

“You shall do homage to the Lord your God”
(Mt 4:10)

First of all, here is an excerpt from the letter to which my own letter is an answer:

“I love to adore. I feel impelled to adore. I am happy when I adore God and I should even say that I am never so happy as when I am adoring. And yet I must add that I don’t know what adoration is. Isn’t that paradoxical? I have often searched in books, inspired by the hope that at last I was about to find the definition of this adoration which holds first place in my life. Each time, I have been disappointed by the diversity of definitions or descriptions. Adoration is presented as man’s reaction to the presence of God’s sovereignty, or of his majesty or glory. It is described by some as the presentiment of his terrifying proximity. For others, it is the spiritual attitude of man confronting the Being who is his origin and his end. From this it follows that adoration of God is compared, depending on the circumstances, to reverential fear or to praise, to submission or to homage. Isn’t that playing games with adoration? If it is not defined rigorously, it dissolves into diverse religious attitudes, and loses its specificity. For me, this is a very serious matter.”

Dear friend, I am happy to hear you say that you are deeply drawn to adoration. It is the indubitable sign of the presence of the Spirit of God within you. It shows that your religion is not simply the moralism or the vague religiousness that so many Christians mistake for true religion. We cannot help wondering whether such Christians are atheists without knowing it.

In order to grasp what authentic adoration is, start out from the affirmations of Scripture: *“You shall do homage to the Lord your God; him alone shall you adore”* (Mt 4:10). This commandment had for centuries been the fundamental rule for the Jewish people. Christ solemnly proclaimed it anew at the dawn of the Messianic era (cf. Lk 4:8). And he added: *“Yet an hour is coming, and is already here, when authentic worshipers will worship the Father in Spirit and truth....God is Spirit, and those who worship him must worship in Spirit and truth”* (Jn 4:23-24).

Isn’t it clear from these texts that adoration is an act of man that can be addressed only to God? The first Christians understood it in this way, and they died by the thousands for refusing to worship emperors or idols.

The other religious attitudes—reverence, praise, love—by contrast with adoration, are to be found also in human relations. Indeed, God does not claim to be the only one to be revered, praised, and loved. But he does not tolerate that men should adore anyone other than him: *“The Lord is ‘the Jealous One’, a jealous God is he”* (Ex 34:14).

Clearly, adoration is addressed to God, *simply because he is God*. Adoration is that deep-seated attitude of soul (whether or not it is translated by external gestures or activities) that proclaims: "There is a God. You are God. You alone are God." Therefore, the object of adoration is not one or another of God's perfections, but the Godhead as Godhead, independently of his attributes.

Granted, when I affirm through adoration that the One before whom I stand is God, I am by that very fact acknowledging his admirable perfections. And these perfections (his oneness, simplicity, truth, goodness, infinity, eternity, incomprehensibility, wisdom, providence, justice, mercy and omnipotence) inspire the multifarious religious sentiments: fear, admiration, reverence, obedience, praise, repentance, thanksgiving, trust and filial love. But these sentiments, which are the escort of adoration, are not adoration. It should even be added that without adoration, all these sentiments would be nothing. For they derive all their religious value from adoration.

However, it is equally true that adoration attains its plenitude only by incorporating these diverse sentiments, and being nourished by their substance. Only then does it appear in its splendor as filial adoration, trusting and jubilant.

The unspoken adoration of man, who is not a pure spirit, expresses itself through corporeal attitudes, of which prostrating himself is unquestionably the most characteristic. There are so many pages of the Bible on which we read: "*They prostrated themselves and worshiped him*" (cf. 2 M 3:15; Mt 2:11; etc.). It also finds expression in divine worship, *latria*, reserved for God alone. Its privileged manifestation is sacrifice.

Even so, the adorer in spirit and in truth always remembers that external worship is empty of meaning, unless it is rooted in interior worship. Christ flung at the Pharisees the reprimand that Isaiah the prophet had hurled at his contemporaries in the name of Yahweh: "*This people pays me lip service but their heart is far from me. They do me empty reverence, making dogmas out of human precepts*" (Mt 15:8-9; Is 29:13).

Because man is a social being, he is inclined to translate his adoration and worship into social terms. That is, he confesses his gratitude to God publicly, and joins in with other men: "Come, let us adore him...."

In the last analysis, you will have a complete understanding of adoration only if you consider it in the life of the great Adorer, Jesus Christ. Indeed, as the perfect man, endowed with a created human nature, his first religious obligation was adoration of the Father. This was the warp and woof of his earthly life, in the carpenter shop at Nazareth as well as on the roads of Palestine. It was in the sacrifice of Calvary that Christ's adoration attained its supreme expression. It was on the Cross that Jesus proclaimed to the whole world that there is only one God, and that this God (whose love went to the extreme limit of giving his own Son) insists on being adored by all creatures.

The great uninterrupted adoration which rises "*from the rising sun to the setting sun*" (cf. Ba 5:5) from all the sons and daughters of God, is the same as the firstborn-Son's adoration. He himself transfuses it into the heart of each of his brothers and sisters.