



### **Prayer Before Studying Theology:**

Give us, Lord, a humble, quiet, peaceable, patient, tender and charitable mind, and in all our thoughts, words and deeds a taste of the Holy Spirit. Give us, Lord, a lively faith, a firm hope, a fervent charity, a love of you. Take from us all lukewarmness in meditation, dullness in prayer. Give us fervor and delight in thinking of you and your grace, your tender compassion toward us. The things that we pray for, good Lord, give us grace to labor for. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

--St. Thomas More

### **Week #8a: Anselm on the Relation between Faith and Reason and on God's Existence (*Proslogion*)**

#### **Anselm's Life and Works**

The principal source for information about Anselm's life is the *Life of Anselm (Vita Anselmi)* by Eadmer, a monk of the Cathedral Church at Canterbury. There is an interesting story about the origins of this *Life*. Anselm had asked Eadmer to come see him privately. Having discerned that Eadmer was hiding something, Anselm questioned him about it and told him either to stop the work or show it to him (no unauthorized biographies allowed). Anselm reviewed the *Life* and suggested various deletions and corrections and a better ordering of the material, but later felt that he was not worthy to be celebrated in this way so asked Eadmer to destroy the manuscript. Eadmer therefore made a careful copy of the manuscript before destroying the original, thus nominally complying with Anselm's request. Thus the *Life* is a semi-authorized biography.

Anselm was born in Aosta (northern Italy) in 1033. After his mother's death, he quarreled bitterly with his father and renounced his patrimony, setting off across the Alps with a single servant and spending several years traveling in France. By 1059, he had decided to settle at the monastery of Bec in central Normandy (France) to study under the prior of the monastery, Lanfranc of Pavia (c. 1005-1089). In 1060 at the age of 27, he became a monk of the monastery. When Lanfranc left the monastery of Bec in 1063 to be the abbot of the abbey of Saint Étienne at Caen, Anselm served as the principal teacher at Bec, becoming abbot in 1078 (succeeding the monastery's founder, Herluin). (On Anselm's work as a monastic superior, see Evans, *Anselm*, p. 7.)

Contrary to the monastery of Bec's previous practice, which was for monastic teachers to accept "wandering scholars" (who were young noble laymen and could bring money into a new monastic foundation), Anselm focused all of his attention upon teaching his fellow monks. Anselm's first two works, the *Monologion* (c. 1075) and the

*Proslogion* (1077-1078), were written after the monks he taught asked him to commit his teaching to writing.

The *Monologion* is a meditation upon the nature of the divine essence while the *Proslogion* explores the connection between faith and reason. (Though these early treatises include reflection upon philosophy, grammar and dialectic, they actually formed part of an introduction to the disciplined reading of the Bible.)

By 1085, Anselm's treatises were being read throughout Europe and he had received and responded to a criticism of his *Proslogion* by Gaunilo, a monk of Marmoutier (France). Anselm subsequently was obliged to write *On the Incarnation of the Word*, responding to the quandary posed by Roscelin (b. circa 1050 in Compiègne [France]; advocate of nominalism in regard to universals) concerning whether the Father, Son and Holy Spirit were three separate entities (=tritheism, three distinct gods) or one entity (this saves the unity of the Godhead, but implied that the Father and Holy Spirit had also been present in the Incarnation together with the Son).

Anselm was elected Archbishop of Canterbury in 1093, succeeding his teacher Lanfranc (the first Archbishop of Canterbury under Norman rule), who had died in 1089, allowing the morally challenged king (William Rufus) to plunder the Church's estates for the four years prior to Anselm's appointment. As a monastic teacher, Anselm was less than thrilled with the administration and politics required by his new job as archbishop. He had a tense relationship with the king, who expected the Archbishop (as a feudal landholder) to contribute significant funds and troops to support the king's military campaigns. Anselm felt this placed an intolerable financial burden upon the tenant farmers who worked the land on the Church's estates. The king and most of the English bishops also did not recognize Urban II as pope (as Anselm did). This remained a source of friction, leading Anselm to leave England in 1097 or 1098 and not return until 1100 after the king's death. It was during this period (1093-1100) that Anselm produced his other two major works, *Why God Became Man* (on the purpose of the Incarnation) and *On the Virgin Conception and Original Sin*.

Anselm continued to experience tension with the new king (Henry I) over the role played by the Pope and king in selecting bishops and investing them with temporal and spiritual authority, again going into exile over this question of lay investiture from 1103 to 1106, when the king and pope were able to reach a compromise solution. After two years of frail health, Anselm died on April 21, 1109.

### Question: How Are Faith and Reason Related?: Three Different Responses

As one reflects upon these different positions, one might also ask oneself how each position might change both

- one's understanding of faith/Christian life and
- one's understanding of what is to be a human being, i.e. what it means to live in and speak to the broader world and to engage in disciplined enquiry concerning what is true.

#### **(1) Faith → Growth in Faith and Holiness**

The mysteries of the Christian faith (e.g. what the Church confesses concerning God's nature and will) cannot be analyzed or proved by logical

argument. Such matters transcend the order that can be rationally observed in created things; they need not conform to the latter.

- A view sometimes found in monastic circles

## **(2) Use of Reason → Understanding → Faith → Rational Enquiry into Matters of Faith**

Reason is a creation of God; since human beings are made in the image of God and given reasoning powers, they should use them.

- From the very beginning, reason must be used to find the meaning of propositions (statements of faith). Without reason, one could not even grasp the sense of statements concerning what is to be believed.
- Use of the *quaestio* method in theology — two truths of the faith are set alongside each other, one being an affirmation and one being a negation contradicting it, and each of these two seem to have arguments in favor of their truth. E.g.
  - “There exists original sin, or a sin which, proceeding from Adam’s sin, is present as a true sin in all men, belonging properly to one, yet spread to others by way of propagation” (with the prooftexts from Ps. 51 and Rom. 5 being provided).
  - “But on the other hand it says in Ez. 18:20, ‘The soul which has sinned, it [alone] shall die; the son shall not bear the iniquity of the father.’ From this, it seems that the sin of the father is not passed on to the son. Therefore original sin is excluded.”
- A view sometimes found in the emerging cathedral schools (Abelard; 1079-1142), representing the beginnings of the scholastic approach to theology

## **(3) Faith → Reverent Inquiry concerning Matters of Faith**

Rational investigation of the mysteries of faith is acceptable, provided that reason is ordered within and under faith (a reserved retreat from the nascent scholasticism).

- Reason is seen as a servant or handmaid (*ancilla*) of faith (Peter Damian [Pietro Damiani]; 1007-1072)
- Reason is not, however, treated as an independent principle.

### **Faith and Reason in Anselm**

*Anselm and Monastic Theology of Faith and Reason*

Anselm essentially follows the older monastic theology:

- In teaching the faith to our fellow Christians, we do not use reason to prove the truths of faith, e.g. that God is a Trinity.
- In teaching of the Church reason is therefore not viewed as an independent principle that can prove or establish things on its own.

- In teaching the faith, it would be inappropriate to propose, by way of argument (*sed contra*), that matters affirmed by revelation/the teaching of the Church were not so.
- At the same time, the disciplines of grammar (i.e. the analysis of texts and basic literary criticism) and logical analysis can help us
  - to understand the Scriptures and the faith of the Church and
  - to understand, in regard to what is taught there about God and the world, *how these matters are so*.

### **Faith/Experience of the Truth → Enquiry → Understanding**

**One must receive by faith the truths of revelation taught by the Church** (which rests upon its own grounds and needs no proof) but **reason has the duty afterwards to examine what is believed** (inquiring into how and why matters are so), it being presupposed that **reason and revelation cannot contradict each other**:

- “I do not try, Lord, to attain your lofty heights, because my understanding is in no way equal to it.” But I do desire to understand your truth a little, that truth that my heart believes and loves. For I do not seek to understand so that I may believe; but I believe so that I may understand. For I believe this also, that ‘unless I believe, I shall not understand’ [Is. vii.9].” (*Proslogion* 1; ET Charlesworth, 115)
- "For no Christian ought to dispute how what the universal Church believes with its heart and confesses with its mouth may not be [the case], but, while always holding the same faith without doubting, loving and living humbly in accordance with it, as far as reason is able to inquire how it may be. If one is able to understand, he gives thanks to God; if one is not able...he bows his head to what must be revered." (*De incarnatione verbi* 2)

### **The truth must be experienced before it can be understood.**

- Anselm’s “faith seeking understanding” (*fides quaerens intellectum*) is a development of Augustine’s account of understanding the faith (*intellectus fidei*): “Unless you believe, you will not understand” (*Nisi credideritis non intelligetis*).

### **Faith → Understanding → Love of God**

“I pray, O God, that I may know You and love You, so that I may rejoice in You” (*Proslogion* 26; ET Charlesworth, 153)

**Faith that moves toward understanding is a tending toward God** (*tendere in deum*) **that finds its goal in love of God** (even though, in knowing and loving God, there may be matters into which the intellect is unable to gain understanding, e.g. the mystery of the Trinity, the confession of which is still necessary to salvation).

- “I recognize and give you thanks, O Lord, that you have created in me this image of you [i.e. reason that aims at understanding], so that I may remember you, think of you and love you. But this image has been so worn away by the withering action of my vices, so obscured by the smoke of my sins that it cannot do what it was

made to do unless you renew and reform it.” (*Proslogion* 1; tr. Principe, *Intro.* p. 184)

**Inquiry that oversteps the bounds proper to human nature and insists that one will believe nothing not previously established by reason annuls the very faith which is necessary to attain stability and firmness of belief and true understanding.**

- “Surely no Christian should question *how* what the Catholic Church believes with its heart and professes with its mouth *is not*; but, while always holding that same faith without doubting, while loving it and living according to it, he should humbly seek, so far as he can, the reason *how it is* (*quomodo sit*). If he can understand, let him thank God; if he cannot, let him not lower his horns in order to start tossing them, but rather bow his head in adoration” (*De incarnatione verbi* 1; tr. Principe, *Intro.*, p. 183)

#### *Anselm and Scholastic Theology on Faith and Reason*

At the same time, Anselm makes extensive use of concepts and patterns of argumentation associated with the emerging scholasticism. He also displays similar interests when he allows that reason may be used in apologetic presentations of the faith to those who do not and will not believe:

**The defense of the truths of faith by means of reason alone could be used to respond to criticisms made by non-Christians**, who do not wish to believe what they do not understand (*Fides nostra contra impios ratione defendenda est, non contra eos, qui se Christiani nominis honore gaudere fatentur*).

- It is possible, then, that certain beliefs that Christians hold by faith could be proved by “necessary reasons,” without appealing to the authority of Scripture.
- Such demonstrations, though not intended for believers, could also incidentally strengthen the faith of believers who seek better to understand what they believe.

Understanding what Anselm means here is one of the most subtle and difficult points in understanding Anselm’s theology.

Apparently, Anselm is assuming two things:

(1) Faith and reason (at least, any reason which is native to us and worth having) will always be in agreement.

Therefore,

- a. what faith confesses and
- b. what any reason worth having will eventually recognize and acknowledge are the same.

(2) Not believing arises from defects in using the rational mind we have been given and these defects arise from a prior defect in the will due to sin. We therefore do not want to



### **Prayers Before Studying Theology:**

God be in my head,  
    And in my understanding;  
God be in mine eyes,  
    And in my looking;  
God be in my mouth  
    And in my speaking;  
God be in my heart,  
    And in my thinking;  
God be at my end in my departing.  
    --Sarum Missal

Lord God, since you brought us safely to the beginning of this day, defend us as this day proceeds by your mighty power, so that we do not fall into any sin, but that all our words, our thoughts and actions may be so governed, as to be ever righteous in your sight. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.  
    --Roman Breviary

### **Week #8b: Anselm on the Relation between Faith and Reason and on God's Existence (*Proslogion*)**

- Anselm as a transitional figure,
  - rooted in monastic theology and spirituality and yet
  - receptive to the intellectual tools provided by the emerging scholastic theology.

Anselm's Question: Is it possible to show that God exists and has a certain character, basing one's argument solely on things that must *necessarily* be so?

If one could do this, any reasonable person (whether a faithful Christian or even the professed atheist) should be able to see that this must be the case, because it is supported by reference to necessary reasons (what must be so).

- It's interesting to think about what should be counted as necessarily and incontrovertibly true. (By this I mean not what is assumed by most people as part of the status quo, but rather what is certainly to be accepted as true and necessary by people of all times, places, backgrounds, etc., transcending the limits of culture or personal perspective.)
  - What would count today as certainly and incontrovertibly true?

- If we profess to have few if any certainties today, why is this so? What specifically has changed about the way that contemporary North Americans see their world?

Anselm attempts to demonstrate the existence and attributes proper to God by means of an *a priori* argument (i.e. an argument based upon a certain definition, apart from and prior to experience/empirical observation).

- Mathematical and geometrical truths are of this type and can be known with certainty by definition ("2+2=4"; "the internal angles of a right triangle will always total 180 degrees"; "there are an infinite number of prime numbers"; a married bachelor is something impossible by definition, i.e. internally contradictory).
  - A simple argument based on what is true by definition should introduce the least possible opportunities for error and thus offer the most compelling proof, based on necessary premises.
- This is in contrast to *a posteriori* arguments, which are based upon claims that can be verified or falsified by the use of empirical observation with the senses.
  - Arguments based on sense-perception are subject to errors introduced by sense-perception, e.g. the "oasis" the thirsty desert traveler sees is not really what at all, but a mirage.
    - Arguments based on sense perception may therefore offer a less compelling proof, since the premises are not necessary and are more likely to be based on erroneous perceptions.
    - Arguments based on inferences from sense perception are also more complex and introduce more opportunities for errors in reasoning to creep in.

Anselm: There exists in the human mind a conception of a "being than which no greater can be thought" (BTWNGCBT), i.e. He is

- the greatest being logically conceivable by anyone and
- has all great-making properties (goodness=absence of non-moral restrictions=capacity for forms of existence and action unlimited by any non-moral constraints).
  - This ("all great-making powers") would also include being
    - a necessary (rather than a contingent) being
      - since it would be a better (superior) condition to remain in existence without dependence upon others (existing from and through oneself) than to be in existence only briefly or intermittently due to one's dependence upon others
    - that is capable of a maximal state (else infinite regress would be possible), thus there is no more to have beyond what God has. God is therefore the Supreme Good (*summum bonum*).

In other words, being what He is, He has every perfection there is to have in the highest degree.

This conception (of the BTWNGCBT) will exist even in the mind of the atheist (the “fool” mentioned in Psalms 14 and 53, who possesses reason but wills not to live in accord with right reason).

- The fact that this conception exists in the atheist's mind is the reason why the atheist can understand what is being said, even though he/she fails to understand that this is a conception of something that actually exists.
- Belief in God (not atheism or agnosticism) is therefore the default position of the human mind, i.e. ought to be self-evident to those able to make proper use of their capacity for rational thought. Thus, the existence of God should be self-evident not only for Christians (as Barth interprets Anselm) but for any human being with the ability to think (given the BTWNGCBT definition, the claim that God does not exist is rationally incoherent).
  - Note, however, that the atheist
    - need not know anything about God other than that He is BTWNGCBT (to know more would require revelation) and
    - may not be moved from recognizing such a being to rightly understanding and trusting/worshipping Him.

Possession of Actual Existence: **This BTWNGCBT can, by definition, not exist in the mind alone**, because if it existed only in the mind we could imagine a way in which this being could possess a further (additional) excellence of actually existing (which it does not currently possess); if this were ever the case, however, the thing in question could hardly be a BTWNGCBT, since we could conceive of a superior being which possessed the excellence in question. (A greater being *could* be conceived which existed not only in thought [*in intellectu*] but also in reality [*in re*] and only it would be the BTWNGCBT.) Furthermore, **the BTWNGCBT cannot be thought not to exist** (at least not if one *understands* what one is saying; see *Proslogion* 22), because whatever one imagined not to exist would not be the BTWNCGBT, since, if we imagined it not to exist, it would lack the excellence of actually existence and therefore by definition could not be the BTWNCBT. (In other words, the kind of thing it is [unique] requires it to exist.)

- Possession of the Good: Because the BTWNGCBT possesses all excellences to the highest (maximal) degree it is also reasonable to think that the BTWNCBT is the source of all good through which every good (partial, less complete/perfect goods) come to exist in the created realm.
- Possession of Perception: Because perception is an excellence which creatures possess, it must also be found in the BTWNGCBT else there would be an excellence missing from the latter (which by definition is impossible) and it must be found in the latter in a way appropriate to the BTWNCBT's perfection (i.e. as a complete and unlimited perception unrestricted by bodily limits).
- Possession of Omnipotence (Rightly Defined): Omnipotence does not mean being able to do all possible actions (including immoral actions which are associated with corruption or are harmful to oneself and cause corruption/weakness--this would conflict with other excellences the BTWNGCBT must possess).
  - Omnipotence means being able to do all things that are appropriate to one's perfections, not being limited by corruption, disorder or weakness (which give something else power over one).

- Possession of Justice (Rightly Defined): Perfect justice is not incompatible with the redemption of the wicked. God's goodness requires being good even to the wicked and not only punishing them (as strict justice requires) but also acting for their benefit (which mercy requires and moves sinners away from sin to gratitude and love).
- God the Source of His Own Life, Goodness and Wisdom: If God depended for his life/existence, goodness and/or wisdom upon someone or something else, he could by definition not be the BTWNCBT, since there would be a good (self-existence; not depending upon someone/something else for his life) that God did not have. Not only is God not dependent upon another, but rather all things are dependent upon him.
- God Is Without Limitations: If God had **limitations upon his existence** or movement (e.g. being mortal or confined in a place), bodily limitation and spatial extension/restriction **would be less perfect states and by definition cannot belong to the BTWNCBT**.
- God Is Ineffable (Greater Than Can Be Thought, So Exceeds the Understanding): If could be understood, something greater can always be conceived that exceeds the understanding.
- God Is Supremely Good and the Source of the Greatest Joy There Is (Unsurpassable)

### **Gaunilo's Response**

#### Gaunilo's Summary of What He Thought Anselm Was Arguing:

It is claimed that the BTWNGCBT must

- (a) exist in the mind if one is able to understand what is said and
- (b) exist in reality or else it would lack the excellence of actual existence and therefore not be the BTWNGCBT.

#### Gaunilo's (Misguided) Criticism of Anselm's Argument:

We should accept

- (a) that something can be said to exist in the mind when we understand it, but reject that this has any connection with
- (b) that things existing in the mind need have any actual existence (e.g. we can have unreal ideas, like conceptions of unicorns).

In other words, understanding does not require a perception/recognition that the object actually exists.

Gaunilo appears to be arguing that Anselm's *a priori* argument has a fundamental problem—it treats

- (1) what exists in the mind and
- (2) what exists in reality

as if these two had precisely the same features and were indistinguishable from one another. Sense experience could add something further to [2] that is not found in [1], allowing these to be distinguished as they ought to be.

Gaunilo seems to have missed the point here.

- Anselm is not arguing that because the mind *understands* and therefore *has a conception of the thing* that the understanding must recognize that the thing has *an actual existence* (i.e. knowing requires that the object of knowledge exist/be a real thing).
- Anselm's argument instead depends upon the internal logic of what being a BTWNGCBT strictly requires (and the BTWNGCBT is a unique being and not an instance of some more general case about how created things exist; see *Proslogion* 22) and Gaunilo fails to adequately appreciate the legitimacy of *a priori* arguments that are based upon a valid definition.

In ch. 5 of his response, Gaunilo tries to tackle the latter claim (as he understands it) by asserting that existence can mean more than one thing and not just "actual existence" or "real existence in the world apart from the mind." Real existence somewhere must be proved first before "than which no greater can be thought" can be discussed in a meaningful way. (This makes some sense but his subsequent example of the imaginary island misses the point, by ignoring the internal logic of the BTWNGCBT argument; whoever thought that an island could be a BTWNGCBT??). Gaunilo's subsequent distinction in ch. 7 between "cannot be thought not to exist" and "cannot be understood not to exist" only reduplicates what Anselm already says (thought/conceived=thought in a way in which one understands what one is claiming).

### **Anselm's Response**

Let's go back to the self-evident claim that a BTWNGCBT exists, which we as Christians know to be God. Furthermore, understanding presupposes that there is an object of the understanding, hence it is clear from the structure of the act of understanding that what is understood (the object of understanding) exists in the mind.

In regard to the claim about the Lost Island being the best possible land and therefore necessarily existing, this is totally different from being a BTWNGCBT, which means having *every possible excellence in the highest degree*, i.e. in the best possible way.

### **Kant's Response**

There is a difference between logical predicates and real predicates; "is" is a logical predicate but not a real predicate (as Anselm's argument illicitly assumes). A real predicate adds something to the definition of the concept, e.g. instead of "the horse is a quadruped" (logical predicate), we say "the horse is fast" (real predicate).

"Is" doesn't add anything that is not already presupposed in the definition of a thing. (The existence of a thing is presupposed in its definition otherwise there would be no subject to have the attributes/properties specified in the definition. Here Kant goes after Anselm's claim that there is something added to a thing existing in the mind when it actually exists.)

Kant says if I ask for what makes a \$100 dollar bill what it is, I will get the same definition regardless of whether I am talking about an imaginary \$100 dollar bill or an actually existing \$100 dollar bill. The one will match the definition given of the other. (Evaluation: This is clearly a misguided criticism, failing to recognize that "is" is equivocal, having different senses [in regard to mental concepts and existing objects] that are not convertible.)

Furthermore, Kant claims, whether this definition of the concept is instantiated in an actually existing object cannot be determined on an *a priori* basis, but only on the basis of and by reference to observation/experience.

### **Final Evaluation**

One fuzzy area that is worth noting in Anselm's argument is where Anselm claims that if the concept can be instantiated in the mind (because its definition is coherent rather than self-contradictory) then it might exist (possibly exists) in reality; the coherence of the definition therefore shows that it is a thing (has the properties specified by its definition and is actually existent at least in the mind) rather than a non-existing thing.

This seems to treat things existing in the mind as at least minimally existing, in accordance with Anselm's version of Christian (Augustinian) Neoplatonism.

- Anselm's Neoplatonic assumptions can be seen in *Proslogion* 17, for example, where there is an analogy between
  - the sensible qualities found in created things (like sweetness) and
  - the supremely desirable qualities of God, which transcend created existence and are ineffable but are knowable (within limits) when the mind is freed from the darkness of sin.
- This analogy presupposes a correspondence between the mind's perception of an object and the object itself (as the prior cause which allows for subsequent, analogical effects).
  - The same thing may be presupposed in the treatment of joy and delight in *Proslogion* 24 and of the good in the beginning of *Proslogion* 25

### Problems Needing Further Study

- Is it a problem, as Gaunilo briefly contends, that the mind cannot comprehend the divine nature or its definition (as opposed to just one peculiar quality God has)?
- How true is the criticism that Anselm illicitly moves from the order of knowing (*ordo cognoscendi*) to the order of actually existing things (*ordo rerum*)? (In other words, to what extent is the definition of BTWNGCBT a *semantic* claim, i.e. a claim about meaning (how/what words mean)?