

Doxology – Praise in three Dimensions

[Dr. Curt Dodd](#) tells the story of a little boy who was singing the doxology in church at the top of his voice. He got some of the words tangled up when he got to this part: “Praise God from whom all blessings flow, praise him all creatures, ‘Here we go!’

That reminded me of a concert I had attended years ago. The violinist was performing the [Brahms Violin Concerto](#) with the Miami Philharmonic and was about to play the third movement. It was the first time I had ever heard the piece, and I remember that the look on the soloist’s face told me to “sit up, get ready, you are going to love what we’re about to play for you...” Shouldn’t our worship and our worship leaders be marked by that same excitement? Shouldn’t we be saying to those around us and even to those who are streaming live with us, “Here we go?”

This is the kind of worship, I think, that is inherent in our notion of [Doxology](#) – rendered from the Greek δοξολογία (*doxologia*), *doxa* – “praise” and *logia* – “saying.” So, literally “praise-speaking” or, by extension, “praise-singing.” Our challenge is to see how something so venerable and ancient can take on new dimensions: height, width, depth in today’s worship.

Doxologies appear in various forms throughout scripture: Romans 11:36; Ephesians 1:3; Jude 1: 24-25 among other places. For some traditions, they also regularly appear in other forms: the Great Doxology is the *Gloria in Excelsis* not only found in several Christmas carols but in worship – whether as exuberant and beautifully complex as in [JS Bach’s B minor Mass](#) (opening movement) or as elegantly simple as in the chant-like [Missa Simplex](#). Of course, there is the short prayer known as the lesser doxology, the *Gloria Patri* that closes many prayers: Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost. As it was in the beginning, and now, and always, and into the ages of ages. Amen. Another doxology appears at the end of the Our Father: [“For thine is the kingdom...”](#) and since 1970, it has been part of the Catholic Mass. Another Catholic doxology appears at the end of the Eucharistic prayer: *Through him, and with him, and in him, O God almighty Father, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory and honor is yours, forever and ever, AMEN.* It is said that in the 4th century, the people’s powerfully sung Amen, overheard in the streets, brought many pagan converts into faith. Perhaps they could have sung: “Here we go!”

And speaking of that little boy, his preferred Doxology is the one that many churches sing each Sunday when, having gathered the collection, we offer our monetary support to God and present it in the sanctuary or chancel: *Praise God, from whom all blessings flow; Praise him, all creatures here below; Praise him above, ye heavenly host; Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.* The words were written by a bishop, Thomas Ken in 1674 – England’s first hymnist. The words originally appeared as the final verse for two hymns: one intended for morning worship, the other for evening at Winchester College. The words are traditionally set to music by French composer Louis Bourgeois in his hymn tune Old 100th. With slightly different lyrics, a powerful and iconic version was arranged by composer [Ralph Vaughan Williams](#) for the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II in 1953.

Earlier, I mentioned how this doxology can take on new dimensions. Let’s have a look at each phrase: *Praise God, from whom all blessings flow.* We can discern an action from God to us, an arrow downward. Bishop Ken Untener, once used gestures to describe worship and likened hearing God’s word proclaimed on Sunday to a similar downward arrow, recall Timothy 3:14-17: “...from infancy you have known the sacred Scriptures, which are capable of giving you wisdom for salvation...so that one who belongs to God may be competent and equipped for every good work.”

Praise him, all creatures here below is the reverse; our singing, our spoken responses to bidding prayers and the like, our assents when we respond “Amen,” are all arrows upward AND are arrows front, back and sideways as we connect with fellow worshippers again, in the building and possibly by live feed to other satellite church locations or homes. Recall 2 Corinthians 4: 5-6 a calligraphy that I have hanging in my choir room as their mandate for sung worship leading: “It’s not ourselves we preach but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus sake. For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” has shone in our hearts, that we in turn might make known the glory of God shining on the face of Christ.” Some theologians refer to this dynamic as the economy of salvation; the eternal ebb and flow. A freely offered gift of eternal life that our free will can either accept and respond in faith or choose to ignore. Could we liken it to the image found in Michaelangelo’s [Creation of Adam](#), God the Father reaching out, Adam/humankind there to receive? Railway stations in England regularly display the admonition to “Mind the Gap,” as people, mostly tourists, perhaps, enter or leave the cars. Perhaps we

could see the gap between the fingers in the fresco as an image of our worship (scroll down in the link to see the detail). Composer [Bob Hurd](#) sings of this in his Easter Hymn, “Though not seeing you, still we love you...”

Praise him above, ye heavenly hosts adds another horizontal dimension similar to what we read in Psalm 19:1-6; “The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge...their voice goes out through all the earth...” It is scripture mirrored by Franz Joseph Haydn I a movement from his oratorio, [Creation](#).

Lastly, *Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost*. We honor the Trinity as the perfect summation of our faith. “Who doesn’t love a mystery,” asks Bishop Robert Barron? And of them all, the Trinity is our most sublime paradox, perhaps, as Churchill once described Russia, “a riddle, wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma.” Yet, we [walk by faith](#) and not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7).

Perhaps it might also help to see them in a different light provided by Madeleine L’Engle (author of *A Wrinkle of Time*) in her reflection on the Incarnation *Bright Evening Star*. She quotes *The New Zealand Prayer Book* – a resource for the Anglican Church in New Zealand and Polynesia whose version of the Lord’s Prayer refers to the Trinity as [Earth Maker, Pain Bearer and Life Giver](#).

Finally, the story is told about a ship torpedoed off the coast of Brazil near the end of World War II. Lifeboats filled with survivors had completely run out of water when salvation appeared on the horizon. As the ship loomed closer and closer someone cried out, “Give us water!” Incredibly, a sailor shouted back, “Dip your hand over the side!” When one survivor did so, to his surprise he tasted fresh water. They later learned that their ship had gone down near the Amazon delta which had been pumping fresh water all around them. They were in the midst of their salvation and didn’t know it.

Perhaps the next time we find ourselves at worship and are moved to sing out our praise to God as Earth Maker, Pain Bearer and Life Giver, let us remember how close we are to our salvation. When prompted maybe we will be compelled to sing out: “Here we go!”