

Anselm's *Cur Deus Homo*: A Meditation from the Point of View of the Sinner

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Elements in Anselm's Cur Deus Homo point quite differently from the usual view of it as the locus classicus for a theory of Incarnation and Atonement which exhibits Christ as providing the substitutive revenging satisfaction for the infinite dishonor God suffers at the sin of Adam. This meditation will attempt to bring out how the rhetorical ergon of the work upon faith and conscience drives the sinner to see the necessity of the marriage of human with divine natures offered in Christ and how that marriage raises both man and creation out of sin and its defects. This explanation should exhibit both to believers, who seek to understand, and to unbelievers (primarily Jews and Muslims), from a common root, a solution "intelligible to all, and appealing because of its utility and the beauty of its reasoning" (1.1).

Anselm's *Cur Deus Homo* is the *locus classicus* for a theory of Incarnation and Atonement which exhibits Christ as providing the substitutive revenging satisfaction for the infinite dishonor God suffers at the sin of Adam (and company).¹ There are elements in it, however, which seem to point quite differently from such a view. This meditation will attempt to bring further into the open how the rhetorical *ergon* of the work upon "faith and conscience"² shows something new in this Paschal event, which cannot be well accommodated to the view which makes Christ a scapegoat killed for our sin.³ This *ergon* upon the conscience I take—in what I trust is a most suitably monastic fashion—to be more important than the theoretical theological shell which Anselm's discussion with Boso more famously leaves behind. That is to say, as is true in Plato, the dialogue's effect/work upon the soul or conscience is more important than any particular intellectual position defended in the dialogue. This reading will show how the aim of this dialogue, for Anselm, is in line with that of his more famous meditations—

¹ The summary preceding Anselm's works in Fordham University's on-line "Medieval Sourcebook" is a good indication of the general acceptance of this view (available at <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/anselm-intro.asp>). Unless noted otherwise, for *Cur Deus Homo* (CDH), I will be using the translation by Sidney Norton Deane in *St. Anselm: Proslogium; Monologium; An Appendix in Behalf of the Fool by Gaunilo; and Cur Deus Homo*, noted in the text by book and chapter of that edition.

² In responding to Gaunilo, Anselm appeals to his fellow monk's "faith and conscience" that he understands Anselm's phrases in *Proslogion*. That whole book aims to arouse us insignificant readers to "abandon [ourselves] for a little to God, and rest in him:" a not unfitting phrase to summarize the aim of monastic life. See *Anselm: Basic Writings*, edited and translated by Thomas Williams (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2007); quotations in this note are from Anselm's "Reply to Gaunilo," and "Preface" to *Proslogion* respectively.

³ Several scholars have recently pointed to the rhetorical work of the dialogue as a matter of significant weight. See Bernd Goebel and Vittorio Hösle, "Reasons, Emotions and God's Presence in Anselm of Canterbury's Dialogue *Cur Deus Homo*," *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 87 (2005): 189-210. Eileen Sweeney ends her fine discussion of *Cur Deus Homo* in *Anselm of Canterbury and the Desire for the Word* (Washington DC: CUA, 2012) with a problem and a suggestion: the problem is that Anselm's construction of CDH "leads to a distorted emphasis on Christ's death" (301). The suggestion is to read CDH next to Anselm's *Meditation on Human Redemption* (MHR), which emphasizes God's design to raise human nature (302). This is an attempt to read that end through CDH, but from within.

Monologion and *Proslogion*: to return us to our own (monastic) meditations upon Christ with greater fervor and clarity.

The title question arises, however, as Anselm is leaving the monastery for the greater world; it is one which many unbelievers consider an objection to Christianity *tout court*, as well as one which believers seek to understand (CDH 1.1). The unbelievers Anselm must have in mind would be Jews and Muslims, with whom Christians share a belief in the unapproachable holiness of God. Thousands of years of Jewish practice and teaching have grown a deep tap-root regarding this from the seed of Abraham; but only one of these trees flowers. Anselm means to show, from this common root, a solution “intelligible to all, and appealing because of its utility and the beauty of its logic” (1.1).⁴ Boso grants that while infidels are unwilling to come to faith without reason, those with faith wish to understand what they believe, so “the object of our quest is one and the same” (1.3).⁵ The forthcoming enquiry, then, will be joint in many more ways than merely between two eleventh century Catholic monks, or between them and us.

As Anselm says, it is difficult to understand why God became man in Christ and died in order to restore human beings to eternal life when it seems the almighty and eternal God might have done so merely by his will (1.1). Surely, the God “who created the universe by a word, could” have corrected the sin of man by another word (1.6). And it is unfitting,⁶ if not impossible, to imagine that the eternal and almighty God should become human and suffer every sort of human suffering: a) from all of humanity—Jews, gentiles, men, women, rulers, servants and the mob; b) in every sort of way—abandonment by friends, loss of reputation, honor, glory, (from king to crucified criminal in a week), all property including even his clothes; c) with sadness, weariness and fear in his soul, and d) pain in every part of his body—head, feet, face and in every sense.⁷ Why go through all that when God might forgive all men bloodlessly (CDH 1.10)?

⁴ R. W. Southern argues that the Incarnation and all its attendant indignities was seen as an immense affront to God’s transcendent majesty, particularly by Jews and Muslims, and that Anselm is certainly aware of Jewish arguments regarding this in writing *CDH*. See R. W. Southern, *St. Anselm: Portrait in a Landscape* (Cambridge, 1990): 197-202. *Cur Deus Homo* is written between the preaching of the First Crusade (1095) and its conclusion (1100) and as Anselm himself is leaving his beloved monastery to enter the stormy greater world as archbishop of Canterbury. As Sweeney notes, whatever the historical references or mediating causes, Anselm’s posing of the question carves “a methodological place from which he can consider the questions he wishes to in rational terms, seeking . . . atemporal necessary reasons” (279). Anselm’s discussion with his fellow monk, Boso, under these historical circumstances is a sort of coming out party for the culture of medieval monasticism. In the next generation there will develop out of the schools a great number of dialogues between Christian and Jew, Christian, Pagan and Jew, Christian, Moslem and Jew. These are indicative of the kind of interaction with the greater world the previous several hundred years simply did not imagine, much less have much occasion for, and from which Anselm himself would prefer to retreat.

⁵ This quotation and the previous I have translated from the Latin; this second is mistakenly placed in 1.2 by Deane.

⁶ The root of this unfitness is undoubtedly birth itself: *inter faeces et urinam nascimur* being an old image even if the phrase’s origin is . . . questionable. I have found numerous people saying it is Augustine, though it cannot be found by a computer search of his extant work; I have also seen references to Porphyry, Bernard of Clairvaux, and Odo of Cluny; tracing its birth more exactly is not attractive to me. It would be most telling if it was first written in Porphyry’s *Adversus Christianos*.

⁷ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, translated by the Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1947), Part 3, q. 46, a. 5.

The importance of this question can hardly be over-stated. For both Jews and Muslims the idea that the Holy, Mighty, Eternally Just and Wise God should unite Himself to humanity is blasphemy; to do so in order to suffer adds stupidity to the charge. Even an atheist would say of this story: “see, that’s just what I mean: the self-contradictions of theists are absolute stupidities, than which no greater can be conceived. If there were an Infinite All-wise All-good Being he wouldn’t join the idiot children in some backwater town, knowing he will get crucified for it—by the idiots themselves. To do so would prove he is neither infinite, nor wise, nor perfect.” As Boso says less colorfully: “that the Most High should stoop to things so lowly, and the Almighty . . . [work] with such toil” (1.8) seems inconsistent with divine power, goodness and wisdom. Even granting the Christian teaching that God does not suffer, though the Man who is Christ does, Boso considers that if God “could not save sinners in any other way than by condemning the just man,” then he is not omnipotent; and if he could, but did not will to do so, he is neither wise nor just (1.8). This sounds perfectly valid: an atheist might use it as an argument proving Christianity is either false or not notably superior to Aztec sacrifice. We also know that the history of this question has, shamefully, been the matter of some division in the body of Christ, which is the church. How is this Passion to be understood as a work of perfect justice, fitting to the Absolute holiness, power, and wisdom of God?

The Ordering Justice which creates the world is owed, by every rational creature, the ordered justice of its upright will; “sin is nothing else than not to render God his due” (1.11). Boso agrees that nothing could be more true, but he is “startled” and “unable to bring any objection” to Anselm’s next move: “He who does not render this honor which is due to God, robs God of his own and dishonors him . . . and, considering the contempt offered, he ought to restore more than he took away;” this more must be “something which could not have been demanded of him, had he not stolen what belonged to another” (1.11). Why is Boso startled? Why does he seem to want to object, but can think of none?

I suggest that it is the idea that a human being “robs God of his own” that would most startle a monastic raised up in the theology of Augustine. For such a one every sin is *contemptus dei* as well as *imitatio dei*, but Augustine understands this contemptuous imitation as feeding upon shadows and so transforming *oneself* into a land of want, but *not* as touching God.⁸ Anselm here presents a view of evil, as it were, from outside the relation—as if we could take a God’s eye view on the relation between God and man. We see the man stealing from God’s tree; we see him get caught. In such cases we take out our scales of justice and ask what must be put in the balance to make up for what has been removed by the human party. We thereby imagine Justice separated from the being of God (as Euthyphro’s dilemma--and first answer--does⁹) and judge His relations to others. The crime here is worse ordinary criminality since it is God’s tree, not any old pear; so, the theft is from one who has given everything to you: How sharper than a serpent’s tooth is an ungrateful child. What return for such pain, suffering or, most particularly,

⁸ See Augustine, *Confessions* 2.6.12-14, 2.10.18.

⁹ Plato, *Euthyphro*, 6e-8b.

disrespect? Anselm then moves away from this external, transcendentally objective view by degrees in what follows.

First he notes that, “it is impossible for God to lose his honor. . . . For either man renders due submission to God of his own will, by avoiding sin or making payment, or else God subjects him to himself by torments even against man’s will, and thus shows that he is lord of man” (1.14). As if God were to say, “You can put the scale right, or I will put the scale right: ya pays yer money and ya takes yer choice.” When Boso asks, since God *ought* to sustain his honor, and his honor *is sustained* in one way or the other, why does He allow it to be violated in the least degree, Anselm seems to make the whole argument disappear: “Nothing can be added to or taken away from the honor of God”; the honor belonging to him “is in no way subject to injury or change” (1.15). Apparently, the child has been shadow boxing with the father whose arms are infinitely longer. God’s impassibility disallows any effect on Him due to the action of man.

God’s honor, like God himself is impassible, not subject to change, neither is there any shadow of turning. What parent would ever take a four-year-old’s fit of pique as actually applying to his own (the parent’s) being? Only, Anselm points out, there is now this: by not choosing as he ought, the rational creature “disturbs the order and beauty of the universe as it relates to himself,” producing “an unseemliness [by which] God *would appear to be deficient* in his management” (1.15).¹⁰ Note the passive subjunctive—a verb form unlikely for the deity, but rather more so for a conditional contrary to fact; note that the disturbance of order in the universe is as it relates *to ourself*—how things *would be seen*, how they would appear. It is not that evil is only an appearance, for there now are real goods lacking in creation, but these tears in Creation make it *seem* as if God’s management is defective. It is not, for (a) the tears are effected by the one who is in the garment and (b) God is not done working. Is God’s honor in play? Can it be in play? Can it be put into play by a finite rational creature? Even angels are unable. We have, however, punched ourselves in the eye and so can no longer see what we were meant to see, nor does the world work so well or beautifully, since we have thrown flesh into the gears.

Having disallowed the problem of God’s honor being really offended, or his power to bring about the beauty of justice in creation being really and determinately destroyed, Anselm continues along in this external view of honor and just payment, beginning with a problem of comparative justice: “Can you think that man, who has sinned, and never made satisfaction to God for his sin, but has only been suffered to go unpunished, may become the equal of an angel who has never sinned?” (1.19). Boso agrees that such a view would be utterly senseless, and that “even the smallest unfitness is impossible with God” (1.20). Upon this confession, Anselm drives Boso to admit that “if in justice I owe God myself and all my powers, even when I do not sin, I have nothing left to render to him for my sin”; and he is reduced to “hope through Christian faith, ‘which works by love’ that I may be saved” (1.20). “But,” Anselm reminds him, “we set

¹⁰ *Deus in sua dispositione videretur deficere.*

aside Christ and his religion as if they did not exist,” in beginning the discussion, and so we should “proceed by reason simply” (1.20).¹¹

The rhetorical situation is now different; from what looked like an objective—even transcendental—investigation of a theological problem relating God to man, Anselm has driven the issue into the personal: “What will become of you then? How will you be saved?” he had asked just before Boso’s confession of hope; but that hope has already been removed, by their earlier agreement, from the argument: we seek necessary reasons. We are in the wilderness; there is no light in the world save what reason can bring. The problem we are facing is not the pretty theological difficulty of God’s honor or creation exhibiting the beauty of God who is justice. Now, Anselm suffers us to measure the depth of problem: “You have not as yet estimated the great burden of sin” (1.21).

The rational being, by virtue of its rationality, is made to know justice and to see God; and, by virtue of its will, it may cling to justice or defect from it in favor of something it prefers more—its own rule over things. Clinging to justice is thus the *raison d’être* of the finite being created with reason; he does honor to both God and himself by so clinging. Through justice any rational being wills to cling to the Eternal Holiness which is the source of all justice—or not. Having been made rational, both angel and man owe God this “sole and complete debt of honor”: to remain upright of will (1.11). In doing so, the rational being remains a participant in that sovereign and common good who is the end of all creation—God himself—and achieves the true purpose of his own existence: community with the All-holy Good. ‘Tis a consummation devoutly to be wished, in fact, the only consummation to be wished, and the only devotion. Consider then what sin is. Anselm presents this case:

If you should find yourself in the sight of God, and one said to you “look thither;” and God, on the other hand, should say: “It is not my will that you should look;” ask your own heart what there is in all existing things which would make it right for you to give that *look* contrary to the will of God (1.21).

Boso rightly sees that true devotion and love for the All-holy would not look, even if all things else should perish because he does not, even if (*per impossibile*) his own salvation depended on his looking away. Though it looks a slight failing, though that slight failing save the universe (or all the kingdoms of this world in their splendor) from immediate destruction, nothing can be so grievous as to look away from the will of the All-holy, from whom all good comes.

¹¹ I wonder if, perhaps, this is not the problem Anselm (by his difference) illustrates most powerfully for contemporary philosophers: what is “reason simply”? Can there be a view from pure reason, a view not rooted in love (or which is not itself an aspect of—as Kant, that late Platonist, will say—the faculty of desire)? Could that philosophy’s problems—or answers—be the real human ones? To what would such a view apply? It would be an instrumentality without an end. Mere instrumental reason is unthinkable, since whatever being thinks it must think of using it for some end—as men invent computers.

Knowing himself to have given such a glance, Boso responds, “This alone would drive me to despair, were it not for the consolation of faith” (1.21).¹² Anselm, looking forward to Luther perhaps, having already reminded Boso that we had agreed we were going to work “sola ratione” (1.20), then retells the story of the Fall, the infection of weakness it brings upon man, the loss of order and spoiling of creation which results, driving Boso further into despair.¹³

Let us continue meditating along in line with Anselm’s leading of Boso. Supposing we have looked away once, can we, even by complete obedience thereafter pay what the All-holy is owed? Can we live up to what *our creation* as rational beings sets as our natural end? Every rational creature owes the All-holy Just One complete obedience through all times and in eternity. This, only rational beings can see; this is the good whose fulfillment is our happy success. So we human beings have a debt we cannot pay—we are lacking a minute of attention (or so), and we know with absolute and infinite certainty that we can’t go back to pay it; we can’t now fulfill our nature. And one more thing—if we love God, *we want to pay it*; and as we love ourselves, *we want our natural fulfillment*.

Boso. To what would you bring me? . . . nothing which you can add will alarm me more.

Anselm. Yet listen.

Boso. I will (1.22). . . .

That’s how things look from our end—infinite and intimately deep distress is the appropriate, and just, and permanent response of each rational creature in this position. But this is merely each one’s personal problem; there is another problem as well; we are but halfway into Boso’s despair.

This second problem is not really another problem, it is the same problem with a slight addition; we might call it the ‘wider view’ of the subjective problem. God creates the finite rational being with a will in order that it might freely join in community with His perfect goodness; we are “made holy in order to choose and love the highest good” (2.1). The first man declines, looks elsewhere, and thereby infects all his progeny with a social disease that weakens their ability to stand in the good will, and through which all the children of man lose possession of their God-ordained property—the happiness of the garden. Even if you reject the idea of inherited original sin, you have committed a repetition of Adam (if not, you can stop reading); thus the great good for which God had ordered *creation fails to come to fulfillment*. Congratulations. We have, by our looking elsewhere, blotted the perfection of creation; the honor we were meant for is fallen away. Not only can nothing we do make up for the moment of

¹² Sweeney rightly points out that Anselm’s approach puts into abeyance the question of the doctrine of original sin, which Jews and Muslims would reject (285); the problem is personal—have you looked away? Though he retells the story of the fall, it matters not a whit whether sin is inherited, or merely repeated by each on his own account. This strikes me, as frequent in Anselm, as bespeaking high theological daring—and confidence.

¹³ What follows, as Sweeney says, “is excruciating” (290). Cf. Goebel and Höslle, “Anselm offers a true crescendo of emotional unrest” (202); see also 204–206.

looking away in ourselves, the moment of looking away has bollixed creation, having effects far beyond us in the world—can we fix that? And should we have to—in all justice? Do you want to? Anselm is clear about the answer here: the sinner who cannot repay “either wishes to restore, or else he does not wish to. Now if he wishes to do what he cannot, he will be needy, and if he does not wish to, he will be unjust” (1.24). Either way, he will be unhappy. All the pipes are leaking in the brave new world we have set up outside the garden which was our true inheritance. One can see the temptation to just flush it and start all over.

[H]ow then shall man be saved? ... Or with what face shall we declare that God, who is rich in mercy above human conception, cannot exercise this compassion?
(1.24)

Boso, who began the discussion in the role of rational skeptic,¹⁴ is no longer able to sit on such a transcendent judgment stool; neither, I trust, is any of us. We see (and feel), as rational creatures, that no unjust creature can be fully happy; this is not an arbitrary rule, but simply a fact for a finite rational will.¹⁵ If you have reason and will (that is, a nature capable of moral choice not merely the garbage in garbage out causality of a computer program), you see that this is true. Happiness is a completion and fulfillment which is lacking in nothing; but the unjust rational creature understands 1) that it is unjust, 2) that it cannot now perfect itself into justice—even by being perfect henceforth, which—3) he also cannot accomplish by his own will, 4) that it cannot bring to perfection the creation which it has by its own unjust choice made defective and 5) that if the All-holy Just One should bring *creation* back to perfection by his mere word, the defecting *sinner* should not and cannot be part of that re-creation, certainly not a happy part, precisely because he is now morally defective and unsuitable. To speak in more feudal terms: we are no longer capable of our estate, thereby bringing our Lord’s estate into ruin. More comically, the village idiot was not made that way, but volunteered for the position, and now *is* village idiot and has been running the village (all the rest of creation) in the manner usual to village idiots.

Suppose, however, that God is Love, how could the perfect Lover justly solve this problem?¹⁶ *Human nature* needs to both come out of and make up for the idiocy it has made

¹⁴ Sweeney (281) describes him this way regarding the early chapters; such a position is no longer possible for him.

¹⁵ Kant, for instance, sees it in opening the *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*: the sight of a being without a good will yet enjoying unbroken prosperity can never give pleasure to a rational impartial observer—and we are that observer of ourselves. Immanuel Kant, *Grundlegung der Metaphysik der Sitten* (Berlin: Königl. Preussische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1911), 393.

¹⁶ Some readers claim Anselm uses “feudal and monastic illustrations . . . [to] illustrate [his] principle from the facts of everyday life” (Southern, 227). I think he is much more monastic than feudal—whatever that is. I here will switch to our everyday life (and figuratively his), but come back to the “feudal” issue at the end. Anselm’s own life illustrates this marriage theme. He writes from within the marriage which saved him. For he was, in his youth, driven to despair and did not know what to do with himself; when Lanfranc told him to become a monk, he did so; he thought it the worst thing of all to leave, and only did so himself out of obedience: consider here the many and frequent monastic commentaries on the Song of Songs. This idea of the intimate unity of man with God is more clear in Anselm’s later “Meditation on Human Redemption,” where, addressing Christ, he says, “You called me by a new name, which you gave me from your name. . . . From then on you accepted me into your care so that nothing could harm my soul against my will” (*The Prayers and Meditations of Saint Anselm*, translated by Sr. Benedicta

itself into—though of course it is incapable of doing either now. On the other hand, *God* could easily correct the problem with creation, though, as we look at the situation objectively, correcting the problem requires the destruction of the idiot who is *no longer fit for his place* in it. Instead, God marries the village idiot. The eternal, all holy God marries his nature to the finite rational embodied human nature, and the two natures become one person. As all marriages, this one too says one thing clearly: I love you, I will share all the good I am capable of with you. Within the family of the idiot children such promises sometimes don't mean much, and (God knows) we are not very dependable even with all the good of Creation on the table, but for the eternal all holy God to say it—well, I am just struck dumb by the thought. But this is not merely a story of some lucky idiot marrying above her station; even the idiot—waking up from the stupor of the wedding party—remembers the five things about herself that every finite rational being knows. There is nothing lacking in the wedding partner, but there are all kinds of lack in herself and creation which she has caused, which she cannot correct, and for which she cannot make up.

So the groom leads her into, and shows her *in his person*, what must be done: first of all, perfect obedience to ordering justice, though it lead through torture and death to the loss of everything, and all the while not considering it loss, for the All-good and All-holy is what you love above all—as is only just. Nor is it loss for the Bridegroom to give up everything for the bride; the groom who so gives himself thinks it honorable, just and good to do so. Moreover, “this one,” not having participated in sin, may give up something that is not naturally required of him and that cannot be taken without his will; he may give up his life.¹⁷ He can't be killed, since not having participated in that which causes our disease he has not that weakness (as we did not have it by nature, but now have it due to defection). That act—giving up his life for the beloved in following the All-good—is infinitely superior to anything unfallen Adam could have done. Had he stayed merely obedient Adam would have held continuous life; that would have been the natural intended Glory of creation. This one gives up his life out of mercy, for the beloved. Now there is a wholly different glory *in the world*, a glory the human being itself could not have accomplished *even by keeping eternally at one* with the All-holy and refusing ever to look elsewhere. So, after him and in him, is creation any longer defective? Or, has the human defect been turned into a divine glory through this one? More feudally, is there yet a defect in God's estate? And what of our individual lack? Is the estate holder any longer in dishonor or lacking the capability to hold his estate? Our husband carries us; his act, his Passion more than corrects our defecting nature, makes the village idiot a part of (one flesh with) something more glorious than even perfect pre-idiocy obedience could have produced; and in seeing this our love

Ward [New York: Penguin, 1973], 236). As Katherine Rogers points out, this marital and family imagery pervades *CDH* as well. See her “Family Ties in *Cur Deus Homo*” in this issue of the *The Saint Anselm Journal*.

¹⁷ “He allowed his life to be taken from him for the sake of righteousness. This gave an example to others not to reject the righteousness of God because of fear of death. . . . Thus in him human nature gave to God something it had of its own, willingly, and not because it was owed” (*MHR*, 233).

increases (or ought to) for the All-holy.¹⁸ This one's mercy allows us to be remade into justice—if we unite ourselves to him.

That's our story. Now is such a story fitting to the eternal and absolute holiness of God? Well, consider this: by suffering this world-noted Passion, does Christ draw the attention of the idiot children from every corner of the world to consider the work of God? "What a weird story!" they all exclaim. May not all men then, by faith, participate in the holiness of this one who took up their nature—if they will? Whoever wills may accept the marriage proposal. Insofar as by faith we do participate in this holiness, does this exceeding work of holiness more than overcome what is wanting to the glory of creation due to our disobedience? Does God "overlook it" as a human being might overlook an affront, *or has it disappeared*—actually been swallowed up? Insofar as we unite ourselves to this holy passion of our spouse, is not what is wanting to our own obedience overcome by his act? Do we not aid in this swallowing up into glory insofar as we answer "yes, *fiat voluntas tuas.*" May we (as the married hope) grow ever more united with our spouse in sharing of all good? Would not the All-holy love in such a way that allows the beloved to participate herself in her own recreation into holiness? In fact, would that not be what perfect holiness, justice, and mercy would will for the finite free being who could be holy? Would the finite free being not will so for itself? Would that not be the most beautiful way? Therefore this was His will.

To be redundant then, is such an incarnate Passion an act of justice, or answering to justice? Well, is anything lacking to the just ordering of the universe and its ordination to the will of the creator? Not that I can see: the world is redeemed into glory, the finite rational creature united to the All-holy, in justice, through mercy. Is there any injustice among the rewards and punishments meted out to saints and sinners? Not that I can see, for the saints are defined as those who accept the marriage proposal and are being remade in unity with the glorious bridegroom, and insofar as they are remade are welcomed into the happiness of the garden. Those who do not accept are, as they always have been, abandoning themselves to their own devices, the devices of those who look away.¹⁹ Is there any injustice done to Christ in his passion—yes, by all of us sinners; but he knew we were like this, for when we were enemies he gave himself to us—in *person*, uniting himself to us according to nature, despite ourselves, even as we were despising and looking away from that eternal justice which flows from holiness. Does this injustice stand as witness against us? Eternally, unless we desire and accept our continual remaking in and through the marriage, and take upon us its responsibilities, which, with the help of our spouse (who is also God) we hope to carry joyfully into greater joy. Creation has been remade in the beauty of a love which includes perfect justice, not at all contradicting it. "The world can hear nothing more reasonable, nothing sweeter, nothing more desirable" (2:19).²⁰

¹⁸ Cf. *MHR*: "Consider what he was to you, what he did for you, and think that for what he did for you he is the more worthy to be loved. Look into your need and his goodness, and see what thanks you should render him, and how much love you owe him" (235).

¹⁹ "Whosoever wills to come to this grace with the love it deserves, will be saved. And those who despise it are justly condemned, because they do not pay the debt they owe" (*MHR*, 234).

²⁰ *Nihil rationabilius, nihil dulcius, nihil desiderabilius mundus audire potest.*

So then, is the story of the God-man a blasphemous stupidity or stupid blasphemy? Having once sinned, no human being can solve the problem each has generated. But God, “nothing wanting in himself,” began a great good in Creation—“for our sake and not his own,” that is, out of love. In “freely creating man, God, as it were bound himself to complete the good which he had begun: . . . he freely places himself under the necessity of benefiting another, and sustains that necessity without reluctance” (2.3)—as our marriage analogy considers. In order to solve the problem man has got himself into, a God-man is required—to whom all men might be joined. Any other view of the problem of sin does not take it seriously enough, nor does it take what is required for a moral being’s happiness seriously enough.²¹ Our story may not be true, but it is what is necessary: every finite rational sinner sees that only through marriage to the God-man is happiness (which lacks nothing, *especially not righteousness*) possible for him. It is also a necessary truth that no gospel can be sweeter, no end more desirable. Therefore, abandon all hope, or enter here.

Even the atheist, being rational, can see what justice is, and where he stands with regard to it. Can he make up for his insufficiency? No; the moment has passed. Are there other such moments? You tell me. Such a one need not fear judgment of course, since there is no god; but one might wonder how serious he is about the importance of justice. Where does it justly fall in the rank of things: before or after one has made sufficient money that one need not cheat or lie? (to consider a remark of Cephalus’ in *Republic*²²). At any rate, the gospel contradicts neither itself nor morality. In fact, it is the opposite of that--this gospel is absolutely necessary for the unhappy rational creature, in the unhappy situation he has reduced himself to: you can see, by reason alone, what is demanded of you. You can see, by reason alone--as Boso did (1.20)--that you have no possible answer. I set before life and death, blessing and curse: marriage or refusal. Choose life therefore.

Does God the Father, then, require the death of his innocent Son to assuage his anger at the damage done by the sin of man? If we ask that question, what kind of God can we be thinking of? Not one who moves us the way in which Anselm has moved Boso; the story from which such a question arises is the story of a different god, not the all holy, just and merciful one—not the God who is Love; and, I think, it does not arise from the point of view of the sinner: it is not a human question, then. Who--or should we say what--then, could be raising it? Perhaps it arises from taking some absolutely transcendental view of the issue—which really isn’t possible for us to take, is it? That is the point of the way Anselm’s questions work on Boso: there are improper ways to raise theological and even philosophical questions. Some cannot be asked from the point of view of the disinterested, objective spectator; someone who takes a disinterested view of their own justice or lack thereof is not “on the way to solving” the problem, but in fact is making it worse. To return to Anselm’s opening problem: Would God’s honor even seem to be impugned any longer? Does he appear deficient in his management?

²¹ Cf. our argument above concerning man’s natural end, pp. 5-7.

²² Plato, *Republic*, 331b.

Finally, we might ask whether or not Anselm's story, having begun by removing the Christ of faith and scripture, arrives at a God-man who can also be found in it. What, for instance, does Christ's prayer in the Garden, that this cup pass from him unless it is not the Father's will, mean? And the remarks in Romans that [God] "delivered him up for us all" (8:32), "setting him forth as a propitiation through faith in his blood, to show forth his righteousness through the passing over of accomplished sins in the forbearance of [God]" (3:25)? I believe our explication lets us see a non-scapegoating way, an other-than-punitive repayment manner, of understanding those lines. What is the father's will except love for his creation, and for the moral creatures within it—the only ones who, made to the image and likeness of God, can also love? This being the case, what cup must any true lover drink? So then, our spouse's love includes a forbearance which accepts all we will do and have done: we are mixing his cup; it is the will of Love to drink it. Through faith in his acceptance of this cup, we join the one who not only showed forth righteousness, but who is righteousness; we are joined to the side of righteousness—as Eve was originally taken from Adam's, as blood and water flowed out from Christ's upon those who tore themselves away. In this way we perhaps accomplish what Anselm suggests in another work: "we ought not so much cling to the impropriety of the words covering the truth so much as be amazed at the propriety of the truth latent under various kinds of verbal expression."²³

The sinner (atheist, Jew, Christian, Muslim, . . .), who has yet in his memory an inkling of All-holy justice, which Anselm's sin story reminds us of and magnifies (as a magnificent magnifies), sees that his position is utterly unsalvageable. God, too, sees it; God wills to save the (seemingly) irrevocably lost, who are incapable even by henceforth perfect obedience to rightly honor the All-holy complete good. He wills to become human; *that man* wishes, on seeing suffering approach, to avoid it, but that *person* has also willed (and wills) perfect obedience to the All holy. Very well, the question repeats itself in us: do we wish to be joined to our true spouse? "The natural desire of safety" makes human nature shrink from such a cup (CDH 1.9). Since obedience leads to suffering, however, that one wills obedient suffering. Why? Out of love for the All-holy above all things, and for his neighbor, whose nature he has taken up and united to his own. Thus the entire Old Law is fully consummated. He has been delivered up, and he delivers himself up, for us all. "Through this . . . he determined to accomplish his exaltation" (CDH 1.9), and with himself and in himself the exaltation of all mankind. If we agree to the marriage, becoming one with him through faith and sacrament, must we not do likewise? And in so joining our spouse, is our own guilt any longer visible? Is the new creation, of which we have become a part, lacking any good originally ordained by the all holy? In fact, is it not more glorious? To one, like Paul, who knows the rigors of the law of the All-holy, this may look like the forbearance of God—but is it not something much greater than forbearance? It looks like our

²³ *De casu diaboli* 1.1: *nontantum debemus inhaerere improprietati verborum veritatem tegenti, quantum inhiare proprietati veritatis sub multimodo genere locutionum latenti*. He is speaking here of cases in which Scripture talks of God as causing evil, causing not to be, leading into temptation—improprieties for the All Good. Consider Augustine's similar explanation that the wrath of God is what we run into when we turn ourselves against the order of Creation, which is mercy in *Confessions* 4.9.14.

sins have been propitiated for—but is it not a much greater event than that? New wine is not fitly received by old wine skins. The Old Law and its righteousness have not the words for this happening. Do we even have the word for it now?