



Anselm of Canterbury

Collected Works

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Ancient Classics Series

The Collected Works of
ANSELM OF CANTERBURY

(c. 1033-1109)



Contents

The Translations

Monologion (c. 1076)

Proslogion (c. 1078)

Gaunillon's 'In Behalf of the Fool' and Anselm's 'Apologetic' (c. 1079)

De veritate (c. 1084)

Cur deus homo (c. 1096)

Meditations and Prayers

The Latin Texts

List of Latin Texts

The Dual Texts

Dual Latin and English Texts

The Biography

Anselm (1911)

Anselm's Philosophy (1914) by Frank Thilly

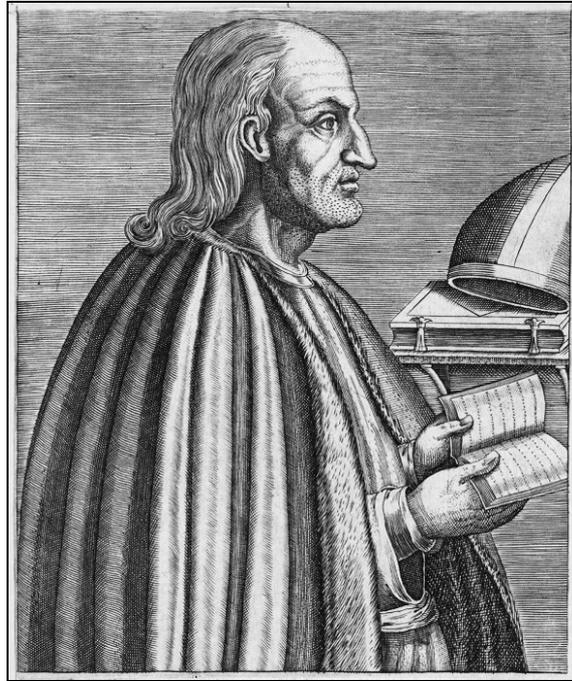
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The Collected Works of
ANSELM OF CANTERBURY



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Collected Works of Anselm of Canterbury



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The Translations



Aosta, the principal city of the Aosta Valley, Italian Alps, 70 miles north of Turin — Anselm's birthplace



A plaque commemorating the supposed birthplace of Anselm in Aosta.

Monologion (c. 1076)



Translated by S. N. Deane, 1903

Also known as *An Example of Meditation on the Reason for Faith* (Exemplum Meditandi de Ratione Fidei), this treatise was written in c. 1076 and is heavily influenced by Augustine's *De Trinitate*, of which work Anselm acknowledges his debt in the prologue. Still, Anselm takes great pains to present his reasons for belief in God without appeal to scriptural or patristic authority, relying instead on new and daring arguments. He attributes this new style to the requests of his fellow monks that "nothing whatsoever in these matters should be made convincing by the authority of Scripture, but whatsoever... the necessity of reason would concisely prove".

In the first chapter, he opens with a statement that anyone should be able to convince themselves of the existence of God through reason alone if they are moderately intelligent. He argues that many different things are known as 'good', in many varying kinds and degrees. These must be understood as being judged relative to a single attribute of goodness. He then posits that goodness is itself very good and, further, is good through itself. As such, it must be the highest good and "that which is supremely good is also supremely great. There is, therefore, some one thing that is supremely good and supremely great — in other words, supreme among all existing things."

A letter survives by Anselm responding to Lanfranc's criticism of the work. The elder cleric took exception to its lack of appeals to scripture and authority. The preface of the later *Proslogion* records Anselm's own dissatisfaction with the arguments expressed in the *Monologion*, since they are rooted in *a posteriori* evidence and inductive reasoning.



The illuminated beginning of an eleventh century manuscript of the 'Monologion'

CONTENTS

PREFACE.
CHAPTER I.
CHAPTER II.
CHAPTER III.
CHAPTER IV.
CHAPTER V.
CHAPTER VI.
CHAPTER VII.
CHAPTER VIII.
CHAPTER IX.
CHAPTER X.
CHAPTER XI.
CHAPTER XII.
CHAPTER XIII.
CHAPTER XIV.
CHAPTER XV.
CHAPTER XVI.
CHAPTER XVII.
CHAPTER XVIII.
CHAPTER XIX.
CHAPTER XX.
CHAPTER XXI.
CHAPTER XXII.
CHAPTER XXIII.
CHAPTER XXIV.
CHAPTER XXV.
CHAPTER XXVI.
CHAPTER XXVII.
CHAPTER XXVIII.
CHAPTER XXIX.
CHAPTER XXX.
CHAPTER XXXI.
CHAPTER XXXII.
CHAPTER XXXIII.
CHAPTER XXXIV.
CHAPTER XXXV.
CHAPTER XXXVI.
CHAPTER XXXVII.
CHAPTER XXXVIII.
CHAPTER XXXIX.
CHAPTER XL.
CHAPTER XLI.
CHAPTER XLII.
CHAPTER XLIII.
CHAPTER XLIV.
CHAPTER XLV.
CHAPTER XLVI.

CHAPTER XLVII.
CHAPTER XLVIII.
CHAPTER XLIX.
CHAPTER L.
CHAPTER LI.
CHAPTER LII.
CHAPTER LIII.
CHAPTER LIV.
CHAPTER LV.
CHAPTER LVI.
CHAPTER LVII.
CHAPTER LVIII.
CHAPTER LIX.
CHAPTER LX.
CHAPTER LXI.
CHAPTER LXII.
CHAPTER LXIII.
CHAPTER LXIV.
CHAPTER LXV.
CHAPTER LXVI.
CHAPTER LXVII.
CHAPTER LXVIII.
CHAPTER LXIX.
CHAPTER LXX.
CHAPTER LXXI.
CHAPTER LXXII.
CHAPTER LXXIII.
CHAPTER LXXIV.
CHAPTER LXXV.
CHAPTER LXXVI.
CHAPTER LXXVII.
CHAPTER LXXVIII.
CHAPTER LXXIX.



'Saint Anselm gives Mathilde his work', Orationes, Diocese of Salzburg, c. 1160

PREFACE.



IN THIS BOOK Anselm discusses, under the form of a meditation, the Being of God, basing his argument not on the authority of Scripture, but on the force of reason. It contains nothing that is inconsistent with the writings of the Holy Fathers, and especially nothing that is inconsistent with those of Saint Augustine. — The Greek terminology is employed in Chapter LXXVIII., where it is stated that the Trinity may be said to consist of three substances, that is, three persons.

Certain brethren have often and earnestly entreated me to put in writing some thoughts that I had offered them in familiar conversation, regarding meditation on the Being of God, and on some other topics connected with this subject, under the form of a meditation on these themes. It is in accordance with their wish, rather than with my ability, that they have prescribed such a form for the writing of this meditation; in order that nothing in Scripture should be urged on the authority of Scripture itself, but that whatever the conclusion of independent investigation should declare to be true, should, in an unadorned style, with common proofs and with a simple argument, be briefly enforced by the cogency of reason, and plainly expounded in the light of truth. It was their wish also, that I should not disdain to meet such simple and almost foolish objections as occur to me.

This task I have long refused to undertake. And, reflecting on the matter, I have tried on many grounds to excuse myself; for the more they wanted this work to be adaptable to practical use, the more was what they enjoined on me difficult of execution. Overcome at last, however, both by the modest importunity of their entreaties and by the not contemptible sincerity of their zeal; and reluctant as I was because of the difficulty of my task and the weakness of my talent, I entered upon the work they asked for. But it is with pleasure inspired by their affection that, so far as I was able, I have prosecuted this work within the limits they set.

I was led to this undertaking in the hope that whatever I might accomplish would soon be overwhelmed with contempt, as by men disgusted with some worthless thing. For I know that in this book I have not so much satisfied those who entreated me, as put an end to the entreaties that followed me so urgently. Yet, somehow it fell out, contrary to my hope, that not only the brethren mentioned above, but several others, by making copies for their own use, condemned this writing to long remembrance. And, after frequent consideration, I have not been able to find that I have made in it any statement which is inconsistent with the writings of the Catholic Fathers, or especially with those of Saint Augustine. Wherefore, if it shall appear to any man that I have offered in this work any thought that is either too novel or discordant with the truth, I ask him not to denounce me at once as one who boldly seizes upon new ideas, or as a maintainer of falsehood; but let him first read diligently Augustine's books on the Trinity, and then judge my treatise in the light of those.

In stating that the supreme Trinity may be said to consist of three substances, I have followed the Greeks, who acknowledge three substances in one Essence, in the same faith wherein we acknowledge three persons in one Substance. For they

designate by the word *substance* that attribute of God which we designate by the word *person*.

Whatever I have said on that point, however, is put in the mouth of one debating and investigating in solitary reflection, questions to which he had given no attention before. And this method I knew to be in accordance with the wish of those whose request I was striving to fulfil. But it is my prayer and earnest entreaty, that if any shall wish to copy this work, he shall be careful to place this preface at the beginning of the book, before the body of the meditation itself. For I believe that one will be much helped in understanding the matter of this book, if he has taken note of the intention, and the method according to which it is discussed. It is my opinion, too, that one who has first seen this preface will not pronounce a rash judgment, if he shall find offered here any thought that is contrary to his own belief.

CHAPTER I.

There is a being which is best, and greatest, and highest of all existing beings.



IF ANY MAN, either from ignorance or unbelief, has no knowledge of the existence of one Nature which is highest of all existing beings, which is also sufficient to itself in its eternal blessedness, and which confers upon and effects in all other beings, through its omnipotent goodness, the very fact of their existence, and the fact that in any way their existence is good; and if he has no knowledge of many other things, which we necessarily believe regarding God and his creatures, he still believes that he can at least convince himself of these truths in great part, even if his mental powers are very ordinary, by the force of reason alone.

And, although he could do this in many ways, I shall adopt one which I consider easiest for such a man. For, since all desire to enjoy only those things which they suppose to be good, it is natural that this man should, at some time, turn his mind's eye to the examination of that cause by which these things are good, which he does not desire, except as he judges them to be good. So that, as reason leads the way and follows up these considerations, he advances rationally to those truths of which, without reason, he has no knowledge. And if, in this discussion, I use any argument which no greater authority adduces, I wish it to be received in this way: although, on the grounds that I shall see fit to adopt, the conclusion is reached as if necessarily, yet it is not, for this reason, said to be absolutely necessary, but merely that it can appear so for the time being.

It is easy, then, for one to say to himself: Since there are goods so innumerable, whose great diversity we experience by the bodily senses, and discern by our mental faculties, must we not believe that there is some one thing, through which all goods whatever are good? Or are they good one through one thing and another through another? To be sure, it is most certain and clear, for all who are willing to see, that whatsoever things are said to possess any attribute in such a way that in mutual comparison they may be said to possess it in greater, or less, or equal degree, are said to possess it by virtue of some fact, which is not understood to be one thing in one case and another in another, but to be the same in different cases, whether it is regarded as existing in these cases in equal or unequal degree. For, whatsoever things are said to be *just*, when compared one with another, whether equally, or more, or less, cannot be understood as just, except through the quality of *justness*, which is not one thing in one instance, and another in another.

Since it is certain, then, that all goods, if mutually compared, would prove either equally or unequally good, necessarily they are all good by virtue of something which is conceived of as the same in different goods, although sometimes they seem to be called good, the one by virtue of one thing, the other by virtue of another. For, apparently it is by virtue of one quality, that a horse is called *good*, because he is strong, and by virtue of another, that he is called *good*, because he is swift. For, though he seems to be called good by virtue of his strength, and good by virtue of his swiftness, yet swiftness and strength do not appear to be the same thing.

But if a horse, because he is strong and swift, is therefore good, how is it that a strong, swift robber is bad? Rather, then, just as a strong, swift robber is bad, because he is harmful, so a strong, swift horse is good, because he is useful. And, indeed, nothing is ordinarily regarded as good, except either for some utility — as, for instance, safety is called good, and those things which promote safety — or for some honorable character — as, for instance, beauty is reckoned to be good, and what promotes beauty.

But, since the reasoning which we have observed is in no wise refutable, necessarily, again, all things, whether useful or honorable, if they are truly good, are good through that same being through which all goods exist, whatever that being is. But who can doubt this very being, through which all goods exist, to be a great good? This must be, then, a good through itself, since ever other good is through it.

It follows, therefore, that all other goods are good through another being than that which they themselves are, and this being alone is good through itself. Hence, this alone is supremely good, which is alone good through itself. For it is supreme, in that it so surpasses other beings, that it is neither equalled nor excelled. But that which is supremely good is also supremely great. There is, therefore, some one being which is supremely good, and supremely great, that is, the highest of all existing beings.

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