Gloria Patri

The History and Theology of the Lesser Doxology

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PART ONE

*Doxology: Word and Concept*
Doxology as Mystery of God

Doxology is the most exalted verbal expression and the climactic liturgical gesture of the assembled community of faith. Doxology is a formula of praise always dedicated to God and God alone. Doxology is the moment of greatest intensity in prayer. Failing in our own words, we readily acknowledge that only the very Word of God can give perfect glory to God. “Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the world. He is the reflection of God’s glory and the exact imprint of God’s very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word” (Heb 1:1–3). Only God can speak adequately of God. Jesus is our Word of God and hence our ultimate doxology. Our prayer to the Father is always through the Word and in the unity brought about among us by the Holy Spirit. As the Eucharistic Prayer concludes in its own great doxology: “Through him, with him, and in him in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory and honor is yours, almighty Father, for ever and ever. Amen.”
In the context of worship services, the word “doxology” refers specifically to a short formula of thanksgiving and glory given to God at the closing of a longer prayer formulation. Doxologies can be found throughout the Hebrew and the Christian scriptures. Doxological prefaces to prayers and more often conclusions were common in the Jewish synagogue. The early Christians continued the practice of doxologies, but the formulations now confessed Jesus Christ as Lord. Early in Christian worship, for example, in the second-century Didache, we find this doxology added to the Lord’s Prayer: “For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen.” So widespread and popular was this doxology that the words themselves were copied into some ancient Bible texts and for centuries were thought to be originally from Matthew’s gospel. In the eastern Church, liturgical prayers commonly ended with a doxology. In the western Church, the liturgical recitation of individual psalms commonly ended with a doxology. In classical Christian preaching in the Patristic age, homilies often ended with a doxological formula. Eventually the Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—in all their mystery and ultimate divine glory became the heart of all Christian doxology.

The psalms are filled with praise and worship of God, and for that reason they remain a prime example of doxology in the Jewish faith. Each of the five books of the Jewish Psalter concludes with a doxology in praise of the one true God. Book I ends “Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting. Amen and Amen” (41:13). Book II concludes, “Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, who alone does wondrous things. Blessed be his glorious name forever; may his glory fill the whole earth. Amen and Amen.” (72:18–19). Book III ends “Blessed be the Lord forever. Amen and Amen” (89:52). Book IV concludes, “Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting. And let all the people say, ‘Amen.’ Praise the Lord!” (106:48). And the last book of the Psalter concludes with Psalm 150, which in its entirety is a doxology. The psalms were appro-
Doxology in the Christian liturgy clearly took its lead from doxology in the Bible. The epistles of Paul are peppered with doxological prayers and especially laudatory salutations at the beginning of epistles and praise excitations at their conclusions. “For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever. Amen” (Rom 11:36), and Paul concludes his Epistle to the Romans “to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever! Amen” (Rom 16:27). Paul writes in the beginning of Ephesians: “Blessed be the God and Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world, to be holy and blameless before him in love” (Eph 1:3–4). And later in the same epistle: “Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen” (Eph 3:20–21). And we read in Philippians: “To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen” (Phil 4:20).

Turning to the gospels, the so-called greater doxology, the Gloria in Excelsis of the Eucharistic liturgy, is an amplification and elaboration of the angels’ praise and glory revealed to the shepherds at the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem. “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!” (Lk 2:14). Mary’s Magnificat in Luke’s gospel (1:47–55) echoes Hannah’s hymn of praise in the first book of Samuel (2:1–10). The lesser doxology, the Gloria Patri that is the subject of this book, developed from Christian faith in the Trinity, which has beginnings in a text such as the baptismal formula at the conclusion of Matthew’s gospel: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of
the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Mt 28:19).

The First Letter of Peter contains the doxology later appended to the Lord’s Prayer in its liturgical recitation: “To him belong the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen” (1 Pt 4:11). And this same epistle concludes: “And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, support, strengthen and establish you. To him be the power forever and ever. Amen” (1 Pt 5:10). The last book of the Bible is adorned with lyrical doxologies, such as: “To the one seated on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!” (Rev 5:13) and “Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen” (Rev 7:12).

The gradual development of a Trinitarian formula used in the liturgy as part of many prayers can be established. “The Martyrdom of Saint Polycarp” in the second century displays the Trinitarian formula: “I bless Thee [Lord God, Almighty Father], through the eternal and heavenly High Priest, Jesus Christ, Thy beloved Son, through whom be to Thee with Him and the Holy Spirit glory, now and for all the ages to come. Amen.”4 The “Canon of Hippolytus” in the third century reads: “In each prayer which is said over each thing, there is said at the end of the prayer, Glory to you, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, to the ages of ages.”5 Origen writes: “And having begun by glorifying God it is fitting to conclude and bring the prayer to an end by glorifying him, hymning and glorifying the Father of the universe through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit, ‘to whom be the glory for ever’ (Rom 16:27).”6 Clement of Alexandria concludes his extended homily on the rich man in the gospel story with a clear and elaborate Trinitarian doxology addressed to the “Pater ille, qui est in coelis, . . . cui cum Filio Jesu Christo, qui vivorum et mortuorum
Dominus est, per Spiritum Sanctum, fit gloria, honor, potestas, aeterna majestas, nunc et semper, et in generationes generationum, inque secula seculorum. Amen.” In English, “To the Father, who is in heaven . . . who with the Son, Jesus Christ, who is Lord of the living and the dead, through the Holy Spirit, be glory, honor, power, eternal majesty, now and forever, from generations to generations and from ages to ages. Amen.”

In the ancient creeds in their tripartite structure, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are clearly professed. The Te Deum remains a magnificent and ancient doxology surpassed by none. Doxology in the East remains even more entrenched than in the West. Jungmann writes “In the Byzantine liturgy, most orationes begin with the address ‘Lord our God’ and end: ‘(For thou art a good and merciful God and) to thee we send up praise, to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, now and always and to all eternity. Amen.’”

Christian hymns follow the practice of Christian prayers. There are many doxologies that conclude sacred songs, but none as felicitous as Bishop Ken’s memorable verses sung to the tune of the “Old Hundredth”: “Praise God from whom all blessings flow, / Praise God all creatures here below. / Praise God above ye heavenly host, / Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.” The Tantum Ergo of Eucharistic devotion ends with a magnificent doxology: “Genitori, Genitoque / Laus et jubilatio, / Salus, honor, virtus quoque / Sit et benedictio; / Procedenti ab utroque / Compar sit laudatio.” In English, “To the one begetting and to the one begotten [the Father and the Son] may there be praise and jubilation, together with welfare, honor, and power, along with blessing; and to the one who proceeds from them both [the Holy Spirit] may there be like adoration.”

The spiritual impact of doxology in Christian prayer should not be overlooked. Given there is a God, and if that God is for us and we are truly the beloved of God, how can we not also rejoice in the being of God in all its glory? Our doxology is not directed.
to a God who would collect our applause. Our doxology is our recognition of the truth, the wonderful reality of our creation and salvation, and our invitation to dance with God for eternity in friendship and love. Doxology is praise, praise that changes not God but us. We awake. We recognize the beauty and goodness of the infinite God. We look into the kaleidoscope of God’s marvelous works, and we are changed from despair to overwhelming hope that “if God is for us, who is against us?” (Rom 8:31). Liturgy is always about the recognition of what God is doing and our giving thanks “always and everywhere.” Doxology is the heavenly prayer, the prayer of endless awe and admiration, the prayer that acknowledges we have nothing without the boundless mercy of God and everything with God’s grace. And of that we are assured. Glory be to God!
The translation of the Latin gloria into the English glory is straightforward and requires little comment. Glory in English will, of course, carry connotations that may vary from time to time and place to place. Living languages change; usage changes; dictionary meanings change in the futile attempt to stay current in the wonderful world of human language in all its creative manifestations.10

Living faith also creates meaning by its practice of praying. The lex orandi, lex credendi (the rule of prayer is the rule of belief) reflects this truth. Believers pray first, and then reflect on their expressed faith. People live the faith first, and theology follows to record practice, much like people talk and write first, and the dictionary follows to understand usage. Living faith and living language both manifest the wonderful creativity with words that allows for new meanings that reflect new realities. We shall see below how this principle that life precedes codification plays
out with the word “glory.” The way believers used the word glory led to new definitions, and these in turn led to a particular understanding of the word glory in all its glory.

Hebrew Glory

In the Hebrew Scriptures the “glory of God” is rendered by *kebod YHWH.* In its profane meanings, *kabod* suggested “(1) weight or burden, (2) riches or wealth, (3) importance, and (4) prestige, renown, honor (royal prestige, majesty).” In the earliest biblical understanding, the glory of God was seen in the theophanies of nature. “The heavens are telling the glory of God” (Ps 19:1). Especially in storm lightning and thunder was the glory of the Lord revealed. “The voice of the Lord is over the waters; the god of glory thunders” (Ps 29:3). Moses on the top of Mt. Sinai witnessed a great theophany of the Lord God: “Now the appearance of the glory of the LORD was like a devouring fire on top of the mountain in the sight of the people of Israel” (Ex 24:17). In one account Moses is given to see the face of God, and afterward he veiled his own face to protect onlookers from the reflected radiance of God (Ex 34:29–35). In another account, Moses is given to see only the back of God as the divinity passes by in glory (Ex 33:20–23). Vermeulen writes: “The *Kebod Yahweh* is primarily the concrete Divine Being in so far [as] This reveals Itself to man, and secondarily stands for the more or less abstract divine attributes connected with the appearance of this divine Being, notably the refulgent splendour of God, His might and Majesty.”

In the Mosaic revelation, the “glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle” with a cloud by day and fire by night (Ex 40:34–38). That glory of God was a presence through thick and thin as Israel wandered in the desert in search of the Promised Land. As the glory of God became less phenomenal in its portrayal, a new word was coined by Jewish commentators on the Hebrew Scriptures. *Shekinah* suggested the tenting of God or the indwell-
ing of God, and emphasized the on-going presence of God with God’s people. God’s glory was not necessarily overwhelming as the storm, though it ever remained awesome. From the glory of God in the heavens to the glory of God in the Temple was a journey of human understanding. The greater reality was found in the deliberate presence of God and not in the boundless power of God. In his vision of the glory of God that fills the Temple, Isaiah writes: “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory” (Is 6:3). Ezekiel, the “prophet of the glory of God” writes eloquently of his many visions of the glory of the Lord that filled the Temple (see Ez 1, 10, and 43 in particular). The shekinah became the source and center of the Lord God’s glory. Kebod YHWH, however, was not replaced so much as it was enhanced.

Greek Glory

When the Hebrew Scriptures were translated into Greek (the Septuagint composed in the second century B.C.), the Hebrew word kabod was rendered throughout with the Greek word dōxa. Vermuelen argues that epipaneia (in English, epiphany) “would undoubtedly have been a more adequate rendering of Kabod.”

Epipaneia seems to have been rejected because of its pagan religious connotations going back to the theophanies in the writings of Homer. It was a word also used to describe the divinization of emperors and princes.

Dōxa in the Greek Bible is commonly rendered in English as “glory.” The term “doxology” is composed of two words: dōxa and logos. Logos is a word for word itself or for mind (reason). Thus biology is the reason or words about life (bios). A great deal has been written of the Christianization of logos, a word with multiple meanings in Platonic and Neoplatonic philosophy. As Christians began to use logos to speak of the Word of God, who is the Son of God and our Lord Jesus Christ, the connotations of logos became
more theological than philosophical. But the transition was
gradual and at times confused. The shift of dóxa as used in classi-
cal Greek to dóxa as employed in Christian theology and liturgy
over the first centuries of Christianity also makes for a story of
complexity marked by gradual development. Christine Mohrmann
claims that the choice of the Greek dóxa to translate the Hebrew
kabod was a radical and extraordinary shift of meaning. Thus the
word doxology comes to us transfigured from classical Greek into
a Christian theology that grew out of Christian faith and prac-
tice. Doxology would be translated well as “word of glory,” or
“praise.” “Worship” would also not be an implausible synonym.

The Hebrew word kabod was a quite common word for glory.
Kabod has a root meaning of weighty. One’s kabod signifies all
that one amounts to, one’s weight in the world, both possessions
and reputation. One’s figura might capture that idea of kabod as
dóxa, and dóxa as glory. The Latin claritas, majestas, gloria, and
honor were more or less captured by the Greek dóxa, but it was a
stretch to convert dóxa into the glory of God. To comprehend
and render verbally what the glory of God entails seems no easier
today. Of the weight of glory, C. S. Lewis writes: “To please
God . . . to be a real ingredient in the divine happiness . . . to be
loved by God, not merely pitied, but delighted in as an artist
delights in his work or a father in a son—it seems impossible, a
weight or burden of glory which our thoughts can hardly sus-
tain. But so it is.”

Laurentin outlines the theological development of the word
dóxa through the first four centuries of Christianity, beginning
with dóxa understood as power and deed, to dóxa understood as
origin and source, and finally to dóxa comprehended as the divine
essence. Vermeulen summarizes his study of dóxa in the Bible:
“we may say that both in the Old and the New Testament, dóxa
Theou stands for (1) the refulgent appearance of God, or His shin-
ing power and greatness; (2) the eschatological—in the New
Testament even the anticipated—participation of man in God’s
greatness.”

12
The roots of the Greek word δόξα contain some useful implications. Before the Christian era, δόξα referred to the opinion or judgment that a person might profess. If one’s opinion proved wise, one was thought to be orthodox, that is, a person of right (ortho) judgment (δόξα). If one appeared wise in the eyes of others, one’s δόξα was all the more worthy. In the Christian era δόξα became associated with the divinity. Since reputation formed one’s abiding glory, whose fame could outdo the fame of God? Hence δόξα became the word fitting the divine glory spoken of God and spoken to God. In the end δόξα never lost a link to its ancestry as opinion, but opinion that was far more than the typical Greek understanding of the appearance of being glorious. Δόξα developed into the Christian proclamation of the hidden knowledge of the very nature of God, who now is glory itself, and of humanity, which in mystery shares God’s glory.

Because δόξα implies fame, rightly deserved fame or reputation becomes one’s glory. Orthodoxy means right fame, rightly deserved reputation. Doxology might then be understood as words about getting it right. Doxology becomes simply the way things are. Doxology is the truth of the human condition before God. Doxology is the plain truth. God is glorious, and God’s ways are glorious for human beings, who are made in the image of God. In the end we become doxology, and our lives are “words” of glory to God. “The glory of God is the salvation of the world. Doxology and soteriology are one theologically.”22 The Church thus gives glory to God in the work of human salvation with an unending cascade of doxologies.

Roman Glory

“The glory that was Greece and the grandeur that was Rome.”23 Cicero defined Roman gloria as frequens de aliquo fama cum laude24 (enduring and praiseworthy personal reputation). Augustine defined gloria as clara cum laude notitia25 (manifest display of praise). Δόξα in the Greek Christian scriptures was translated into Latin
with the word *gloria*. In the Old Latin versions prior to Jerome’s vastly influential *Vulgate* translation, *dóxa* was sometimes translated by *claritas*, which captured the rich imagery of light that was lost in the word *gloria*. Majestas is also found, but eventually *gloria* dominated the Latin Bible. The word was not originally a happy choice, for it came with connotations of worldly empire. Gloria was the ancient world’s hope of immortality; the grave was the end, only fame endured. The change of *gloria* from the word appropriate for Roman military victory and a divinized political power in the figure of the Roman emperor remains the story of how Christian usage led to Christian redefinition. Glory that began as renown in the eyes of human history became glory in the eyes of God’s eternity. The military glory of the Roman general was replaced by the spiritual glory of the Christian martyr. The utter shame of the crucified criminal became the very glory of God revealed in the Son of God who rose from the dead. The glory of this world was overshadowed by the glory of the Kingdom of God. The glory of the earth became the glory of heaven, and the glory of the divinized Emperor, the glory of the Lord Jesus. Perhaps a way to understand the baptism of words in Christian usage is to recall the Christianization of the Roman winter festival of the return of the sun: the celebration of Christ-mas on the darkest day of the year glorifies the Son of God made flesh, who is now the true light of the world. *Lex orandi, lex credendi* is well illustrated in this one word *glory*, which was trans-figured from the very pagan connotation of the emperor as God to the exaltation of Jesus Christ as the King of kings and the true King of Glory.

*The Theology of Glory*

God’s glory is from within. By the free act of creation, God gains nothing and enjoys no further glory. God’s glory is infinite al-
ready, was forever, and will be forever. Eternity is beyond time. Let us reflect upon the nature of God as fully God and established forever in infinite glory. God is simple because only an infinity that is everything can claim there is nothing other. God does not pursue truth: God is Truth. God does not seek beauty: God is Beauty. God does not have glory: God is Glory. The only and one God has been revealed to us to be Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Therefore, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is/are Glory. The mystery of God is a mystery of glory. “In the doctrine of the Trinity and in Christology gloria comes to designate the divine nature proper to the Father, the Son and the Spirit.”

Given God’s full and perfect glory, which cannot be enhanced nor demeaned by any created glory, human beings should never be envisioned as servants whose work provides more glory to God. God does not need us to do God’s work, though God allows us to do what is God’s work. Although we are co-creators with God, co-creators in the work of giving life, God’s will at its depth is not designed to make us servants but to make us friends. God, of course, needs neither friends nor servants, but God chose us to be friends, and friends must be free. There can be no friendship without freedom. Therefore God wants each human being to do what at their deepest and truest selves they choose to do, that is, to be truly themselves. That maturation of God’s gift of creation reveals the glory of God. “So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God” (1 Cor 10:31). C. S. Lewis speaks well of this glory in us: “Next to the Blessed Sacrament itself, your neighbor is the holiest object presented to your senses. If he is your Christian neighbor, he is holy in almost the same way, for in him also Christ vere latitat [truly is hidden] — the glorifier and the glorified, Glory Himself, is truly hidden.”

God surely wants us to be human, and only that, but human fully and deeply as revealed and realized only in the humanity of Jesus Christ. God wants finally not the human nature of an Apollo
but the humanity of his beloved son, Jesus our Lord, whose graced humanity we had never imagined. That graced humanity, which is ours in the gift of the Holy Spirit in the depths of every human being’s heart, wishes to lay down its life for its friends. Such sacrifice stems not from duty, command, or guilt, but out of the truest self-identity and out of the fullest free love welling up from the gift that is our very being, made in the image of God who is love. In that kaleidoscope of humanity radiant in love with every color appears God’s glory. C. S. Lewis writes of fidelity to God’s gift of freedom: “when human souls have become as perfect in voluntary obedience as the inanimate creation is in its lifeless obedience, then they will put on its glory, or rather that greater glory of which Nature is only the first sketch.” St. Irenaeus concludes succinctly: Gloria Dei vivens homo (a vital human being is the glory of God). And his words but echo St John: “My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love” (Jn 15:8–9). The Jesuit motto, Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam (For the Greater Glory of God), is not the aphorism of an indebted servant, but rather the response of a beloved friend of God who eschews self-glorification in this life for the God-intended self-fulfillment that is found in living for God. “Let your light shine before men, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven” (Mt 5:16). Our glory is God’s glory and God’s glory is ours.

In the end, creation and redemption kiss. Kabod as the glory of creation and shekinah as the abiding presence of God dovetail. Doxology as praise of God and soteriology as the salvation of God join hands. Communicating divine life to the world establishes God’s glory among us. A “universe totally transfigured by the glory of God, receiving glory from Him and rendering glory to Him” manifests a divine reciprocity that in creaturely fashion reflects the very life of the Trinity, in which the divine being of God is totally exchanged in an eternal communion that gives itself and receives itself in endless love.
If the Father has “loved them [us] even as you [the Father] have loved me [Jesus]” (Jn 17:23) then we also are the beloved sons (and daughters) of God. Jesus says “the glory that you [the Father] have given me I have given them” (Jn 17:22). Thus when we say the doxology, “Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit,” we pray with Jesus within the mystery of the Trinity indwelling in our hearts. We truly are the adopted and graced children of God and the sisters and brothers of Jesus our Lord. The doxology, therefore, is not only a statement about the Trinity and an acknowledgment of how glorious it must be to be God. The doxology enacts and embodies our inclusion in the glory of God, that “they may be one, as we [Father and Son] are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me” (Jn 17:22–23). When one ponders the great discourse at the last supper in John’s gospel (chapters 13–17) one may well understand why the mystics write of the love of God as a marriage between humanity and divinity.

We receive in our very existence a participation in the divine glory that is the life of God, and we return that glory in our praise and worship. “Yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist” (1 Cor 8:6). As the Son receives the glory of being God from the Father and returns it perfectly to the Father in the Holy Spirit, so we human beings are included in a created way in this mystery of exchange of the Trinitarian life. “See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are... Beloved, we are God’s children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is” (1 Jn 3:1–2).

As we have seen above, the meaning between claritas and gloria overlaps. The glory of God is manifest in the beginning of creation: “Let there be Light!” Moses on top of Mt. Sinai saw
the flames of YHWH, the same flames he saw at the burning bush, when the Lord said: “I AM WHO I AM” (Ex 3:14). Zechariah sings of the coming light: “By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death” (Lk 1:78–79). On top of Mt. Tabor the face of Jesus “shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white” (Mt 17:2). Paul is struck down on the road to Damascus by a great light, and he hears a voice from heaven saying, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” (Acts 9:4). Dante in his *Paradiso* consummates his vision of God as a white rose of pure light (Canto 31). Thoreau concludes *Walden* with the promise that tomorrow holds ever so much more light than today: “The sun is but a morning star.” We know God as light. We await the beatific vision, when we will be able to look upon the sun/Son of God with eyes open to infinite splendor. We shall then see not only the three primary colors of our human creation, but an infinite array of divine colors never seen on earth. We await the new Jerusalem coming down from heaven like a bride dazzling in the beauty of her sparkling jewels. “And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb” (Rev 21:23). “And the fire and the rose are one.”32