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## CHAPTER 32

### A Conflicted Stigma

When the Truth about God appeared in person, an unlikely entourage spent their wealth and risked their lives to worship Him. Matthew, a redeemed tax collector, describes the first humans outside of heaven to worship Jesus. Before offering gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh, magi *“from the east”* (literally, from the rising) fell facedown, venerating Him as *“King of the Jews”* and as *“Messiah”*.<sup>1</sup> After entering the house where He stayed, they

*saw the Child with Mary His mother; and they fell to the ground and worshiped Him. (Matthew 2:11 NAS)*

With astrological insight based on prophetic revelation, this caste of Zoroastrian priests took the lead in worshiping Jesus—and they worshiped Him according to heaven’s facedown precedent. Our Heavenly Father found pagan experts offering the same homage on earth that Jesus receives in heaven. Except for those filled with unclean spirits, the Bible rarely mentions other persons or groups offering Jesus this gesture of reverence before His resurrection.

In three instances, the New Testament mentions worship or bowing prior to Jesus rising from the dead. Once, several awestruck disciples worshiped Him in a boat saying, *“You are certainly God’s son”*. Another time, a man healed of blindness worshiped Jesus in an undisclosed way. On a third occasion, a lone Samaritan fell on his face to convey gratitude after Jesus healed him and nine others of leprosy.

After worshiping Jesus, the magi (unstipulated in number) returned home in stealth because God warned them in a dream to avoid King Herod. They either

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 2:2, 4-6 NAS

travelled from Bethlehem to Persia (Iran), Babylon (Iraq), or perhaps, further east. Justin Martyr (AD 100 to 165) claims they came from Arabia.<sup>2</sup> John Chrysostom (AD 347–407) suggests they were Makreb kings from Yemen. Other experts propose points of origin from Africa, possibly Egypt. Nonetheless, five centuries later, the general region from which the Magi travelled converted en masse to Islam (622-661 AD).

Devoted Muslims bow daily during five scheduled prayer times: predawn, noon, afternoon, sunset, and evening. They also prostrate themselves when reciting fifteen specified verses from the Koran. Wherever they find themselves, Muslims (perhaps distant relatives of the magi) are required to worship facedown in the direction of the Ka'bah shrine in Mecca, Saudi Arabia. Each year during the Islamic month of Dhu al-Hijjah, two to three million followers of Muhammad (estimates from the first decade of the 21st Century) gather there for a Hajj. This major pilgrimage represents a once in a lifetime obligation to bow and pray at Islam's holiest site—al-Masjid al-Haram. Throughout the year, worshipers of Allah may also perform a minor pilgrimage or Umrah. Day and night prostration reinforces Islam's reputation for bowing facedown.

While followers of Christ rarely show their Heavenly Father worship on earth as it is in heaven, followers of Muhammad bow like clockwork. By projecting an image of scripted submission and regimented obeisance, they have stigmatized this heavenly gesture on earth.

Islamic fundamentalists are just one truth away from adjusting the direction of their bow and the passion in their heart toward Jesus. After recognizing the truth about their maker and redeemer, they too can receive His grace, embrace His mercy, and engage His love. Perhaps a new breed of enlightened Muslims will pick up where the magi left off, worshiping Jesus with facedown veneration on earth as multitudes do in heaven. Eventually, *“All the earth will worship [shachah]”* Him with informed reverence.<sup>3</sup>

Bowing reflects a universal sign of veneration and respect. Practically every civilization understands this body language and its implied meaning. Throughout

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<sup>2</sup> Dialogue with Trypho, chapters 77, 78, and 88; translated by Marcus Dods and George Reith. From Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. 1. Edited by Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe. Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885. Revised and edited for New Advent by Kevin Knight. Available online March 2010 (<http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/01286.htm>)

<sup>3</sup> Psalm 66:4 NAS

history, imperial dignitaries have demanded the worship that God deserves. In ancient Babylon (modern Iraq), King Nebuchadnezzar II ordered every ethnic group and nation under his domain to worship facedown before an image of gold. A royal herald issued the command in a loud voice saying:

*“As soon as you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes and all kinds of music, you must **fall down and worship** the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. Whoever does not **fall down and worship** will immediately be thrown into a blazing furnace.”<sup>4</sup>*

After hearing the sound of music, everyone except a few courageous Hebrews *“**fell down and worshiped** the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up”*.<sup>5</sup>

### **A Cultural Deterrent**

Bowing in worship has become a counterfeit reality on a massive scale. When false worshipers hijack this heavenly gesture, they crash it into the ground. Coerced compliance subverts our response and poisons the social standard. Extreme radicals are exerting an intimidating stigma as they invade our comfort zone.

Most peace-loving citizens, especially in the west, would rather accommodate their dignity with a respectable song instead of an embarrassing bow. Notwithstanding, Roman Catholic worshipers bend one knee in their most solemn form of bowing, i.e., genuflection.<sup>6</sup> They consider bending from the waist a profound bow, which represents the next most solemn form. The simplest bow involves inclining the head slightly forward and down. Along with their Protestant brothers and sisters, Catholic supplicants kneel occasionally during prayers as a sign of reverence and humility. Rarely however, do Christians prostrate themselves publicly in the western church.

Because multitudes in heaven know the truth about God, they ignore unpalatable stigmas on earth. The heavenly host shows no reticence to bowing before the Holy One seated upon His throne. As we propel our faith into the future, facedown reverence will materialize on earth as it is in heaven. Every ethnic group from every nation will eventually recognize the truth about Jesus and bow facedown to venerate Him.

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<sup>4</sup> Daniel 3:5-6 NIV

<sup>5</sup> Daniel 3:7 NIV

<sup>6</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genuflection> (11-17-2010)

*“All nations whom You have made shall come and worship [shachah] before You, O LORD, And they shall glorify Your name.” (Psalm 86:9 NAS)*

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