

The Glory of God in the Liturgy

THE glory of God—how well-known, how frequently used, is that phrase. It comes to our lips frequently in our worship, in our prayers and in our praise. Our church buildings and their furniture are dedicated to the glory of God. It has to do with our practical ethical life, as the *Shorter Catechism* reminds us, placing this firmly at its beginning, “Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.” Yet many of us use the phrase, or listen to others using it, without really trying to understand its depths or its heights. The consequence is that, as Canon Liddon said long ago, and his words are as true today as ever, “Glory is one of those words which we use in our common language with great latitude and haziness of meaning; and we sometimes carry our vagueness into the interpretation of scripture.”⁽¹⁾

So are we not bound to ask, what do we mean by “the glory of God”? In what does it consist? How is it revealed to us? What are we to understand by it? If glory already belongs to God, can we ‘glorify’ God? Can we add to his glory? Thus indeed many questions arise on this lofty subject.

I propose therefore to take this phrase and look at it, first of all in its derivation. In these days when the science of semantics is being widely applied to the discovery of the full implications of words and ideas, it may be good for us to examine this one from that point of view. The word “glory” occurs frequently in the Bible, and it will be helpful to examine the Hebrew and Greek words of which “glory” is the translation. Next we shall pass to the patristic period when Latin words were chosen for the translation of the biblical words. Then we shall summarize the biblical teaching and finally we shall deal with the liturgical aspect.

First of all, let us say something of the biblical conception of the glory of God, and, to begin with, of the words used for the expression. In the Old Testament the word which has been translated “glory” is *kabod*. Here there is a profane or non-theological use, the root giving a suggestion of heaviness or weight, hence prestige or distinction,

⁽¹⁾ *Christmas-tide in St Paul's*, (London, 1891). p. 369.

wealth or power. But more important to us is the phrase *kebod yahweh*—the glory of God.

Sometimes this has to do with theophanies which may be accompanied by thunder and lightning or by fire, but always suggesting power and majesty, brightness and splendour. Later developments show an increasing appreciation of an ethical character. In the vision of Isaiah (chapter vi) for example, the ethical content is very clear. Again, the idea may take on an eschatological sense, where the theophany is regarded not as present, but as future. Thus, "The Lord shall arise upon thee and his glory shall be seen upon thee" (Is. 60 : 2). "The whole earth shall be filled with his glory" (Ps. 72 : 19). "When the Lord shall build up Zion, he shall appear in his glory" (Ps. 102 : 16). "So shall they fear the name of the Lord from the west, and his glory from the rising of the sun" (Is. 59 : 19). Finally, we have not merely the contemplation of, or a rejoicing in, the glory of God. We have also the conception of giving glory to God, found in the Psalms especially, and this seems to mean the acknowledgment of the might, holiness and wonder of God.

When we pass to the Septuagint and the New Testament we find that the Greek word *doxa* was chosen as most suitable for the translation of *kebod*. In classical usage this word meant "opinion," orthodoxy was right opinion, and heterodoxy wrong opinion. Sometimes too it carried the suggestion of "good repute," and (in Josephus and Philo) the sense of royal splendour and majesty. So in the Septuagint and the New Testament, *doxa* attains the meanings suggested by the Hebrew word. In the New Testament, *doxa* is attributed above all to God the Father, but it belongs also to Jesus Christ, and especially to the Risen Christ, "The Lord of Glory," whose fulness of glory will be revealed at his Second Coming.

Yet *doxa* can belong also to the faithful. God calls all men into his Kingdom of glory (I Thess. 2 : 12) ; they may be changed from glory to glory by the Spirit of the Lord (II Cor. 3 : 18). Those who are thus brought to faith must glorify God, i.e. recognise his greatness and acknowledge the wonder of his attributes. So as A. J. Vermeulen has put it, "The *doxa* emanates from the Father, passes via the Logos to men, and from them comes to God as a glorification of his greatness." ⁽¹⁾

(1) *The Semantic Development of Gloria in Early Christian Latin.* Nijmegen, 1956. p. 17.

When we pursue this study into Latin patristic times we find that, while *doxa* was the almost universal word in the Greek New Testament, there was no such uniformity in Latin. The Latin versions of the Scriptures, the *Vetus Latina* for example use various words—nouns like *gloria*, *claritas*, *maiestas* and *honor*, with the verbs *glorificare*, *clarificare*, *magnificare*, *honorificare*, and adjectives like *gloriosus* and *honoratus*. Vermeulen, whose detailed study on this point is exceedingly interesting, says that in some African versions *doxa* is usually rendered by *claritas*, rarely by *gloria*, and only twice by *maiestas*; but in the *Codex Palatina*, *gloria* and *claritas* are about equally frequent. Other codices show similar almost arbitrary variations. ⁽¹⁾

These Latin words, like the Hebrew and Greek words we have been considering, had a profane use which gives colour to the conception of "glory." *Gloria* itself had an abstract meaning of renown and it came to be applied particularly to Rome in its military fame. It was regularly used to translate *doxa* in its profane sense, and so it was easy to use the same word in the scriptural sense. *Claritas* in its original meaning suggested light in its clearness and brightness. *Maiestas* was not used by classical writers for *doxa*, but it emphasized the ideas of dignity and power. But in fact *gloria* gradually became more frequent than the others in Christian writings, and it drew to itself the suggestions implied in the other words. This was particularly true of the Vulgate of S. Jerome, where *claritas* and *maiestas* are comparatively rare. There is then little wonder that the word now normally used for *kabod*, *doxa*, *gloria*, should be just 'glory.'

I hope this linguistic introduction may have helped us to realize the richness of the content of our phrase, "the glory of God." We shall now consider how the biblical documents, and especially the New Testament, give depth and meaning to our understanding of the glory.

The Old Testament makes it clear that God has revealed his glory and that men must acknowledge the glory in his majesty, power, light and wonder. Prophet and psalmist as well as historian join together to declare the glory of God in creation, in the government of the world, in the overruling of the movements of men and above all in the leading of his people

In the New Testament the glory is seen above all in the Incarnation of our blessed Lord. How beautifully St. Luke

(1) *Op. cit.* p. 19f.

pictures and emphasizes this. The glory of God in a little child! How well the *Magnificat*, the *Benedictus* and the *Nunc Dimittis* with the song of the angels and the shining light, even the star, express the great truth that God has revealed his glory in this new visitation and redemption of his people. How wonderfully this glory is described in the Prologue to the Fourth Gospel: "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth—and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father."

Yet this is only the beginning of the glory seen by men. The narrative of the Gospels is a working out of the divine glory on earth revealed. This is perhaps particularly clear in the Fourth Gospel which shows that the whole life of Christ is a demonstration of his glory. The miracles are signs or manifestations of the Glory of God in Christ (John 2: 11). Just as in the Old Testament God revealed his glory by performing wonders, and men saw in them the reflection or expression of his glory, so in the New Testament the wonders performed by Christ witness to the presence in him of the Divine Glory. The Transfiguration is an outstanding testimony to the glory of Christ, not only in itself but as an anticipation by God of Christ's future glory and a participation by Christ in God's glory. The strongest demonstration of the glory is in the Cross and the Resurrection and the Ascension, signifying Christ's way of entrance into or return to the heavenly glory. And yet it is clear that the glory of the Father and that of the Son are essentially the same glory.

And history is not enough to reveal the fulness of the glory. There is a glory to come. Psalmist and prophet had indeed looked forward to the full revelation of the divine glory, and both they and the writers of the Apocrypha looked to a final day of judgment when the Messiah would sit on the throne of glory, and those gathered round would adore the glory of the Most High. But it is in the New Testament that the full significance of that idea comes to light. There is much in the world that dims our view of the glory; but there is a final goal where the greater, the perfect, glory shall be revealed, when Christ who has come, comes again. (e.g. Matt. 24: 30).

Yet the glory is to be seen not only in its perfection in the distant future. The glory is to be reflected now, however imperfectly, in his Church and in his faithful people. We have all sinned and come short of the glory of God, that is, "are deprived of the divine splendour" (NEB); yet man was created in the image of God and never lost that

image altogether. And when man is made a new creation in Christ, the image is restored and man comes nearer to the glory of God. He is changed "from glory to glory." It may seem strange that this should be so. Yet our Lord spoke of this in his High-Priestly Prayer (John 17): "I have glorified thee on earth . . . Glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee, before the world was . . . All mine are thine and thine are mine; and I am glorified in them . . . The glory which thou gavest me I have given them." Thus it is an obligation that Christ's people should reflect his glory, and though we know not yet what we shall be, we know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is—in the fulness of his glory.

We now turn to examine the liturgical use of the idea of the glory of God. And in the first place I wish to make a few remarks about three almost universally used liturgical passages in which the idea occurs very noticeably: *Gloria Patri*, *Gloria in Excelsis*, and the *Sanctus*.

Gloria Patri: the Lesser Doxology. The present widely used form appears not to be the original. There are indications that the second clause, "as it was in the beginning . . ." was predominantly a Western addition, though there are traces of its early use in the East, especially in Egypt. But even the first clause was not invariable. The Arians for example used the form "Glory be to the Father through the Son in the Holy Ghost" (*Gloria Patri per Filium in Sancto Spiritu*). And by opposition the Catholic party used the form to which we are now accustomed, emphasizing the equality of the Three Persons in the Trinity. In some Western liturgies other than the Roman, for example the Mozarabic, the form *Gloria et honor Patri et Filio et Spiritui Sancto* was used, but this had little additional significance, perhaps only suggesting what D. H. Hislop once called "emotional expansiveness." (1)

Another point of discussion arises in the translation of the form. Does it mean "Glory be to the Father . . ." as we usually say; or should the understood verb be the indicative: "Glory is to the Father . . . belongs to the Father . . .?" It appears that doxologies and similar forms in biblical Hebrew and Greek are often like the Latin in omitting the verb, but where a verb occurs, it is frequently in the indicative. (2) Either, then, *Gloria Patri* is a sincere

(1) *Our Heritage in Public Worship*, p. 153.

(2) See W. C. van Unnik, *Dominus vobiscum*, in *New Testament Essays*, Manchester 1959.

prayer, or it is a confident assertion. Perhaps there is room for both in our worship. When this form occurs at the end of a psalm, which is indeed its widest use, being found in the Daily Offices of the Eastern and Roman churches, in the *Book of Common Prayer*, and after the Reformation in our Scottish psalmody, and with increasing frequency today (one is glad to say), it "gives the Old Testament songs a Christian stamp." (1)

The second form is the Greater Doxology, *Gloria in Excelsis*. This seems to have been one of the hymns of the primitive church—perhaps one of those referred to in the Council of Laodicea in the fourth century as *psalmi idiotici* (private psalms), which were opposed by many as being too great a contrast to the scriptural psalms. This Council in fact prohibited their use. Nevertheless the use of the *Gloria in Excelsis* is witnessed to quite early, as in *Apostolic Constitutions* (vii. 47). The text of this doxology has varied greatly—as between that in *Apostolic Constitutions*, the text of *Codex Alexandrinus*, the Syrian text, and the early Latin text as found in the *Antiphonary of Bangor*. But in general this *Gloria* is in three parts. The first is based on the song of the angels at Bethlehem: "Glory to God in the highest . . .," followed by praise of the Holy Trinity; "We praise thee, we bless thee, we worship thee, we glorify thee, we give thanks unto thee for thy great glory." Then there is prayer for mercy to Jesus Christ, "Lord the only begotten Son." The third part is the adoration: "For thou only art holy, thou only art the Lord, thou only, O Christ, with the Holy Ghost, art most high, in the glory of God the Father." Part of this is sung in the Eastern Church at certain points in the Eucharist. In the Roman Mass it is recited early in the service before the lessons, while in the *Book of Common Prayer* it is recited towards the end of the service, after the communion. The revisers have recently had some discussion as to which position is best and opinion inclines to the Roman, though it should be remembered that the classical 17th century Anglican liturgists had little doubt that after the communion is correct. It is perhaps unfortunate that we do not give this ancient hymn a more important place in our services. The text is in the *Revised Church Hymnary*, but it seems to be used only too rarely. It would be an excellent thing if it could be recited within the Order for Holy Communion, where tradition has so long given it a place.

(1) Lechner-Eisenhofer: *The Liturgy of the Roman Rite*, p. 71.

The third form is the *Sanctus* or *Trisagion*. This again is of very ancient use, based on the record of the vision of Isaiah in the Temple: "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Hosts; Heaven and earth are full of thy glory. Glory be to thee, O Lord most high." It is found almost universally in the liturgy from Hippolytus to the present day, while it was used and still is used in the liturgy of the Synagogue. But we must notice one important and significant change. Isaiah says only, "The whole earth is full of his glory"; while the Christian form says, "Heaven and earth are full of thy glory." It is no longer the Temple in Jerusalem that is the sphere for this song, and it is no longer the seraphim alone who sing it. The whole heaven has become the theatre, and all the choirs of blessed spirits, the whole *militia coelestis exercitus*, unite in it, singing *socia exultatione*. Why? Because the glory of the Lord no longer dwells in the Temple alone, but has in a new way tabernacled among us in the Incarnation of the Word, and He died and rose again and ascended into heaven and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty, there indeed sharing in the glory of God. It is worth noticing that the Alexandrian Liturgy of St. Mark extends the *Sanctus* thus—"Holy, holy, holy, Lord of Hosts; Heaven and earth are full of thy holy glory. Full, in very truth, is the heaven and earth of thy holy glory, through the manifestation of our Lord and God and Saviour Jesus Christ." Here is emphasis on the new dimensions reached in the manifestation of divine glory.

Let us remember too that from early times the people, and not only the clergy, recited the *Sanctus*, and so should it be today. The Liturgical Movement in the Roman Church is leading the people to join in this as also in other parts of the service. More of our people are taking the same step, and it might encourage this tendency if the *Sanctus* were printed in italics in our *Book of Common Order*.

It will not be necessary to spend much time in detailed examination of the historic liturgies. A small acquaintance only is required to assure us of the important place given in them to the conception of the glory of God. The Eastern liturgies in particular make much of this, as in the Eucharist, where doxologies are frequent. The idea appears in many prayers. Thus, the prayer at the Little Entrance: "O Master, O Lord our God, who hast established in the heavens orders and armies of angels and archangels for the ministry of thy glory, grant that with our entrance there may be an entrance of holy angels, ministering to us and glorifying

with us thy goodness." The Cherubic Hymn frequently used in the Divine Office is an expansion of the Trisagion. Eastern worship, in fact, begins and ends with the ascription of glory to the Triune God.

Turning to the West, here is a prayer from the Ambrosian Rite: "O God, the true light of the faithful; O God, the everlasting glory of the just; whose light goeth not out, whose splendour knows no end; grant that we may live in thy glory and may enter into the light of thine eternity, so that as thou hast made light to dawn upon us after the night, thou mayest cause us to attain to that blessed and eternal day." Here we notice the collocation of the three words—glory—splendour—light.

The Roman Missal and Breviary contain many forms that reflect the same thought. Here on the whole the language is more restrained, but the idea is almost everywhere. One point of particular interest is the use in the Roman books of some of the words already discussed; *claritas* and *maiestas*, as well as *gloria*, and less frequently, *magnificentia*, *splendor*, and so on. Words such as these are used of Christ as well as of God the Father. Many examples might be given: for example, the Tract for the Mass of the Most Holy Trinity: "We glorify, praise and bless, with our whole hearts thee, God the Father not begotten, thee the only begotten Son, thee the Holy Ghost the Paraclete, the holy and undivided Trinity. For thou art great, and dost wonderful things: thou alone art God. To thee be praise, to thee glory, to thee thanksgiving for ever and ever, O blessed Trinity."

The Reformed tradition is sometimes regarded as inclined to subjectivity, yet here the fundamental thing about worship is its objectivity. For Calvin the central truth of religion was in the majesty and glory of God's sovereignty, "an uncompromising devotion to God's glory." (1) So he begins his *Institutes* with a consideration of the doctrine of God. He says, "Men are never duly touched and impressed with the conviction of their insignificance, until they have contrasted themselves with the majesty of God" (I.I.3). Or again, "When duly imbued with the knowledge of (God), the whole aim of our lives will be to revere, fear, and worship his majesty, to enjoy a share in his blessings, to have recourse to him in every difficulty, to acknowledge, laud, and celebrate the magnificence of his works, to make him, as it were, the sole aim of all our actions" (II.VIII.16).

(1) E. Underhill, *Worship*, p. 288.

Indeed, the *Shorter Catechism* begins where Calvin began ; " man's chief end is to glorify God."

The Anglican rites have preserved much of the ethos of the medieval forms, while at the same time there is added the reformed ideal of corporate piety. The architecture of the building, the order of service, the form and content of the prayers, tend to assist the congregation in their high calling to offer God the honour due to his Name. Many of the Collects, even when they do not specifically mention the glory of God, yet suggest the idea, and direct the people to the adoration of the Almighty.

This brief survey of the rites, which obviously could have been greatly extended, makes it clear that everywhere in the historic liturgies, the feeling is that the glory of God is the prius as well as the end of all our worship. We must now ask, what does all this mean for us today? What lessons does it teach? It will probably be agreed that our forms of worship today are a great improvement on those of, say, a century ago. The Church Service Society came into existence in 1865, and it was founded with the purpose of improving the worship of the Church of Scotland. Much indeed it has achieved, not only in the Church of Scotland, but in the Church in Scotland, for generally services are far better in every way than they used to be. Yet there is still much need for the work of our Society. There seems to be a constant temptation to fall away from the highest standards. The serene elevated temper of worship is perhaps not attractive enough, not exciting enough, not urgent enough, to keep the eyes of the worshippers in the right direction. There is a great temptation, for example, to use so-called " popular " forms of service with the ulterior aim of getting people to attend church. Services conducted, for example, by members of youth fellowships may be justifiable from some points of view, but they may easily give quite a wrong idea of what worship really means and involves. It is important to affirm, and to continue to affirm, that the objectivity of worship must come first, and the subjective results only afterwards.

First then in our worship we must acknowledge and proclaim the glory of God. Our approach to God should be tempered by the attitude to him of the heavenly hosts who sang " Thou art worthy, O Lord our God, to receive glory and honour and power " (Rev. 4 : 11). Nicolas Cabasilas ⁽¹⁾ lays much emphasis on this attitude. He says, for example,

(1) *Commentary on the Divine Liturgy* (S.P.C.K. 1960) pp. 64, 43.

“ May it always in all things be our aim to glorify God . . . For we are slaves, and owe to our Master this duty for which he first created and redeemed us. That is why you will find that the Church is everywhere concerned with the glory of God ; she proclaims it throughout the universe, she sings of it always. She does all things for God’s glory—prayers, supplications, the holy rites, preaching—in short, all that is holy ”. Elsewhere he says ; “ In doxology we lay aside ourselves and all our interests, and glorify the Lord for his own sake, for his power and his glory . . . Immediately we approach God we recognize the inaccessibility and force and grandeur of his glory, and are filled with wonder and awe.”

If there is truth there, it means that the opening moments of a service of worship are tremendously important ; the first note must surely be one of reverence and awe before God. The penitential opening of Mattins and Evensong in the *Book of Common Prayer* have been frequently criticized, and many have felt that the opening sentences should be better chosen, as some say they were in the Proposed Prayer Book of 1928, in order to direct attention first to the glory of God rather than to the sinful heart of the worshippers. The services provided in our *Book of Common Order*, especially the morning services, seem to me to be particularly good from this point of view, where after scripture sentences there comes a prayer of adoration. The Communion Service in the *Book of Common Order* seems to suggest the right movement of thought ; “ We unworthy sinners, approaching thy presence and beholding thy glory, do repent us of our transgressions . . . ” Many of us are perhaps too careless, not only about the early prayers of our services, but even more perhaps about the opening item of praise. Many of the hymns or psalms or paraphrases selected for this point strike the wrong note altogether. Here they should be “ objective and call out in those who sing (them) a sense of the glory, majesty, and wonder of the person of God.” ⁽¹⁾

Yet no part of the service should be allowed to let the mind turn away altogether from the over-riding and shaping truth of the glory of God. There are of course other things. There must be room for penitence ; but penitence is deepest when our sin is seen as an obscuring or an ignoring of the glory of God. There must be a reading of Holy Scripture, which is ultimately a declaration of the glory. There must be intercession, which can be seen as desire for the glorifying of God in the saving of men and their perfecting in Christ.

⁽¹⁾ *Morning and Evening Prayer*, H. E. Hopkins, p. 159.

And is not the sermon a setting before the people of the glory of the Triune God? Any service of worship which neglects to make the worshipper more aware of God and of his marvellous attributes must so far fail. The *Larger Catechism* reminds us that "we are to pray with an awful apprehension of the majesty of God" (Q.185). And again, "In the first Petition which is, Hallowed be thy name, we pray that God would enable us and others, to glorify him in all that whereby he maketh himself known, and that he would dispose all things to his own glory" (Q.101).

Here then is a great ideal for our worship, just as it is the great ideal for all human life. Our common worship must first give glory to God and only then stir up a fresh spirit of dedication and of fellowship and of service, which in turn will be to the glory of God. The second aim, which is edification, is useless without the first which is adoration. For even to be stirred to higher and purer thought or to have our hearts touched or our wills stimulated, will not carry us far unless the inspiration to all that comes from the vision of the divine glory. We may speak of worship as a stimulus to missionary zeal, or as a training for life, or as an intellectual treat, or as a source of edification, and indeed it must be all that. But let us not forget D. H. Hislop's warning, ⁽¹⁾ that if "the eye is not wholly fixed upon the Ineffable Glory of the Infinite God," worship "inevitably must be content with a lower place in life than the first place." We must be careful not to "rob the worship of Almighty God of its majesty and serenity, its depth and grandeur," ⁽²⁾ for it is our offering to him for his glory, who created all things and brings them to fruition.

JOHN A. LAMB

⁽¹⁾ *Op. cit.* p. 22.

⁽²⁾ W. D. Maxwell. *Concerning Worship*, p. 84.