

# Swept off your Feet

## Beyond Worship-as-Usual

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### CHAPTER 28

#### Exchanging the Glory of God for a Bird

##### Worshiping Ravens and Turkeys

On a clear day, Hubbard Glacier thrills onlookers with awe-inspiring beauty. Framed by the second and third tallest mountains in North America (Mount Logan and Mount St. Elias), Hubbard spans an area bigger than Rhode Island, USA.<sup>1</sup> It stretches for 76 miles (120 km) beginning near the base of Canada's highest elevation with the most expansive base of any non-volcanic mountain on Earth (Mount Logan).<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 mountain-side to seashore. Along its terminal face, Hubbard extends vertically for 650 feet (200 meters) where it empties into Disenchantment Bay. With a rumble of demanding attention, gravity transforms its ice blue walls into bobbing icebergs.



Mount Logan and Hubbard Glacier, 2009

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

<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)

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

world including majestic mountains, glaciers, and oceans. News of Raven stirred curiosity among fellow sightseers, but it did not evoke facedown worship. This dubious claim ascribed by native lore to a second-rate bird-god lacked credibility. Raven received a wishy-washy response because that's what watered-down gods deserve.

Honest observers reject avian divinity. They dismiss dumbed-down bird impostors along with their commercialized paraphernalia. Domesticating God or worse, *ravenizing* Him, invites a jaded response fraught with skepticism. Adorned with exaggerated hype, made-up deities do not measure up to the truth. Unlike the actual Creator of the universe, impersonators exhibit an illusion of worth inflated beyond every reliable boast.<sup>4</sup> Our guide did not mention that Tlingits also acknowledge a supreme being, whom they call Kah-shu-goon-yah (divisible-rich-man) as the creator of living things.<sup>5</sup>



Mount Saint Elias, 2009

As smallpox, influenza, and tuberculosis ravaged their tribe between 1886 and 1895, many Tlingits embraced Orthodox Christianity and renounced Raven and Kah-shu-goon-yah. Four 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 interest, but they do not evoke worship in spirit and truth. All impostors fall short of supreme eminence. They may simulate divine credentials with episodes of intrigue, but they cannot manifest His power and influence. Using a plagiarized script, copycats mimic divine words and steal credit for divine deeds, but they cannot compete with past and present performances by Almighty God.

Fake gods are not all powerful, all knowing, ever-present, unchanging, eternal, holy, sovereign, or transcendent. Compared with the Creator of the universe, the performance of a fraud lacks substance. Empty words stimulate superstition but cannot transform broken sinners into eternal saints thriving with abundant life.

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<sup>4</sup> Lane, F. W., *The Elements Rage*, David & Charles 1966, p.176

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.everyculture.com/North-America/Tlingit-Religion-and-Expressive-Culture.html> (accessed July 17, 2008)

Properly understood, facedown worship conveys a sacred response reserved exclusively for one true God. Fligthy birds certainly do not deserve this level of veneration—neither do angels, demons, idols, or people. 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. Quoted with my emphasis in bold, Lincoln called the entire nation to render gratitude with penitence, petition, and reverence. He wrote in part:

It has seemed to me fit and proper that they [gracious gifts from **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 Thursday 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 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. Most of the USA workforce enjoys this day as a paid holiday—ostensibly for the purpose of rendering thanks to Almighty God. Instead of offering as President Lincoln urged, “the ascriptions justly due” our “beneficent Father”, we socialize, gluttonize, and strategize shopping sprees. Distracted by leftover stuffing and Black Friday bargains, the significance of this national holiday

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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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fades away with little emphasis on our Heavenly Father. After chuckling about a Tlingit bird-god, Americans exchanged the truth about God for a turkey as they idolize a fowl.

When we recognize the One that deserves effusive gratitude, festive foods and bargain sales become less of a distraction and more of an occasion for family and friends to commemorate His provision. Knowing the truth about God motivates us to acknowledge Him with greater priority in all we think, say, do, and eat during Thanksgiving Day celebrations.

### Connecting with Reality

The impetus to worship someone as God requires more than secondhand folklore or a presidential decree. Information and edicts inform the brain, but they do not inspire the heart to worship facedown. Tokens of casual reverence imply a bias for uncertainty, suspicion, and doubt. Throughout history, individuals and groups have offered radical reverence because they experienced genuine revelation from a life-transforming God. When a person encounters the truth about God their response becomes decisive and dynamic. The closer they get the more sincere, compelling, and comprehensive their response of worship.

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 veneration. When worshipers arise from this demonstrative posture, they embrace life more abundantly—far removed from the performance charade of obligatory religion.

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