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CHAPTER 16

Worship and Adoration

English dictionaries designate two distinct definitions for the noun *adoration*.

1. The act of worship
2. Profound love or regard

As a religious concept, worship-adoration refers to attitudes and expressions that convey divine veneration, with or without affectionate feelings. Some dictionaries differentiate between deity worship and homage rendered to persons. Worship-adoration should not be confused with love-adoration, which implies fond emotions or affectionate devotion for a person, place, object, interest, feature, creature, or activity. Worship and adoration are synonymous terms in the English language, but only regarding veneration—regardless of love.

Protestant theologians limit expressions of legitimate worship exclusively for God—otherwise it becomes idolatry. Bible translators avoid renditions of *adoration* and *adore*. These words never appear in the biblical text for NAS, ESV, RSV, KJV, or NKJ. The NIV uses *adore* once in the Song of Solomon where maidens express love (not worship) for their beloved.¹ Some ESV Study Bibles add the descriptive heading, “The Bride Adores Her Beloved” before Song of Solomon 2:8.

The “Catholic Encyclopedia” elevates religious service to worship-adoration. Editors define adoration, “In the strict sense, [as] an act of religion offered to God in acknowledgment of His supreme perfection and dominion, and of the creature's dependence upon Him”.² They differentiate adoration from other acts of worship because it “formally consists in self-abasement before the Infinite, and in devout recognition of His transcendent excellence”.

¹ Song of Solomon 1:4 NIV

² Catholic Encyclopedia, <https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/01151a.htm> (accessed 2-21-21)

Published in 1970, 1986, and 1991, the “New American Bible” (NAB) reflects a synonymous view of worship and adoration. It provides biblical text for the only English-language Lectionary authorized by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) for Mass in the United States.³ Renditions of *adore* appear 216 times and *adoration* four times in the NAB. The 2010 “New American Bible—Revised Edition” (NABRE) eliminates the use of *adore* and *adoration* in favor of *worship* and *bow down*, except twice in reference to idolatry where *caged* is rendered *adore(s)*.⁴ The Roman Catholic Church has not yet authorized the NABRE for Lectionary use in the United States.

Based on the Latin Vulgate, the Counter-Reformation “Douay-Rheims Bible” replaces *worship* and *bow down* with renditions of *adoration* and *adore*. This traditional and more conservative 16th Century Catholic translation also reflects a synonymous view. It replaces worship terminology with renditions of *adore* throughout Jesus’ conversation with the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s Well.

*You **adore** that which you know not: we **adore** that which we know. For salvation is of the Jews. But the hour cometh and now is, when the true **adorers** shall **adore** the Father in spirit and in truth. For the Father also seeketh such to **adore** him. God is a spirit: and they that **adore** him must **adore** him in spirit and in truth.* (John 4:22-24 DRB)

Likewise, the 1985 “New Jerusalem Bible”, popular with Roman Catholic readers, renders Psalm 29:2 and Psalm 96:9 as, “...**adore** Yahweh in the splendour of his holiness...”, and Psalm 86:9 and Revelation 15:4 as, “...*all nations will come and **adore** you...*”.

Roman Catholic and Orthodox faith traditions promote worship-adoration directly and indirectly to God, and in various degrees to others. They distinguish worship-adoration in three Latin categories: *Latria*, *Dulia*, and *Hyperdulia*.⁵

1. *Latria* refers to worship-adoration due to God alone; it’s considered a consecrated theological term.
2. *Dulia* refers to secondary worship-adoration paid to Canonized and Acclaimed Saints, angels, martyrs, sacred relics, and sacred images.

³ <https://www.usccb.org/faq/questions-about-lectionary> (accessed 2-16-2021)

⁴ Isaiah 44:15,17

⁵ Catholic Encyclopedia, <https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05188b.htm> (accessed 2-16-21) and The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, 5th Edition (accessed 2-16-21)

3. *Hyperdulia* refers to a higher distinction of worship-adoration paid to the Virgin Mary.

Editors for the “Catholic Encyclopedia” claim “adoration” is the best translation from our language for the Greek noun *latreia* (Latinized as *latria*). They confine *Latria*’s application to “incommunicable adoration which is due to God alone.”⁶ They also highlight both internal and external elements, asserting that without spirit-and-truth worship from within, outward expressions are pantomime and falsehood spectacles.⁷

Classical Greek literature considered *latreia* “the state of a hired servant” and Plato used *latreia* to indicate “divine service”.⁸ The “Theological Dictionary of the New Testament” defines *latreia* as, “any service or ministration: the service of God; the service and worship of God according to the requirements of the Levitical law”.⁹ This definition confines *latreia* worship to Old Testament legal duties.

The New Testament Church has replaced Jewish Temple service stipulated by Levitical Law with religious rituals, liturgies, and sacraments. Some faith traditions emphasize more than others, the sacred service of saying and doing religion as a synonymous act of worship-adoration. Biblical narratives consistently describe Old and New Testament worshipers falling or bowing facedown to venerate God in heaven and earth—without implicating love. When defining adoration, dictionaries, Greco-Roman literature, secular and some religious encyclopedias seldom emphasize this demonstrative response consistent with the biblical precedent for worship.

Semantic Shift

The “Online Etymology Dictionary” traces the semantic progression of *adore* since the 10th Century.¹⁰ This transitive verb comes from the Late Latin, *ad*, which means “to” and *orare*, which means, “speak formally or pray”. In Classical Latin, *adōrāre* meant, “to speak formally, to beseech, or to ask in prayer”.¹¹ It does not suggest homage, reverence, veneration, love, or affection. However, its root extends to an Old French word, *aorer*, which means, “to adore, worship, praise”.

⁶ Catholic Encyclopedia, <https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09036a.htm> (accessed 2-17-21)

⁷ Catholic Encyclopedia, <https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/01151a.htm> (accessed 2-21-21)

⁸ Aesch., “Prom.,” 966 and Plato, “Apol.,” 23 B

⁹ Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, <https://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/greek/nas/latreia.html> (accessed 2-17-21)

¹⁰ “Online Etymology Dictionary” <http://www.etymonline.com> (accessed 1-15-2011)

¹¹ Ibid (accessed 1-15-2011)

During the late 1500's, *amour*, meant, "to pay divine honors to", then near 1600, "to honor very highly". By the 1880's this source claims that a "weakened sense" emerged when its definition adopted the notion of affection, "to be very fond of". Unlike God's *agape* love, love-adoration depends on preferences and conditions. It lends itself to compulsive reactions, similar to idolatry, and accommodates subjective feelings, similar to infatuation.

The verb *adore* has evolved to hold a two-part distinction in meaning.¹² The first part, emphasized by Roman Catholic, Anglican, and Orthodox doctrine, means to venerate God in worship. The second part appears to be the result of a 19th Century semantic shift where *adore* began to reflect a sense of fond affection, admiration, and devotion.

This dual meaning complicates the usefulness of adoration and *adore*. By the 20th Century, someone might adore God with reverent worship while another person might lavish their affection on a cute little puppy—because of its adorable composure. God's glorious splendor and a puppy's cuteness do not qualify for adoration in the same way.

Roman Catholic doctrine employs the noun *adoration* for two additional applications. *Eucharistic Adoration* formally venerates the sacramental bread used for Holy Communion. The word *Adoration* also refers to a method for "electing a pope by the expression of homage from two thirds of the conclave" of Cardinals.¹³

According to the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (ISBE), adoration incorporates both subjective sentiments and outward expressions into acts of worship. ISBE asserts that, "Though this word never occurs in [Protestant] English Versions, it represents aspects of worship which are very prominent in the Bible."¹⁴

Previous Chapter: Worship and Love

Next Chapter: The Father's Quest for Worshipers

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¹² The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, 5th Edition, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company, 2021, <http://merriam-webster.com/dictionary> (accessed 2-21-21)

¹³ Webster's Revised Unabridged Dictionary, 1996, 1998 MICRA, Inc

¹⁴ International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, <http://www.bible-history.com/isbe/A/adoration/> (accessed 5-1-07)