

Good Enough to be God: Biblical Worship and Anselm's Formula

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ABSTRACT: This paper develops a view of worship according to which worship is a certain sort of *life orientation*, and argues that according to the Bible, the worship of God normatively is *non-instrumental, comprehensive, unconditional orientation of one's life toward God*. It then develops a biblical view about how this sort of worship of God is *possible*. Finally, it argues that it is *good* to worship God in this way only if God is an Anselmian being—*that than which nothing greater can be conceived*—and suggests that the God of the Bible, the Psalms in particular, is in fact an Anselmian being.

1. Introduction

There is a message about the worship of God expressed in Jewish and Christian scriptures, a message which says that the activity of worship ought to be coextensive with the activity of living—put more colloquially, one's whole life ought to be lived as one big act of worship. Moreover, the strength of this *ought* is as strong as *oughts* come: it is *unconditional* and *comprehensive*. By *unconditional* I mean that there is nothing which can rightly demand of us anything contrary to the worship of God. And by *comprehensive* I mean that every activity of one's life ought to be worshipful. Thus, when it is time to worship, nothing more pressing ever arises which would make it permissible not to worship; and it is always time to worship. In the following I have two main goals. First, I want to offer some reasons for thinking that biblical worship normatively is just this all-encompassing life activity (section II), and also make plausible the thought that it is physically and psychologically possible for humans to worship something unconditionally and comprehensively, despite the fact that many worthy things demand our attention (section III). Second, I will argue that there is a way God must be like if we take for granted that worshipping God unconditionally and comprehensively is a good or right or morally obligatory way to live (section IV). The way God must be like, I argue, is to be found in Anselm's *Proslogion*: God is that than which nothing greater can be conceived.

2. Worship as Life Orientation

Worship of God involves a giving of oneself to God, not this or that of one's own, or now and then giving oneself to God, but always giving all of oneself. We are to love the Lord our God with *all* our heart, soul, mind, and strength (Deut. 6:5). The Lord requires that we do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God (Mic. 6:8), not 10,000 steps a day but all the steps everyday. God wants his people to return to him with their *whole* hearts, rending their hearts not their garments (Joel 2:12-13). God desires from his people "*steadfast* love and not

sacrifice, the knowledge of God, rather than burnt offerings (Hosea 6:6).” The Psalmist declares that what God wants is not sacrifice but a broken and contrite heart (Ps. 51:16-17). In the New Testament, Paul tells us to do everything we do as unto God (1 Cor. 10:31), and to offer our bodies to God as a living sacrifice, which is our *reasonable worship* (Rom. 12:1). The biblical witness is clear that we can only fulfill what we might think of as specifically religious duties by offering the whole of our lives to God, unconditionally and comprehensively. But worshipping God in this way is, on the surface at least, extremely difficult if not impossible. We might point to several reasons for this difficulty, but here I want to focus on this: we care about a lot of things besides God, and our sustenance requires us to do many things that direct our attention away from God. Attending to other things besides God does not seem to be idolatrous, or wrong. Yet it also seems to be incompatible with fulfilling an unconditional and comprehensive obligation to worship God.

I want to show that these are not in fact incompatible. My suggestion is that they are not incompatible if there is a plausible way in which our merely natural affections and activities can *partially constitute* worship of God. More colloquially, on my view of what biblical worship of God normatively is, not just our explicitly religious activity (attending services, saying prayers, etc.) but all our activities, are acts of worship. I call this the *life orientation* view of worship.

In the remainder of this section I want to do two things: 1. clarify what this view does, and does not, imply about the nature of worship as such; and 2. add some precision to the view itself, to distinguish the sort of life orientation I have in mind from other sorts of life orientation.

1. First, I am not trying to defend any claims about what worship as such is. Instead, I’m primarily interested in defending a view about how, according to the Bible, God is to be worshipped.¹ That said, the life orientation view of worship does imply several things about the nature of worship as such, even though it does not yield a real definition or analysis of worship as such. Among these implications it is worth discussing three. (i) I think that some forms of life orientation toward things other than God really are worship of those non-divine things. (ii) Given (i), it follows that worship need not involve some belief or acknowledgment on the part of the worshipper that the object of worship is “massively greater” than the worshipper (Murphy 2017, 131), or “exceeds” the worshipper “very vastly” (Findlay 1948, 179), as some accounts of worship require. And (iii), given that a whole life can be, on my view, one big act of worship, it follows that the range of what can count as a worshipful attitude or action is far greater than the range we most commonly associate with the category of specifically religious attitudes and actions, a category which would include familiar concepts like awe, reverence, fear, adoration, praise, and thanksgiving.

Now I will say a little more about (i), (ii), and (iii), in turn. (i) It is possible to have a life orientation toward a creature in a way that constitutes worship of the creature. Some instances of life orientation creature worship are idolatrous, but I don’t think all of them are idolatrous. The example I have in mind is in the service for Holy Matrimony in the 1662 version of the *Book of Common Prayer*. In this rite, the Man is instructed to say to the Woman, “With this ring I thee wed, with my body I thee worship, and with all my worldly goods I thee endow.” It is implicit that worshipping one’s wife in this way is not idolatrous. Likewise implicit is that worshipping one’s wife is not to be done only with the body, as if the man in his interior life could permissively be anti-worshipful so long as his body were doing things for his wife that

¹ I rely on some passages from the Christian New Testament, but these particular New Testament texts do not, as I read them, express any doctrinal commitments about which Jews and Christians disagree.

husbands ought to do. The explicit mention of the body here is meant to suggest faithful presence and action rather than just warm and fuzzy thoughts. His life is to be lived *for her*, oriented toward her, but (somehow) in a way that is meant to be compatible with worshipping God in the unconditional and comprehensive way our religious traditions teach us to worship God.

(i) Other views of what worship is should also be able to concede the possibility of a non-idolatrous worship of a creature. For example, Mark Murphy (2017, 131) says there is a “colloquial” sense of worship in which he worships Thomas Aquinas on account of that philosopher’s overwhelming brilliance. Hugh Burling refers to the same sort of phenomenon as “analogues of worship” (Burling 2019, 360). But Murphy does not imply that he offers to Aquinas what properly belongs to God, and so we can safely assume that his worship of Aquinas is non-idolatrous. Older English usage backs Murphy up: in Shakespeare’s *Much Ado about Nothing* (III.v.18), Dogberry addresses Leonato as “your Worship,” acknowledging his superior social rank without implying that he worships Leonato instead of God. This archaic sense of “worship” is preserved, not quite *à la lettre*, in *Wayne’s World*, when Wayne and Garth bow down before icons of heavy metal and exclaim, “We’re not worthy!” Their words and actions are worshipful, but it has never seemed to me that they were thereby guilty of idolatry.)

(ii) Murphy (2017, 131) thinks that worship can only be extended toward an object which the worshipper takes to be massively greater than himself. J. N. Findlay (1948, 179) thinks that a worshipful attitude is only “fitting where the object revered *exceeds* us very vastly, whether in power or wisdom or in other valued qualities.” But I don’t think that the sort of worship that life orientation can be implies that the object worshipped is (or is taken to be) massively greater than the worshipper. While I happily grant that it is natural for lovers to think and speak about each other in superlatives, the duty of the Man to worship the Woman (in the sense described earlier) holds even if he comes to recognize, or believe, that the superlatives do not really apply to her.

Moreover, some biblical examples of idolatry suggest that there can be a life orientation sort of worship of something not massively greater than the worshipper: Mammon (Matt. 6:24) and one’s own belly (Phil. 3:19). These idols are deceptive because while they can’t really be believed by their worshippers to be massively greater than their worshippers, it is easy for their worshippers to devote their lives to them. No glutton would say that his belly is vastly superior to himself, but he is nevertheless oriented toward its needs and pleasures in a whole-life sort of way. Similarly, a worshipper of Mammon wants wealth so that he can be master of himself, but in giving his life to Mammon he becomes Mammon’s slave and devotee instead.

Finally, Charles Williams (1933) wrote compellingly in *The Place of the Lion* about a lepidopterist who, visited by The Archetypal Butterfly, worships it, “eyes full of plenary adoration, his whole being concentrated on the perfect symbol of his daily concern.” But I don’t see anything either in the novel or in the nature of butterflies to suggest that a worshipful lepidopterist considers butterflies massively greater than himself.

(iii) The life orientation view of worship implies that any attitude or action compatible with a worshipful orientation of one’s life toward an object, can itself be a worshipful attitude or action. For example, groggily preparing coffee for one’s spouse is one aspect of a spouse-oriented form of life (in coffee-drinking households), but there need be nothing solemn or reverential about the action in order for it to count successfully as worship of one’s spouse. Similarly, while attitudes like reverence and awe, and actions like kneeling and bowing, have a special place in a God-oriented form of life, these distinctively religious or cultic attitudes and actions do not exhaust the sorts of actions and attitudes that should constitute the whole-life act of worshipping God.

2. Now it is time to get a little more precise about what sort of life orientation the worship of God normatively is. Clearly, not every sort of life orientation is worship. A fisherman might justly be said to orient his life around tides and weather, without implying that he worships tide and weather. When I was a freeway commuter in Los Angeles it sure felt like my life was oriented around traffic patterns. Wrapped up as their lives are in the circumstances on which they depend for their livelihood, the fisherman and the freeway commuter do not thereby *care* very much for these things. Despite orienting my life around traffic, I did not thereby worship traffic; indeed I positively hated it. And these examples easily generalize. What the examples show is that life orientation, strictly speaking, is not enough to capture either the sort of worship we owe God or the sort of worship that can be extended to a creature.

In addition to an orientation of one's life toward the object worshipped, we need a recognition of the *non-instrumental value* of that object and some sort of connection between that recognition of value and the life orientation. For example, God says to the Israelites, I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt (...*therefore...*) you shall have no other gods before me, etc. (Ex. 20:2-3). The giving of the Law entails a demand that the Israelites' lives are to be oriented toward God. But the giving of the Law also includes a reason why the demand is just: God freed the Israelites from slavery and promised to lead them to a land flowing with milk and honey. And this particular reason yields more general reasons why the Israelites ought to orient their lives around God. Since God delivered the Israelites from slavery, he must either be very good or must favor the Israelites over their oppressors. Since Pharaoh and his gods were powerful, God must be even more powerful. Since God parted the waters and sent food from heaven, God is not constrained by the forces of nature. The commuter orients his life around traffic *only because*, if not, he won't be able to work (and so won't be able to support his family, etc.). Same for the fisherman, *mutatis mutandis*. But it's not like this for the Israelites and God's demand that they orient their lives around him. (Normative) life-orientation toward God is *non-instrumental*: God is the highest good, whereas non-worshipful life orientation (e.g., toward tides and traffic) is *instrumental*. So the worship of God is, we might think, *non-instrumental life orientation*.

Here we've supplied a genus and a difference, so we have the makings of a definition. But this is not yet specific enough. I think that anything that can be accurately described as non-instrumental life orientation really is worship. The by-now familiar example is the Man's licit worship of the Woman. *Pace* Augustine, it seems like a bad description of the moral reality of spousal love to say that it ought to be instrumentally ordered to some higher object of devotion. Like (normative) worship of God, (non-idolatrous worship) of one's spouse has a non-instrumental quality to it.

Further precision comes by way of my earlier characterization of the worship of God as (normatively) *unconditional* and *comprehensive*. A fisherman is justly described as having an instrumental life orientation towards tides and weather, but this orientation is neither unconditional nor comprehensive. Not comprehensive, because not every single thing he does—*qua* man if not *qua* fisherman—is oriented toward tides and weather; and not unconditional, because it's easy to imagine circumstances in which he would forego fishing—even in ideal conditions, even when he needed to fish to survive—to attend to more important matters (e.g., heroically saving a drowning man). Likewise, the Man is justly described as having a non-instrumental life orientation toward the Woman, but even this orientation is neither comprehensive nor unconditional. Ideal spousal love really does call for orienting one's life around one's spouse, but not in every detail, and so is non-comprehensive; and spousal commitment is conditional: abuse and infidelity are plausibly good grounds for ceasing to orient one's life around a spouse.

Here, then, we have a precise-enough account of the sort of life orientation which the worship of God is supposed to be: *non-instrumental, comprehensive, unconditional, life orientation*. I started with the characterization of right worship of God as the orientation of one's whole life toward God. This characterization begs for further precision given *both* (a) perfectly sensible ways of talking about life orientation which no one would want to describe as worship (traffic, tides, etc.) and (b) some plausible ways of talking about life orientation toward a creature which can be construed as non-idolatrous worship. The addition of *non-instrumental* distinguishes the worship of God from non-worshipful life orientations, and the addition of *unconditional* and *comprehensive* distinguishes worship of God from other forms of worshipful life orientations.

(a) and (b) together generate two challenges for the life orientation view of the worship of God. First, they show that the life orientation view needs to be rendered precise enough to distinguish the sort of worship the Bible tells us we owe to God, from other forms of life orientation. I take it that this challenge has been met, and in the remainder of the paper, when I write about the "worship" of God I have in mind just the sort of life orientation I have distinguished in this section. Second, they generate a puzzle how it is possible to worship God in this way, when it is in some cases permissible to have non-instrumental life orientations toward things other than God, and in other cases practically necessary to have instrumental life orientations toward the means of our survival. In the following section I will offer a solution to the puzzle.

3. Worshipping God in Other Things

This puzzle is very similar to what Robert Adams calls "The Problem of Total Devotion." The "really hard question" arising from the Problem, he says, is "whether the sort of maximal devotion to God demanded by theism is compatible with love for anything finite at all" (2002, 185). If, as Deut. 6:5 instructs, we are to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, then it might be hard to see how there can be, as Adams puts it, "any room left in our hearts for the love of anything else (such as our neighbor)" (2002, 185), let alone for an orientation of one's whole life toward anyone else. Adams' solution to the Problem focuses on the attitudes of enjoyment and admiration, and plausibly speculates that it is possible to enjoy and admire one thing *in* another, where each is enjoyed for its own sake, but where the enjoyment of the second is "the stuff from which [the enjoyment of the first] is made" (2002, 194). Applied to the Problem, the solution tells us that God may be enjoyed and admired in finite goods, where the finite good appears to us as enjoyable and admirable in itself, but also as "fragmentary and pointing beyond itself" to the transcendent Infinite Good, thereby occasioning enjoyment and admiration of the Infinite Good.

I want to adapt Adams' solution to the Problem to the present context of worship. The version of the Problem which arises in the context of worship is that it does not seem possible to fulfill the conditions for worship of God while orienting one's life around a creature in the ways that love often invites and morality often demands. On a straightforward adaptation of Adams' solution, we retain his preposition 'in' and say that we can worship God *in* the orientation of one's life toward a creature. To my ear, the preposition 'by' could carry the same semantic load as 'in': we can worship God *by* orienting our lives toward (certain types of) creatures. Whether 'in' or 'by', we should understand the relationship between these types of worship here as a *constitutive* relationship, rather than an *instrumental* relationship. To constitute a thing is to be what it's made of, the "stuff from which it is made," in Adams' phrase. If I

have a bronze ball, I have a ball and some bronze, and the bronze constitutes the ball. So, too, if I worship God in or by some intense devotion to a creature, the worship of the creature constitutes, here and now, the worship of God. Notice there is not strict identity between the bronze and the ball. The bronze might take some other form and be the very bronze it is. So too I might fail to worship God in my devotion to the creature. But the point is that God-worship is a form my creature-devotion really can take on, just as the bronze really can take on the form of the ball.

The Problem of Total Devotion arises not just when we consider the tension between our religious obligations and our legitimate but intense devotion to certain very special creatures such as a spouse or child or dear friend. It arises in a more general way when we consider our need as human beings to be constantly going about the business of life, a business which, on the surface at least, has little to do with religion. Humans are God's favorite beasts but we're beasts all the same, and this means we're rooted in time and place, attached to each other, in need of rest and replenishment, liable to illness and disease. God justly demands unconditional and comprehensive worship, but if we spend all our time in explicitly cultic activities then we won't have many days to worship, and no days at all to be fruitful and multiply. There is perhaps a time and place for all-day religious activity, such as when the walls of Jerusalem had been rebuilt and Ezra presided over public prayer, fasting, and reading of scripture (Neh. 8-9). But this form of religious life literally cannot last very long. Therefore, the Bible directs us to structure quotidian activities in a religious way, allowing our animal lives to become the matter of God-worship instead of a hindrance to or limit on it. Whether sitting or walking, lying down or waking up, parents should speak to their children about God's laws, and write God's laws on their doorposts and gates so that they are visible in all the family's comings and goings (Deut. 6:6-9). And the scope of the law really does cover the whole of life in a fine-grained way—e.g., relationships, diet, hygiene—showing how to conduct every aspect of life and not just its cultic aspects in a God-oriented way.

The New Testament too attests to the potential in quotidian life for being oriented toward God. St. Paul says to the Corinthians, "Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God (1 Cor. 10:31)." According to Paul's teaching, those early Corinthian Christians were not obligated to follow all biblical dietary laws. But this freedom did not mean that quotidian life was no longer to be lived in a God-oriented way. More emphatically, he tells the Romans to "present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your reasonable worship (Rom. 12:1)." Paul goes on in chapters 12-15 to outline an early Christian ethical code focused not primarily on our conduct toward God alone but our conduct toward other people. Life according to that code is, presumably, at least part of the way in which we offer our bodies as "living sacrifices" and so perform that "reasonable worship" Paul has just told us to offer.

We might wonder why offering our bodies as living sacrifices is worship. I think the answer is pretty clear from what comes immediately before Rom. 12:1:

O the depths of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! "For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?"² "Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?"³ For from him and through him and for him are all things. To him be glory forever (Rom. 11:33-36).

² Close paraphrase of Is. 40:13.

³ Possibly a paraphrase of Job 41:11.

Everything that exists, including everything we call our own, exists from, through, and for God. Therefore there is nothing we can offer him which would put an end to our owing God something, since anything we have to offer is already his. We can't satisfy any claim God has on us by giving over just a portion of our time or resources. It is not as though by, say, attending a religious service, we could satisfy our religious debt and then think of the rest of our time as our own. Something analogous to having debt well-characterizes the entire metaphysical situation of any creature which, like us, can know what it is doing and can be held responsible for its actions. But it is a debt that cannot be discharged. Therefore it is appropriate for creatures like us to be in a constant state of giving everything back to God.

It's not obvious how I can give to God what he already possesses. It is easy to see how I can give back to *you* something you already possess. Suppose you lend me your coat and then ask for it back. I can give it to you. Since you lent it instead of gave it, it was always yours, even while I wore it and stored it in my closet. But when I give you back your coat, I no longer have it around to wear. It's in your possession now, not mine. Nor does it make sense to say I'm still borrowing it, if I've given it back. Also, if I hold on to it when you ask for it back, then I fail to return it. But with God, I can't give him everything I owe him in the way I can give your coat back to you. For some things I possess, or tend to think of myself as possessing, such as my hat, it is not so hard to see how they can be separated or alienated from me, even if it is hard to see how God could possess them in a way he doesn't already possess them. (It is just as much God's whether I wear it on my head or give it to a friend or bury it in the ground.) But for other things I tend to think of myself as possessing, such as a life, or a mind, or a will, or a body, it is hard to see how I can alienate these from myself and make them God's possessions, or return them to God so that he relates to them in a way he doesn't already relate to them. Selves and lives just don't seem to be the sorts of things with which I can part. They can be destroyed, of course, but then I would be destroyed too.

That Paul is not asking us to destroy ourselves as an act of worshipping God is clear by the fact that he tells us to make our bodies *living* sacrifices. We are to live in such a way that we are constantly giving back to God everything we have. Since God already possesses everything we have, giving or sacrificing to God *need not* involve being alienated from the thing you give. In these circumstances, then, what counts as giving to God must involve the manner in which we use what we have. In context, following the Pauline ethical code is a reliable guide to what it means to give back to God all that we have. Keeping the code would unite us deeply with others. We would love and honor one another (12:10); we would bless those who persecute us (12:14) and live as peaceably as possible with everyone (12:18); we would obey the laws of the government (13:1) and pay taxes (13:7); we would avoid debauchery (13:13) and pass no judgment on our neighbors (14:13); we would seek to please our neighbor for his good, and to edify him (15:1); and so on. In fact, in keeping the code we would have an intense devotion to our neighbors' good, and especially those neighbors whose goods are more immediately under our influence, such as family and friends. In short, in worshipping God by giving back to God everything we have, we create and sustain the intense bonds which are supposed to give rise to the original Problem of Total Devotion. But notice that we cannot successfully worship God unless we treat other things and other people the way God wants us to treat them. Treating creatures the way God wants us to treat them is one of the ways in which we give to God what is already his. Giving to God what is already his is worshipping God. So by treating others the way God wants us to treat them we worship God. God wants us to treat at least some others in such a way that involve intense devotion or orienting one's

life around them. Therefore we can worship God by being thus intensely devoted to other people.

On the one hand, the sort of worship we owe God is unconditional and comprehensive: all worship all the time. On the other hand, it's hard at first to see how it is possible for creatures like us to offer to anything this sort of worship, God or not. We are frail things full of natural loves for things other than God. The tension between the hands resolves, however, when we consider the way in which Jewish and Christian scripture places every aspect of human living under the scope of divine worship: when we conduct ourselves in the world according to God's laws, we worship God; because these laws cover the whole of life, the whole activity of life is potentially an activity of worship. Failing to realize this potential, at any moment, is, always, a failure to worship God as he ought to be worshipped.

One potential worry here is that acting towards others as God wants us to do is merely necessary but not sufficient for worship. For we can conduct ourselves rightly toward other people but, say, not think about God very much, let alone express thanks or praise toward God. Moreover it seems very challenging to have a conscious God-orientation all the time. This challenge explains why Jews and Christians mark many of their quotidian activities with short prayers, as a way of dedicating them to God, even if they do not expect to be conscious of God during every moment of the activity. A more daunting sort of response to this challenge is to say that a pervasive and conscious God-orientation in all one's mundane activity is sometimes proposed as an achievable goal of religious life. I'm thinking here in particular of Brother Lawrence's *The Practice of the Presence of God*, and Jean-Baptiste Chautard's *The Soul of the Apostolate*. The psychological and physiological possibility of being conscious of God in this way does not entail it is easy to achieve. Nor is a lack of maturity in religious life (in which a person acknowledges the obligation to worship, is motivated to fulfill it, but cannot yet manage to do so perfectly) morally equivalent to other forms of failure to worship God.

Now imagine deliberating about whether to set out on a religious form of life in which you will attempt to worship God in this totalizing way. One sort of question you might ask is, "Is there a powerful and personal creator of the world who has, through people like Moses or Paul, communicated to us that he wants to be worshipped in this way?" But there is a different sort of question you might ask, such as, "Assuming there is such a being, is it good for him to demand that sort of worship, and is it good for me to give it? Might it even be morally obligatory for me to give it?" In the following section I will take up questions of this second sort.

4. Anselm's Formula

So what would it take for it to be a good or right thing to do, to worship God in this unconditional and comprehensive way? We have already considered one sort of answer to this question: Paul appears to explain the reasonableness of our worship of God by appealing to the fact that everything comes from God and is for God's sake (*Rom.* 11:36). On the surface, however, this fact does not seem like the sort of fact which alone would make it reasonable, let alone good or morally obligatory, to worship God unconditionally and comprehensively. I don't mean this in criticism of Paul and ultimately I think further scriptural and philosophical reflection could take us from the apparently value-neutral fact about God's causal origin of the world, to value-laden facts about what God has to do with how we should live our lives. But instead of following this path I want to consider a value-laden description of God, which comes from Anselm. The advantage of value-laden descriptions of God is that they make

manifest why we should live our lives in a God-oriented way. And Anselm's in particular makes manifest why we should worship God in the way I have so far argued the Bible bids us worship God.

In the Prologue of *Proslogion* Anselm tells us of his desire to find a "single argument" which will establish all on its own that God exists.⁴ But he wants more from this single argument. In addition to God's existence, he wants it to show "that God is the supreme good, who depends on nothing else, but on whom all things depend for their being and for their well-being; and [to show] *whatever we believe about the divine nature*." In Chapter 2, he addresses God, asking for understanding that "you exist as we believe you exist, and that you are what we believe you to be." The famous description immediately follows: "we believe that you are something than which nothing greater can be thought" (*aliquid quo nihil maius cogitari possit*). The formula is not totally original to Anselm. Augustine said (*De Moribus* II.11.24, PL 32, col.1355) that God is that than which nothing better can exist or be conceived (*quo esse aut cogitari melius nihil possit*). And Boethius after him wrote (*De Cons. Philos.* III.X.25-27, Loeb ed., 276–277) that nothing better than God can be conceived (*Nihil deo melius excogitari queat*). There is little difference between these predecessors and Anselm's own, more famous formula. But whereas Augustine and Boethius arrived at their formulae by reflecting on what follows from the identification of God with the Good, Anselm arrives at his formula by distilling or summarizing the picture of God he finds in scripture, and the Psalms in particular. This feature of Anselm's formula helps us to see the significance of the formula to our question about what God must be like for it to be good to worship him as the Bible bids us.

Proslogion 1 reveals an already-committed religious worshipper, someone who already knows he ought to orient his whole life around God, wants to do so, and is therefore dismayed by his own failure to live in an unconditionally and comprehensively God-oriented way. He acknowledges God to be the source of all human happiness, and distance from God the source of all misery. He is among the children of Eve who, through their sinfulness, have become miserable and find it difficult to seek God. He longs to return to God, but God dwells in "unapproachable light." This makes the return journey difficult:

How am I to approach an unapproachable light? Who will lead me into it, so that I can see you in it? And by what signs am I to seek you? Under what aspect? I have never seen you, O Lord my God; I do not know your face.

In light of this predicament, Anselm asks God,

Teach me how to seek you, and show yourself to me when I seek. For I cannot seek you unless you teach me how, and I cannot find you unless you show yourself to me.

If God grants him what he asks, Anselm believes he will enjoy every good thing. His sighs of despair will turn to hopeful breathing; his bitter desolation will become sweet consolation; his hunger will be satisfied; his poverty will come to an end; now bent double, his back will be straightened; from the heavy burden of his sins he will be freed; and so on.

From these quotations and summary of Chapter 1 we see Anselm doubly dismayed: by his lack of understanding of God, and by his lack of the sort of complete well-being he believes

⁴ All quotations of *Proslogion* are taken from Anselm, *Basic Writings*, trans. Thomas Williams (Hackett, 2007). Latin references are drawn from *tomus I, volumen I* of Schmitt's edition of Anselm's *Opera Omnia*.

he would enjoy if he were related to God as he knows he ought to be related to God. But there is a certain tension in this dismay. On the one hand there is a confession of ignorance about God; but on the other hand there are many assertions about what God is like and how we ought to relate to God. In fact, he knows enough about God to make his whole life about God, bidding his “whole heart” to say to God, after the Psalmist, “I seek your face; your face, Lord, do I seek (Ps. 27:8).” But if he really were ignorant, you would not expect such confidence either that he ought to seek to understand God, or that it would be good for him to find God.

The quotation from the Psalm is the hint for resolving the tension. Chapter 1 of *Proslogion* is saturated in Scripture. In his translation of *Proslogion*, Thomas Williams counts eighteen references to Scripture of which sixteen are taken from the Hebrew Bible and thirteen from the Psalms (Anselm 2007, 79-81). Through Scripture, and the actual religious life in which he encountered Scripture, Anselm has gained a certain vision about what God is and how human beings ought to relate to God. That vision involves a total commitment of the whole of one’s life. Anselm’s “single argument” to establish “whatever we believe about the divine nature,” is intended, I suggest, to be an argument which yields God *qua* God-of-the-Bible, that is, God as the one who is worthy of unconditional and comprehensive worship.

What would it take for something to be worthy of that sort of worship? It is not enough to be the greatest thing; it must be the greatest *conceivable*. To see that it is not enough to be merely the greatest thing, consider two problems which arise on the assumption that being the greatest thing makes something good enough to be God. The first is *the problem of merely conditional worship*. Suppose we are confident there is something, x , which is the greatest existent thing, but we are unsure whether x is unsurpassably great. We might wonder, for example, whether something greater than x might come into existence later on. In the midst of this uncertainty, our worship of x could only be conditional: were we to become confident there is something better than x , we ought to worship it instead. The conditional nature of our worship of x would make it psychologically difficult, and probably morally problematic, to be wholeheartedly committed to x . How could we love x with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength without confidence that nothing is more lovable than x ?

The second is *the problem of not being good enough*. Suppose we are confident that x is the greatest existent thing. But suppose we also have some reason to think that x is just not that awesome. In this situation it would be appropriate to treat x as godlike in various ways, proportionate to x ’s excellence. We might delight in the goodness of x , such as it is. But since x is just not that awesome, we would not be obliged to orient our whole lives around x , and it might even be wrong to do so. For example, being mistaken about moral matters is consistent with being better than a human but of limited awesomeness. Suppose x were a personal being who, being mistaken about some aspect of moral reality, commanded humans to act in morally bad ways. It would be wrong to follow x ’s commands. But we, acknowledging x ’s mistake, could consistently rightly refuse to follow x ’s commands while continuing to acknowledge the overall superiority of x .

To be sure, if something exists and is that than which nothing greater can be conceived, it is thereby the greatest existent thing. But being unsurpassably great also makes something worthy to be worshipped as God; here we have neither the problem of merely conditional worship nor the problem of not being good enough. It is logically impossible that there is anything better than that than which nothing greater can be thought, so there is no concern about a possibly more excellent being to whom we must, if we discover it exists, transfer our worship. Also, that than which nothing greater can be thought cannot make mistakes or be

defective in any way, so there is no concern that in worshipping it unconditionally and comprehensively we are giving it more than it deserves.

According to Charles Hartshorne (1965, 3), “Anselm’s Discovery” is that the existence of God is a logical or analytic truth. I want to suggest, in closing, that “Anselm’s Other Discovery” is at least as important an achievement as the first. This Other Discovery is the full significance for Judeo-Christian worship of God of the description of God as that than which nothing greater can be thought. This verbal formula economically expresses “whatever we believe about the divine nature:” it is only implicit in scripture, but it sums up in one line everything the Bible teaches about God, it explains why God is owed unconditional and comprehensive worship, and, oh, by the way, it supplies the first premise of one of the most powerful arguments for God’s existence ever formulated.

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