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"O COME LET US WORSHIP"

By D.B. Knox

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The Protestant Faith

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The word "worship" has the same meaning as "honour". For example, some judges are called "your worship" and others "your honour" according to the court over which they preside. So to worship God means to give God honour, to give Him His worth, to recognise His character and our relationship to Him.

Worship is a natural instinct and all communities throughout our history have forms of worship. What form worship takes depends on the concept of God held by the worshippers. Some heathen primitive communities think that God needs bribes to persuade Him to confer favours or to avert His displeasure. Christian worship reflects the Christian concept of God, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the God of Revelation, the God of the Bible. If our worship is to be acceptable to God, it must express and reflect His true character and His true worth so that it is truly honouring to Him. Some people think acceptable worship means acceptable to the congregation; but this simply reveals a very tenuous concept of the greatness of God.

When we approach the true and living God, our worship must firstly take the form of adoration and thanksgiving; for God is the Creator of all things, He is our Creator, He has given us life and breath and all things richly to enjoy. Adoration and thanksgiving from the bottom of our heart should be our first response as we seek to give God His worth and to honour Him as He is in truth. Mankind's basic sinfulness, according to St. Paul in Romans 1, is the refusal to adore God's divinity and thank Him for His generosity.

The second element of Christian worship must be related to God's provision of salvation; for God reveals Himself to us as a saving God, One who has mercy on us in our lost and perishing condition, under the eternal judgement of hell. The God whom we worship is the God Who "so loved the world that He gave His only son; that all who believe in Him should not perish but have eternal life". How do we honour and worship such a Saviour? Paradoxically by accepting the provision of salvation for ourselves, humbly and faithfully. All other worship and honouring of God is vain if we are scorning what He has provided as such cost to Himself. As the Psalmist says

"what shall I render to the Lord for all His goodness towards me. I will take the cup of salvation and call upon the name of the Lord" (Ps. 116). If we have not accepted His salvation for ourselves so that we are conscious that He is our saving Lord, all other attempts to honour the God of Scripture, the true God, are vain, indeed a grave dishonour to Him.

Thirdly, we worship God by putting our faith in His promises of daily provision and putting our hope for the future in His inheritance provided for us. By casting our cares and anxieties on Him, we show His character of One Who cares for us. If we are seeking the things of this world we are in fact saying that we do not believe that God will provide for us if we seek His kingdom as our chief objective. Or again, if our hearts are set on possessions, on the things of this world and if our energies are directed to their acquisition, what dishonour we are casting on His promised inheritance! How can we say that we worship God if we are not putting our hope in Him and looking forward eagerly to the fullness of His fellowship. To trust God is the only way by which we can show what we believe to be the truth about the faithful and trustworthy God. Mere words without actions deceive no-one. Faith and trust lead directly to obedience, to the doing of God's will, knowing it to be the best. That is honouring Him; that is the way we declare His character of faithfulness and goodness, by putting our trust in Him and by obeying Him. Prayer is the natural expression of this attitude of trust and obedience.

Fourthly, the clearest form of recognition of God's character and of giving Him His worth, is imitation of that character. God is a generous God, Who gives Himself to us and Who gives us all that we have. In a word - God is love. We worship and honour Him when we imitate His character of love by being ourselves other-person centred, and loving and serving them for Christ's sake.

Worship takes its content from the character of the God worshipped. Christians worship the true and living God who has revealed His character in Holy Scripture. All Christian worship must be in line with Holy Scripture. Adoration and thanksgiving for our creation and all the blessings of this

life; faith and trust in God for our salvation and for all our daily needs; joyful and firm hope in His promised inheritance; fellowship with Him in prayer and love for Him and for our neighbour - these are the ways by which we reflect our view of God and these are the ways by which we give God His worth and honour Him; these make up Christian worship - but these things are ordinary daily activities; there is nothing different about them. In other words, our daily life and daily attitude is what the worship of the true God consists of. There is no cult or ritual in Christian worship.

But what about Sunday and church-going? Keeping Sunday holy is a way by which we honour God with our time. So it is certainly a form of worship and honour. Normally we have to work for our living six days or so a week but when we relax this work, as we must if we are to continue it, our first use of such free time should be to turn our thoughts to God in a way we are not able to when they are taken up with earning our daily living. We must honour God with our time. If it is possible to devote every day to God, well and good, but at least we must devote the day of rest to Him if we have not done so during the rest of the week. And naturally, we will use this free time to meet as Christians together (if our Christian hope is the chief element of our thoughts) so that we can share our Christian experience, and meet our Saviour in meeting one another and to learn from Him through one another's words. This is firstly Christian fellowship, but it is also church worship just like all our actions directed towards God are worship. In church we do together what we do as individuals during the rest of the week. That is, we adore and praise Him with thanksgiving, we bring our cares and concerns to Him in prayer and sit at His feet through listening to His Word as we strengthen one another in our Christian hope. It is, however, foolish to do these things in fellowship in church if we do not do them individually or with our family on the other days of the week.

We must honour God not only as individuals but also with our spouse, praying and reading God's Word together, and with our family, too, bringing our prayers to Him and seeking His Will through His Word together as a family. Then with our

neighbours once a week we honour and worship God our Creator and Saviour as we acknowledge His character together.

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