

Gloria

With these April days we enter into what the Holy Church calls the 'Easter season' (*tempus paschale*), traditionally the time between Easter Sunday and the nones of the Saturday after Whit Sunday, and in more modern usage since 1960 the fifty days from Easter Sunday up to the Sunday of Pentecost (Whit Sunday inclusive).

Traditionally also, the Western Church used the final day of the Easter season, the vigil of Trinity Sunday, preceded by the three ember days of fasting, to ordain men to the glory of the priesthood and diaconate.

In this way the traditional Easter season stands bracketed between the incomparable glory of Christ's Resurrection and the special imparting of that glory to His sacred ministers.

As far as *glory* is concerned, we end every psalm with an attribution of glory in the minor doxology (*Glory be to the Father...*), and this practice exists in every Christian tradition, Eastern and Western.

Likewise the Western church includes the angelic hymn of glory, the major doxology (*Glory be to God on high...*) in all festal celebrations of the Mass, and the Eastern church gives the same doxology a major role as the morning blessing in the office of Matins (*Orthros*).

Glory surrounds and interweaves throughout our Christian experience, even in less sacramental surroundings, from cries of 'Glory be' to 'Glory, glory, hallelujah!' in the Battle hymn of the Republic.

Yet we run the certain danger of devaluating this most central concept and of reducing it to the status of just another pious word, a synonym for 'splendor, majesty, honor', even just 'importance'. And the corresponding verb *to glorify* takes on the flavor of words like 'to praise, to magnify, to bless, to honor'.

Even St Augustine minimally, almost clinically, states the designation of glory as *clara notitia*

cum laude 'bright acknowledgement with praise'*

But true glory (*dóksa*) dwells in a realm of its own, far beyond what human language can paraphrase and can do little more than refer to when experienced in part: "And we have seen His glory, the glory as it were of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." (Jhn 01.15b *Et vidimus gloriam ejus...*). For John the Evangelist witnessed blinding glory on the mount of the Transfiguration (Luc 09.29ff; Mat 17.01ff; Mar 09.01ff), and Peter, who was also with him, could not leave off the lasting impression of that moment (2 Ptr 01.16ff).

In the apophatic theology of the Eastern church God dwells in glory, in uncreated light, a light inaccessible except when God shares it in a blinding revelation of created light, the light which we see, or He manifests it through the revelation of His Divine Word, whether in sacred scripture or in the incarnation of His only-begotten Son. This attribute characterizes God and God alone, such that any glory of which we speak with regard to humans or to any part of God's creation only lives as a metaphorical extension. 'The heavens show forth the glory of God, and the firmament declareth the work of His hands.' (Pss 018 (019). 01).

So what are we saying when we 'give glory' to God? In no way can we add to God's glory. In a similar vein of secular recognition, Abraham Lincoln, in his Gettysburg Address, very effectively framed human inability to add to the significance of the sacrifice already effected by the combatants in the decisive Civil War battle of 01-03 July 1863.

But, in a larger sense, we can not dedicate, we can not consecrate, we can not hallow this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who

* PL42.770. *Contra Maximinum hæreticum Arianorum episcopum libri duo*. II.13 —St Thomas Aquinas mistakenly attributes this to St Ambrose. (ST 1a2æ.2,4).

struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract.

What Lincoln advanced in this regard, we must always keep in mind in a religious sense when we say 'Glory BE to the Father...' because in more than one sense ALL glory already IS to the Most Holy Trinity. We should note that the original formulation (*Gloria Patri...*, *Dóksa Patrí...*) has no verb 'to be', neither indicative (*is, est, esti*) nor subjunctive (*be, sit, eiē*). We encounter this certain vagueness also in the originals of other liturgical formulæ where English has made up its mind but which the originals left empty:

The Lord BE with you.

Dominus Ø vobiscum.

Peace BE with you.

Pax Ø tecum.

yet in the *Hail Mary*:

The Lord IS with thee.

Dominus Ø tecum.

So what are we actually doing when we 'give glory' to God, or even when we 'bless' God, again the one 'from whom ALL blessings flow'? Let us remember in this regard that God created us so that we might know Him, love Him, and serve Him. When we 'glorify God' we are acknowledging His glory, not adding to His glory, but coming to know Him as He intended, 'that they may know Thee' (Jhn 17.03, *ut cognoscant te*), and a certain quantum of Augustine's *notitia* mentioned above, 'acknowledgement, notice, recognition'.

Even Augustine's adjective *clara* 'bright, brilliant, shining' brings us back to the notion of light and splendor in which God dwells. Our glorifying God attempts to answer the glorious revelation of divine light by reflecting back to its source what we can understand of it and acknowledge. Icons of the Glorious Transfiguration of our Blessed Lord, or those when He comes 'in glory to judge both the quick and the dead' depict the glorious presence with a full body halo, a *mandorla*, oftentimes even a triple *mandorla*. Saints also we often depict with halos, the disk of the sun or moon over or behind their heads, to denote them as sharers in divine glory. Indeed what the West calls *canonization*, the adding of a

saint's name to a list, the Eastern church calls *glorification*.

This acknowledgement of God's glory in the minor doxology runs a severe danger in our time of losing its significance, of becoming a simple formula, a trinitarian *yadda-yadda-yadda*. Fortunately the Anglican use still shows great respect for the phrase by bowing the head (and keeping it bowed) while saying or chanting the first part of the doxology. The recognition which it demands we can most easily enhance with slow and deliberate delivery. That delivery must also take into account what one can call the 2x(1+3) structure of the *Glory be...*:

Glory (be)

to the Father

and to the Son

and to the Holy Ghost

As it was in the beginning

is now

and ever shall be

world without end.

The original *Gloria Patri...* demonstrates this structure even more sharply:

Gloria

Patri

et Filio

et Spiritui Sancto

Sicut erat in principio

et nunc

et semper

et in sæcula sæculorum.

Glory (is/be) to Father and to Son and to Holy Spirit.

As it was in the beginning, (so it is/may it be) both now and always and unto ages of ages.

and with an increasing syllable count in the principal terms of each of the triplets (2-3-4; 1-2-3).

Holy Church knew well how to structure this most important and central formula, and when we declaim it we owe it all the attention we can bring to bear on its delivery. In many ways this simple *Gloria* contains as much profession of the kernel of our belief as the most elaborate creed.

The Hebrew term for 'glory' *kbd* (kavod) originally meant 'heaviness'. The Greek term for

'glory' *dóksa* originally meant simply 'opinion, judgement'. But the Christian experience, the Transfiguration, the glorification of the Christ on the throne of the Holy Cross, His 'mighty Resurrection and glorious Ascension into

Heaven' have transformed the concept of *glory* into full transcendence far beyond even the eventual semantic developments of these words. With Easter we have entered again into a full realm of glory.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:CLUNY-Coffret_Christ_1.JPG



