

The one who writes with fire

By [David Williams](#)

November 20, 2014

It came in a moment of reflection. It was a brief meditation over a concept, or rather, a meditation over the interplay between two ways of conceptualizing the divine.

On the one hand, the concept—often troubling—of God as a consuming fire. Generally, we do not want to be burned. Burning is bad. Burning hurts, a bunch if it's you encountering a hot pan, rather more so if you're [Servetus after a particularly contentious Presbytery meeting](#). Despite all the emo-Jesus Christian Contemporary Music that tries to make it seem romantic, fire-language still feels more than a little bit too reminiscent of Tomas de Toquemada.

Plus, there's a strong negative theology of burning. Burning is what happens to bad people. Lakes of fire! Hot coals! Sinners get the weeping and gnashing, plus, did we mention you'll be on fire?

Mysticism, of course, has always embraced the divine fire. It is that light that is kindled in us. It is the light that awaits, and that we will embrace as it consumes us.

This is the mystic vision, in both Christianity and every other human religion. It's what [Jesus brought and lived out](#), and what [Paul affirmed and spread](#).

But America is not a very mystic place, and the idea that we will be subsumed into anything annoys us. That'll destroy our individuality, we grump. America has always been fiercely self-oriented, but now, it's reached a fever pitch. Our consumer culture needs us to be distinct and separate and conveniently trackable, more than any culture in human history.

Consumed by the Numinous? Really? How will Netflix know our preferences in heaven if it can't pigeonhole our demographic profile? Think what being indistinctly suffused into the nature of the Holy would do to Amazon Divine's business model! And the Google AfterLifeAds? They'd be completely random!

The horror.

To my reflections on this idea came another image of the divine, that of God as Author. I like this image, for reasons that are very slightly transparent. Yeah, I like to write. So sure, I see God as an author. And yes, there's a wee bit of projection involved. I get that. But I'm aware of the limits, and aware that it's metaphor.

It just happens to be an excellent metaphor. The very best. Ahem.

God is the storyteller, the one who spins out the narratives of our existence and of time and space. He tells not just our story, but ourselves, writing us into being. He has authorship over us, and authority, and yet allows us to participate in the telling of the tale, like a master DM spinning out an elegantly complex D&D campaign for a circle of dear friends.

Two different images. There's the One who Writes. And the One who Burns.

When I was a little child, those would have been very different metaphors.

But what struck me, in my reflection, was that "burning" and "writing" are now interchangeable words. They have become synonyms, in this digital age. Burning is how we write, how we set data into a physical medium.

The two wove up in a reflection, of a God who writes us out with fire, burning the truth of our life into creation.

*Originally posted at [Beloved Spear](#)*