

BECOMING GOD

108 Translations from
Angelus Silesius'

The Cherubinic Pilgrim

Dedication

For Caroline Myss

Becoming God

I: As Vast as God

II: Heaven Is Inside You

III: Melted in God's Fire

IV: From Light to Light

Forward

Rev Dr Matthew Fox

I have long been allured to the work of Angelus Silesius and especially to this book, *Cherubic Wanderer*. Reading these selections and translations by Andrew Harvey excites me all over again—and it should excite all of us. Why is that?

First, because our times call for some radical realignment of our modes of thinking and imagining—a stretching of our boundaries and consciousness if you will. If you believe that the modern era, with its emphasis on materialism and so-called “objectivity” that numbers promise is humming along just fine, then this book is not for you. I wouldn’t waste your time with it. It will taste like nonsense.

But if you feel that the thought patterns and structures that have dominated our thinking and our institutions for several centuries are failing us deeply, at that interconnectivity and interdependence are the stuff of the universe, then this book is for you. Why is that? Because Angelus Silesius is special in his succinct, almost haiku-like enunciations of the deepest aspects of human experience and the human soul. He takes us to profound places where other authentic mystics take us, to places of darkness and ignorance--notice how the very first page strips us of all we thought we knew about “God” or “Deity”—it pierces our smugness about God. Silesius’ apophatic divinity hits us in the very first poem that opens this book. Clearly we are on a journey to deconstruct and dismantle our God talk here. We are journeying into lesser traveled territory. This is what mystics do for us—they take us on adventures too seldom dared.

Another dimension to reading Silesius is to appreciate how deeply a part of the mystical tradition he is. He is not standing alone in his insights and language and the many images he offers us. He is steeped in a *lineage, a tradition* of creation spirituality mystics.

I first encountered Silesius when I was studying and teaching Meister Eckhart and I recognized in him a kind of poet rendering Eckhart’s teachings into poetry or as I said above haikus. “Live like the rose who lives without a why” he counsels us. Eckhart frequently urges us to live without a why. But it is not only Eckhart who comes alive in these pages--Mechtild of Magdeburg is present (“melted in God’s fire;” “the bird in the air, the fish in the water, my spirit in God’s hand,” etc); Julian of Norwich (“Everything God created is so small...only a dot”); Thomas

Aquinas (“In God all is God”); Jacob Boheme; and more. One does not have to do an analytical study to determine exactly which mystics Silesius has read and studied in depth (though my guess is all of them since that is what drew him to convert from his Lutheran faith to the Catholic tradition—the appeal that the mystics held for him).

What is most useful is to realize that in reading and tasting Silesius you are encountering the best of Western mysticism in so many respects. His work is a sort of shorthanded encyclopedia of mystical (non-dualist) teachings. He may have had experiences from which he writes without having derived them from the readings of Aquinas, Mechtild, Eckhart, Julian, etc. but how are we to know? And does it matter? The point is that he trusted his experiences and uttered them in poetry. His images echo those around the globe who have undergone similar one-ing experiences. Art is the proper language for a mystical experience and Silesius is a carrier of that truth.

His poetry stands by itself; but it is also part of a lineage and it is that lineage of mysticism that has been so sorely lacking in Western education and religion during the modern era. That is what makes this book so exciting! It welcomes back that tradition of intuition and “one-ing” that we call mysticism so that now we can entertain a full expression of what it is to be human.

The title of this book, “Becoming God,” is a bit daring. And dangerous. One should balance that invitation with another one, “Becoming Human.” For there is a danger that some people will read the mystics in an effort to *escape their humanity and their bodies and the earth and politics and economics and all the rest that humans must undergo in our efforts to discover our deepest God-self which is inclusive of community*. This is surely not what Andrew Harvey has in mind nor what Angelus Silesius had in mind nor Meister Eckhart and other creation centered mystics had in mind in calling us to our Divinity. To become God is also to become more human. When Thomas Aquinas says that “compassion is the fire that Jesus came to set on the earth” or when Rabbi Heschel says that we are to be God’s hands of compassion while on earth, both are making the point I am making. “Becoming God” means we become more effective instruments of compassion, builders of justice and justice-based communities.

To “become God” on this earth *means* that we re-engage in the battles of justice and survival and community but from another level of being, from another perspective. One that derives from our God-self and not from our reptilian brains

of fight and flight. Or from an angelic projection that would invite us into airy-fairy escapes from our bodies or the earth body or the suffering of both. As Meister Eckhart put it, “a person works in a stable; that person has breakthrough. What do they do? They return to the stable.” We return to our work in the world but working from another perspective, a more divine one, a more interdependent and compassionate one therefore, when we encounter the kind of experiences that Silesius underwent and names for us so brilliantly in these pages.

Let us consider a few of these namings.

Page 2, “It is—I don’t know what.” To enter the world of “I don’t know what” is a deeper world than “I am right and you are wrong.” It is a world of unknowing and it can empty the mind so that mind-ful-ness might happen.

Page 6, “The abyss of my spirit cries out incessantly to the abyss of God—which is deeper, tell me?” Eckhart says our souls are as unfathomable and as ineffable as God is and he too talks about the “abyss” that we experience.

Page 10. “I am not outside God, God isn’t outside me.” Panentheism surely.

Page 10. “I’m his brilliance, I’m His light.” The Cosmic Christ who shines not on us but from within all of us.

Page 11. “God is my center...my circle when love melts me into Him.” Cf. Aquinas: “The first effect of love is melting.”

Page 13. “God’s like a spring flowing out constantly into his creation yet staying in himself”. Cf. Eckhart: “Creativity flows out but remains within.”

Page 14. “Godhead is my sap: What greens and blooms from me spring from His holy spirit, the force of flowering.” Cf. Hildegard: God is greening power which is the sap of the Holy Spirit.

Page 17. “That I was born for God is beyond doubt; so you don’t need to ask me who my Mother is.” Mechtild and Julian both celebrate God as Mother.

These citations are found in just the first 17 pages of this book! Imagine what riches await you as you journey further. One could go on and on. But no need.

The need is for the reader to read these pages with an open heart, continue heart first, not head first. Lead with the heart; the head will follow. The heart will shift things in the head. That is what is needed today—a big shift in our minds, our consciousness, one that begins where the mystics begin—with the heart. That is

why Angelus Silesius and the mystical tradition he speaks from and gathers his riches from is so needed today. That is why this book can ignite a revolution in consciousness.

Thank you, Andrew Harvey, for bringing Selesius back to our midst. Back to aliveness! Back to lighting fires.

The Cherubinic Pilgrim
By Angelus Silesius

Translated by Andrew Harvey

Foreword:

*God, whose love and joy
are present everywhere,
can't come to visit you
unless you aren't there.*

When I first discovered this passage, I slipped it in my pocket and have carried it with me ever since. Sometimes I reach in and rub the words between my fingers. *God's love and joy are everywhere! Always! I just need to stay out of my own way.* To my surprise, while I have quoted the aphorism many times both in talks and in writing its author, seventeenth century Christian mystic, Angelus Silesius, has remained generally obscure. I thought he was my own little secret.

And so when Andrew Harvey asked if I might consider offering a small foreword to his revolutionary new translation of Silesius' poetic masterpiece, the *Cherubinic Pilgrim*, my heart leapt. Now at last, through the lucid lens of Harvey's own mystical heart, Angelus Silesius is bound to emerge from the shadows and sing again, opening the hearts and expanding the consciousness of a whole new generation of seekers.

That's what happened with the great Sufi master Mevlana Jalaluddin Rumi, one of the most beloved poets in America. This was not always so. When I first encountered Rumi as a teenager studying Sufism, there were only a couple of existing translations in English and these were rather stuffy, accessible only to those with patience for arcane poetics or who, like me, were hungry enough for the spiritual wisdom of the medieval Sufi master that we would take it any form we could get our hands on. Then a wave of insightful new translators washed onto the shores of America, Andrew Harvey among them, and suddenly Rumi was like a gorgeous genie released from a bottle. He spilled forth and infused the world with beauty and truth, striking the exact chord our souls thirsted for.

It's Angelus Silesius' turn to break us open and quiet our minds and unfurl our soul-wings. Silesius, though rooted in the Christian tradition, speaks a universal love-language that transcends religious identification and evokes the perennial yearning for union with the Absolute. The wellspring of his wisdom, as you saw in the opening poem, is paradox. He uses language to transcend language, evoking the ineffable sacred state his poems point to. Listen to this one:

*Friend, if you want
To express
Eternity's essence
You'll have to
Forget all words.*

Angelus Silesius was a German aristocrat who abdicated power and privilege and gave himself over to a life of voluntary simplicity, contemplative prayer, and passionate pursuit of the Real. Silesius is the quintessential non-dual teacher, wrapped in the heart of a lover. The aphoristic quality of his poetry peels away self-indulgent spiritual inclinations and invites us into a naked encounter with the object of our heart's deepest longing: Love Itself. The union Silesius celebrates requires nothing less than the eradication of all our cherished notions of God so that we may have the possibility of a direct experience of the Godhead. He is both rigorous and voluptuous, simultaneously ecstatic and sober.

*Godhead is my sap: What greens and blooms from me
Springs from His holy spirit, the force of flowering.*

In this vibrant new volume of Silesius' most luminous jewels, you will find the treasure you may not have even known you were seeking. Slow to a stop. Sit quietly with each poem as a meditation, as living prayer. Dissolve into the radiance of these words and remember who you are: a pilgrim, an angel, a being continuously transmuted by the flames of suffering into an intimate friend of the One.

*You are loved by all things —
Like a crowd
They hurry toward you
Eager to reach God.*

Movement I: As Vast as God

What God is, no-one knows.
God is neither light, nor spirit
God is not bliss, not unity,
Not what we call “deity.”
God is not wisdom, nor reason,
Nor love, nor will, nor goodness.
God is not a thing, nor a nothing,
Nor is God essence.
God is what neither I nor you
Nor any creature can understand
Without becoming what God is.

What is eternity?
Neither “this” nor “that”
Not this moment,
Nor a thing, nor nothing.
It is—I don’t know what.

In God all is God: the simplest tiny worm
Is in God as great as a thousand Gods.

Look, everything God created
Is so small—
For God
The whole creation
Is only a dot.

God is in Himself all things—
His own Heaven, His own bliss.
Why then did He create us?
Who'll ever fathom this?

The abyss of my spirit cries out incessantly
To the abyss of God—which is deeper, tell me?

The bird in the air
The stone on the ground
The fish in the water
My spirit in God's hand.

God is an eternal present
That's why
He's present eternally
In me.

God lives in light
No roads lead there;
You'll never see that light
If you don't become it.

I am not outside God
God isn't outside me—
I'm His brilliance
I'm His light:
He's my adornment.

God is my center when I hold Him in me
My circle when love melts me into Him.

I am as rich as God
Not a single dust-speck exists
In which (believe me, friend)
I do not have a share.

God's like a spring
Flowing out constantly
Into His creation
Yet staying in Himself.

Godhead is my sap: What greens and blooms from me
Springs from His holy spirit, the force of flowering.

The drop becomes the sea
When it enters into it
And the soul becomes God
When it drowns in Him.

Absorb yourself
Into the deepest depths
Of God's humility—
You'll be the highest radiance
Of all heavenly sparks.

That I was born of God
Is beyond doubt
So you don't need to ask me
Who my Mother is.

God thinks nothing.
To think He thinks
Is to say
God wavers to and fro
Which isn't His way.

Don't wonder, friend,
Why I love staring
Into nothing—
I must keep turning
Towards my Sun.

Even the consciousness of the Cherubim
Cannot satisfy me—
I want to soar to where
Nothing is known.

I am as vast as God
No place in any world
O miracle
Can contain me.

I am God's child and son
And He's my child too.
How does this come to be
That both are both?

A heart, grounded in God,
And still as He desires
Will be the one
He loves to touch—
The lute He plays upon.

Don't search beyond the seas
For spirit and wisdom.
Nobility of soul flames out
From one-pointed love.

Wherever I turn—
Neither beginning nor end,
Neither center nor circle.

When God unites Himself
With the human
The beginning sees
It has found its end.

Movement II: Heaven Is Inside You

Everything arises from unity
Everything returns to unity;
As soon as duality appears, however,
Everything drowns in multiplicity.

God is pure no-thing, unstained by “here” or “now.”
The more you grasp after God, the more God disappears.

It isn't the world that chains you
You are yourself the world
Your yourself hold yourself prisoner.

What you're searching for
Is already here, in you;
All your anguish springs
From not making it appear.

Heaven's inside you, so is Hell's pain and despair.
What you will and choose is with you everywhere.

Be empty—
Water will spring from you
As from the source
Of eternity.

You hope to sit
By the well of life?
Then first, down here,
Sweat out
The water for your thirst.

An eagle can stare directly
Into the blazing sun
And you, if your heart is pure,
Into the eternal lightning.

God is like a fire
And my heart's the furnace
Where He consumes incessantly
The wood of vanity.

Friend, let the world
Go its willful way;
Its acts are nothing
But a tragic play.

Poor human being, don't stay hypnotized
By the world's colors
And your painful life.
All the creation's beauty
Is only a path
That opens the way
To the Creator's supreme beauty.

Grow beyond yourself
And all creatures—
The Divine nature
Will grip onto you.

God is so great, He'd give
Great gifts to us all—
O that we wretches
Have hearts so small!

A heart that time and space can satisfy
Is ignorant of its own immensity.

God demands nothing of you
Other than that you rest in Him.
Do this, and only this—
Leave Him to do the rest.

When you desire Him
And long to be His child
He's in you already.
It's He
Who inspires your desire.

Open yourself to Him
You'll hear Him in you.
If only you'd grow quiet
And hold to silence—
He'd speak endlessly.

When I plunge
Into the abyss of God
I return again
To where I was
From all eternity.

Friend, if you want
To express
Eternity's essence
You'll have to
Forget all words.

The flaming-out of splendor
That blazes in the night—
Who can see it?
A heart with eyes
In constant vigil.

If God lives, dwell in, and moves
Every single creature
Then why do you keep asking
To know
The path to Heaven?

The rose is without *why*
It blooms because it blooms—
Doesn't attach to itself,
Doesn't seek to be seen.

What all the saints do
All together
An ordinary human being
Can do too.
Realize this:
All the saints do
Is abandon themselves to God.

Love is the touchstone
That tests the gold
And tells it from mud.
Of nothing it makes something
And turns me to God.

Eat, at dusk, holy sorrow's bread—
You'll find prepared an evening meal
Of boundless joy in God.

Movement III: Melted in God's Fire

My world's my ocean
God's spirit my captain,
My body the ship
My soul comes home in.

This world's too small
Eternity too narrow,
Where could my soul
Truly expand?

In the sea
All is sea
Even the smallest drop.
So tell me
What holy soul in God
Will not be God?

That soul that knows nothing
And loves nothing
But one unique good
Is naturally the bride
Of the eternal bridegroom.

Nobility
Is to be empty
Open always
To instreaming God.

Become God.
If you want to go to God
God gives Himself
To the one
Who wants to be God with Him
And be what He is.

The soul that longs
To hit God's heart
Must aim
With one eye only
That sees right.

I pray to God with God
Through God and in God—
He's my spirit, my word, my psalm
And all that I can.

I was God's life already
Before I came to be.
That's why He's offered up
All of His life for me.

Before I was *me*
I was God in God
And can be again
If I die to my *me*.

God Himself, to live for you, must die:
How can you win His life without dying?

If you can't die joyfully
You've got no will to live;
The life you're hungry for
Only death can give.

Love's like Death—
It kills my senses
Shatters my heart
Takes my spirit out.

No sooner have I been
Melted down in God's fire—
He stamps me with His seal
My essence is His own.

O God, how can this be?
My spirit's nothingness
Burns to consume
Your vast eternity!

The circle's in the point
The seed in the fruit
God in the world.
Wise the being
Who searches for Him
In the smallest things.

God makes no distinctions—
Everything's the same for God;
He's just as present
In the fly as in you.

The rose that today
Your outer eyes see
Has bloomed in God, unchanged
From all eternity.

God attaches the same significance
To frog-croaks as to lark-song.

There's nothing imperfect—
A pebble's just as precious
As a ruby;
The frog as ravishing
As any cherubim.

You are loved by all things—
Like a crowd
They hurry toward you
Eager to reach God.

See in your neighbor
Only God and Christ—
The light that spreads
From Divinity.

It's only the annihilation
Of your being
That soars you free
Of yourself.
The most annihilated
Is the nearest to God.

Leave, God will enter.
Die, you'll live in God.
Be nothing, He'll be in you.
Do nothing, and His will
Will be fulfilled.

Die before you die
If you don't want to die
When death comes. If you don't—
Your disappearance
Will be absolute.

I don't believe in death;
May I die each hour!
Each time I have
I've found
A richer life.

It is when you die
That God becomes your life.
Then you transfigure
Yourself into God.

Movement IV: From Light to Light

God's my final end; I, His beginning.
He finds His essence in me
I vanish into Him.

You are born from God and die in Christ
And are, by the Holy Spirit, resurrected.

The human abandoned to God
Lives in God's peace—
Traveling, each moment,
Beyond time and space.

What my heart
Loves most about blessedness
Is that it births
From my inmost being
And never goes outside.

If you are Godded
You eat and drink God
(This is always true)
With every bite of bread.

I too am God's child; I too sit at God's right hand.
In me God comes to know His spirit, flesh and blood.

I must be sun and paint with my own rays
The color-free sea of total Godhead.

I abandon myself
To God totally.
If He wants
To make me suffer
I'll smile back to Him
As simply as in joy.

I am neither I nor You:
You are this “I” in me
That’s why I give you, my God,
All the glory.

Who lives just one day
In eternity
Grows even older
Than God Himself can be.

Being at peace with yourself
One with God and all beings—
That is peace beyond peace.

I have it from God and God from me
That God's so joyful
And lives without desire.
This He gives to me
And this I give to Him.

O sweet Feast! God alone is the wine,
The food, the table, the music
And the one who serves them all to us.

The soul's like a crystal
Godhead its radiance
The body you live in
A shrine for both.

I am myself eternity
When I abandon time.
Me in God
And God in me
Melt together.

The soul in which God dwells
(O bliss!) will be
A wandering tent, housing
Eternal majesty.

For me, nothing's great but God.
A heart filled with God
Sees even in Heaven
Only a tiny cabin.

I am the Godhead's vessel
Into which It pours itself.
It's also my deep sea
And in Itself enfolds me.

There's still more God
Absorbed in me
Than if a small sponge
Held all the vast sea.

Love, when it's new,
Bubbles like a new wine—
The older and clearer
The more calm and still.

God's the eternal Sun
And I'm one of its rays;
That's why I can call myself
Eternal by nature.

There's not a grain of sand
So insignificant
Nor a point so tiny
Where the wise don't see
God's blazing totality.

God is eternal peace
God doesn't search for
Or desire anything.
Make yourself like that
You'll be like God.

Christ could be born
A thousand times;
If He isn't born in you
Your loss is eternal.

God is my spirit
God is my blood
And flesh and bones—
How could I not be
Completely
Deified in Him?

Go where you can't go
Gaze where there's nothing to see
Listen to silence—
You are where God speaks.

True emptiness
Is like a noble vase
Holding nectar: having it
But not knowing it.

Abandon opens to God.
To leave God too
Is an abandon
Only the very few
Ever understand.

Where's my home? Where I and you can't stay.
Where's the end to where I must go?
Where no end is. Where should I go?
Beyond God, into a desert.

Wherever you are, friend,
Never ever stop—
You must progress ceaselessly
From light to light.

Friend, enough: if you want to read more
Become yourself both book and essence.

