

When I first began to draw near to belief in God, and even for some time after it had been given to me, I found a stumbling block in the demand so clamorously made by all religious people that we should 'praise' God; still more in the suggestion that God himself demanded praise. We all despise the man who demands continued assurance of his own virtue, or of his own intelligence, or delightfulness. We despise still more of the crowd of people around every dictator, every millionaire, every celebrity, who gratify that demand. Thus a picture, at once ludicrous and horrible, both of God and of his worshippers, threatened to appear in my mind. The Psalms were especially troublesome in this way. 'Praise the Lord, O my soul,' 'O praise the Lord with everything that's within me,' 'Praise him,' say the Psalms. Worse still for me was the statement put into God's own mouth, 'Whoever offers me thanks and praise honors me' ([Psalm 50:23](#)).

"It was hideously like saying, 'What I most want is to be told that I am good and great.' ... [Furthermore], more than once the Psalmists seemed to be saying something like this, 'You like praise, O God. If you do this good thing for me, I'll give you what you want, namely praise.' It was extremely distressing to me. It made one think that what one least wanted to think. Namely, gratitude to God, reverence to him, obedience to him, I thought I could understand, but not this perpetual worshipping, this perpetual eulogy. Now, part of my initial problem is that I did not see that it is in the process of being worshipped that God actually communicates himself to us.

"It is not of course the only way, but for many people at many times the 'fair beauty of the Lord' is revealed chiefly and only in times of corporate worship. The miserable idea that God should in any sense need or crave or yearn for our worship like some vain woman wanting compliments on a new dress, or a vain author presenting his new books to people who have never met or heard him, that unworthy idea of God is answered in that same Psalm. [Psalm 50:12](#). 'If I were hungry, I would not tell you.' Even if such an absurd deity could be conceived he would hardly come to us, the lowest of

rational creatures, to gratify his appetite. I don't want my dog to bark his approval of my new books. But the most obvious fact about praise - whether of God or anything - strangely escaped me. I thought of it in terms of compliment, approval, or the giving of honor; I had never noticed that all enjoyment spontaneously overflows into praise unless shyness or the fear of boring others is deliberately brought in to check it.

“The world rings with praise - lovers praising their lovers, readers their favorite poet, walkers praising the countryside, players praising their favorite game. There's praise of weather, praise of wines and dishes, of actors, motors, horses, colleges, countries, historical personages, praise of children, praise of flowers and mountains, rare stamps, rare beetles, even sometimes politicians and scholars. I had not noticed either that just as men spontaneously praise whatever they value, so they spontaneously urge us to join them in praising it. ‘Isn't she lovely?’ ‘Wasn't it glorious?’ ‘Don't you think it magnificent?’

“The Psalmists in telling everyone to praise God are doing what all men do when they speak about something they care about. My whole more general difficulty then about the praise of God depended on my absurdly denying to us as regards what is supremely valuable, God, what we delight to do, in fact, what we can't help doing about everything else we consider valuable in our lives. I think we delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses, but actually, in some sense, completes the enjoyment. It is its appointed consummation. It is not out of compliment that lovers keep on telling one another how beautiful they are; the delight is incomplete until it's expressed. It's frustrating to have discovered a new author and not be able to tell anyone how good he is, or to come suddenly at the turn of a country road, upon some beautiful mountain valley, something of unexpected grandeur, and then I have to keep silent because you know the people that you're with and that care for you care no more for it than for a

tin can in the alley or in a gutter. Or to hear a good joke and not have anyone to share it with.

“If it were possible for a soul, a created soul, fully to appreciate, that is to love and delight in, the worthiest object of all and simultaneously at every moment to give this delight a perfect expression, then that soul would be in the highest form of happiness imaginable. To see what the doctrine really means we must then suppose ourselves to be in perfect love with God, drunk with, drowned in, dissolved by that delight and then have it flow out from us like some river, a river of praise. The Catechism says. ‘Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.’ But we shall then know that these are really the same thing. Fully to enjoy is to glorify. Therefore in commanding us to glorify him, God is inviting us to enjoy him.”