

QUESTION 84

Adoration

Next we have to consider the exterior acts of worship (*de exterioribus actibus latriae*): first, adoration (*adoratio*), through which one uses his body to venerate God (question 84); second, those acts by which some exterior thing is offered to God (questions 85-87); and, third, acts by which things that have to do with God are undertaken (questions 88-91).

On the first topic there are three questions: (1) Is adoration (*adoratio*) an act of worship (*actus latriae*)? (2) Does adoration involve an interior act or an exterior act? (3) Does adoration require a fixed place (*requirat determinationem loci*)?

Article 1

Is adoration an act of worship, i.e., an act of [the virtue of] religion?

It seems that adoration is not an act of worship, i.e., an act of [the virtue of] religion (*non sit actus latriae sive religionis*):

Objection 1: The worship that belongs to religion (*cultus religionis*) is owed to God alone. But it is not the case that adoration is owed to God alone, since Genesis 18:22 says that Abraham adored the angels, and 3 Kings 1:23 says that when the prophet Nathan was going into King David, he “adored him prostrate on the ground.” Therefore, adoration is not an act of religion.

Objection 2: As is clear from Augustine in *De Civitate Dei* 10, the worship that belongs to religion is owed to God insofar as we are beatified in Him. But adoration is owed to Him by reason of His majesty, since in commenting on Psalm 28:2 (“Adore the Lord in His holy court”) a Gloss says, “We come from these courts into the court where His majesty is adored.” Therefore, adoration is not an act of worship (*non est actus latriae*).

Objection 3: The worship that belongs to a single act of religion is owed to the three persons. But we do not adore the three persons by a single act of adoration (*una adoratione*); instead, we genuflect for each one individually (*singulariter*) in invoking the three persons.

But contrary to this are the words taken from Matthew 4:10, “You shall adore the Lord your God, and Him alone shall you serve.”

I respond: Adoration is ordered toward having reverence for the one who is adored. But it is obvious from what has been said that it is proper to religion to show reverence for God. Hence, the adoration by which God is adored is an act of religion.

Reply to objection 1: God is owed reverence because of His excellence, which is communicated to certain creatures not by way of equality but by way of participation. And so we venerate God by one sort of veneration that belongs to worship (*latria*), and we venerate excellent creatures by another sort of veneration that belongs to honor (*dulia*), which will be discussed below (q. 103). And since the things that are done exteriorly are signs of interior reverence, some exterior things pertaining to reverence, the greatest among which is *adoration*, are directed toward excellent creatures, whereas there is something that is directed toward God alone, viz., *sacrifice*. Thus, in *De Civitate Dei* 10 Augustine says, “There are many things taken from divine worship that are redirected toward honoring men—either through exaggerated obsequiousness or through nauseating flattery—yet in such a way that those to whom they are redirected are still treated as *men* who are to be revered and venerated and even adored, if they have a lot of extra influence (*si multum eis additur*). But who has ever thought that he should offer sacrifice except to one whom he knew or thought or imagined to be a *god*?”

Therefore, Nathan adored David with the reverence that is due to an excellent creature. On the other hand, as Esther 13:14 tells us, it was the reverence due to God that Mordechai refused to adore Aman with, fearing “lest he should transfer to a man the sort of honor that belongs to God.”

Again, it was the reverence due to God that John was forbidden to adore the angel with (Apocalypse 22:9), both (a) in order to exhibit the dignity human beings had acquired through Christ and by which they had been made equal to the angels—this is why it is added, “I am the fellow servant of you and of your brethren”—and (b) in order to rule out an occasion for idolatry—and this is why it is added, “Adore God.”

Reply to objection 2: What is meant by ‘divine majesty’ is every excellence of God’s, which includes everything that is in Him as the highest good, in whom we are beatified.

Reply to objection 3: Since there is a single excellence belonging to the three persons, what is owed to them is a single honor and a single reverence—and, as a result, a single act of adoration. It is a figure of this when, in Genesis 18:2, it is said of Abraham that when the three men appeared to him, he said to the one in adoration, “Lord, if I have found favor with you ...”

Now the three genuflections are a sign of the trinity of persons, but not of a distinction among acts of adoration.

Article 2

Does adoration involve a corporeal act?

It seems that adoration does not involve a corporeal act (*adoratio non importet actum coporalem*):

Objection 1: John 4:23 says, “... the true adorers (*adoratores*) will adore (*adorabunt*) the Father in spirit and truth.” But what is done “in spirit” does not belong to a corporeal act. Therefore, adoration does not involve a corporeal act.

Objection 2: The name ‘adoration’ (*adoratio*) is taken from prayer (*oratio*). But prayer consists mainly in an interior act—this according to 1 Corinthians 14:15 (“I will pray with the spirit, I will pray also with the understanding”). Therefore, adoration especially involves a spiritual act.

Objection 3: Corporeal acts belong to sentient cognition. But it is with a mental sense, and not with a bodily sense, that we attain to God. Therefore, adoration does not involve a corporeal act.

But contrary to this: A Gloss on Exodus 20:5 (“You shall not adore them, nor shall you worship them”) says, “Do not worship them inwardly (*affectu*) or adore them outwardly (*specie*).”

I respond: As Damascene says in *De Fide Orthodoxa* 4, “Since we are composed of a twofold nature, viz., intellectual and sentient, we offer a twofold adoration to God, viz., *spiritual* adoration, which consists in the mind’s interior devotion, and *corporeal* adoration, which consists in the exterior humbling of the body. And so in all acts of worship (*in omnibus actibus latriae*) what is interior is related as the more important element to what is exterior. Therefore, exterior adoration is done for the sake of interior adoration—so that, namely, through the signs of humility that we exhibit with our bodies, our affection is incited to subject itself to God. For it is connatural for us to proceed from what can be sensed to what can be understood (*connaturale est nobis ut per sensibilia ad intelligibilia procedamus*).

Reply to objection 1: Even corporeal adoration is done “in spirit,” insofar as it proceeds from spiritual devotion and is ordered toward it.

Reply to objection 2: In the same way that, as was explained above (q. 83, a. 12), prayer is first and foremost in the mind and is expressed secondarily in words, so, too, adoration consists mainly in an interior reverence for God and secondarily in certain corporeal signs of humility—in the way that we genuflect to signify our weakness in comparison to God, and in the way that we prostrate ourselves as if to profess that we are nothing of ourselves.

Reply to objection 3: Even if we cannot attain to God through our senses, it is nonetheless through signs which can be sensed that our mind is stimulated to tend toward God.

Article 3

Does adoration require a fixed place?

It seems that adoration does not require a fixed place (*non requirat determinatum locum*):

Objection 1: John 4:21 says, “The time is coming when you will adore the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem.” But the same line of reasoning seems to hold for other places as well. Therefore, no fixed place is required for adoring.

Objection 2: Exterior adoration is ordered toward interior adoration. But interior adoration is offered to God as one who exists everywhere. Therefore, exterior adoration does not require a fixed place.

Objection 3: It is the same God who is adored in the New Testament and in the Old Testament. But in the Old Testament adoration was offered toward the west, since, as Exodus 26:18ff. has it, the entrance to the tabernacle faced toward the east. Therefore, for the same reason, we should now likewise adore toward the west if a fixed place is required for adoring.

But contrary to this: Isaiah 56:7, as quoted in John 2:16, says, “My house shall be called a house of prayer.”

I respond: As has been explained (a. 2), in adoration the interior devotion of the mind is the main thing, whereas what belongs exteriorly to corporeal signs is secondary. Now the mind apprehends God interiorly as not enclosed in any place. But corporeal signs must exist in a determinate place and position. And so a fixed place is not required—in the sense of being necessary for it—for adoration in its main element (*principaliter*), but it is required in accord with a certain fittingness, just as other corporeal signs are.

Reply to objection 1: By these words our Lord was foretelling the cessation of adoration both (a) according to the rite of the Jews, who adored in Jerusalem, and (b) according to the rite of the Samaritans, who adored on Mount Garizim. For both of these rites ceased with the coming of the spiritual truth of the Gospel, according to which “sacrifice is made to God in every place,” as Malachi 1:11 puts it.

Reply to objection 2: A fixed place is chosen for adoration not for the sake of the God who is being adored—so that He might be confined, as it were, to that place—but rather for the sake of those who are adoring. There are three reasons for this:

First, because the place is consecrated, with the result that those who pray there maintain spiritual devotion in order that they might better be heard—as is clear in the case of Solomon’s adoration (3 Kings 8).

Second, because of the sacred mysteries and other signs of sanctity that are contained in the place.

Third, because many adorers come together, with the result that the prayer is better heard—this according to Matthew 18:20 (“Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am in the midst of them”).

Reply to objection 3: It is with a certain fittingness that we adore toward the east. First, because of the indication of God’s majesty that is made manifest to us in the movement of the heavens, which is from the east. Second, because, as we read in Genesis 2:8 (according to the Septuagint translation), Paradise was established in the east and so we are, as it were, seeking to return to Paradise. Third, because of Christ, who is the light of the world, and who is called the ‘Orient’ (Zachariah 6:5), and “who ascends above the heaven of heavens to the east” (Psalm 67:34), and who is expected to come from the east as well—this according to Matthew 24:27 (“As lightning comes out of the east, and appears even unto the west, so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be”).