Souls Of The Third Class

"These are like Torrents which have their source in God, and enjoy not a moment's rest until they are lost in Him. Nothing stays their progress, and they run with a rapidity which strikes fear into the boldest. They are drawn from among the feeble ones (the first class), or from the souls in the 'way of light' when any of these have courage to part with their rich experiences and to press on to know God.

"God commences His work in a soul by causing it to feel the estrangement from Himself. It is given a true grief for its sins and sees a rest in God afar off, the sight of which redoubles its restlessness, and increases the desire to reach it.

"It seeks at first in outside means what it will never find except within. The wound is in the heart. Unsatisfied, these souls become more eager, and struggle with all in themselves that hinders, but the fight only increases their sense of helplessness

"In the mercy of God, help is sent them, and they are instructed to seek within what they have looked for without; at last they find they have the treasure within them that they sought afar off. (Gal. 1:15, 16).

"It is now nothing but ardor and love; all earthly pleasures are not comparable to one moment of the joy it tastes. Its prayer is uninterrupted, becoming so ardent that it cannot contain it. Its senses (i. e. , feelings or sensibilities) are so much centered, and its recollection in God so strong, that it would fain be in perpetual solitude with its Well-Beloved; for it is not sufficiently established to be undisturbed by ordinary conversations, so it is disposed to shun them.

"The Well-Beloved is so manifestly in possession that He rapidly reproves for an idle look or hasty word, and it changes more in one day than in years before. It seems as if sentinels were placed over all the senses, and as if it were no longer held to earth, so much does it feel detached there from.

"The soul is so full of what it 'feels, ' that it would fain impart it to the whole world. Its words are all fire and flames, and it is fertile in beautiful thoughts; full of deep lively feelings; all reasonings are swallowed up in ardent love, and one word from God awakens afresh the love that burns it. "

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