

“Not to us, Lord, but to your name give the glory”: God’s glory and human action”

These readings, taken from the Old Testament (Exodus), New Testament (St. Paul), and two great saints of the Early Church (St. Irenaeus, 2nd century) and Middle Ages (St. Catherine of Siena, 14th century) all deal in some sense with the relationship between God’s glory and our action as creatures. As you read, some questions for reflection:

1. What does “glory” mean? What does “God’s glory” mean?
2. What is the role of human beings in “glorifying God”?
3. Why does God want to be glorified in/by his creatures?

I’m looking forward to discussing this topic with you all! -- Joshua Hinchie, S.J.

Old Testament: Exodus 14:10-15:1

Now Pharaoh was near when the Israelites looked up and saw that the Egyptians had set out after them. Greatly frightened, the Israelites cried out to the LORD. To Moses they said, “Were there no burial places in Egypt that you brought us to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us, bringing us out of Egypt? Did we not tell you this in Egypt, when we said, ‘Leave us alone that we may serve the Egyptians’? Far better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness.”

But Moses answered the people, “Do not fear! Stand your ground and see the victory the LORD will win for you today. For these Egyptians whom you see today you will never see again. The LORD will fight for you; you have only to keep still.”

Then the LORD said to Moses: Why are you crying out to me? Tell the Israelites to set out. And you, lift up your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea, and split it in two, that the Israelites may pass through the sea on dry land. But I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they will go in after them, and I will receive glory through Pharaoh and all his army, his chariots and his horsemen. The Egyptians will know that I am the LORD, when I receive glory through Pharaoh, his chariots, and his horsemen.

The angel of God, who had been leading Israel’s army, now moved and went around behind them. And the column of cloud, moving from in front of them, took up its place behind them, so that it came between the Egyptian army and that of Israel. And when it became dark, the cloud illumined the night; and so the rival camps did not come any closer together all night long. Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the LORD drove back the sea with a strong east wind all night long and turned the sea into dry ground. The waters were split, so that the Israelites entered into the midst of the sea on dry land, with the water as a wall to their right and to their left.

The Egyptians followed in pursuit after them—all Pharaoh’s horses and chariots and horsemen—into the midst of the sea. But during the watch just before dawn, the LORD looked down from a column of fiery cloud upon the Egyptian army and threw it into a panic; and he so clogged their chariot wheels that they could drive only with difficulty. With that the Egyptians said, “Let us flee from Israel, because the LORD is fighting for them against Egypt.”

Then the LORD spoke to Moses: Stretch out your hand over the sea, that the water may flow back upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots and their horsemen. So Moses stretched out his

hand over the sea, and at daybreak the sea returned to its normal flow. The Egyptians were fleeing head on toward it when the LORD cast the Egyptians into the midst of the sea. As the water flowed back, it covered the chariots and the horsemen. Of all Pharaoh's army which had followed the Israelites into the sea, not even one escaped. But the Israelites had walked on dry land through the midst of the sea, with the water as a wall to their right and to their left.

Thus the LORD saved Israel on that day from the power of Egypt. When Israel saw the Egyptians lying dead on the seashore and saw the great power that the LORD had shown against Egypt, the people feared the LORD. They believed in the LORD and in Moses his servant.

Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the LORD:

I will sing to the LORD, for he is gloriously triumphant;
horse and chariot he has cast into the sea...

St. Paul: 2 Corinthians 3:7-4:6

[Brothers and sisters:]

Now if the ministry of death, carved in letters on stone, was so glorious that the Israelites could not look intently at the face of Moses because of its glory that was going to fade, how much more will the ministry of the Spirit be glorious? For if the ministry of condemnation was glorious, the ministry of righteousness will abound much more in glory. Indeed, what was endowed with glory has come to have no glory in this respect because of the glory that surpasses it. For if what was going to fade was glorious, how much more will what endures be glorious?

Therefore, since we have such hope, we act very boldly and not like Moses, who put a veil over his face so that the Israelites could not look intently at the cessation of what was fading. Rather, their thoughts were rendered dull, for to this present day the same veil remains unlifted when they read the old covenant, because through Christ it is taken away. To this day, in fact, whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their hearts, but whenever a person turns to the Lord the veil is removed. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. All of us, gazing with unveiled face on the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, as from the Lord who is the Spirit.

Therefore, since we have this ministry through the mercy shown us, we are not discouraged. Rather, we have renounced shameful, hidden things; not acting deceitfully or falsifying the word of God, but by the open declaration of the truth we commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God. And even though our gospel is veiled, it is veiled for those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this age has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, so that they may not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For we do not preach ourselves but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your slaves for the sake of Jesus. For God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to bring to light the knowledge of the glory of God on the face of Jesus Christ.

St. Paul: Romans 15:5-9, 13

[Brothers and sisters:]

May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to think in harmony with one another, in keeping with Christ Jesus, that with one accord you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Welcome one another, then, as Christ welcomed you, for the glory of God. For I say that Christ became a minister of the circumcised to show God's truthfulness, to confirm the promises to the patriarchs, but so that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written:

“Therefore, I will praise you among the Gentiles
and sing praises to your name.”

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the holy Spirit.

St. Irenaeus of Lyon: *Against Heresies*, IV.20

The glory of God gives life; those who see God receive life. For this reason God, who cannot be grasped, comprehended or seen, allows himself to be seen, comprehended and grasped by men, that he may give life to those who see and receive him. It is impossible to live without life, and the actualization of life comes from participation in God, while participation in God is to see God and enjoy his goodness.

Men will therefore see God if they are to live; through the vision of God they become immortal and attain to God himself. As I have said, this was shown in symbols by the prophets: God will be seen by men who bear his Spirit and are always waiting for his coming. As Moses said in the Book of Deuteronomy: On that day we shall see, for God will speak to man, and man will live.

God is the source of all activity throughout creation. He cannot be seen or described in his own nature and in all his greatness by any of his creatures. Yet he is certainly not unknown. Through his Word the whole creation learns that there is one God the Father, who holds all things together and gives them their being. As it is written in the Gospel: No man has ever seen God, except the only-begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father; he has revealed him.

From the beginning the Son is the one who teaches us about the Father; he is with the Father from the beginning. He was to reveal to the human race visions of prophecy, the diversity of spiritual gifts, his own ways of ministry, the glorification of the Father, all in due order and harmony, at the appointed time and for our instruction. Where there is order, there is also harmony; where there is harmony, there is also correct timing; where there is correct timing, there is also advantage.

The Word became the steward of the Father's grace for the advantage of men, for whose benefit he made such wonderful arrangements. He revealed God to men and presented men to God. He safeguarded the invisibility of the Father to prevent man from treating God with contempt and to set before him a constant goal toward which to make progress. On the other hand, he revealed God to men and made him visible in many ways to prevent man from being totally separated from God and so cease to be. Life in man is the glory of God: the life of man is

the vision of God. If the revelation of God through creation gives life to all who live upon the earth, much more does the manifestation of the Father through the Word give life to those who see God.

St. Catherine of Siena: Letter T113 to Countess Bandeçça Salimbeni

Oh dearest daughter, don't you see that we are a tree of love, because we were made for love? And this tree is so well made that no one can keep it from growing or take its fruit without the tree's consent. And God has given this tree a worker to tend it as it pleases, and this worker is free choice. ...

Dearest daughter, if this worker, free choice, plants the tree where it ought to be planted, that is, in the soil of true humility (for it should not put it on the mountain of pride, but in the valley of humility), then it will produce fragrant blossoms of virtue, especially that topmost blossom of glory and praise for God's name. And all the other sweet blossoms and fruits, its virtuous deeds, will receive fragrance from that topmost blossom. This is the blossom, dearest daughter, that makes our virtues flower; it is the blossom God wants for himself. The fruit he wants to be ours. The only thing he wants from this tree is this blossom of glory, that is, that we give glory and praise to his name. The fruit he gives to us.

God has no need of our fruit, because he lacks nothing. He is the one who is, but we (who are the ones who are not) do need it. We have no being of ourselves, but only through God, because he has given us being and every gift we have beyond that. So we can be of no service to him. Supreme eternal Goodness saw that human beings cannot live on blossoms but only on fruit. (If we eat blossoms we die, but on fruit we live.) That is why God took the blossom for himself and gives the fruit to us. And if we foolish people want to feed on the blossom—that is, give ourselves the glory and praise that ought to be God's—it robs us of the life of grace and gives us eternal death if we die without changing our ways, [if we don't learn] to keep just the fruit and give the blossom, the glory, to God.