

# Swept off your Feet

## Beyond Worship-as-Usual

Connecting with God for a Strong Finish

### PART III

## A Conviction for Worship

Prepare for a Season Change—Worship Wars,  
Worship Stigmas, and Worship Mavens

### CHAPTER 20

## Exchanging the Glory of God for a Bird

On a clear day, Hubbard Glacier thrills onlookers with its awe-inspiring beauty. Framed by Mount Logan and Mount St. Elias, the second and third tallest mountains in North America, Hubbard spans an area bigger than the state of Rhode Island.<sup>1</sup> It stretches for 76 miles (120 km) beginning near the base of Mount Logan (Canada's highest elevation with the most expansive base of any non-volcanic mountain on Earth).<sup>2</sup>

Hubbard is the largest tidewater glacier on the continent. It moves faster than nearly any other glacier in North America. Even so, this massive river of ice takes about 400 years to complete its journey from



Mount Logan and Hubbard Glacier, 2009

<sup>1</sup> <http://pubs.usgs.gov/fs/fs-001-03/> (accessed 11-20-2012)

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.nps.gov/wrst/naturescience/upload/HG%20Fact%201.pdf> (accessed 11-20-12)

mountainside to seashore. Along its terminal face, Hubbard extends vertically for 650 feet (200 meters) where it empties into Disenchantment Bay. With a rumble of commotion, gravity transforms towering walls of blue ice into bobbing icebergs.

While admiring this view from the deck of a commercial cruise liner, a Tlingit (Klin-kit) Indian guide announced the source of this stunning sight.<sup>3</sup> According to tribes indigenous to this



region, a Raven-god organized the material world including the majestic mountains, glaciers, and oceans. News of Raven, based on native lore, stirred some curiosity but it did not evoke facedown worship. Ascribing dubious acclaim to a second-rate bird-god lacks credibility. Raven received a wishy-washy response because that's what a watered-down god deserves.

Our guide did not mention that Tlingits also acknowledge a supreme being, whom they call Kah-shu-goon-yah, as the creator of living things.<sup>4</sup> Honest critics dismiss claims of divinity attributed to a powerless bird. They reject dumbed-down impostors along with their commercialized paraphernalia. Humanizing God or worse, *ravenizing* Him, invites a jaded response fraught with cynicism. Adorned with exaggerated hype, made-up deities do not measure up to the truth. Unlike the actual Creator of the universe, they sport an illusion of worth inflated beyond legendary boasts.<sup>5</sup>

As smallpox, influenza, and tuberculosis ravaged their tribe, many Tlingits embraced Orthodox Christianity between 1886 and 1895. Four

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<sup>3</sup> Personal experience June 2, 2009

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.everyculture.com/North-America/Tlingit-Religion-and-Expressive-Culture.html> (accessed July 17, 2008)

<sup>5</sup> Lane, F. W., *The Elements Rage*, David & Charles 1966, p.176

years later, two powerful earthquakes (7.4 and 8.0 on the Richter scale) rocked the region with the highest vertical displacement measured at the time—parts of Disenchantment Bay rose by 47 feet (14 meters).

Deity wannabes like Raven do not qualify for facedown reverence. They may arouse some interest but they do not compel worship in spirit and truth. All impostors fall short of supreme eminence. They may simulate God’s credentials with episodes of intrigue but they cannot manifest His glory. Using a plagiarized script, copycats mimic holy words and steal credit for divine deeds, but they cannot compete with the active performance of an Almighty God.

Fake gods are not all powerful, all knowing, ever-present, unchanging, eternal, holy, sovereign, or transcendent. When compared with the Creator of the universe, the performance of a fraud lacks substance. It may stimulate superstition but it cannot transform Hell-bound sinners into eternal saints.

Properly understood, facedown worship is a sacred response reserved exclusively for one true God. Birds certainly do not deserve this level of veneration—neither do angels, idols, people, or demons. When pretenders masquerade as God, they compete for the spotlight with the One who created light. As dumbed-down deities pose as God, facedown reverence belongs to the One who deserves it.

### **A Bold Proclamation**

President Abraham Lincoln issued a historic proclamation two and a half years into America’s Civil War. He used the authority of his office to establish a national holiday dedicated to giving thanks and praise to God. Here in part is what he wrote:

It has seemed to me fit and proper that they [the gracious gifts of “the most high God”] should be **solemnly, reverently, and gratefully acknowledged** as with one heart and one voice by the whole American people. I do, therefore, invite my fellow-citizens in every part of the United States...to set apart and observe the last Thurs-

day of November next as a day of thanksgiving and praise to our beneficent Father who dwelleth in the heavens. And I recommend to them that, while offering up the **ascriptions justly due to him** for such singular deliverances and blessings, they do also, with humble penitence for our national perverseness and disobedience, commend to his tender care all those who have become widows, orphans, mourners, or sufferers in the lamentable civil strife in which we are unavoidably engaged, and fervently implore the interposition of the almighty hand to heal the wounds of the nation, and to restore it, as soon as may be consistent with the Divine purposes, to the full enjoyment of peace, harmony, tranquility, and union.<sup>6</sup>

Though it was not the first time that Americans dedicated a day for giving thanks to God, Lincoln's proclamation established an annual tradition, which has endured for more than 150 years. America's workforce enjoys the day off for this purpose generally as a paid holiday. Instead of offering as President Lincoln urged, "the ascriptions justly due" our "beneficent Father", we socialize and gluttonize. Distracted by Black Friday bargains and leftover stuffing, the significance of this national holiday fades away with little emphasis on God. After chuckling about the Tlingit bird-god, Americans may have exchanged the truth about God for a turkey.

When we realize who it is that desires our special attention, bargain sales and festive foods become less of a distraction and more of an occasion to commemorate His provision. Knowing the truth about God motivates us to acknowledge Him with greater priority in all that we think, say, do, and eat during the celebration of Thanksgiving Day.

## **Connecting with Reality**

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<sup>6</sup> [www.nps.gov/history/history/online\\_books/.../sb2w.htm](http://www.nps.gov/history/history/online_books/.../sb2w.htm) (Dec 6, 2010)

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The impetus to worship someone as God requires more than a presidential decree. Secondhand theology seasoned with piety may inform the brain but it does not compel the heart to worship facedown. Throughout the Bible, individuals offered radical reverence because they experienced a radical revelation. When they encountered God personally, their worship became decisive and dynamic. The closer they got the more robust their response became.

Our reticence to bow confirms the fact that we do not know God well enough. Casual tokens of reverence betray our bias for uncertainty. Those who worship God in spirit and truth have no need of pretending. Their deportment reflects an authentic connection with divine reality. When executed with integrity, falling facedown conveys awestruck reverence. When worshipers arise from this posture, they embrace life more abundantly—far removed from the performance charade of obligatory religion.

