

Anselm and Some Modern Anselmians

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Abstract

It is not unusual to find respected, modern-day Christian apologists and philosophers of religion citing the methodology of St. Anselm of Canterbury as influential in their own work – even titling their theological methods according to Anselmian categories (e.g., “perfect being” or “greatest possible being”). Some of these thinkers, however, have reached decidedly non-Anselmian conclusions in their explanation and defending of theism (e.g., Thomas V. Morris, John S. Feinberg, and William L. Craig). Indeed, some have reached heterodox doctrinal conclusions. This paper suggests that the source of this parting of ways is that, unlike Anselm, the methodology employed by these thinkers gives little weight to religious authorities outside of Scripture and (moreover) their own philosophical commitments. This departure makes for a wide variance in outcomes from otherwise similar methodologies.

Keywords: Anselm; Greatest Possible Being; Philosophy of Religion; Apologetics; Theology; Orthodoxy; Heresy; Tradition;

1. Introduction

Known by various titles (e.g., “perfect being” or “greatest possible being”), St. Anselm’s theological method follows from two major works: the *Monologion* and the *Proslogion*. The former is Anselm’s treatise on the attributes of God, the latter on God’s existence. What makes both works unique is that each is said to reach its theological conclusions from reason alone apart from Sacred Scripture or tradition.

Such “Anselmian Theology” has contributed to the debate over God’s existence and attributes. Indeed, it is not uncommon for Christian theological apologists and philosophers of religion to cite the insights of Anselm as influential (or even a primary motivator) for their own theological work. Some of the Christian thinkers in this arena, however, have reached unorthodox conclusions in their defense of theism while allegedly following Anselm’s method. This article takes a brief look at what might account for the discrepancy between these thinkers’ theological positions and the formulations of the traditional creeds and confessions of Christianity with which Anselm agreed.¹

¹ The ascription “traditional” here ought not be taken in a contentious or question-begging manner.

Rather, it refers here to the objective theological agreement between the major creeds and confessions accepted by the majority of Christendom throughout its history. The Church of the first millennium accepted the resolutions of the first seven “ecumenical” councils, from which the *Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed* and the *Definition of Chalcedon* were the result. Neither of these are contested by any major Christian group (the mostly-reconciled Oriental Orthodox churches notwithstanding). The 6th Century *Athanasian Creed* holds a similar status. Even during the most doctrinally-challenging time in its history – the 16th Century Protestant Reformation – Christendom’s theological commitments concerning God’s nature remained in agreement with these sources (as evidenced by important denominational doctrinal statements such as the 16th Century’s *Augsburg Confession*, *Belgic Confession*, and *Heidelberg Catechism*, or the 17th Century’s *Westminster Confession of Faith* and the *The Baptist Confession Of Faith*). Since no major Christian

2. Some Modern Anselmian Theologians

Even if not strictly determinative, it seems clear that one's methodological commitments can have a large impact on one's theological/philosophical conclusions, and some of the philosophers and theologians who have contributed to modern theistic apologetics show a clear reliance on what they consider to be Anselm's theological method. This is seen when, for example, the "greatest possible being" criterion is invoked.

Below will be presented the claims and theological positions of three important Evangelical thinkers whose work in philosophy of religion has been (by their own admission) influenced in important ways by Anselmian methodology. These are Thomas V. Morris (Professor of Philosophy at the University of Notre Dame), John S. Feinberg (Chair of the Department of Biblical and Systematic Theology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School), and William L. Craig (Research Professor of Philosophy at Talbot School of Theology and Professor of Philosophy at Houston Baptist University). Given the tributes paid to Anselm by these writers, an investigation into his theological method (especially with an eye for any departures from it on their part) is in order.

2.1 Thomas V. Morris

Thomas Morris specifically states in his *Our Idea of God* (1991) that his theologizing follows from Anselm's idea of God as a perfect being (1991:35), and that the way many people think of God's attributes are not the result of either philosophical or theological arguments, but rather follow from "Anselmian intuition" (1991:56). Agreement that the Bible is of crucial importance for developing our idea of God is, for Morris, "compatible with a good deal of disagreement and uncertainty over details of biblical interpretation" (1991:103-104). When it comes to his more apologetic material, Morris believes that, "arguments of critics can be very helpful to theists, because if they are good they can steer us away from faulty specifications of the nature of divine perfection" (1991:76-77).

Morris is quite clear from the start that his theological methodology follows from what he thinks of as Anselmian perfect being theology. He reinforces this methodology throughout his writing, often digressing into methodological reflection in the midst of his consideration of God's attributes. For example, in his discussion on God's omnipotence, Morris notes that, "the Anselmian conception of God can often be defended without our having to take definitive stands on difficult issues" (1991:76-77). In his section on God's omniscience, Morris notes that, "theists can differ in their beliefs and still be talking about the same thing. . . . We began with a definition or core concept of God as the greatest possible being. This is the first level of theistic concept of building. . . . Perfect being theology is then developed by means of . . . intuitions . . . The precise details at this second level are to some extent open to dispute and negotiable within the practice of perfect being theology. Agreement on the first level of conceptual thinking about God is this compatible with disagreement, and even significant uncertainty, concerning some of the specifications at the second level." (1991:103-104).

Morris's theological system produces a mixed bag of standard, popular, orthodox views and some unorthodox ones. His ultimate understanding of God's goodness tracks with the former, however his lodging of these attributes in mere "Anselmian intuition" may cause

group has officially repudiated the relevant assertions concerning the divine attributes found in these sources, it seems safe to assign them the role of historical standard here.

traditionally classical theologians pause. Morris claims that his perfect being theology works with and can even add to creation theology and biblical theology, but he does not consider Christian tradition. A good example of this is his discussion of God's eternity. After presenting the two diverging views, Morris states that, "there are no biblical passages which explicitly and undeniably settle the matter nor are their arguments from the methodology of your perfect being theology or creation theology which clearly uncontroversial present the final word on the issue" (1991:121). Morris apparently does not consider the traditional formulations of God's attributes as being relevant to the solving of the debate.

2.2 John S. Feinberg

John S. Feinberg's impressive 2001 tome *No One Like Him* (2001) was written to give a modern Evangelical view of God that would be true to Scripture as well as offering philosophically astute modifications of the classical view of God to bear on the challenges brought on by proponents of Open Theism and Process Theology (2001:32-33). Feinberg's purpose in writing is clear: "Theologians and non-theologians alike are clamoring for a God who is engaged in our lives and responsive to our needs. The remote God of classical Christianity seems irrelevant to our contemporaries. Even Christians broadly in the evangelical community sense a need to replace or at least significantly alter the concept of the classical God. . . . the question confronting the evangelical theologian is what to do about the classical conception of God that has been handed down through centuries of church history. . . . Rather than totally abandoning the traditional concept of God, a substantial overhaul and reconstruction seems more appropriate. In the pages of this book you will see the results of such modifications." (2001:xxiv-vi). Feinberg seeks to offer a "revisioned" God with "nuanced" attributes that bring him closer to the modern concept without "totally abandoning the traditional concept of God" (2001:xxv), in order to bring the Evangelical concept of God up to date with current trends.² In his own words: "In this book, I have argued that we need to reconstruct and revise our conception of the classical God" (2001:800).

Feinberg agrees with Morris's Anselmianism: "Anselm's key insight was that no being could qualify as God if a greater being could be conceived. To say that God is the GCB [Greatest Conceivable Being³] means that 'God is a being with the greatest possible array of compossible great-making properties.'" (2001:210). Feinberg also says, "I prefer something like Anselm's sense for 'God.' 'God' means the supreme being, even the greatest conceivable being. This doesn't mean that we must agree with everything Anselm thought made God the greatest conceivable being. It only means that this is an apt definition of what the term means at least for traditions like Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Those traditions view God as infinite/unlimited and superior to any being that exists or could exist." (2001:40). Indeed, Feinberg agrees with Morris in several places, including key areas of departure from traditional theology (e.g.,

² One reviewer summarized Feinberg's theology as the attempt to "restate, reformulate, or reconceptualize the doctrine of God for evangelical/Protestant orthodox theology in light of contemporary cultural, philosophical and theological trends, issues and concerns . . . in the face of prominent contemporary criticisms of 'classical' Christian theism, Feinberg [responded] to this urgent need by altering, or to use Feinberg's own oft used term, 'nuancing' important aspects of the evangelical God-concept in order to answer contemporary needs and questions to make the said God-concept more coherent." (Morrison, 2003:699).

³ Viz. Anselm's "being than which none greater can be conceived."

2001:255, 291, 329-337). Further, Feinberg's use of "greatest conceivable being" theology is found throughout his writing (e.g., 2001:40, 64, 186-187, 190, 289, 382-385).

Feinberg goes on to say that, "In this book, I have argued that we need to reconstruct and revise our conception of the classical God" (2001:800). And so he does. For example, Feinberg argues that divine immutability should be understood as God not changing in his person, will, or purposes – not necessarily as being free of all change (2001:264-76) – including that brought on by being in time. Thus, Feinberg rejects the atemporal understanding of God's eternity (2001:375-436) as well as divine impassibility (2001:277). Feinberg's "nuancing" of many of God's traditional attributes will affect his view of omnipotence as well, for on Feinberg's system (following Kenny), God's omnipotence consists in "the possession of all logically possible powers which it is logically possible for a being with the attributes of God to possess" (2001:288). The classical doctrine of divine simplicity is rejected by Feinberg (2001:335-337) as well as God's impassibility (2001:277).

Although Feinberg does not include Church tradition in his method, he does give its importance in consideration the occasional nod (e.g., 2001:39, 40, 214, 234, 238, 264, 277). Nowhere, however, does tradition or any other Church authority trump Feinberg's thinking, and he shows little reticence when going against tradition even when he thinks Scripture allows for a traditional interpretation (e.g., his rejection of "the notion [of divine timeless eternity] with the longest pedigree in the Christian" (2001:255), or of immutability: "the static view of God that so many within the classical Christian tradition have held" - 2001:266).⁴

2.3 William L. Craig

William Lane Craig admits in his and J. P. Moreland's *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (2003) that he is in debt to what he thinks of as the Anselmian theological method. When Craig deals with atheistic ontological disproof arguments in particular, he begins by asserting that, "God's self-revelation in Scripture is obviously paramount in understanding what God is like" (2003:501). However, when it comes to interpreting scriptural revelation, Craig believes that, "the Anselmian conception of God as the greatest conceivable being or most perfect being has guided philosophical speculation on the raw data of Scripture, so that God's biblical attributes are to be conceived in ways that would serve to exalt God's greatness." Indeed, Craig says that, "to say that I tacitly endorse Anselmian perfect being theology is an understatement . . . I see the conception of God as the greatest conceivable being as one of the guides for systematic theology's formulation of the doctrine of God" (Craig and Gorra, 2013:167). Craig even says, "The best definition of God as a descriptive term is, I think, St. Anselm's: the greatest conceivable being." (Craig, 2011).

Craig's own theological method, however, has led him to take issue with classical formulations of God's attributes that Anselm would not have rejected. For example, in his response to problems of God's immutability, Craig states that, "Rejection of radical immutability

⁴ According to Feinberg, "The theologian must use whatever facts about God's nature the biblical writers offer, but frequently we must go beyond the biblical testimony about these attributes to formulate a definition or to resolve problems surrounding them. So long as the definition and/or the resolution to problems in no way contradict Scripture, there is nothing wrong with this methodology. Moreover, we must differentiate the traditional Christian understanding of an attribute from what Scripture actually teaches and warrants. If Scripture doesn't support a traditional understanding, we must side with Scripture and modify or reject the tradition." (2001:238)

leaves it open for us to affirm nonetheless that God is immutable in the biblical sense of being constant and unchangeable in His character. Moreover, He is immutable in His existence (necessity, aseity, eternity) and His being omnipresent, omniscient, and omnipotent. These essential attributes are enough to safeguard God's perfection without having Him frozen into immobility" (2003:527). This kind of thinking also leads Craig to deny that God is atemporal: "A second powerful argument for divine temporality is based on God's being all-knowing. In order to know the truth of propositions expressed by tensed sentences like 'Christ is risen from the dead' God must exist temporally. For such knowledge locates the knower relative to the present" (2003:513).

Beyond mere disagreement with classical theology, Craig has been accused of heresy due to some of his philosophical theology.⁵ Craig also denies the procession of the Son from the Father (2003:594), which is affirmed in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed. Craig further admits to holding to a form of "Neo-Apollinarianism" (2003:606-612) – a view that was condemned by the Second General Council at Constantinople.⁶ Craig holds to Monothelitism (the denial that Jesus had both a human will and a divine will), a view that was declared heresy at the Third Council of Constantinople (2003:611).

While material heresy does not necessarily involve formal heresy, Craig is aware of his thinking's conflicts with the Church's traditional beliefs in these areas: "No earnest Christian wants to be considered a heretic. . . . While one disagrees with the promulgations of an Ecumenical Council only with great hesitancy, nonetheless, since we do not regard these as invested with divine authority, we are open to the possibility that they have erred in places" (Craig, 2008a). While this may not concern some Evangelicals, Craig seems to affirm the Church's creeds as the determiners of orthodoxy (2008a), and recognizes that the Church has defined heresy.⁷ Craig thinks he evades this conundrum by combining the Protestant principle of

⁵ Norman (2010). Such a charge is noted by Craig as well (2008a). "Heresy" is a difficult term to precisely define in a manner inclusive of all Christian traditions and opinions. According to Brown, "The word 'heresy' . . . came to be used to mean a separation or split resulting from a false faith (1 Cor. 11:19; Gal. 5:20). It designated either a doctrine or the party holding the doctrine, a doctrine that was sufficiently intolerable to destroy the unity of the Christian church. In the early church, heresy did not refer to simply any doctrinal disagreement, but to something that seemed to undercut the very basis for Christian existence. Practically speaking, heresy involved the doctrine of God and the doctrine of Christ . . . just as there are doctrines that are true, and that can bring salvation, there are those that are false, so false that they can spell eternal damnation for those who have the misfortune to become entrapped by them." (1998:2-4). Between orthodoxy and heresy, then, are numerous subdivisions (e.g., "unorthodoxy" or "heterodoxy"). For an interesting discussion of all these distinctions see Bowman (1992:passim).

⁶ See Perry Robinson's critique at <https://energeticprocession.wordpress.com/2017/10/17/is-william-lane-craig-a-christian/>.

⁷ Craig notes that, "The Father knows, for example, that the Son dies on the cross, but He does not and cannot know that He Himself dies on the cross—indeed, the view that He so knows even has the status of heresy: Patripassianism" (2015a).

*sola Scriptura*⁸ with his belief that Scripture gives a “wide latitude” for defining God’s attributes.⁹

3. Anselm’s Theological Method

How is it possible that such brilliant Christian thinkers have gone so far astray from traditional Christian doctrine when they follow the theological method of an orthodox saint? Part of the answer might be that writers like Morris, Feinberg, and Craig depart from Anselm in their reduction of his theological method to a collection of intuitions built up from the axiomatic idea of God as the “greatest possible being.” There is more to Anselm’s theological method than this – and part of it involves theological controls that are lacking in the above theologians.

Anselm scholar Marilyn McCord-Adams (2004) notes that Anselm’s method is actually shaped by *five* fundamental factors:

- (1) appreciation of the ontological incommensuration between God and creatures,
- (2) commitment to the infallible authority of Scripture as interpreted through the creeds and conciliar pronouncements,
- (3) conviction that humans are made in God’s image,
- (4) conception of inquiry as essentially a divine-human collaboration, and
- (5) understanding of human inquiry as holistic and developmental.

The first factor explains why our understanding of God, and our language concerning him, often remains shrouded in mystery. Yet one thing notably absent from the above writers is a robust appreciation for the apophaticism (“negative theology”) seen throughout traditional Christian theology. Now, this first factor is balanced by 3-5 which provide hope to those who earnestly seek knowledge of God – and factor 2 forms, for Anselm, a sort of speculative safety zone within which God’s mystery may be fruitfully explored.

While factors 3-5 may be relatively theologically neutral among the parties of concern in this paper, factors 1 and 2 bear some analysis. These first two factors will be given more consideration below.

3.1 Anselm on God and Creatures

Despite his stated reverence for Scripture and the role it would play in correcting a purely philosophical theology, Anselm’s project is a sort of thought experiment wherein he seeks to defend the notion of God and his attributes by purely rational means. In *Monologion*, Anselm argues from the goodness of things to an ultimate good (namely, God), and then goes on to

⁸ “We Protestants recognize Scripture alone as our ultimate rule of faith (the Reformation principle of *sola scriptura*). Therefore, we bring even the statements of Ecumenical Councils before the bar of Scripture. While one disagrees with the promulgations of an Ecumenical Council only with great hesitancy, nonetheless, since we do not regard these as invested with divine authority, we are open to the possibility that they have erred in places.” (Craig, 2008b).

⁹ E.g., Craig believes that, “the concept of God is underdetermined by the biblical data and since what constitutes a ‘great-making’ property is to some degree debatable, philosophers working within the Judeo-Christian tradition enjoy considerable latitude in formulating a philosophically coherent and biblically faithful doctrine of God” (2003:501).

deduce God's attributes from the fact that God is the highest good. In *Monologion*, Anselm posits four ways to do so. First, God "must not at all be said to be any of those things to which something which is not what they are superior," and second, he "must be said to be any of those things to which whatever it is not what they are is inferior". These two assertions are supported by two more: "do not say that God has any non-perfection," and, "do say that God has every perfection."

In his *Proslogion*, Anselm sought a means to arrive at the same conclusions only following from a single argument. This "Anselmian Argument" (aka "ontological argument" since Kant) appears in more than one form in *Proslogion*, but its general form is well-known: that if God is that which is that which nothing greater can be conceived, and if to exist is better than to not exist, then God must exist (cf. *Proslogion* 5). When the findings of these two ratings are combined, a platform for building up a systematic theology that describes God's attributes is said to exist.

Several problems might be taken with such a method. First, while we certainly have strong intuitions about certain kinds of perfections per the beings that make up those kinds, we do not have this kind of access to God's nature. How then, do we know what counts as a great making property and what does not? For example, in rational creatures both knowledge and wisdom would certainly count as perfections, however it does not seem like these would count as perfections in dogs or horses or rocks. Only by knowing the nature of a thing can we know what would count as its perfection, yet this is the very knowledge that we are trying to attain when it comes to God.

Further, we cannot learn what attributes God has without first knowing what attributes God can have, but Anselm's method does not deliver this information. Rather, it seems to rely on whatever intuition's of "greatness" the theologian begins with. Concerning "Perfect/Greatest Possible Being Theology," even granting that everyone should understand by the name God something than which a greater cannot be thought, one's view of what qualifies as "perfect" can end up guiding the discussion more than is warranted. What makes something a great-making property and another not?¹⁰

Finally, even if a list of such great-making attributes of deity could be produced using this method, the method alone does not tell us that all of these properties are compossible in one being.¹¹ This leads to the related problem that in order to know if any single attribute of God is possible, one would have to know if it was compatible with the rest – which is to say that we would have to know all of God's attributes up front. Yet, again, that is the very thing that this project is supposed to accomplish.

Anselm was not unaware of these difficulties. This can be seen in a brief survey of Anselm's consideration of the attributes that he believes his method picks out for God in both the *Monologion* and the *Proslogion*. In addition to positing God's existence in *Proslogion*, Anselm

¹⁰ For example, Feinberg, writing against a robust view of aseity and impassibility in God, asks, "If God hears and answers our prayers, and if he changes his attitudes toward us when we repent of sin, for example, it seems that his mental and emotional states at any given moment must to some extent be influenced by what we do. But, why is that a deficiency in God?" (p.241). Feinberg's version of PBT is also evident in his arguments against a strong view of divine immutability / omniscience (2001:264-277).

¹¹ For example, God's being perfectly merciful and perfectly just both seem to be intuitively great making properties, yet it is difficult to see how they could exist together.)

finds God to be the creator and the supreme good (as well as its source), merciful, impassable, and impeccable. In *Monologion*, Anselm describes God as living, wise, omnipotent, true, blessed, incorporeal, eternal (i.e., atemporal), just, beautiful, immortal, incorruptible, and immutable. In both Anselm asserts the doctrine of divine simplicity. Anselm recognizes that there are sometimes difficulties found in trying to consider these properties as existing in one being (e.g., that God is both omnipotent and impeccable, merciful and impassable, just and merciful) and deals with these throughout.

Finally, this “Perfect/Greatest Possible Being Theology” was not, for Anselm, the purely a rationalistic enterprise it is often represented as being. As will be shown below, Anselm’s method contained presuppositions from, and was circumscribed by, his faith in the authority of the Christian Scriptures and Tradition.

3.2 Anselm on Scripture and Tradition

While it is clear that both the *Monologion* and the *Proslogion* relied solely on Anselm’s philosophical method for their data (viz. as opposed to Scripture or tradition), it is also clear that this was simply due to the nature of Anselm’s project. It must be remembered that Anselm wrote *Monologion* for his brother monks who were, naturally, already believers, and he wrote *Proslogion* as a sort of sequel based on his self-challenge to reach the same conclusions with a single argument (see the Prologue of each). In these works, Anselm is merely seeing how far one can go with pure philosophy toward reaching the same conclusions that one would reach theologically (cf. *Cur Deus Homo* 1:3). What is less clear, due to its lack of similarly direct statements, is that even when Anselm is pursuing these purely philosophical projects, he remains beholden both to Scripture and to the authoritative tradition of the Church.

As William Mann (2006:258) notes in his discussion of Anselm’s methodological constraints, “Anselm takes his enterprise to be guided necessarily by authority, the authority of Scripture (the revealed Word of God), the authority of confessional creeds formulated by Church councils (in particular, the Nicene Creed), and the authority of the Church Fathers (in particular, Augustine). It would require a book to document all these influences.” McCord-Adams (2004:42) lists several sources of religious knowledge that functioned as authorities for Anselm. These include (1) God, (2) Holy Scripture, (3) the creeds, (4) conciliar findings, (5) the Pope, and (6) the Church Fathers. For Anselm, then, God’s revelation (1) is expressed in Scripture (2) as well as through the Church’s authoritative tradition (3-4) and its leadership (5-6).

Scripture forms a standard which, for Anselm, cannot be contradicted by any alleged philosophical insight. He is clear when he writes, “If I say something which a greater authority does not confirm, then even though I seem to prove it rationally, it should be accepted with no other degree of certainty than that it appears this way to me for the time being, until God somehow reveals the matter to me more fully. For if I say something that unquestionably contradicts Sacred Scripture, I am certain that it is false” (*Cur Deus Homo* I, 18).

Although Anselm’s high regard for scriptural authority is apparent, Anselm does not always seem to feel himself constrained by the literal wording of the biblical text. Because the words of Scripture are dealing with some matters that are beyond human language, it is to be expected that even Scriptures ultimate truth will only be discovered when it is combined with other authoritative sources concerning God. Because Anselm sees each of these sources as necessarily harmonized, there is no problem in interpreting the biblical text in a less than literal way, should revealed-truth demand it.

Anselm's respect for the Church Fathers is made evident in passages such as his introduction to *Cur Deus Homo* where he explains that he is writing in response to those who have asked that he do so. He says he will "attempt to present to those who make this request what God sees fit to reveal to me, even though the holy fathers have said what ought to be sufficient on the subject." In his prologue to the *Monologion*, after Anselm explains that in this particular project he would establish nothing but the authority of Scripture but by reason alone, he then goes on to say that he "could not find that I have said anything in it that was inconsistent with the writings of the Catholic Fathers." Anselm's dependence upon and respect for Augustine is manifest in more than one place as well. Anselm's response to criticism of his *Monologion* from his teacher, Lanfranc, shows his indebtedness to Augustine: "It was my intention throughout this disputation to assert nothing which could not be immediately defended either from canonical Dicta or from the words of St. Augustine. And however often I look over what I have written, I cannot see that I have asserted anything that is not to be found there." Anselm did not seem to consider himself theologically innovative: "Indeed, no reasoning of my own, however conclusive, would have persuaded me to have been the first to presume to say those things which you have copied from my work, nor several other things besides, if St. Augustine had not already proved them in the great discussions in his *De Trinitate*."

Anselm also saw the tradition of the Church as authoritative when it came to theological speculation. He spends several pages introducing *On the incarnation of the Word* with warnings to those who would bring challenge to the Christian faith. He asserts that, "no Christian ought to argue that something the Catholic Church believes with her heart and confesses with her lips is not true" (*IOW*, 1). He also indirectly cites the ecumenical creeds when he refers to the Trinity as "that thing in which we profess to be three persons." Even in his own time, Anselm's submission to Church authority was evident.¹²

The necessity of these sources for Christian theology flows from the fact of ontological distance between God and humans, but also because of the fallen human nature. Indeed, for Anselm legitimate theology requires preparation that involves faith, obedience, and virtuous discipline. Even so, the limits to the human intellect guarantee that mystery and ignorance will remain. These authoritative sources, then, are part of the way God seeks to overcome human

¹² Anselm acknowledges his submission to Church leadership in several places. In the prologue to the *Proslogion*, Anselm explains that it was the Archbishop of Lyons who commanded him "by his apostolic authority" to put his name on these works (*Pros.*, Prologue). In the first section of his letter *On The Incarnation Of The Word*, Anselm writes to "the lord and father of the whole church in pilgrimage on earth, the supreme Pontiff Urban," and says that it was, "divine providence which chose your holiness to whom God entrusted the guardianship of the Christian faith and life in the governance of his church there is no one to whom one might more properly appeal if anything contrary to Catholic faith arises in the church, so that it might be corrected by your authority . . . If anything it requires amendment, it will be corrected by your censure, and if anything in it is used to the rule of truth, it will be reinforced by your authority" (*IOW*, 1). Anselm dedicates *Cur Deus Homo* to Pope Urban II with these words: "my Lord and father, Pope urban, whom all Christians should love with reference and fear with love, whom the providence of God has appointed supreme Pontiff in his church, is that the enclosed work for your holiness to examine . . . So that your authority may give approval to those things and the two that are worthy of acceptance and may correct those things that require amendment." Anselm also indicates the ability of the Church (via Pope Calixtus I) to pronounce heresy when he begins his response to a Trinitarian issue by saying, "if this reasoning is sound, the heresy of Sabellius is true" (*IOW*, 3).

limitations when his faithful seek to know him. They are thus used not only for providing initial information or premises in arguments, they also serve to delimit the number of options the Christian philosopher of religion has available to him.

While all three writers regularly assert their reliance on Scripture, each also admit to (and take full advantage of) the wide latitude they believe Scripture leaves open for theologizing. Contrast this with Anselm's submission of his interpretation to "the creeds and conciliar pronouncements."

4. Conclusion

Each of the above authors eschews (whether implicitly or explicitly) important factors of Anselm's theological approach. First, Anselm's insistence on the mystery of God's nature and its impact of God-talk seems difficult to square with the detailed analysis proffered by the modern analytic apologetic approach. Given Anselm's commitment to a God that is beyond knowing or describing literally with limited human language, a significant source of difficulty may very well be that the precision with which modern approaches must operate simply cannot be attained when speaking of God. Further, the intuitions necessary for a concept of the greatest possible being in the Anselmian sense may be illicit if the apophatic tradition is accurate.

Second, Anselm's project in *Monologion* and *Proslogion* was undertaken with very specific delimiters that are not reflective of his greater theological method. Although famous for his "greatest possible being" axiom, it is clear that Anselm's theological methodology incorporated much more than may at first be clear from his purely philosophical experiment. It went beyond mere "intuitions" and was bound in the end by both Scriptural teaching and Church tradition. Specifically, Anselm deliberately left the pronouncements of divine revelation to the side when forming his arguments – yet he never ignored them as orthodox boundaries. Unbound from these twin adjudicators, it is easy to see how far afield one's theological intuitions may take them. The fact that some of these theistic apologetic practitioners have strayed from traditional Christian theology reveals that this is no mere theoretical concern. The above theologian-apologists allow little-to-no authoritative weight to religious authorities outside of Scripture. While this may resound with sola scriptura proponents, when the Bible is interpreted according to certain philosophical positions its role as a corrective standard is seriously vitiated.

It seems, then, that it is not so much Anselmian perfect/greatest-possible being theology that is at fault for these thinkers' unorthodox views, but rather an attempt to sustain their philosophical/theological interpretations of Scripture by simultaneously elevating Anselm's theological thought experiment to a full-blown method and reducing it to a self-contained system uncoupled from its orthodox constraints. While none of this proves the falsehood of the above theologians' positions, or the illegitimacy of their theological methods, it does indicate that these non-traditional / unorthodox / heretical positions are not derived from a truly Anselmian methodology.

"Let no one, therefore, be in a hurry to plunge into the thicket of divine questions . . . approach questions concerning Holy Scripture as cautiously as possible."

(Anselm, *On the Incarnation of the Word*, 1)

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