

# Anselm of Canterbury

(1033/34–1109)

## 1. Biography

- born in Aosta in Burgundian
- Because he was harshly treated by his father, he left home and after three years finally arrived in Normandy and decided to remain at the Abbey of Bec.
- He then decided against becoming a hermit and in 1060 became a monk at the Abbey of Bec, where he became active as a teacher.
- Three years later he was elected to be Prior.
- At this time he composed some of his philosophical and theological works, notably, the *Monologium* and the *Proslogium*.
- After fifteen years as Prior he was elected Abbot, remaining in this office for fifteen years.
- Since his abbey held possessions in England, Anselm came into contact with England.
- His widespread fame made him sought after even by William the Conqueror.

- Anselm was put under pressure to become the archbishop of Canterbury. Although he adamantly resisted, he did ultimately acquiesce.

## 2. Theology

- Rationality and piety together
- The original title of the work, in which the "ontological" proof occurs: *Fides quaerens intellectum* [Faith seeing understanding]
- *Credo, ut intelligam.* [I believe so that I might understand.]
  - Even this claim is considered as a teaching of faith.
- Theology understood as faith reflection
- "The Father of Scholasticism"

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- "necessary reasons" [*rationes necessariae*]
    - "Why God Became Man" [*Cur deus homo*]
  
  - Anselm's program: to prove from reason the teaching of faith, extending even as far as the Trinity.
  
  - At least the *necessity* of the teachings of faith can be proven.
    - The Mystery is not eliminated; rather, the Mystery is seen *as* Mystery.
  
  - The three level of development of religious knowledge:
    1. faith
    2. insight
    3. vision
  
  - A brief meditation on the dignity and misery of the human condition [*Meditatio de humanae conditionis dignitate et miseria*].<sup>1</sup>

### 3. The so-called Ontological Proof of the Existence of God

- Christian faith is presupposed.

<sup>1</sup> *Patrologia latina* 158, 709B–722A.

- The proof occurs within the context of an intimate prayer.
- The notion of necessity in the proof
  - It is necessary that God exist.
  
  - God's existence is necessary existence.
    - \* God cannot not exist.
    - \* a specific singularity
  
  - Both kinds of necessity are dependent on one another.
  
- Presuppositions for the success of the proof:
  - concentration
  - leisure
  - meditation
  - looking
    - \* "light": "But certainly you dwell in inaccessible light. And where is that inaccessible light? Or how do I reach it? Or who will lead me to it and into it, so that I can see you in it? And then by what signs, under what face shall I seek you? I have never seen you, my Lord God, or known your face. What shall I do,"
    - \* the elimination of hindrances
  
- God is the source of the strength of the argument.

- The point of departure is the notion of God as "that than which nothing greater can be thought".

- Even atheists share this notion.

- \* The atheism in the proof is found in faith, i. e., in Holy Scripture.

- Theism and atheism thus share the same point of departure.

- "God exists."

- "God does not exist."

- Two kinds of existence

- existing in thought

- thought as existing

- Anselm then argues that what exists in reality is greater than that which is only in the mind; wherefore, since "God is that than which nothing greater can be thought", He exists in reality.

- After it has been shown in the second chapter that God exists in reality, it is demonstrated in the third chapter that He exists *necessarily*.

- In other words: that the non-existence of God is unthinkable.

- In chapter four the foolishness of atheism is treated.
  - Two kinds of thinking
    - \* notion
    - \* spoken word
  
  - Atheism thinks just in the realm of language.
    - \* Words without meaning
    - \* God's name with out a notion of God

#### 4. Criticism of the Proof

- Gaunilo was the first critic.
- Rejected by Thomas Aquinas, it was revived in another form by Descartes. After being assailed by Kant, it was defended by Hegel, for whom it had a peculiar fascination.
  
- Thomas Aquinas: If God exists, then His existence is necessary existence.
  
- We have no knowledge of *what* God is, only *that* He is.