

# New Readings of Anselm of Canterbury's Intellectual Methods

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# Divine Justice, Mercy, and Intercession in Anselm's Prayers

Gregory Sadler

*Perhaps I am presumptuous to speak, but the goodness of you both makes me bold.*<sup>1</sup>



On several counts, Anselm of Canterbury has long been recognized as a boldly innovative thinker of the eleventh and early twelfth centuries. In this paper, specifically focused upon his prayers, it is unnecessary to enumerate the contributions he makes within a variety of different areas of life, thought, and society. It is worth noting, however, not only the range and depth of the topics he grappled with but also the rigorous, even relentless, argumentation involved in his works, including the prayers, through which he elaborates a systematic (though not systematized) perspective.<sup>2</sup> Anselm's innovativeness also pervades the very structure of his works, in which rhetorical composition rarely serves primarily as adornment, and instead reflects and embodies the purposes of his texts. This is perhaps evident nowhere more than in the collection of Anselm's prayers, which break new ground in multiple manners.<sup>3</sup> From within the devel-

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1 *Prayer to St. Mary* (3), trans. Ward, 125 (III. 24). All references to Anselm's prayers here are provided with a shortened title of the prayer, the page number(s) from *The Prayers and Meditations of Saint Anselm with the Proslogion*, trans. Benedicta Ward (London: Penguin, 2006), followed by the volume and page number in Schmitt.

2 For a now-classic viewpoint on whether Anselm develops and relies upon a general system of thought, cf. Dom Jean Robert Pouchet, O.S.B. "Existe-t-il une 'synthèse' anselmienne," *Analecta Anselmiana*, vol. 1 (1969). His conclusion, with which I agree entirely, is that: "Saint Anselm's corpus is not simply an ensemble of juxtaposed monographs touching on the majority of great theological subjects, but rather it takes on, to a certain degree, a character of coordination much more spontaneous than coordinated, in virtue of which we can speak of partial syntheses, or of synthetic aspects, or of the synthetic value of his teaching," p. 8. I would go so far as to say that this Anselmian system is to be found as well running through his prayers, meditations, and letters.

3 For a range of assessments of the functions, innovativeness, and cohesiveness of perspective

oping tradition of private prayers, he adapts traditional Christian narratives and imagery, introjects intensely expressed affectivity, and articulates entire dramatic frameworks that are at the same time entirely expressive of his own personal situation and yet eminently adaptable to other persons. The effect of these prayers is to enfold the petitioner performatively into uncompromising consciousness of the reality of his or her own fallen, damaged condition, and by participation into an economy (or better put, community) in which restoration of the human being can take place, not only directly by divine agency but also through the intercession of the saints.

The aspect of Anselm's prayers that I focus upon here is one that assumes central, indeed architectonic, importance within those early works, but also plays an understandably significant role within Anselm's thought more generally. The theme or issue, expressed in a single phrase, is that of the interplay between divine justice and mercy. Everywhere this issue arises, Anselm is concerned not only with working out an adequate understanding, a rational explanation for a compatibility, rather than contradiction, between justice and mercy, but also with more existential concerns, locating and situating the human person affectively, reflectively, and volitionally, within this dynamic and mysterious framework of justice and mercy. In two earlier papers, I have discussed how Anselm examines and then reconciles seemingly incompatible realities of divine justice and mercy in the *Proslogion*<sup>4</sup> and in the *Cur Deus homo*.<sup>5</sup> As a component of what has developed into a book-length project

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in Anselm's prayers, cf. in particular: R.W. Southern, *Saint Anselm and His Biographer: A Study in Monastic Life and Thought 1059–c. 1130* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), 34–47; Thomas H. Bestul, "Saint Augustine and the Oraciones sive Meditationes of St. Anselm," in *Anselm Studies* 2, ed., Joseph Schnaubelt (White Plains: Kraus International, 1988); Marilyn McCord Adams, "Romancing the Good: God and Self according to St. Anselm of Canterbury," in *The Augustinian Tradition*, ed. Garreth Matthews (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 91–109; Rachel Fulton Brown, "Praying with Anselm at Admont: A Meditation on Practice," *Speculum* 81, no. 3 (2006), 700–733; Benedicta Ward, "Inward Feeling and Deep Thinking," in *Anselm Studies*, Vol. 1, ed. Gillian R. Evans (White Plains: Kraus International, 1983), 177–184, and "Introduction," in *The Prayers and Meditations of Saint Anselm with the Proslogion*, trans. Benedicta Ward (New York: Penguin, 2006); and Eileen C. Sweeney, "The Rhetoric of Prayer and Argument in Anselm," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 38, no. 4 (2005), 355–338 and *Anselm of Canterbury and the Desire for the Word* (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2012), ch. 1.

- 4 Gregory Sadler, "Mercy and Justice in St. Anselm's *Proslogion*," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 80, no. 1 (2006), 41–61. That paper also contains some discussion of justice and mercy in the *Monologion*.
- 5 Gregory Sadler, "Is God's Justice Unmerciful in Anselm's *Cur Deus Homo*?" *The Saint Anselm Journal* 11, no. 1 (2015), 1–13.

examining the paradoxical tensions between justice and mercy throughout Anselm's corpus, this paper focuses exclusively on how justice and mercy figure into the *Prayers*.<sup>6</sup>

This presentation is divided into four parts. The first part introduces the problematic of justice and mercy as found in Anselm's thought, and discusses how the *Prayers* provide a distinctive perspective upon the issue. The second part presents the case of divine justice against the petitioning sinner in Anselm's prayers, setting out the problematic that justice would seem to rule out mercy precisely because of what sin's injustice has effected within the human person. The third part examines several recurring, rhetorically constructed resolutions of the seeming incompatibility between justice and mercy proposed by Anselm within the prayers. The fourth part focuses specifically on the active and appropriate roles human beings play for each other within the divine economy of mercy and justice.

## 1 The Anselmian Problematic of Justice and Mercy

Asking a seemingly naïve question provides a useful starting point for thinking about this issue. Why *should* there be *any* conflict between divine justice and divine mercy? Certainly, according to orthodox Christian doctrine, God is just, but why should that fact of being just preclude Him from being merciful even to the greatest of sinners? After all, God made the rules. He calls the proverbial shots in the end. It is God's decree or determination that is ultimately decisive. So why shouldn't God be able to suspend justice, or abrogate divine judgment of a sinner, if He so decides? Indeed, if God is supremely good, if He is a redeemer of the sinner, proverbially "rich in mercy," why should anyone dread divine justice rather than hope for, or even confidently count upon, divine mercy?

To make matters more concrete, why all this endless moaning and groaning in Anselm's prayers about his sinful state, his trepidations over encountering the strict judge, his concerns over his inability to set things right (or even to feel as he ought to), his groveling and wheedling before potential intercessors? Perhaps Anselm himself endorses the view that divine mercy trumps justice precisely through the mechanics of intercessory prayer? After all, he complains to God at one point, "That surely is the sentence of justice, not of mercy, and who calls on justice in my cause? My talk was of mercy, not of justice. In the

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<sup>6</sup> Anselm's *Meditations* are also of considerable interest for understanding his views on these topics, but given the richness of the prayers, and limitations of space, I pass over them here.

wretched tribulation of my soul I beg of you, my God, the bread of mercy; why do you press the stone of justice into my mouth?"<sup>7</sup> Does not this sort of talk seem to presuppose not only that justice and mercy are in some sense opposed, but that God *ought* to set aside his admittedly just judgment in favor of a greater mercy, not least because He can?

Anselm could reply, and does in effect indicate to us readers as we explore the architecture of his prayers, that such a point of view represents a fundamentally mistaken conception of an entire host of matters. One of his main goals in these compositions is to starkly depict the realities facing the sinner and then to outline the remedies available to that person. Put in another manner, the *Prayers* presume and move within the whole of an Anselmian moral and metaphysical perspective, one whose outlines are largely yet to be elaborated in his later treatises, but one entirely consistent with these earlier works.<sup>8</sup> In order to reserve space to explore the prayers, I will simply set out several doctrines I take to be central within this theological perspective.

First, God is not merely superlatively just, but is justice itself, what justice is, and the entire order of creation, including the moral order, participates in some way in the divine justice.<sup>9</sup> Any account of matters that frames divine mercy simply as an abrogation or nullification of (or even as a localized exception from) divine justice ultimately proves unworkable. Second, whatever justice human beings possess, as participation in justice, resides primarily in the human will.<sup>10</sup> It is a good of which human beings can be deprived only through their own volition, by choosing some other good in preference to that of maintaining justice in the will.<sup>11</sup> Third, once justice has been lost, a human being becomes incapable of regaining or restoring it by his or her own power, and injustice imposes consequences damaging to the entire person.<sup>12</sup> Fourth, God does indeed act mercifully towards human beings, not only by effacing the guilt (though not

7 *St. Peter*, trans. Ward, 140 (III. 33).

8 As we know from the explanations Anselm himself provides in the prefaces to his works, they tended to emerge as written compositions from the framework of his own sustained meditations upon given subjects, occasioned by a need or desire on the part of others to have them in written form. As noted earlier, it is arguable that Anselm possessed and relied upon a systematically developed understanding of the matters that he discussed in less systematic, and more occasioned forms.

9 *Mono.* 16, (I. 30–31). *Memorials of St. Anselm*, R.W. Southern and F.S. Schmitt, O.S.B, eds. (Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1969).

10 *De ver.* 12, (I. 194).

11 *De lib. arb.* 5, (I. 215–217).

12 For a few examples, cf. *De lib. arb.* 10, (I. 210). *De casu* 17, (I. 262). *De conc. vir.* 8, (I. 149–150), *De concordia* 3.3, (II. 266), and 3.14, (II. 288).

all consequences) of original sin, but even by offering pardon for personal sins. Fifth, a key way in which God effects this mercy towards the sinner is by graciously restoring that person (and human nature) back from a state of injustice to a state of renewed justice. In forgiving or pardoning (*parcere*), God does not simply wipe away a black mark, or allow something bad to pass on this occasion, but rather affects a change within the person to whom mercy is being shown. Sixth, God's merciful grace is offered to human beings not only, we might say, directly from God himself, but also through the mediation of other human beings who willingly collaborate with the divine will.<sup>13</sup>

Within the fuller, more adequate understanding of divine justice and mercy outlined by these key Anselmian doctrines, we can better understand the purposes of the prayers. Anselm tells Mathilda, when sending her a collection of his prayers, that these works "are arranged so that by reading them the mind may be stirred up either to the love or fear of God, or to a consideration of both."<sup>14</sup> Fear, among other affects (e.g. disgust with oneself, anger at one's sins) is aroused within the penitent sinner through consideration of the scope, rigor, and inescapability of divine justice. Love is something that the human being ought to feel and act upon towards God,<sup>15</sup> but is also evoked through consideration of the depths of divine mercy, all the more so when that mercy turns out to be compatible with justice. Two other features Anselm points out are also significant. He suggests that the prayers be used flexibly by the reader, so that it is not necessary that they be read in their entirety as compositions, but rather in ways the reader finds them useful, for "meditating"<sup>16</sup> and for arousing these affective responses through that prayer. In addition to this, he also suggests his prayers may be useful as models Mathilda can use in composing her own prayers.<sup>17</sup> Returning to the focus upon divine justice and mercy, we might envision Anselm's compositions as embodying and elaborating a teaching upon

13 *De concordia* 3.6, (II. 270–273).

14 *Prayers and Meditations*, trans. Ward, 90 (III. 4). In *Letter 28*, he tells his fellow monk Gundulf, to whom he sends the three prayers to Mary, that what the prayers were intended to do (*ad quod factae sunt*) is that "ere the end is reached, the compunction of contrition or of love may through divine grace be found in them by whoever reads or rather, meditates upon them," *The Letters of Saint Anselm*, trans. Walter Froelich (Kalamazoo, Cistercian Publications, 1990), Vol. 1, 121 (III. 136).

15 *Prayer to Christ*, trans. Ward, 93 (III. 6).

16 *Letter 28*, trans. Froelich, 121 (III. 136).

17 Rachel Fulton Brown emphasizes this as a central motivation for Anselm's composition; "Why did Anselm of Canterbury feel the need to write prayers for himself, his brothers, and friends? ... Historically speaking, there are doubtless many answers. Phenomenologically, there is arguably only one: to experience, and so to understand, prayer, one has to practice making it oneself." "Praying with Anselm at Admont," 708.

this core Christian problematic that contemporary readers might interpret and adapt within the scope of their own reflections, thoughts, prayers, and affectivity.

## 2 The Demands of Divine Justice

Anselm affirms throughout his prayers that God is superlatively just, and he depicts this supreme justice through rhetoric conveying that the divine justice is not merely an extreme point along a continuum of a quality of justice, but rather, as justice itself, exhibits what might be called a “reflexive intensity” of that divine attribute.<sup>18</sup> For instance, in his *Prayer to St. John The Baptist*, calling God “my just judge”, he both affirms the rightness of the judgment, and that God is thereby indeed God, Lord, and Creator.<sup>19</sup> In the *Prayer to Saint Nicholas*, God’s justice is called a “third abyss,” yet more terrible and unfathomable than those other abysses of Anselm’s sins or the punishments of those sins.<sup>20</sup> In relation to the creature, one aspect of the divine justice is manifested in the fear the sinner experiences “before the all-powerful justice of the stern judge,”<sup>21</sup> who rightly condemns the sinful creature.

As Anselm depicts this divine judgment, however, it does not occur as a once-and-for-all punctual event, imposed in extrinsic and purely legalistic manners upon a person for his or her misdeeds, isolated from their environment, their relationships, and the ongoing narrative of their life. Rather, it possesses and moves within interconnected metaphysical and moral dimensions, reverberating throughout the created order, affecting a person at the core of their very being and relations with the rest of creation, and, of course, with God. To be unjust, as Anselm understands it, represents a *privation* of justice within the will of the person, a deformation or lack that is not a mere absence or nullity, but which presents itself determinately. This conception of justice and injustice is a central and distinctive doctrine within the moral theory that runs throughout the entirety of Anselm’s works, but in the treatises, it tends to

18 Cf. Gregory Sadler, “A Perfectly Simple God and Our Complicated Lives,” *The Saint Anselm Journal* 6, no. 1 (2008), 1–23, at 8.

19 *St. John The Baptist*, trans. Ward, 132 (III. 28).

20 *St. Nicholas*, trans. Ward, 192 (III. 59). Cf. also *St. John the Evangelist* (2), trans. Ward, 163–164 (III. 46).

21 *St. Mary* (2), trans. Ward, 110 (III. 15). This language runs consistently throughout the prayers, so that, e.g. in the *St. Paul*, he similarly refers to God as “the powerful and strict judge,” trans. Ward, 141 (III. 33).

be worked out in general terms. Within the *Prayers*, this thematic of the condition within which the unjust human being discovers him- or herself to be is dealt with existentially, depicted and lamented by the subject suffering from but also responsible for their miserable state. The *Prayers* highlight a number of key and mutually reinforcing features of this condition of injustice.

Sin effectively sets one against God as an enemy, subject to His wrath, expressed in the severity of his judgment against, and punishment of the sinner. God is called a “fearsome [*tremendum*] judge,” and, Anselm worries: “terrible is the severity of the Judge, intolerably strict, for the offense against him is huge, and he is exceedingly wrathful.”<sup>22</sup> The sinful creature is not only opposed to God himself, but also to the right order interwoven within creation’s very fabric. As Anselm laments in the Prayer to Saint Paul, “even that which is irrational and insensible condemns me.”<sup>23</sup> A bit later, he adds: “all things that are right are turned against me.”<sup>24</sup> Even worse, “all that has being [*quod est*] opposes” him.<sup>25</sup> This estrangement is still more the case in relation to other rational beings. “All spirits, good and evil, condemn me. The good because they owe justice to God; the evil because they serve my injustice ... They both judge my iniquity in this, because they know that according to justice, I deserve to be damned.”<sup>26</sup>

At multiple points, Anselm worries that his very sinfulness and injustice may preclude the very possibility of any merciful intercession on his behalf. He expresses this generally by asking: “which one will be an intercessor with him, if all are his accusers and judges?”<sup>27</sup> He realizes that, however he may be tempted to (mis-)represent his condition, “the truth of the matter convicts me as an enemy of God.” He points out: “I have provoked God and all things to vengeance, and there is nothing left that is not offended to intercede for me.”<sup>28</sup> This problematic extends particularly to the very people he would ask to intercede, the saints. Precisely by their very closeness to, their friendship with, their participation in the justice of God, the faults of the sinner are rendered more noxious to them. In the *Prayer to Saint Stephen*, Anselm admits that “in offending God, I have offended you also and all the saints.”<sup>29</sup> In the *1st Prayer to St. John the Evangelist*, in which Anselm confesses that he is justly and truthfully

22 *Saint Stephen*, trans. Ward, 175, (III. 50). Cf. also *Saint Nicholas*, trans. Ward, 191 (III. 59).

23 *Saint Paul*, trans. Ward, 142 (III. 34).

24 *Ibid.*, trans. Ward, 144 (III. 35).

25 *Ibid.*, trans. Ward, 145 (III. 35).

26 *Ibid.*, trans. Ward, 141–142 (III. 34).

27 *Ibid.*, trans. Ward, 142 (III. 34).

28 *St. John the Evangelist (1)*, trans. Ward, 159 (III. 43).

29 *St. Stephen*, trans. Ward, 177 (III. 51).

called an “enemy of God,”<sup>30</sup> it is the very friendship of the saint with Christ that understandably produces hatred against the sinner, because “an offense against God deserves to be hated by the friends of God,” seemingly turning those who might intercede for the sinner against him.<sup>31</sup> This sort of personal offense extends even to the Mother of God, for by sinning against Christ, he “alienat[es] [*irritavi*]” and “offend[s]” His mother.<sup>32</sup>

Not only do other people condemn the sinner, the sinner condemns himself reflexively as well in these prayers. At numerous points Anselm experiences his own conscience accusing him, revealing multiple dimensions of damage, corruption, estrangement, and injustice in his sinful condition. Within the dramatic and affective structure, situating the sinful person in conversation with the saints and with God Himself, the petitioner is made progressively more and more aware of the depth and consequences of sins, the malefic effects they produce upon and within the person. In the *Prayer to Saint Nicholas*, this growing awareness reveals a veritable and horrifying abyss, “irredeemable and bottomless.”<sup>33</sup> Anselm is forced to admit that his sins exceed his own capacities to recall, to enumerate, or even to adequately repent for them.<sup>34</sup> He employs a rich and disturbing variety of imagery in detailing the damage done to his soul. He is “sick with the sickness of vice, in pain from the wounds of crimes, putrid with the ulcers of sin.”<sup>35</sup> He is a soul, “lacerated by the wolves” teeth, by wounds self-inflicted, by infection.<sup>36</sup> His soul is practically dead,<sup>37</sup> and though he is not yet suffering “eternal death, even now [he] is abandoned to the spiritual death that draws to the other.”<sup>38</sup> He is “lost to all virtues” and “dominated by a crowd of vices.”<sup>39</sup>

In wanting to turn back towards God, he realizes another set of consequences of sin that manifest themselves in a number of different modalities, including affective, volitional, habitual, and cognitive. He suffers from a com-

30 *St. John the Evangelist* (1), trans. 160 (III. 43).

31 *Ibid.*, trans. Ward., 158 (III. 42).

32 *St. Mary* (2), trans. Ward, 112 (III. 16).

33 *St. Nicholas*, trans. Ward, 191 (III. 59). *St. Mary Magdalene* frames this similarly in term of a “dark prison of sins, wrapped round with the shadows of darkness,” trans. Ward, 201 (III. 64).

34 Cf. *St. Benedict*, trans. Ward, 197 (III. 62) and *St. Peter*, trans. Ward, 139–140 (III. 32).

35 *St. Mary* (1), trans. Ward, 107 (III. 13).

36 *St. Peter*, trans. Ward, 136–137 (III. 30–31).

37 *St. John the Baptist*, trans. Ward, 127 (III. 26).

38 *St. Paul*, trans. Ward, 148 (III. 37).

39 *St. Benedict*, trans. Ward, 198 (III. 63). Cf. also *Prayer to Mary Magdalene*, where Anselm speaks of the “depth of vice,” trans. Ward, 201 (III. 64).

plex state whose significance is consolidated in one word, *torpor*. He does not love or desire God, nor God's will expressed in the right ordering of justice, as he realizes that he ought to. He thus finds himself unable to perseveringly will what is right,<sup>40</sup> as well as to repent of his wrong ways and condition.<sup>41</sup> Instead, he finds himself choosing to return to his sins, committing them at times "willingly, readily, and openly"<sup>42</sup> and at other times secretly, turning his monastic habit into a living lie.<sup>43</sup> Vices have taken deep root within the fabric of his soul and continue to exercise their attraction upon his will.<sup>44</sup> Even worse, he realizes that he is deluded about his true state. His "crowning unhappiness" is that "while it is all true, yet it does not seem so to me."<sup>45</sup> Though he "stand[s] continually in danger" he "does not always recognize this."<sup>46</sup> He laments that "the habit of vice has wiped away in me the knowledge of true good,"<sup>47</sup> and that "even to think of what is for its good makes [his depraved mind] weary and stupid."<sup>48</sup> He can bring to mind the virtues, which he does not possess, only "slowly" and "with what difficulty."<sup>49</sup>

The unjust, sinful human person suffers from a divided self that cannot be reintegrated through its own powers, and such a person cannot escape from the worse parts of this self. This reveals a veritable paradox, identifiable as a "double bind,"<sup>50</sup> for in order to adequately confess what he has done wrong,

40 This will later be thematized as "*pervelle*" in *De casu* 3, (I. 238). Such a characteristically Anselmian use of "per-" also shows up in his characterization of the prayers in *Letter 28*, in which the reader will eventually arrive, *perveniat*, at the affective states the prayers are intended to induce, trans. Froelich, 121(III. 136).

41 Cf. among examples: *Prayer to Christ*, trans. Ward, 93–94 (III. 7), *Prayer Before Receiving the Body and Blood of Christ*, trans. Ward, 100 (III. 10), *St. Mary* (1), trans. 108 (III. 13), *St. Peter*, trans. Ward, 135 (III. 30), *St. John the Evangelist* (2), trans. Ward, 163 (III. 45–46), *St. Nicholas*, trans. Ward, 188 (III. 57–58), *St. Benedict*, trans. Ward, 197 (III. 62).

42 *St. John the Baptist*, trans. Ward, 128 (III. 27).

43 *St. Benedict*, trans. Ward, 198 (III. 63). On this theme of lying through one's life and actions, cf. *De veritate* 9, (I. 199) and *De Humanibus Moribus* 130 (*Mem.* 88). This theme of living a lie also arises in his *Prayer by a Bishop or Abbot*, in which Anselm expresses concern not only over his own sinful and false state but also over the possibility of scandalizing others and involving them with sin, trans. Ward, 211(III. 70).

44 *Ibid.*, trans. Ward, 197 (III. 62).

45 *St. Paul*, trans. Ward, 143 (III. 34). He notes that while he knows this through his "rational nature", he does not understand, trans. Ward, 149 (III. 37). On the purpose of human rationality, cf. *Mono.* 68, (I. 78) and *Cur Deus* 2.1, (II. 98).

46 *St. Stephen*, trans. Ward, 176 (III. 51).

47 *St. Nicholas*, trans. Ward., 189 (III. 58).

48 *St. Benedict*, trans. Ward, 197 (III. 62).

49 *Ibid.*, trans. Ward, 197 (III. 62).

50 Eileen Sweeney aptly uses that term to describe the situation in "The Rhetoric of Prayer

and what is presently wrong with him, Anselm must engage in brutally honest self-examination, but in doing so he becomes horrified by what he now sees within himself, “prevent[ing him] from avowing it.”<sup>51</sup> He realizes just how far removed he has departed not only from God’s supreme justice, or even from a right ordering and orientation of his own will, but apparently even from the very possibility of appealing for clemency. Precisely what needs be admitted and confessed, so that it may be healed, precludes him from showing himself to Mary or to John the Baptist, and thus from appealing to them as intercessors.<sup>52</sup>

Anselm’s consistent personification of sins is a striking rhetorical feature of the prayers. He never claims the old excuse ‘the Devil made me do it’ but a cursory reading of the prayers might suggest that he displaces a certain portion of his guilt onto his sins. He tells his sins that “it is from you that all these evils flow into me.”<sup>53</sup> They “drag [him] here and there.”<sup>54</sup> He speaks of sinners as “misled by sins” and then “caught up in their fetters.”<sup>55</sup> His own sins tempted and deceived him, when they “promised sweetness,” engaged in “persuading” in which they were “gentle with me,” and even suggested “it was easy to get out [of the trap] by the grief of penitence.”<sup>56</sup> In the *Prayer to St. Nicholas*, he faults his sins for seducing him: “you make my soul drunk with your sweetness ... you anoint my heart with your pleasures.” He then asks: “Why did you hide these things from me? Why did you betray me?”<sup>57</sup>

The answer to these questions and accusations, however, involves his taking full responsibility for his sins. “In fact, you have not betrayed me, but I have betrayed myself by believing in you. You did not deceive me, but I have deceived

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and Argument in Anselm,” 358. For other useful discussions, cf. Gillian Evans, “The Secure Technician: Varieties of Paradox in the Writing of Saint Anselm,” *Vivarium* 13, no. 1 (1975), 1–21; George Heyer, “St. Anselm on the Harmony Between God’s Mercy and God’s Justice,” in *The Heritage of Christian Thought*, eds. Robert Cushman and Egil Grisilis (New York: Harper and Rowe, 1965), 31–40; and Rachel Fulton Brown, “Oratio/Prayer,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Mysticism*, ed. Amy Hollywood and Patricia Z. Beckman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 167–177.

51 *St. John the Evangelist* (1), trans. Ward, 159 (III. 43).

52 *St. Mary* (1), trans. Ward, 108–109 (III. 14). Cf. also *Prayer to St. John the Baptist*, trans. Ward, 130 (III. 27–28).

53 *St. Paul*, 143 (III. 34).

54 *St. Benedict*, 197/62–63. Cf. also *St. John the Evangelist* (1), 158 (III. 43).

55 *St. John the Baptist*, 131 (III. 38). In *St. Nicholas*, he employs imagery of “darkness and chains ... shadows and weight,” to describe the “prison,” sin has landed him in, 189 (III. 58).

56 *St. Paul*, trans. Ward, 144 (III. 35).

57 *St. Nicholas*, trans. Ward, 190 (III. 58).

myself because I have received you into myself ... I knew there was no faith in you, and yet I had faith in you.”<sup>58</sup> His sins even arguably perform a useful function when, instead of concealing his condition, they “cry out against” him.<sup>59</sup> The process of prayer reveals that the self, though divided, “disturbed and confused” in “the state of sin,”<sup>60</sup> nevertheless remains oneself. Anselm acknowledges, as fully as he is able, the scope and depth of his own injustice, admitting to himself and to his intercessor that “my sins have made me what I am.”<sup>61</sup>

Perhaps what sets his own injustice into its greatest relief is an additional factor touched upon in the prayers, namely the fact that God has already previously shown mercy to him, and more than once, in pardoning his sins. Anselm reflects upon the extent of his personal sins:<sup>62</sup> “You set aside, merciful Lord, the old rags of original sin ... I busied myself with sordid sins; despising what you had promised .... You refashioned your gracious image in me, and I superimposed upon it the image that is hateful.”<sup>63</sup> He transgressed “against him who made me, and remade me.”<sup>64</sup> He is forced to admit, in addressing Christ: “Your mercy cleansed me from what you had created from original sin; your patience has hitherto borne with me, fed me, waited for me when after I had lost the grace of my baptism, I wallowed in many sordid sins.”<sup>65</sup> In all of this, he notes a central feature: “in sinning ... you prefer yourself to God your Creator,” a moral failure “than which nothing is more unjust.”<sup>66</sup> The situation of the sinner’s injustice, meriting punishment doled out in—and as—justice, is thus seemingly as dire as it could possibly be thought to be.

### 3 Anselm’s Appeals for Mercy

As briefly outlined here, the situation of the sinner appears quite grim, precisely because those outlines depict the reality that would have to be faced if strict justice is to apply, that is, if the sinner is judged on his or her (essentially non-existent) merits alone. It might appear then as if the sinner’s only

58 Ibid., trans. Ward, 190 (III. 58).

59 *St. John the Evangelist* (1), trans. Ward, 159 (III. 43).

60 *St. Mary* (1), trans. Ward, 108 (III. 14).

61 *St. John the Baptist*, trans. Ward, 128 (III. 26).

62 On this distinction, cf. *De conc. vir.*1, (II. 140).

63 *St. John the Baptist*, trans. Ward, 128 (III. 27).

64 Ibid., trans. Ward, 129 (III. 27).

65 *Prayer to Christ*, trans. Ward, 94 (III. 7).

66 *St. Nicholas*, trans. Ward, 191 (III. 59).

recourse is to hope for a miracle, to throw him or herself entirely upon the divine mercy, as a final resort. But Anselm does not merely place or plead his case before God, Mary the mother of God, and the saints. Instead, both passionately and articulately, he argues for the rationality, the fittingness, and even in a sense the necessity of divine and saintly mercy. In doing so, he elaborates for us his readers (and perhaps fellow petitioners) several manners in which mercy and justice can be properly understood to be, not in conflict or contradiction, but complementary to each other. Through the rhetorical structure he provides to his prayers, Anselm models an exemplary architecture of petition, but also provides his readers a meditative and affective education. This teaching encompasses not only how to pray effectively, but also how to understand, and situate oneself within, the interplay between divine justice and mercy.

Comparison and analysis of Anselm's prayers reveals a number of tropes and techniques designedly woven into their rhetorical fabric. These formal features of Anselm's compositions, however, are intimately appropriated to the content, serving not primarily as ornamentation but rather to orient thinking, feeling, and willing one's way through dilemmas and labyrinths of life and death, sin and salvation, justice and mercy, confronting and at times confounding the petitioner. Here, in the interest of space, I focus on three recurring types of argumentative appeals Anselm makes in the prayers. The first of these includes arguments bearing upon the priority of goodness and mercy over injustice and evil. The second encompasses arguments stressing the appropriateness of intercession on the part of God and the saints. The third type consists in recollections of divine examples and teachings.

As we have seen earlier, the Anselmian petitioner is brought to understand himself as deeply entangled in evil or injustice. His sins are not minor transgressions, but have stained his entire being to the core. Any one of these sins on its own is serious enough, and considered together, they constitute a limitless abyss. And yet, goodness possesses an ontological priority over evil, concretely manifested in the prayers in a priority of mercy's power over that of the injustice of the petitioner and the evils to which he has permitted himself to become enslaved. The general structure or argument, often framed as a rhetorical question, is to say something along these lines: If evil has such great power that I cannot on my own escape it, and the goodness you enjoy is more powerful than evil, then the evil I am beset by can be overcome by that goodness. Indeed, not only can that goodness overcome, it ought to overcome that evil, precisely because it is that goodness.

Anselm makes such an appeal in addressing Mary, asking: "If my misery is too great to be heard favorably, surely your mercy will be less than it ought to

be?"<sup>67</sup> He likewise asks in the *Prayer to St. Peter*: "O God, and you his greatest apostle, is this misery of mine so huge that it cannot be met by the wideness of your mercy?"<sup>68</sup> With John the Evangelist, he raises the questions: "if my sins stand in the way of what I desire, why do not your merits assist my prayers the more? Are my sins potent for ill, and your merits impotent to help? ... Why, I say, when the merits that are offered to him are greater than the sins that offend him?"<sup>69</sup> He suggests to Stephen, that "however grave my unhappiness, however bitter my need, how much more wonderful will be the goodness of him who forgives."<sup>70</sup>

He is particularly importunate towards St. Nicholas, arguing: "[Y]ou could not have power only in those things that come to nothing, and be powerless in those that go on into eternity."<sup>71</sup> Drawing a contrast between Nicholas' "plenitude of goodness" and Anselm's "abundance of badness," he urges: "if only that super-abundance would overflow and flood into my abundant ills. Oh, if only that full plenitude would fill the emptiness of my need."<sup>72</sup> Indeed, throughout his prayers, Anselm makes so bold as to suggest that it would be unbefitting for God and the saints not to show "immense mercy,"<sup>73</sup> if indeed mercy can overcome. "Or if it can, but will not, what is the enormity of my guilt that exceeds the multitude of your mercies?" He adds: "Is it true, then, that the more I am oppressed by misery, the more mercy will tarry? That is an unheard-of word from one who is merciful to one who prays."<sup>74</sup>

In fact, Anselm argues in numerous manners that it is befitting for merciful intercession to occur. One particularly strong appeal is made to God in the *Prayer to Saint Nicholas*. "[A]re you so inflamed against a penitent sinner that you forget your own nature?"<sup>75</sup> He asks this in the course of arguing that God's justice opens the door to intercession precisely because of the divine attribute of God's goodness.<sup>76</sup> "Either hear me yourself, or let someone else hear me whom you will listen to on my behalf. Lord, if it is my sins that hold you back from hearing me, you are within your rights, but do not forbid another to hear

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67 *St. Mary* (1), trans. Ward, 107 (III. 13).

68 *St. Peter*, trans. Ward, 139 (III. 32).

69 *St. John the Evangelist* (2), trans. Ward, 166 (III. 47).

70 *St. Stephen*, trans. Ward, 177 (III. 51).

71 *St. Nicholas*, 187/57.

72 *Ibid.*, 187 (III. 57).

73 *St. Stephen*, 174 (III. 50).

74 *St. Peter*, 139–140 (III. 32).

75 *St. Nicholas*, 185 (III. 56).

76 This prefigures the line of argument that will later be found in *Proslogion* 9–11.

a miserable suppliant, because you are also good.”<sup>77</sup> Intercession offers God the opportunity to show, and to be, precisely what God is, and this feature of intercession holds even more for Mary and the saints. In the *Prayer to Saint Stephen*, intercession provides “a place for goodness ... a time for mercy ... an opportunity to show charity.”<sup>78</sup> Intercession also restores a possibility for a sinner to rightly give to God what he owes. Anselm admits: “Lord, I know and admit that I am not worthy of your love, but surely you are not unworthy of my love?” And then, he suggests: “Therefore grant to me, Lord, by the merits of him from whom you have honor, that I may be made worthy out of my unworthiness.”<sup>79</sup> Petitioning both Christ and Mary, Anselm elaborates: “show me your mercy, for I need it and it is right for you to give it, lest I act towards you unjustly .... [G]ive my soul your love, which not unjustly it asks and you justly expect it to ask, lest I be ungrateful for your good gifts because of that which in justice it shudders at, and you not unjustly punish.”<sup>80</sup> By appeals to fittingness, Anselm in effect argues that mercy has a place within the scope of justice. If justice is to be entirely realized, mercy needs be shown.

The saints themselves are human beings, not only exemplary models to be followed, but people who themselves were at one time in need of divine mercy, and who themselves received gracious and restorative instruction from God. Anselm appeals to both of these themes in his *Prayers*, connecting the two of them together in his *Prayer to Saint Paul*, where he points out “kind Lord, you are accustomed to giving counsel to those who plead with you.”<sup>81</sup> He asks Christ: “why did you come down from heaven, what did you do in the world, to what end did you give yourself over to death, unless it were that you might save sinners?”<sup>82</sup> Then he turns to Paul: “what did you teach when you were passing through the world?”<sup>83</sup> When the answer to this, namely faith, turns out not to be for Anselm a secure recourse since his own faith is dead,<sup>84</sup> he first asks Paul to raise him as one who is dead, appealing to biblical examples of Elijah and Elisha,<sup>85</sup> but then appeals to both Christ and Paul, employing striking imagery of them as loving and caring “mothers by your mercy.”<sup>86</sup> Paul is asked

77 *St. Nicholas*, 185 (III. 56).

78 *St. Stephen* 176 (III. 51).

79 *St. John the Evangelist* (2), 164 (III. 46).

80 *St. Mary* (3), 125 (III. 25).

81 *St. Paul*, 145 (III. 35).

82 *Ibid.*, 145–146 (III. 36).

83 *Ibid.*, 146 (III. 36).

84 *Ibid.*, 147 (III. 36).

85 *Ibid.*, 149 (III. 37).

86 *Ibid.*, 154 (III. 40). They are also mothers by “affection” and “kindness,” as opposed to being

to intercede as a mother to Anselm, precisely by following the example of, and repeating the mercy of Christ that was shown earlier to him.

A number of similar examples occur in the prayers. Anselm makes so bold as to remind Peter that Anselm “may have strayed, but at least it is not he who has denied his Lord and Shepherd,”<sup>87</sup> but then recalls another occasion of Peter’s threefold speech, when “Christ asked you three times if you loved him” and then commanded him “feed my sheep.”<sup>88</sup> Later in that prayer, he writes: “see, here is a soul needing mercy, and here is the merciful apostle Peter before the God of mercy, who had mercy upon the apostle Peter, and taught him what to do, and gave him the power to do it.”<sup>89</sup> He appeals similarly in his first *Prayer to John the Evangelist*: “Oh, you compassionate friends of God, have compassion upon one so needy, by that same compassion that God had towards you!”<sup>90</sup> In the second, he invokes John’s teaching of love, and in asking for intercession argues, “do this in exchange for the love you owe him, so that you may set me free for him even my love with yours, for you owe him not only your love, but that of many more.”<sup>91</sup> Then he appeals to John’s own teaching about showing compassion to a brother,<sup>92</sup> and to the parable of the Good Samaritan, asking Christ to urge John to intercede for him: “speak, I pray you to your beloved John to show him me, your servant, and say to him ‘Go and do likewise.’”<sup>93</sup> With Benedict, he urges: “pray and beseech you by the mercy you have shown to others, and by the mercy God has shown to you.”<sup>94</sup> He even reminds Mary Magdalene: “Recall in loving kindness what you used to be, how much you needed mercy, and seek for me that same forgiving love that you received when you were wanting it.”<sup>95</sup>

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fathers by “effect,” “authority,” and “teaching.” For useful discussion about Anselm’s masculine and feminine depictions of Christ and the Saints, cf. Caroline Walker Bynum, “Jesus as Mother and Abbot as Mother: Some Themes in Twelfth-Century Cistercian Writing,” *Harvard Theological Review* 70, no. 3–4 (1977), 257–284; Sally Vaughn, “Saint Anselm and His Students Writing About Love: A Theological Foundation for the Rise of Romantic Love in Europe,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 19, no. 1 (2010), 54–73; and Kari Elisabeth Børresen, “Female Metaphors, from Scripture to Julian’s *Showings*,” in *The High Middle Ages*, eds. Kari Elisabeth Børresen and Adriana Valerio (Atlanta: Society for Biblical Literature Press, 2015), 167–180.

87 *St. Peter*, trans. Ward, 137 (III. 31).

88 *Ibid.*, trans. Ward, 137 (III. 31).

89 *Ibid.*, trans. Ward, 139 (III. 32).

90 *St. John the Evangelist* (1), trans. Ward, 159 (III. 43).

91 *St. John the Evangelist* (2), trans. Ward, 166 (III. 47).

92 *Ibid.*, trans. Ward, 168 (III. 48).

93 *Ibid.*, trans. Ward, 170 (III. 49).

94 *St. Benedict*, trans. Ward, 199 (III. 63).

95 *St. Mary Magdalene*, trans. Ward, 202 (III. 65).

#### 4 The Dramatic Context of Intercession and Mercy

One of the key innovative aspects of Anselm's prayers is his invitation of the petitioner into a dramatic, concretely and intensely interpersonal context of compunction over sin, awareness of one's own condition, appeals for intercession, and restoration not only for the person but growth in relationships and involvement in a community. He provides the words and the frameworks for even a contemporary petitioner to place him or herself, intellectually, affectively, volitionally into needed conversation with God, Mary, and the saints. The guiding theme orienting this paper, the interrelation between divine justice and mercy, plays a significant role in this process, not least since Anselm is invoking mercy of (and through) intercession while brought to face the fact and the consequences of his own injustice set in stark contrast, even opposition, with the divine justice. It is not simply the case that because of his sins, he now happens to find himself on the outs, so to speak, with a divine juridical regime against which he has transgressed, and therefore liable to suffer the penal consequences. Rather, the injustice of the sinner means that he is on his own, cast by his own wrong volitions and vicious habits outside of a community of persons with whom he yearns to be reconnected. The sinner has not been abandoned by this community, or by God, but rather has exiled himself, by abandoning the justice that he ought to have kept when he possessed it, and cannot reacquire by his own powers or choices in his fallen state. In Anselm's own particular case, this disconnect is exacerbated by the higher demands imposed by his own chosen monastic profession, as well as his subsequent responsibilities as an abbot and a bishop, roles that he certainly fills, but to which he confesses himself inadequate.

Still though, he is not entirely removed from this Christian community. For this is not simply a community in accordance with or structured by justice, but one in which justice assumes its fullest dynamism and agency, a community united by love, by concord, by grace, in which a multitude of persons are able to be entirely that, persons in the fullest sense. Anselm's prayers reflect his own desires to be reincorporated within that community, within which alone he can be, or become, the person he is supposed to be, rather than the miserable sinner he finds himself to be. How does this play itself out in his prayers? In order to bring this discussion to a close, I will briefly mention just three features key to Anselm's perspective in his prayers: the first is the importance of the community of conversation. The second feature is the roles humans play within the economy of grace. The third is the nature of the reformation of the sinning petitioner.

Anselm's prayers are rarely addressed solely to the addressee mentioned in the title. In the *Prayer to Christ*, Anselm also addresses himself in one paragraph to "[m]y most merciful Lady," i.e., Mary, and in the second and third prayers to Mary, he addresses himself equally to Christ, her son and his Lord. This expansion of the conversation of prayer to encompass additional persons is not exclusive to this Theotokos-Christ axis, but occurs throughout the prayers to the various other saints. In fact, the only prayer in which this does not seem to be the case is the one addressed to Saint Stephen. Why is this? What is going on in this shift of addressee? Is Anselm merely meandering from his hoped-for intercessor, if not his topic, in bringing God (or more specifically the Son, Christ) into the conversation? Is he attempting to "kick his problem upstairs," as we sometimes say, to appeal to the ultimate authority, when he finds himself getting bogged down with a middleman of grace and redemption? Or is he perhaps playing one person against another in order to wriggle himself off the hook, as might be suggested by a cynical reading of the interplay in the second *Prayer to St. Mary*?

Notice how Anselm argues his case there. He suggests: "surely if I have offended you both equally, you will both also be merciful? So the accused flees from the just God to the good mother of the merciful God. The accused finds refuge from the mother he has offended in the good son of the kind mother. The accused is carried from one to the other and thrown himself between the good son and the good mother." This allows him to ask: "Dear Lord, spare the servant of your mother; dear Lady, spare the servant of your son" because "[w]hen I throw myself between two of such unbounded goodness, I shall not fall under the severity of their power."<sup>96</sup>

A better interpretation would stress that, in making this sort of appeal, Anselm is recognizing the already existing community of the saints in a very tangible, concrete way. The saints can intercede not because they are heavenly bureaucrats for a divine substance who would be alternately detached and disengaged from, wrathfully and strictly just towards, or impersonally connected with His creation, but because they are intimately and continually engaged with a just, but also merciful, loving, and personal God. Intercession occurs not just between sinner, saint, and God, but rather through the reincorporation of the sinner into a community of concord centered around God, and this is reflected in the fact that the petitioner addresses the saints alongside God within the same prayer. The sinful human being, as damaged and stained by

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96 *St. Mary* (2), trans. Ward, 112–113 (III. 16).

sin as he or she is, is not yet cut off from the possibility of participation, at first limited, and later fully enjoyed, in that heavenly community.

As noted earlier, the economy of grace is not something alien to the agency of human beings. While ultimately everything, even being itself, comes from God, and grace occurs primarily through divine initiative, in Anselm's view, human beings are intended to play a central role in the actual workings of grace, through willingly cooperating, or better put, collaborating, with God's will.<sup>97</sup> In Anselm's prayers, what the divine will wants for human beings is clearly that intercession by the saints occurs on their behalf, and that it be deliberately sought by the Christian petitioner. Perhaps the most audacious example of this occurs when Anselm asks: "The merciful son of God ... came to seek the sinner who had strayed, and will you ... repel wretches that pray to you?"<sup>98</sup> Peter's role is to intercede as shepherd to the lost sheep, following both Christ's example and explicit injunction. Paul is given the privilege and power to raise those who are spiritually dead. In fact, he is entirely aligned within his will, though not equal in power to, Christ.<sup>99</sup> He reminds Stephen that "you and the saints are so full of such wealth ... that you delight rather to free by your goodness, those who by justice you are able to condemn."<sup>100</sup> The saints are, to put it very simply, not those people who have transcended the human condition and left it behind, but those in whom human nature is most fully realized, as concrete human persons, within the community of the blessed fully enjoying the divine conversation.

The last aspect that needs to be highlighted here is that Anselm's prayers do not ask that some cosmic slate be wiped clean, that he be removed from some type of naughty list and inscribed instead within a list of nice persons. That sort of legalism would remain beside the central point. After all, we are talking about the person who shocked his hearers by telling them "he would prefer to sin and go to hell innocently, than to go to heaven polluted by the stain of sin."<sup>101</sup> Anselm is a petitioner who focuses on the heart of the matter at issue. Accordingly, the mercy that he asks of his intercessors ultimately is that he may be restored, through God's graces, to a state of justice. And this is not simply having some transgressions against justice effaced or forgotten, but rather having

97 This is made clear in the person of Christ in *St. Mary* (3), trans. Ward, 123 (III. 23).

98 *St. Mary* (2), trans. Ward, 111 (III. 16).

99 *St. Paul*, trans. Ward, 154 (III. 40). "If in quantity of affection you are unequal, yet in quality you are not unlike. Though in the greatness of your kindness, you are not unequal, yet in will you are of one heart."

100 *St. Stephen*, trans. Ward, 177 (III. 52).

101 *Vita Anselmi*, 84.

justice replaced where it most needs to be, within the human will. As an example of this, he asks Mary: "let this filth be washed from my mind, let my darkness be illuminated, my lukewarmedness blaze up, my listlessness be stirred."<sup>102</sup> He realizes that without internal moral reformation, any sort of external justification would be of no use. Another prime example of this is when he tells Mary Magdalene: "such a flavor [of the love of God] will make my heart sick, if it has of itself nothing of the same virtue."<sup>103</sup> One might say that the effects of any intercession that does not produce, or at least open the possibility of, justice perseveringly sought by willingly choosing a change in the person, simply will not stick. What Anselm most truly desires, the culmination of intercession, the effect of mercy, is found in the *Prayer to God*: "let me believe and hope, love and live, according to your purpose and your will."<sup>104</sup> What he asks in the meantime is that God "[h]ear[s] always with your favor, not according as my heart wills or as my mouth asks, but as you know and will that I ought to will and ask."<sup>105</sup>

The resolution of the problem, or the seeming paradox, of divine justice and mercy thus occurs not only at the highest level, within what we might call the scope of the divinity, or of the interpenetration of God's attributes of justice and goodness (which are, as Anselm will remind us, the same thing in God). This resolution also occurs at the lower level in which we human beings exist and live, in the human soul, and particularly in the human will. In the latter, mercy means not an escape or absolution from justice's demands, but a grace that restores once again the justice that ought to be present within the damaged human will. This restoration reflects but does not replicate the justice within the wills of saintly human beings, since each human person is different and distinct, even when in complete concord and harmony. And just as faith is not living faith unless it shows itself in striving and action, and orients its vivacity by ardent love, the justice restored to the will of the sinner by the mercy of God and His collaborators, the saints, should in turn show itself not only in enacting justice, but also in displaying mercy towards yet other people, offering them the possibility of reincorporation into that community between the human and divine.

102 *St. Mary* (3), trans. Ward, 116 (III. 19).

103 *St. Mary Magdalene*, trans. Ward, 206 (III. 67).

104 *Prayer to God*, trans. Ward, 91 (III. 5).

105 *Prayer for Enemies*, trans. Ward, 219 (III. 75).