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## **Bowing Down in Worship**

When we want to talk about worship, we usually start with what the Bible says about it. The Bible uses several different words to talk about worship, including words that mean “to bow down” and “to serve.”

But before the Bible, or Israel, or humanity, or anything in all creation existed, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit existed in a relationship that was expressed by their bowing down and serving each other. The Divine Persons of the Trinity have forever, and will always, serve each other, bow down before each other, and tell each other how much they love and adore each other. The Divine Persons are constantly worshipping each other.

So, worship is an inherent property of the Triune Life itself. The Father, Son, and Spirit worship each other. Their worship is similar to the way that we might describe a married couple who are so in love that they “worship” each other. This is the worship that flows from mutual love, mutual respect, and mutual adoration. This is the worship that gazes longingly at the other.

The worship of the Trinity has very little in common with the worship devised by human beings to appease the angry gods of our imagination. For example, the ancient Greeks bowed down before capricious and angry deities that they imagined to be toying with human lives. Is that what is happening in the Triune Life when the Son bows down before the Father or the Father bows down before the Spirit? Of course not. Such an image of worship is a direct contradiction of the Life that Jesus shares with his Father and reveals to us.

Even though this image of worship is not faithful to who Jesus is, it has still influenced Christian thinking about worship. You do not have to go far to find Christian thought about worship that centers on our human, fearful response to the overwhelming holiness of God. It is true that when we first encounter the Triune Life in a new or more immediate way it often evokes a response of terror in our human nature – we might think of Peter saying to Jesus “go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man” (Luke 5:8.) But this response of terror is not the Triune Life, it is the response of fallen human nature to the glorious love and joy of the Triune Life.

Consider John in the first chapter of Revelation. At his first sight of the risen Jesus he is struck with terror and prostrates himself before him. (Rev. 1:17) But notice Jesus’ response to John’s prostration and terror: Jesus places his right hand on John and says “Do not be afraid.”

That is the worship of the Triune Life. It is not a worship rooted in terror of a God who is holy just because he is morally perfect. It is a worship rooted in the adoration and awe of The Three who are holy because their relationship is whole, healthy, perfect, and functional. The terror that our human nature experiences when encountering the Triune Life is like the terror one sometimes feels at a dinner party with people who all seem to you to be smarter, richer, and better looking than you. It is the terror of feeling inadequate.

In response to the cloying, sniveling, self-hating, kind of worship that the gods of our imagination demand, the Father picks us up off our feet, throws his arms around us through his Son

Jesus Christ, and says “do not be afraid.” He embraces us into the loving, adoring, joyful worship of the life that he and the Son have always shared in the Spirit. In the light of the Trinity we understand our bowing down before God to be the bow of respect and mutual love between persons who adore each other.

So, worship is an inherent property of the Triune Life itself and therefore worship is a reality that Jesus is sharing with humanity. Because Jesus is both fully God and fully Human, he is therefore also both “worshiped God” and “worshiping man.” Our human nature, broken and fallen, does not know how to worship and is not capable of worship. This is especially true when we define worship as the adoration and service that the Divine Persons give to each other. All we are capable of doing is hiding in the bushes and barbecuing animals to appease the imaginary god we think is looking to kill someone to satisfy his rage.

Now that the Son has entered our humanity, and raised up our humanity into the Trinity, we no longer have to cringe in fear before our imaginary image of the god we think is out to get us. Because humanity is in Christ and Christ is in humanity, we are now able to participate in the worship of the Triune Life.

Jesus bows down before humanity, serves us, and adores us as the God who loves us. At the same time he bows down before the Father and the Spirit on our behalf, serving the Father and expressing the adoration and love for the Father that we are so incapable of expressing.

This is why we pray in Jesus’ name – and, in fact, carry out all worship in his name – because it is only in and through Jesus’ human nature (his blood and flesh) that any real human worship ever takes place. In his human nature he bows down and worships the Father on our behalf and in his Divine nature he bows down and serves humanity on the behalf of the Father. And it is the Holy Spirit who empowers and enables this relationship, both within the life of the Trinity itself and within the life that Jesus shares with humanity.

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*This article is taken from an online class that Jonathan is teaching with Grace Communion Seminary (GCS) called “The Practice of Ministry.” To learn more about GCS’s online program, or to sign up to take the class during the upcoming fall semester, visit [www.gcs.ambassador.edu](http://www.gcs.ambassador.edu).*