ANSELM OF CANTERBURY
and the Desire for the Word

EILEEN C. SWEENEY

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I

THE PRAYERS

Persuasion and the Narrative of Longing

Though the basis for the collection of Anselm’s letters as it appears in Schmitt’s critical edition are manuscripts derived from the collection of prayers and meditations Anselm sent to Matilda, Countess of Tuscany, in around 1104, most of the prayers were written between about 1063 and 1078, during his time as prior of Bec; thus, the form in which the prayers appear in the modern edition is somewhat artificial.¹ The manuscript tradition shows that Anselm’s prayers were collected in a variety of ways, early on anthologized with prayers by others and without attribution to Anselm.² In this period, it was unusual for prayers to be attributed to any author and when they were, it was never a contemporary or even near contemporary but a saint from an earlier period.³ More significant, perhaps, is the manuscript tradition in which Anselm’s prayers and meditations were collected independently; these manuscripts identify Anselm as author and include a prologue on how the prayers and meditations were to be used. According to Thomas Bestul, this manuscript tradition is evidence of the development of “the notion of a single individual as an


THE LETTERS

Physical Separation and Spiritual Union

Problems of Construction in Reading Anselm’s Letters

F. S. Schmitt’s critical edition of Anselm’s works contains 475 letters, the vast majority written by Anselm but including some written to Anselm. The letters have been the subject of controversy on several fronts. The first is over whether Anselm himself made a collection of his letters late in his life, during his second exile. The controversy is focused on Anselm’s later letters written as archbishop since it is accepted that Anselm made a collection of the letters he wrote as prior and abbot of Bec. As a factual matter, the dispute between Richard Southern, Walter Fröhlich, and Sally Vaughn turns on the dating of an important manuscript collection of Anselm’s letters—whether it was made during Anselm’s lifetime or later, but the deeper issue is whether Anselm used his letters as a vehicle for crafting his image.\(^1\) Fröhlich and Vaughn have used the letters and

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There was a time when Anselm’s *De grammatico*, the *Lambeth Fragments*, and even *De veritate* were neglected and disparaged in favor of the famous treatises on God, the *Prologion* and *Monologion*.¹ Prantl, the great historian of western logic, complained that Anselm’s short dialogue known as *De grammatico* was “futile, wandering, tiresome, and laborious.”² Nineteenth-century commentators tended to draw a sharp line of separation between Anselm’s theological works and *De grammatico*, seeing its preoccupations as unconnected to the rest of the Anselmian corpus.³ Desmond Henry convincingly showed that the analysis of ordinary language, the construction of a technical language, and distinction of senses present in the logical writings are not an anomaly but are significantly present in all Anselm’s work. Thus, Henry argues that all the works, logical and philosophical, are united by the theme of the “distinction between the meaning and the use of words and sentences.”⁴ Anselm’s interest in linguistic analysis “permeates” all his work, on Henry’s view.⁵ Henry notes the parallel gap between grammar and logic, on the one hand, and between ordinary language and the language used to talk about God, on the other, and he speculates that it may have been Anselm’s awareness of the gap between the latter that drew his attention to that between the former.⁶ Gillian Evans essentially con-

1. Desmond P. Henry has given a bibliography of some of these views in his “Saint Anselm’s *De Grammatico*.” *Philosophical Quarterly* 10, no. 39 (April 1960): 115.
6. Desmond P. Henry, “Saint Anselm as Logician.” in *Sola Ratione: Anselm-Studien für Peter*
THE **MONOLOGION** AND **PROSLOGION**

Language Straining toward God

The Problem of Faith and Reason

Central to the interpretation of the *Monologion* and *Proslogion* and the focus of centuries of controversy about them is their dueling claims to proceed *sola ratione* and by “faith seeking understanding.” Commentators have tried to understand and reconcile these claims in a variety of ways. The opposing positions were classically articulated by Karl Barth, who argued strongly that Anselm’s investigation takes place wholly within the context of faith, which provides the premises as well as the questions, and Etienne Gilson, who took it that Anselm’s project was to prove the things of faith—all of them—on rational grounds. Thus for Barth, the presupposition of the notion, that which none greater can be conceived, is a theological one, and its exploration is undertaken in faith; for Gilson, Anselm is, as I noted earlier, “recklessly” rationalistic, his pretensions for reason “indefensible.”¹ Others have argued that Anselm contradicts himself without knowing it.² Still others have argued in different ways

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² M. J. Charlesworth, “Introduction,” in *St. Anselm’s *Proslogion* with *A Reply on Behalf of the Fool* by Gaunilo and *The Author’s Reply to Gaunilo*,” edited and translated by M. J. Charlesworth (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), 34–40. Charlesworth claims that Anselm’s practice is rationalist but that Anselm’s description of his work in terms of an older patristic conception of theology does not match his practice. David Pailin contends that the arguments are meant to be based only on
THE TRILOGY OF DIALOGUES

Exploring Division and Unity

In the preface to this set of three dialogues (De veritate, De libertate arbitrii, and De casu diaboli), Anselm asks that they be published together in this order. They belong together, first, because all three pertain to sacred scripture and, second, because they are united by subject matter and similarity of discussion. Anselm must specify this because unauthorized copies of the texts have been made and they have circulated in another order than he wished. Anselm makes similar complaints in the preface to Cur Deus homo and gives similar directives that the work should appear complete and in the shape Anselm wished, along with his preface and a list of chapter headings. Anselm seems to be both surprised and dismayed by the ways in which the dissemination of his work has gone against his wishes, and he tries to reassert control. He had perhaps gotten some criticism of these works by those whose objections or misunderstandings were caused, he thinks, by incomplete or wrongly ordered texts. Clearly he thinks of them as books, as units complete in themselves and tied to him as their author whose intentions are an intrinsic part of their meaning. This is an interesting historical development in the notions of authorship and publication, but it is also important for understanding Anselm's sense of his project and audience. In this middle period, after the intimate meditations of the Monologion and Proslogion (which were also, as we saw, disseminated and interpreted in ways Anselm seems not quite to have anticipated), Anselm still does not seem to have reconciled himself to the way in which written texts are published, literally made public, and, hence, available to audiences with

UNITING GOD WITH HUMAN BEING AND HUMAN BEING WITH GOD

Anselm's trilogy of works on the Incarnation are linked not just by their subject matter but also were linked in Anselm's thinking. *De conceptu virginali*, Anselm carefully explains in his preface, was prompted by a thread of argument left untied in *Cur Deus homo* that he is certain Bosio will want completed.¹ The connection between *De incarnatione Verbi* and *Cur Deus homo* has only recently come to light. A text edited by Constant Mews, apparently an earlier draft of a section of *De incarnatione*, contains the mention of the author's desire to discuss not just the logic of the Incarnation and union of divine and human natures but the question which was to become the focal point of *Cur Deus homo*: "why however or by what beautiful and necessary reason or rational necessity did the supreme majesty—since he is capable of everything by will alone—assume our nature with our weakness and mortality."² In the context of replying to Roscelin and reflecting further on the more traditional Christological problems he raised, Anselm seems to have come to a different question he wanted to consider.

Besides their interlocking composition and related subject matter, these works are linked by Anselm's reflection in all of them on his own methodology and project. Drawn in by Roscelin and criticism of his own account of the Trinity in the *Monologion*, Anselm is driven to describe and justify his foray into these topics with these methods. He makes not just one but three tries of tone and method in response to Roscelin in the

1. DCV Praef., S II. 139.
2. Mews's translation, along with the Latin text is found in Constant J. Mews, "St. Anselm and Roscelin: Some New Texts and Their Implications I: The *De incarnatione Verbi* and the *Disputatio inter Christianum et Gentilem*," in *Reason and Belief in the Age of Roscelin and Abelard* (Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2002), VI. 60. The edition of the whole fragment can be found on 82-85 of the same essay.
THE LATER WORKS

From Meditatio to Disputatio

In the last two works of Anselm's corpus, De processione Spiritus Sancti and De concordia praescientiae et praestationis et gratiae Dei cum libero arbitrio, the basic themes of earlier works return: the metaphysics of God, the most specifically Christian (and most difficult) theological problems, and the "metaphysics of creaturehood." In these works we get a chance to see how Anselm's way of working with these issues developed by the end of his career. The most obvious change is that these last works are in more than one sense the most "scholastic" of his Anselm's writings. Even though avant la lettre, the works move further toward the scholastic model of disputation than the works on the Incarnation considered in chapter 6. The elements of dialogue in the classical, literary sense—particular interlocutors whose characters, prejudices, fears, and concerns become part of the discussion, where there is (more or less specifically laid out) a dramatic setting and some kind of dramatic transformation of the participants, especially the objector—have all been suppressed in these works.

De concordia uses the pronouns "us" (as those inquiring together), "you" (as the one posing objections), and "I" (as the one answering objections). But the "dialogue" is in indirect discourse; the "you" quickly disappears, reabsorbed into the "we" of Anselm's reply and silenced by the "I" who speaks without further interruption. Moreover, unlike De libertate and De casu, it takes as one of its main tasks the harmonization—not just of free choice with foreknowledge, predestination and free choice—but of scripture passages with Anselm's views and with each other. Thus not just in its suppression of the elements of dialogue, but in treating scripture markedly different from Anselm's dialogue trilogy, De concordia presages later scholastic methods.

De processione has a defined rather than disembodied objector in the