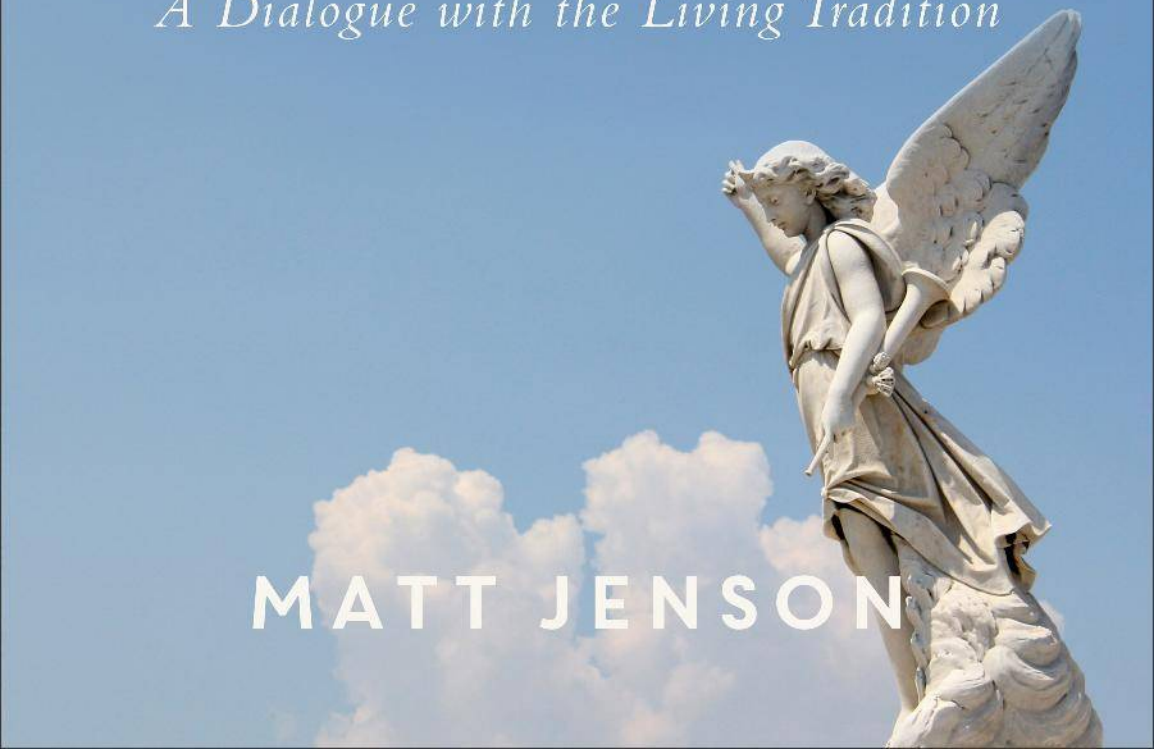
THEOLOGY IN THE DEMOCRACY OF THE DEAD

A Dialogue with the Living Tradition



MATT JENSON

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INTRODUCTION

You may be wondering about the macabre title of this book. It's a bit spooky, this reference to a "democracy of the dead." It conjures graveyards, evokes underworlds. The words come from G. K. Chesterton, who writes:

> I have never been able to understand where people got the idea that democracy was in some way opposed to tradition. It is obvious that tradition is only democracy extended through time. It is trusting to a consensus of common human voices rather than to some isolated or arbitrary record. . . . Tradition may be defined as an extension of the franchise. Tradition means giving votes to the most obscure of all classes, our ancestors. It is the democracy of the dead. Tradition refuses to submit to the small and arrogant oligarchy of those who merely happen to be walking about. All democrats object to men being disqualified by the accident of birth; tradition objects to their being disqualified by the accident of death. Democracy tells us not to neglect a good man's opinion, even if he is our groom; tradition asks us not to neglect a good man's opinion, even if he is our father. I, at any rate, cannot separate the two ideas of democracy and tradition; it seems evident to me that they are the same idea. We will have the dead at our councils. The ancient Greeks voted by stones; these shall vote by tombstones.[1]

The marriage of democracy and tradition makes for an odd couple. They are more often portrayed locked in battle, with the traditional fighting to preserve the glory of the past, while the democratic seeks to liberate the many who were passed over and pushed aside in that purportedly glorious age. Democracy liberates *from* tradition, we might think; it gives a voice and a vote to all of us. Finally.

But Christians believe in the communion of the saints. We believe that God is not the God of the dead but the God of the living, and that the city

1. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, in *Collected Works*, 1:250–51.

in which we vote is a heavenly one. And so, as Chesterton quips, we would be insufficiently democratic if we restricted the franchise to "the small and arrogant oligarchy of those who merely happen to be walking about."

This is an issue of catholicity. To speak of the church's wholeness (*catholic* derives from Greek *kata holos*, "according to the whole") is to evoke the fullness of the deposit of faith, as well as all those who by faith have come to know and love the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. To be catholic is to treasure the truth of the Triune God in the company of all his people, living and dead. Given our innate tendencies toward the parochial, however, we have to work to hold in mind and heart those Christians in other times and places; so consider this book a complement to the many recent forays into a more globally informed theology.[2] Whereas those efforts champion a catholicity in space, this seeks and celebrates a catholicity in time.

Karl Barth wrote at the end of his life that "in order to serve the community of today, theology itself must be rooted in the community of yesterday."[3] And yet, what he wrote much earlier is no less true: "Galvanized father-piety is exactly what we do *not* need. . . . But the founders, in their seeking, questioning, confusion, and affliction, who stood in the boundless difficulty and need of the human before the Lord, could challenge us to become founders *ourselves*, also responding to *our* time."[4] To give the dead a vote, then, is not to give the dead *my* vote. It is not to abdicate responsibility to seek understanding. "Let us know; let us press on to know the Lord," Hosea exhorts us (6:3). And if knowing the Lord is about more than theology, it is not about *less* than theology! Theology requires us to think for ourselves, even if never by ourselves and only after and as we learn to think with the mind of Christ under the tutelage and in the company of others.[5]

This book is not an overview of eleven theologians or a survey of their positions on key doctrines. Nor is it theological journalism. Instead, it is an invitation to apprenticeship. Imagine that Irenaeus, say, is a master painter at work in his studio. You and I are standing just over his shoulder, and I am pointing out brushstrokes, color choices, surprising juxtapositions, figural arrangement. I have struggled at times to know how and when to register

2. This is only one of many such attempts, I hasten to add, stretching back to the *ressourcement* movement of the early twentieth century and often flying under the banner of "retrieval theology." See, in particular, the proposal of Allen and Swain, *Reformed Catholicity*, and the survey in Webster, "Theologies of Retrieval."

3. Barth, *Evangelical Theology*, 42.

4. Barth, *Word of God and Theology*, 216. Here and throughout, emphasis in quotations is as set in the original unless otherwise noted.

5. Tom Smail speaks of the Spirit enabling us to respond for ourselves, but never by ourselves, in *Giving Gift*, 27.

disagreement or even disappointment with these theologians. I most want to hold them up as master craftsmen, to suggest that we would do well to imitate their theological concerns and style. But sometimes, because of bad lighting or fatigue, poor judgment or a lack of vision, their work is marred. And sometimes I will say so.

I want you to see what they are doing and why they are doing it. So I will cite primary texts generously, with only occasional forays into the secondary literature. This mirrors my own apprenticeship to these theologians. I have read as much as I can of their primary work, notated it, pored over it, and tried to make sense of what they were doing on their own terms.

I do so as a systematic theologian whose day job is to teach great books in a Socratic style. So my questions are systematic more than they are historical; I am less interested in the sources of Luther's thought than I am in how it holds together and what it implies for the church here and now. And I trust that these primary texts can teach us quite a lot—about how Luther and the others thought, about how we should think, and above all, about who the Triune God is and how he loves the world.

A colleague of mine asked a trenchant question: Is this a democracy or a meritocracy? Do I really mean to extend theological suffrage to "the people," or only to the best and brightest? We might ask further whether this isn't an aristocracy, with only people of a certain status gaining the right to vote. Perhaps this is a faux catholicity after all.

One obvious reason for asking is that all eleven of these theologians are men. Now, I don't think that these are the only possible candidates for inclusion in a book of great theologians. I can quickly think of another half-dozen who could just as easily have been included, and a couple of those I have included are highly contestable. All but one of these eleven are on the booklist in the Torrey Honors Institute, where I teach; to some extent this is an accident of biography. But I stand by the list, nonetheless.

The fact is, few women wrote formal theology at a high level before the last couple centuries. Far more women have written mystical and devotional theology, both of which can be as probing as the more second-order discourse that I consider in this book. There are many material and social reasons that women have seldom written formal theology until relatively recently. To write formal theology requires education and sufficient leisure (often in a monastery). Women rarely had either. Add to this stricter societal expectations and limitations than we are familiar with in the West these days, and the dearth of female theologians should not surprise us.

But perhaps the most significant reason is sin. For blocking women from reading and writing theology, we in the church can only repent and lament.

While I am suspicious of attempts to include certain second-tier theologians out of a desire to rewrite or redress this sinful history, I am heartily eager to see things change. My hope is that the next millennium will yield as many, if not more, great theologians who are women. It is an auspicious sign that some of the most rigorous and creative theologians working today are women. The work of Sarah Coakley, Katherine Sonderegger, Kathryn Tanner, and Frances Young is stimulating, surprising, and searching—and each is so different from the next, giving the lie to the belief that there is something called "the woman's perspective"! Some of the sharpest students who have graduated from the Torrey Honors Institute and gone on to do graduate theological work are women, and I hope to count these women as colleagues and interlocutors in the years to come.

Let me conclude with two metaphors for the craft of writing that describe what I have attempted to do and how I have done it. The first is from Annie Dillard, who describes the experience of writing in the dark, curiously, carefully, almost blindly, only discerning the way as you go: "You write it all, discovering it at the end of the line of words. The line of words is a fiber optic, flexible as wire; it illumines the path just before its fragile tip. You probe with it, delicate as a worm."[6] Some writers know just what they'll say before they begin saying it; I can't begin to understand them.

The second metaphor comes from the Irish poet Seamus Heaney. Really, it is a transformation of metaphor. Descended from men who farmed potatoes and cut peat, Heaney finds himself in a very different vocation; he is a writer. He begins his poem "Digging" like this:

> Between my finger and my thumb
> The squat pen rests; snug as a gun.

Heaney sits at a window and hears his father digging outside, like his father before him. He marvels at the work of these men—but it is *their* work, not his. Then it occurs to him: he may not have a spade, but he does have a pen. Heaney concludes: "I'll dig with it."[7]

A weapon of war has become a tool with which to till the earth so that it might bring forth life. The work of writing connects Heaney to these men who worked the land after all. All three dig; all three cultivate the soil, in which lie buried the past and the future. Consider *Theology in the Democracy of the Dead* an exercise in digging.

6. Dillard, *Writing Life*, 7.
7. Heaney, "Digging," in *Poems, 1965–1975*, 3–4.

5

FAITH SEEKING UNDERSTANDING—OR UNDERSTANDING SEEKING FAITH?

Anselm of Canterbury and the Logic of God

The Problem of Faith and Reason

Anselm of Canterbury is famous for three things: a far-reaching account of the atonement (to which we will return later), a description of the theological task as "faith seeking understanding," and the first articulation of the ontological argument for God's existence. These latter two make a prima facie odd couple. If the former claim suggests a fideist position submissive to revelation, the latter calls to mind a rationalism confident in the deliverances of naked human reason. Whereas the former makes Anselm a friend of theologians, the latter makes him a friend of philosophers (and prompts theologians to worry that his may be a case of the tail wagging the dog). If the first suggests the insularity and introspection of the monastery, the second anticipates the confident intellectual castle-building of the scholastics.

Consider Anselm's first major work, the *Monologion*, written at the request of monks who insisted on a certain approach: "Nothing whatsoever to be argued on the basis of the authority of Scripture, but the constraints of reason

concisely to prove, and the clarity of truth clearly to show, in the plain style, with everyday arguments, and down-to-earth dialectic, the conclusions of distinct investigations."[1] At the outset, Anselm proclaims that even those who know nothing of the faith "can, even if of average ability, convince themselves, to a large extent, of the truth of these beliefs, simply by reason alone."[2] And what he demonstrates is God himself! Beginning with our universal desire for the good, Anselm sets out toward the source of that good, stringing together a daisy chain of arguments on creation ex nihilo, divine simplicity, and omnipresence, moving on to the divine essence and trinitarian persons and to their mirror in the mind.[3] Yet, all this rational demonstration does not render faith redundant. At the end of his confident meditation, Anselm is adamant: "One must, therefore, have faith in Father, in Son and in their Spirit, equally in each individual and in all three together. . . . The supreme essence is the only thing that everyone ought to believe. This is because the supreme essence is the only goal at which everyone, in every thought and deed, ought to aim. Hence it is clear that there is no possibility of progress without belief, and no benefit from belief without progress."[4]

Or take his second major work, the *Proslogion*, in which Anselm advances the ontological argument. He tells us that he is searching for "one single argument that for its proof required no other save itself, and that by itself would suffice to prove that God really exists."[5] He takes the tack of introspection, entering into the "little chamber" of his soul, shutting out all but God and what will aid him in his quest for God. The seeking begins in prayer: "Teach me to seek You, and reveal Yourself to me as I seek, because I can neither seek You if You do not teach me how, nor find You unless You reveal Yourself." Furthermore, the image of God in Anselm "is so effaced and worn away by vice, so darkened by the smoke of sin," that it must be renewed and reformed if it is to do "what it was made to do." "For I do not seek to understand so that I may believe; but I believe so that I may understand."[6]

1. In the prologue to the *Monologion*, in *Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works*. All references to Anselm's works are drawn from *The Major Works*.

2. Anselm, *Monologion* 1.

3. This broadly Platonic project parallels Augustine's *The Trinity* at many points, though Augustine's conclusions in the closing paragraphs of *The Trinity* are more significantly qualified than Anselm's.

4. Anselm, *Monologion* 77.

5. In the preface to the *Proslogion*. Still, he writes "from the point of view of one trying to raise his mind to contemplate God and seeking to understand what he believes" (preface).

6. Anselm, *Proslogion* 2. Anselm's inward turn recalls Augustine's move in *The Trinity* and anticipates Calvin's claim at the outset of the *Institutes* that knowledge of God and self are mutually implicating.

From here Anselm sets out to prove the incoherence of the fool's statement in his heart that "there is no God" (Ps. 14:1; 53:1).[7] God is that than which none greater can be conceived, and the fool who thinks the nonexistence of God is not thinking the nonexistence of *God* but the nonexistence of one who is less than that than which none greater can be conceived. Existence, after all, is greater than nonexistence. It is not possible, therefore, to conceive God's nonexistence. To think of God, which even the fool does, is to acknowledge his existence. Hence, God necessarily exists. None of this argument requires faith,[8] in Anselm's mind, though the very search for it began in prayer.

It is worth noting the contrast between Anselm and Descartes, who would later offer his version of the ontological argument. Both shut themselves up in isolation. But whereas Anselm begins in prayer on the assumption of God's ever-present help, Descartes begins his first meditation in demolition, committed to a project of tearing down his assumptions and reestablishing indubitable foundations. Here is Descartes: "I realized that it was necessary, once in the course of my life, to demolish everything completely and start again right from the foundations if I wanted to establish anything at all in the sciences that was stable and likely to last. . . . I am here quite alone, and at last I will devote myself sincerely and without reservation to the general demolition of my opinions."[9] Descartes's project is straightforwardly rational; he must begin by rebuilding the house of knowledge from the ground up. Where he grabs a sledgehammer, Anselm kneels in prayer.

Finally, consider *On the Incarnation of the Word*, an apologetic work written in response to Roscelin's suggestion that either there are three gods or all three persons of the Trinity became incarnate. Roscelin has made an intellectual error, and Anselm sets him (and the record, as Roscelin had suggested that Anselm shared his views) straight. He recalls the *Monologion* and *Proslogion*, in which he sought "to show that compelling arguments apart from the authority of Scripture can establish things that we by faith hold about

7. Anselm, *Proslogion* 2.

8. Visser and Williams make this observation:

> Thus, the fool cannot grasp the reason of faith in the same way as someone who has the "experience" that comes from belief; yet there is always something the believer can say to the fool that the fool can understand. And (although Anselm does not say this explicitly) the fool who is convinced by the demonstration has not attained understanding of the same kind, or in the same degree, as the believer who formulated the proof. The convinced fool, no longer a fool, has simply been brought to a state in which faithful inquiry is possible for him. He can now retrace not only the believer's reasoning but the spiritual discipline that made such reasoning possible by yielding an understanding born of experience. (*Anselm*, 24)

9. This comes from the beginning of the first meditation in Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, 12.

the divine nature and the divine persons besides the incarnation," likening them to a kind of defense of the faith.[10]

And yet Anselm is quick to point out that any attempt at defending the faith ("as if the faith should need my defence"!) would be as if Anselm were to trip around Mount Olympus with ropes and stakes trying to stabilize it.[11] Indeed, one is left wondering whether Roscelin needs to be argued into the right beliefs or rebuked into submission. "If one can understand, one should thank God; if one cannot, one should bow one's head in veneration." Faith, obedience, and humility are the necessary prerequisites for understanding, which leaves us in the curious situation of wondering whether *On the Incarnation of the Word* is meant to sway its target Roscelin at all. For "those who have not believed will not understand. For those who have not believed will not find by experience, and those who have not found by experience will not know." He goes on: "And not only is the mind without faith and obedience to the commandments of God prevented from rising to understand higher things, but the mind's endowed understanding is also sometimes taken away, and faith itself subverted, when upright conscience is neglected."[12]

Might *On the Incarnation of the Word* be an apologetic work intent on laying bare the logic of faith over against Roscelin's cavils, yet one in which Anselm assumes that Roscelin will persist in error as he refuses to humbly submit to the faith of the church? After all, it is one thing to be able to think one's way through to understanding; it is another to offer a coherent account of God's existence that is persuasive to heretics and non-Christians (not that Anselm would have known many of the latter). There is an ex post facto character to Anselm's reasoning in these treatises—should we expect it to be persuasive to those who do not yet believe? How much can reason really do?

Anselm's writings display a combination of deference and daring. On the one hand, his reflection begins (and, we assume, continues) in invocation, as he recognizes his need for God to guide him. Anselm does not seek to ground things for himself but is largely content with "the irrefutable arguments of the holy Fathers and especially blessed Augustine, after the apostles and evangelists."[13] He seeks to further explore their logic and share with others "what God shall see fit to reveal to [him] about this subject."[14] Still, it must be said that Anselm stands out in his time for the clarity and individuality of his

10. Anselm, *On the Incarnation of the Word* 6.
11. Anselm, *On the Incarnation of the Word* 1.
12. Anselm, *On the Incarnation of the Word* 1.
13. Anselm, *On the Incarnation of the Word* 6. Also see the commendation of *Why God Became Man* to Pope Urban II and Anselm's remark at *Why God Became Man* 1.1.
14. Anselm, *Why God Became Man* 1.1.

voice. He is inventive and creative, in an age more suspicious than celebratory of such things. His work is not explicitly exegetical. Whereas it was common to litter one's writing with appeals to authority—indeed, the offering of florilegia (literally, bouquets of flowers) of patristic citations was much more the norm—Anselm leaves even his intellectual debts to so influential a master as Augustine largely tacit.[15] It is hard to know what to make of this omission. Some in Anselm's day found it unsettling: "Lanfranc hated the *Monologion*'s reliance on reason rather than authority, and said so; Anselm ignored him."[16] Southern judges that Anselm utterly and unquestionably assumed—that is, took on the mind of—Scripture and the church fathers (chiefly Augustine), even though he seldom cited them.[17] This is either deeply subversive or thoroughly submissive, and it seems most likely that Anselm so took for granted his indebtedness to Scripture and the teaching of the church that it scarcely seemed necessary to reassert them.

In any case, we are left with a Benedictine monk—and that is what he was, before being a theologian or an archbishop—who everywhere assumed the priority of faith and yet took daring steps in the confidence of reason.[18] In what follows, after sketching a bit of the life and world of Anselm, I'll seek to locate this question of faith and reason within the context of the notions of freedom, necessity, and fittingness in Anselm, looking in detail at the importance of harmonious order and turning to the atonement as a case study before offering some concluding thoughts on the reason of faith.

Biography

Though known for his ecclesial geography (he was an archbishop in England), Anselm of Canterbury was born in 1033 in the Italian Alps, in Aosta, east of Lyons, north of Nice, and west of Milan. His mountainous surroundings left an impression on him, from the early dream in which he climbed the "mountains of Jupiter" next to Aosta, ascended to God's house, and was fed with

15. Southern, *Saint Anselm*, 72–73.

16. Thomas Williams, in personal correspondence with the author. See also T. Williams, "Anselm's Quiet Radicalism."

17. "He was not a collector or arranger of material; he simply absorbed the Bible in his thought and language, and allowed his meditations to grow, as a river gathers strength from the springs from which it flows" (Southern, *Saint Anselm*, 70). "If he removed authority from his arguments, it was not to replace it with his own views: quite the contrary, it was to install authority so deep in the foundations that it was out of sight and beyond dispute" (*Saint Anselm*, 443–44).

18. Anselm's uniqueness can be indirectly witnessed in Leclercq's refusal to consign him to either monastic or scholastic theology. See Leclercq, *Love of Learning and the Desire for God*, 277.

God's bread, to the bracing, alpine ambience of his theological reflection and singular obedience.[19] Despite an early aspiration to the monastery, Anselm turned to a wilder youth, before his mother died in his late teens. In his early twenties Anselm's relationship with his father fractured, with father growing hostile and son renouncing his patrimony, crossing the Alps with a servant to seek his way in a far country.[20] He traveled for three years in Burgundy and the Loire region, spent some time at Avranches near Mont-Saint-Michel, and eventually arrived at Bec, a monastery in central Normandy. There he studied under the prior Lanfranc, whose career Anselm would follow in the years ahead. Anselm became a monk at age twenty-seven, a decision that he left to Lanfranc to make.[21] Though he would rise in rank and stature, Anselm was *always* a monk, never less and—unless authority or circumstance demanded it—seldom more.[22] When Lanfranc left Bec, Anselm became prior in his place and focused on teaching the monks. For a decade we find Anselm engaged in his work as prior and in teaching, but writing nothing.[23]

In the 1070s, around age forty, Anselm began to write his *Prayers* and *Meditations*, for which he was most widely known in medieval times.[24] These were richly pious; with Anselm we see a shift in "the environment of prayer," from corporate liturgical prayers to private devotional ones.[25] A few years later Anselm wrote his first two major works: the *Monologion* (a meditation on the essence of God) and the *Proslogion*, in which Anselm sets forth what has come to be known as the ontological argument, according to which God's necessary existence follows from his being the being than which no greater can be conceived. He became abbot of Bec in 1078 and began occasionally traveling to England to check in on the properties belonging to the monastery and, we can assume, reconnecting with his old friend and teacher Lanfranc, who had become archbishop of Canterbury. Of note in this middle period is a debate with Roscelin, an aggressive freelancing teacher whose heretical consideration of the incarnation claimed the support of Anselm and Lanfranc. In response, Anselm wrote *On the Incarnation of the Word* to clarify

19. See the wonderful description in Southern, *Saint Anselm*, 6.

20. Evans, *Anselm*, 3.

21. Southern, *Saint Anselm*, 31.

22. Indeed, "much in his later life as archbishop becomes clearer if we remember that every practical question had for him a monastic orientation" (Southern, *Saint Anselm*, 172).

23. On the reasons for this, see Visser and Williams, *Anselm*, 5.

24. Southern, *Saint Anselm*, 91.

25. "The environment of prayer [with Anselm] has shifted decisively from the church to the chamber, and from communal effort to severe and lonely introspection: we have not only withdrawn from corporate worship into the privacy of the chamber; we have withdrawn into the secrecy of the soul" (Southern, *Saint Anselm*, 102). Also see Evans, *Anselm*, 28.

that, though there are three persons in God, there are not three gods—but yet neither do all three become incarnate. (The key point is to understand that "the Son assumed a human being into the unity of his person and not into the unity of his substance."[26])

In 1093 Anselm became archbishop of Canterbury—quite against his will—taking up an office Lanfranc had held until a few years prior. When Anselm was called upon to administer last rites to the king, the king named him to the vacant archbishopric.

> Chaos and consternation ensued: Anselm resisted with tears streaming down his face, his nose bleeding, protesting his incapacity and predicting disaster; the king and bishops and his own clerks all harrying him to accept. The king attempted to press the pastoral staff into his clenched hand, and when he failed, the bishops forced open his fist and closed his fingers round the shaft. Anselm was then carried into church with the crozier thus held in his hand in the midst of acclamations, "*Vivat episcopus" [Long live the bishop!]* and "*Te Deum" [To you, O Lord]*, while he continued to cry out "*Nihil est quod facitis" [Nothing is being done]*. So the long day ended in tears and confusion, but with Anselm, however reluctantly and certainly uncanonically, still in possession of the archiepiscopal crozier.[27]

Anselm preferred a life of contemplation and was fairly incompetent as an administrator. Furthermore, there were the sticky politics of allegiance to Pope Urban II (an allegiance that was unquestionable to Anselm) and William Rufus, king of England; it didn't help that Anselm was "a man of God who stuck out like a sore thumb among the worldly."[28]

Anselm would find himself frequently caught in debates over jurisdiction of spiritual and temporal affairs. The investiture controversy, in which Pope Urban forbade the conferral of spiritual authority by kings, found Anselm in a particularly difficult situation—sworn to papal allegiance but himself the fruit of an elevation to the archbishopric whose legitimacy was questionable.[29] Even if Anselm never sought power, he did seek the good of those entrusted to him. Even though he spent seven of his sixteen years as archbishop in exile, mostly embroiled in the tug-of-war between popes and kings, Anselm sponsored the local piety and doggedly campaigned for the primacy of Canterbury over the British isles.[30]

26. Anselm, *On the Incarnation of the Word* 9.
27. Southern, *Saint Anselm*, 189–90.
28. Evans, *Anselm*, 19.
29. Evans, *Anselm*, 22–23.
30. Southern, *Saint Anselm*, 238.

"After two years of failing health, Anselm died at Canterbury on 21 April 1109."[31] We have Eadmer chiefly to thank for the details of Anselm's life. Eadmer worked for years on his *Vita Anselmi*, drafting sections of it before transcribing them onto parchment. When Anselm pressed him as to what he was doing, Eadmer finally showed him. Anselm made some corrections, and Eadmer was ecstatic to have received his support. A few days later, though, Anselm ordered him to destroy it, "judging himself unworthy of any such literary monument for posterity." But having spent so long on the work, Eadmer "obeyed him in the letter by destroying the quires on which the work was written, having first transcribed the contents on to other quires."[32]

Freedom, Necessity, and Fittingness

One way to uncover the reasons driving Anselm's faith is to examine his notion of the sorts of things God "must" do. Anselm makes much of the language of freedom, necessity, and fittingness as he accounts for the nature of God and why he does what he does. God being God, it would seem that he is free to do whatever he wants. And so he is. Anselm is clear that "it is incorrect to say of God that he 'cannot do something' or that he 'does it of necessity.' For all necessity, and all impossibility, is subject to his will. Moreover, his will is not subject to any necessity or impossibility. For nothing is necessary or impossible for any reason other than that he himself so wills it."[33] God is the one than which no greater can be conceived, and as such he is "so free that he is subject to no law and no judgment, and is so benevolent that nothing can be conceived of more benevolent than he." Therefore, "there is nothing right or proper except what he wishes."[34]

Again, God is free to do whatever he wants. But for Anselm, much hangs on the "whatever." Might God want to create for wanton sport? Might he want to do an about-face and decide to reward viciousness instead of virtue? We quickly recoil at this possibility and suggest that there must be some limits to "whatever God wants"; this intuition is basic to a number of moves Anselm makes throughout his work.

For instance, could God tire of his creation, turn his back on it, and consign it to oblivion? Could he take this drastic step of changing his mind? Isn't he

31. Southern, *Saint Anselm*, 414.

32. Southern, *Saint Anselm*, 412, quoting Eadmer, *Vita Anselmi*. As a result of Anselm's command to destroy the *Vita* and his subsequent withdrawal from Eadmer, Eadmer's account shrinks after about 1100.

33. Anselm, *Why God Became Man* 2.17.

34. Anselm, *Why God Became Man* 1.12.

capable of this? Absolutely not, says Anselm. But, we might retort, does this not suggest an inappropriate limitation of God's freedom? No, comes the reply, it evinces linguistic sloppiness. To plan something and then change one's mind is to be reactive and inconstant; it is thus to make one's will beholden to another, to allow it to be a function of external circumstances. But God wills whatever he wants, and so even the diabolical defection of humanity cannot change his mind about gathering people to himself. Were God capable of changing his mind—or, Anselm adds, of deceiving or wishing to lie—this "would be incapability more than capability."[35]

At times, Anselm will talk of God's doing something "of necessity," but this is the necessity of self-consistency rather than the necessity of compulsion. God is never other than God, and so some things are "necessary." But there is nothing other than God that moves God to do what God does. He is in no way constrained, "in no way forced to do, or prohibited from doing, anything."[36] Even this divine consistency is no straitjacket but God's "own spontaneous unchangeability"—"spontaneous" because arising from within, so that his unchangeability is an expression of his being fully himself, fully free in all he does.[37] God does "put himself under an obligation to bring his good beginning [in creation] to fulfilment," which eventually requires the incarnation and crucifixion, but it is better to call this grace than necessity.[38]

God does whatever he wants, which is his freedom. When we do whatever he wants, that is our freedom. Anselm sets out a basic, far-reaching principle in his treatise *On Free Will*, defining "the liberty of will" as "the capacity of preserving rectitude of the will for the sake of rectitude itself."[39] Justice is preserved when this capacity is exercised.[40] Elsewhere, Anselm closely aligns truth and justice, defining them both as "rectitude."[41] This is counterintuitive in a late modernity reared on libertarian notions of freedom and a market economy. For Anselm, to be free is not to choose whatever I want; it is to have the capacity to want the right things, and thereby follow the grain of the universe.

All God does is, in a word, "fitting." That is, God being God, he does things well and in good order. The theological sense of necessity is "the utter

35. Anselm, *Why God Became Man* 2.17.
36. Anselm, *Why God Became Man* 2.5.
37. Anselm, *Why God Became Man* 2.16.
38. Anselm, *Why God Became Man* 2.5.
39. Anselm, *On Free Will* 3.
40. Justice is "rectitude of the will preserved for its own sake" (Anselm, *On the Virgin Conception and Original Sin* 3).
41. Anselm, *On Truth* 2, 11, 12.

fittingness with which divine freedom expresses the goodness of its nature in the generosity of its act."[42] There is an unalloyed rightness to what God does. All his works are just. This drives Anselm's soteriology: "If it is not fitting for God to do anything in an unjust and unregulated manner, it does not belong to his freedom or benevolence or will to release unpunished a sinner who has not repaid to God what he has taken away from him."[43]

But perhaps all this talk of regulation and order goose-steps across the page too stridently. We fidget around such stark language and worry that this kind of structure is inimical to love and more suggestive of a tyrant. I suspect this reaction is in large part because, in our limitations and sin, we cannot imagine that an immaculately ordered world might be enlarging and life giving. To most of us, that scenario sounds stifling. But to Anselm, such perfect order is at once true and beautiful.[44] Similarly, Augustine, the master of the medievals, spoke of the "harmony of salvation" that Christ performs.[45] Or recall Irenaeus's logic of recapitulation, in which Christ undoes Adam by redoing Adam the right way. There is a beauty to what he does. It is "fitting," "appropriate," that God would redeem us in this way; and Anselm speaks of "the indescribable beauty of the fact."[46]

There is nothing, though, more unfitting than sin.[47] The problem with sin is that the sinner "is disturbing, as far as he is able, the order and beauty of the universe." Without recompense or punishment for sin, which have a certain "regulatory beauty," "there would be in the universe, which God ought to be regulating, a certain ugliness, resulting from the violation of the beauty of order, and God would appear to be failing in his governance."[48] As we turn to consider *Why God Became Man*, then, we note Anselm's initial answer to why God became man—because something had to be done to restore the ordered beauty of the universe. He offers the analogy of a dirty pearl: "What if he were to allow this same pearl to be knocked out of his hand into the mud

42. D. Hart, *Beauty of the Infinite*, 128.

43. Anselm, *Why God Became Man* 1.12.

44. This is the burden of Hogg, *Anselm of Canterbury*: "The most pervasive constituent of Anselm's *weltbild* . . . is aesthetics" (7).

45. The phrase comes from Augustine, *Trinity* 4.1.5.

46. Anselm, *Why God Became Man* 1.3. Anselm marvels at the beautiful truth of redemption: "In conformity with the fact that it is about someone beautiful . . . it is itself correspondingly beautiful in its logic, beyond the reasoning of men" (1.1). And the monk Boso praises the fitting style of *Why God Became Man*, which is as beautiful as it is true: "These pictures of yours are extremely beautiful and in accordance with logic" (2.8).

47. See Anselm, *Why God Became Man* 1.13.

48. Anselm, *Why God Became Man* 1.15. This helps explain, too, the fixed number of the elect picked up from Augustine and the need for the fallen angels to be replaced by the saints, though "there are to be more elect humans than there are bad angels" (1.18).

by some malignant person, although it was in his power to prevent this, and afterwards, picking it up from the mud, dirty and unwashed, were to store it away in some clean and costly receptacle of his, intending to keep it there in that state."[49] No, this action would not be fitting. A beautifully ordered universe suggests a recompense for sin that is "in proportion to the magnitude of the sin."[50] Mercy must align with justice.[51]

Why *Did* God Become Man?

Why did God become man? Well, "for us and for our salvation": so goes the Nicene Creed. And true enough. But this raises the question of why our plight required this kind of saving action. Here is how Anselm puts it: "The question is this. By what logic or necessity did God become man, and by his death, as we believe and profess, restore life to the world, when he could have done this through the agency of some other person, angelic or human, or simply by willing it?"[52]

After all, if "God so loved the world," could he not more easily have simply zapped it all better? Why, if God is omnipotent, would he choose such a grisly manner of deliverance, such that not a few have detected in Anselmian accounts of the atonement "divine child abuse"?[53] The first question is theoretical: Might there not have been another way in general (possibly a simpler one)? The second question is closer to an objection, and it is a moral one: Isn't there something basically repugnant in forcing someone to die on behalf of others?

So Anselm sets out to lay bare the logic of incarnation and atonement.[54] The treatise is in dialogue form, with the figure of Boso (a monk Anselm had instructed at the monastery in Bec) playing the role of an unbeliever.[55] It is worth noting at the outset that Anselm's concern for justice is deeply aesthetic

49. Anselm, *Why God Became Man* 1.19.

50. Anselm, *Why God Became Man* 1.21. John Owen writes movingly (though in the milieu of penal substitution, not satisfaction) of the recompense required in light of such grave sin in *Communion with the Triune God*, 169–70.

51. Anselm, *Why God Became Man* 1.24.

52. Anselm, *Why God Became Man* 1.1.

53. On this charge, see Joanne Carlson Brown and Rebecca Parker, "For God So Loved the World?," and Rita Nakashima Brock, "And a Little Child Will Lead Us: Christology and Child Abuse," in Brown and Bohn, *Christianity, Patriarchy, and Abuse*, 1–30, 42–61.

54. As the eternal Son became incarnate in order to die (something that the narrative flow of the Gospels makes plain), to ask about the logic of incarnation is always also to ask about the logic of atonement, and vice versa.

55. Anselm, *Why God Became Man* 1.3.

in orientation.[56] Justice is not an abstract canon to which God is subject, but it reflects his beautiful, harmonious ordering of the world.[57] Anselm celebrates "the indescribable beauty of the fact that our redemption was procured in this way."[58] Justice is beautiful precisely in its alignment with God's good creation. This is important to point out, in light of how easily (if flatly) Anselm can be read as simply parroting the concerns of his medieval feudal society in such a way that God is merely a cosmic lord to whom honor is owed in a crassly economic relationship of quid pro quo.

One other word by way of introduction concerns Anselm's method. While there is a certain apologetic thrust to *Why God Became Man*, it is clear that Anselm is working from faith. His proposed *remoto Christo* methodology seeks to (only theoretically) abstract from Christ with regard to the questions at hand. Like a picture in which one chunk has been erased, Anselm paints the scene and tries to prove that the missing figure must of necessity be Christ.

Why God Became Man is divided into two parts. Book 1 considers the various objections of unbelievers to what they consider the irrationality of the Christian faith, eventually arguing that it is impossible that any can be saved without Christ. The book begins with the unbeliever's objection that the incarnation is unseemly.[59] It also seems to call into question God's omnipotence,[60] as he is required to condemn a just man for the salvation of sinners. But, Anselm insists, Christ was not coerced into giving up his life; he did so "of his own volition" for our sake.[61] Still, as the rationality of the death of Christ is a stumbling block, Anselm backs up to consider again whether one can reach a state of happiness, which requires the removal of sin, without Christ.

Anselm writes that sin is "not to give God what is owed to him."[62] The debt we owe him in return for his creating us is, simply, everything we are—the complete subjection of our wills to God, giving him all honor. "It is he who made us, and we are his" (Ps. 100:3). If we fail to give him all we are,

56. See Hogg, *Anselm of Canterbury*.

57. Gustaf Aulén's classic study tends toward a too reductive construal of "law" and "rationality" in Anselm. See Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 90–91.

58. Anselm, *Why God Became Man* 1.3.

59. Anselm, *Why God Became Man* 1.3; 1.8.

60. Anselm, *Why God Became Man* 1.8.

61. Anselm, *Why God Became Man* 1.8. Also see 1.9: "God, therefore, did not force Christ to die, there being no sin in him. Rather, he underwent death of his own accord, not out of an obedience consisting in the abandonment of his life, but out of an obedience consisting in his upholding of righteousness so bravely and pertinaciously that as a result he incurred death."

62. Anselm, *Why God Became Man* 1.11.

we rob him of what is rightfully his. A sinner who has robbed God of his honor is obliged to give him the satisfaction of repaying him more than he took, "in proportion to the insult which he has inflicted."[63] If God were to merely forgive without punishment or payment, then anarchy would rule with regard to sin. This is unfitting, in that it would make sinner and nonsinner similar before God,[64] when in reality sin has violated the "universal order."[65] Were sin to go without recompense, as we saw above, "there would be in the universe, which God ought to be regulating, a certain ugliness, resulting from the violation of the beauty of order, and God would appear to be failing in his governance."[66] From here a long digression ensues on whether the number of fallen angels is to be made up by humanity.[67] This question, too, relates to the good order of God's creation. Part of the relevance of the discussion is that it would be unfitting to admit into fellowship with the angels sinners who have not paid recompense.[68] Recompense must be "proportional to the magnitude of the sin."[69]

But—and herein lies the problem—how can we recompense God for sin if we already owe him everything? Where would we find the resources to pay God back? Furthermore, in robbing God, humanity robs itself; we are impoverished by our sin. In our defeat, "the devil took what belonged to God, and God lost it"—namely, God's intention for humanity.[70] So, unless we return to God what we took, we cannot receive from him what he planned to give. We are, in short "rotten . . . in a ferment with sin."[71] Not that this sad state, this incapacity, renders us innocent.[72] At this point, Boso states the dilemma: "How, then, will man be saved, if he does not himself pay what he owes, and is bound not to be saved if he does not pay?"[73] Book 1 concludes that humanity owes a debt to God it is unable to pay, and it is a debt that must be paid for humanity to be saved. Christ is necessary, then, for our salvation and for God's intention in creation to be accomplished—that is, for God to be seen to be God.

63. Anselm, *Why God Became Man* 1.11. Though note that "no one can honour or dishonour God, so far as God himself is concerned" (1.15).
64. Anselm, *Why God Became Man* 1.12.
65. Anselm, *Why God Became Man* 1.13.
66. Anselm, *Why God Became Man* 1.15.
67. Anselm, *Why God Became Man* 1.16–18. They are, by the way (1.19).
68. Anselm, *Why God Became Man* 1.19.
69. Anselm, *Why God Became Man* 1.20; 1.21.
70. Anselm, *Why God Became Man* 1.23.
71. Anselm, *Why God Became Man* 1.23.
72. Anselm, *Why God Became Man* 1.24. Anselm evocatively speaks of how original sin "percolates through to the whole human race from our first ancestors" (2.17).
73. Anselm, *Why God Became Man* 1.25.

Book 2, in which Anselm will make "another beginning,"[74] argues that humanity was created to "enjoy blessed immortality" and that "this could only happen through the agency of a Man-God."[75] Humanity was created rational (thus able to "love and choose the good") and righteous that it might attain to happiness "by rejoicing in the highest good, that is, in God."[76] Had we never sinned, we would not have died.[77] Despite our sin and the entrance of death, it is "necessary" that God "should finish what he has begun" with regard to humanity. It would hardly be fitting for the Creator to abandon his creation; no, he will bring it to fulfillment. Nevertheless, this necessity is more aptly called grace, in that it is performed by God freely, not under compulsion. So to speak of necessity in this case is to evoke "the unchangeability of God's honour . . . although the whole of what he does is grace."[78] But again, this can't be done without recompense paid for sin.[79] The payment has to be so great because it is the honor of *God* that has been stolen, because the offended party is infinite. And yet, while we cannot pay it, we must. Hence the necessity of a God-man: "For God will not do it because it will not be his obligation to do it, and a man will not do it because he will not be able to. In order, therefore, that a God-Man should bring about what is necessary, it is essential that the same one person who will make the recompense should be perfect God and perfect man. For he cannot do this if he is not true God, and he has no obligation to do so if he is not a true man."[80] God must take an Adamic human nature rather than creating a new one, because the one giving recompense on behalf of the race should be of that race.[81]

Because the God-man is not a sinner, he is not bound to die.[82] Thus, he dies freely, as mortality is not "a property essential for the genuineness of human nature."[83] His death, then, is something above and beyond what he owes to God. It is the ultimate human self-giving and, insofar as it is painful,

74. Anselm, *Why God Became Man* 1.25.

75. Anselm, *Why God Became Man* 2.preface.

76. Anselm, *Why God Became Man* 2.1.

77. Anselm, *Why God Became Man* 2.2. Related is Anselm's doctrine of both a human and an angelic probation.

78. Anselm, *Why God Became Man* 2.5.

79. Anselm, *Why God Became Man* 2.4.

80. Anselm, *Why God Became Man* 2.7.

81. Anselm, *Why God Became Man* 2.8. Anselm has a very thoughtful point about the role of women here: "Moreover, women might lose hope that they have a part in the destiny of the blessed ones, in view of the fact that such great evil proceeded from a woman: in order to prevent this, it is right that an equivalent great good should proceed from a woman, so as to rebuild their hope" (2.8).

82. Anselm, *Why God Became Man* 2.10.

83. Anselm, *Why God Became Man* 2.11.

is a fitting counterpart to the pleasure of sin. Yet, for all this, the God-man is not unhappy, as he takes on discomfort willingly rather than out of necessity.[84] Jesus's death outweighs all sins.[85] His death can even destroy the sin of those who killed him, since they did so in ignorance.[86] Boso asks how God produced a sinless man from sinful matter. Anselm grounds his answer in Mary's sinlessness, though he is quick to note that "his mother's cleanness, whereby he is clean, would not have existed, if it had not come from him, and so he was clean on his own account and by his own agency."[87] The question of Jesus's death seems again to suggest an improper necessity—that is, one in which Jesus was compelled rather than free to give his life. Anselm revisits the question of necessity, insisting that no necessity or impossibility exists in God, but only his will. Anselm reminds Boso of Jesus's words in John 10:18: "No one takes [my life] from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again." In addition to being a debt paid, Anselm considers Jesus's obedience and death as an example to imitate,[88] though this is subordinate to Anselm's satisfaction model of atonement. In conclusion, Anselm notes that Christ's death is the only time someone has given God something that he would not have lost by necessity; furthermore, it was the only debt paid to God by humanity that the person giving it didn't owe.[89] It seems that the Father should give the Son compensation for his great gift. But the Son is God and needs nothing, so the Father should give his gift to another.[90] Hence, the restoration of humanity.

On the Atonement, Briefly

A brief comment about descriptions of the atonement is in order before we ask a key question of Anselm. Ever since Gustaf Aulén's work *Christus Victor*, teachers and scholars have found it useful to speak of three major models of atonement. The *Christus Victor* model emphasizes God's victory in Christ over sin, death, and the devil. Anselm is the classic exponent of the *satisfaction model*, in which Christ satisfies the demands of divine justice. A

84. Anselm, *Why God Became Man* 2.12.
85. Anselm, *Why God Became Man* 2.14.
86. Anselm, *Why God Became Man* 2.15.
87. Anselm, *Why God Became Man* 2.16.
88. Anselm, *Why God Became Man* 2.18.
89. Anselm, *Why God Became Man* 2.18. As beautiful as this passage is, I wonder how convincing it is. After all, it seems that, had Jesus *not* given his life, he would have sinfully disobeyed the Father. Why not see him as perfect, rather than as this supererogatory man?
90. Anselm, *Why God Became Man* 2.19.

later, significant modification of the satisfaction model is *penal substitution*, which foregrounds Christ's being punished for our sin in our place. The *moral influence*, or *exemplarist*, *model* is a "subjective" account focusing on the transformative power of Christ's suffering as an example for us. It's wise to deflate the language of "models," though, and refer instead to "descriptions" of the atonement that use certain metaphors to communicate the saving work of Christ. "Models" too readily suggests that only one such description is viable (when Scripture uses many descriptions) and also that one is *enough* to explain the mystery of salvation. It is worth noting in passing that, despite tendencies to read the models of atonement as alternatives, strands of them are often found in the same writings. While Anselm usually thinks in terms of a satisfaction account, he speaks stirringly of Christ's faithful obedience as an example for imitation.[91]

In speaking of the atonement in terms of satisfaction, Anselm explicitly rejected the then-popular understanding of the atonement as a ransom paid to the devil. At the fall, according to the ransom account, Adam and Eve came under the jurisdiction of the devil, who thenceforth was their "lawful possessor."[92] In light of this, some just way needed to be found to return humanity to God's possession. By orchestrating the killing of an innocent man (and God) in Christ, the devil forfeited his rights to humanity. At times in the tradition, this transaction could be described in terms of divine trickery, with God winning back humanity by being hidden in the humanity of Christ, like a Trojan horse.[93]

Ever quick to appeal to the honor and majesty of God, Anselm would not countenance a description of the devil as some sort of rival with God. Such talk veers toward a dualism in which God and Satan are foes struggling over disputed turf.[94] On the contrary, "neither the devil nor man belongs to anyone but God," and "neither stands outside God's power."[95] "Certainly God did not owe the devil anything but punishment, nor did man owe him anything but retribution—to defeat in return him by whom he had been defeated. But, whatever was demanded from man, his debt was to God, not to the devil."[96] Anselm's discrediting of a significant theme in the ransom account need not be taken to the point of excising ransom language from our soteriology. After

91. Anselm, *Why God Became Man* 2.18–19; also see 2.11.

92. Anselm, *Why God Became Man* 1.7.

93. Most famously, Gregory of Nyssa writes, "God, in order to make himself easily accessible to him who sought the ransom for us, veiled himself in our nature. In that way, as it is with greedy fish, he might swallow the Godhead like a fishhook along with the flesh, which was the bait" (*Catechetical Oration* 24).

94. The dualism charge is outlined in Gunton, *Actuality of Atonement*, 88–89.

95. Anselm, *Why God Became Man* 1.7. Also see 1.6. Note that this is Boso speaking.

96. Anselm, *Why God Became Man* 2.19.

all, Jesus gave his life "as a ransom for many" (Matt. 20:28; Mark 10:45), and we were "ransomed from the futile ways inherited from [our] forefathers" (1 Pet. 1:18) by the blood of Jesus for God (Rev. 5:9). The question, as always, is not the term but its intended meaning: What exactly do we mean by ransom? What is its price? How and to whom is it paid?

Divine Child Abuse?

Now to our question for Anselm. What of the charge I mentioned earlier, that such a violent account of divine payback amounts to no more than divine child abuse? To many, Christian accounts of the cross of Christ smack of the worst form of inhumane paganism. A grisly scene is conjured in which a bloodthirsty, vengeful god tortures his divine son, rather than the sad account of a righteous man whose prophetic and peaceful ways provoked an angry world to kill him. In addition to misreading the gospel accounts, so goes the objection, to ascribe this kind of violence to God and inscribe it *within* God is to underwrite abusive patterns—an angry dad who holds all the power, a son who is convinced it's all his fault and so bears all the responsibility.[97] Better to learn the ways of resistance, not fall into a mode of victimization in the name of righteous martyrdom. So goes the objection. Can it be sustained in Anselm's case?[98]

The first thing to note is Anselm's insistence on Jesus's willing obedience. Given Anselm's construal of human freedom as the capacity to maintain rectitude of will for its own sake, it would seem that Jesus was *free* in his death. As he tells his disciples, "No one takes [my life] from me, but I lay it down of my own accord" (John 10:18). Still, Boso retorts, even if Christ was willing, "since he consented to the will of the Father, it nevertheless seems that the Father did coerce him, through the instructions he gave him."[99] There is plenty of evidence of abuse victims playing along, even at times actively complying in their abuse, but they are hardly free, given the power dynamics at play. Anselm

97. The cleaving of power and responsibility characterizes environments of abuse; so Keshgegian, "Scandal of the Cross."

98. I'll leave largely implicit whether it can be sustained at all. Suffice it to say that, ironically, the divine child abuse objection seems destined to end in violence. It can in no way countenance the view that Christ might triumph and bring peace through suffering and can, at best, propose instead continual vigilance in the face of injustice. This is right and good as far as it goes, but it is only Christ himself who "is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility" (Eph. 2:14–16).

99. Anselm, *Why God Became Man* 1.8.

argues, though, that God required *obedience* of Jesus, not death, because Jesus's sinlessness would not have issued in death. "Rather, he underwent death of his own accord, not out of an obedience consisting in the abandonment of his life, but out of an obedience consisting in his upholding of righteousness so bravely and pertinaciously that as a result he incurred death." It is vital to distinguish between "what Christ did because of the demands of his obedience" and "the suffering, inflicted upon him because he maintained his obedience, which he underwent even though his obedience did not demand it."[100]

Anselm's repeated insistence on divine impassibility further suggests that claims of divine child abuse are misguided. True, Anselm appeals repeatedly to the honor of God, which evokes the feudal society of his day and the nearly absolute ecclesial obedience that he frequently enjoined upon himself and others. But honor and submission were hardly mere tools for the inflation of ego and the negotiation of power. Rather, power itself was a tool for negotiating a properly ordered—that is, beautiful—society. The impassible God is not, strictly speaking, "affronted or offended by transgression."[101] He secures his honor through judgment and, finally, the cross for the sake of the world. This is no raging father lashing out. Similarly, Jesus Christ is no cowering victim, but the eternal Son in the flesh. As the eternal Son, he remains "incapable of suffering," so that "in the incarnation of God it is understood that no humiliation of God came about: rather it is believed that human nature was exalted."[102]

Anselm's soteriology is best understood through the lens of satisfaction, not punishment. Jesus paid our debt, but he was not punished in our place. In fact, Anselm's account of the atonement is "explicitly anti-penal."[103] Colin Gunton insists that "they are not only different but *alternatives*. Satisfaction is therefore according to Anselm the way by which God is enabled *not* to exact a tribute of compensating penalty from the sinner. He is therefore not propounding a version of what came to be called penal substitution, in which Jesus is conceived to be punished by God in place of the sinner. There is a substitution, an exchange, but it is not primarily penal in character."[104]

100. Anselm, *Why God Became Man* 1.9. "It must not be overlooked that for Anselm it is not Christ's *suffering* as such that is redemptive (the suffering merely repeats sin's endlessly repeated and essential gesture), but rather his innocence; he recapitulates humanity by passing through all the violences of sin and death, rendering to God the obedience that is his due, and so transforms the event of his death into an occasion of infinite blessings for those to whom death is condign" (D. Hart, *Beauty of the Infinite*, 371).

101. Gunton, *Actuality of Atonement*, 90.

102. Anselm, *Why God Became Man* 1.8.

103. Thomas Williams, in personal correspondence with the author.

104. Gunton, *Actuality of Atonement*, 90–91. Gunton is responding to John McIntyre's distinction between punishment and satisfaction.

But what if it were penal (and here I am speaking for myself, not Anselm)? Ought we to object to the notion that the Father punishes the Son in our place at the cross? It seems to me necessary at least to acknowledge the cross as an indirect form of punishment. Jesus takes on the consequences of our sin in suffering unjustly at the hands of the Romans and Jews. Furthermore, death for sin is a concept deeply imbedded in the animal sacrifices so central to Israel's life with God; clearly, the purification and reconciliation of Israel with God required stark measures. And this was a purification and reconciliation necessitated by Israel's failure to keep the conditions of the covenant. Surely this must be seen as some form of punishment, even if a merciful and restorative one.

An underdeveloped trinitarian theology might lead us to see such punishment in starkly oppositional terms, with the Father meting out suffering to the Son, who stands in our place.[105] But beside the theologically inadmissible claim that the Father and Son might be at odds, consider: What loving father could possibly bear the pain of killing his own son? Isn't it the mercy of God that he reserves such a task for himself and does not even require it of his faithful servant Abraham? If one reads the crucifixion next to the binding of Isaac (Gen. 22), one can more easily comprehend the compassion of the Father in the death of his Son for the world they love.

And what of the whole idea of substitution? Well, that is as deeply woven into the fabric of Scripture as one could imagine. It overlaps significantly with representation, which suggests a participation in the work of our representative. But substitution implies something done in our place, and it underscores the uniqueness and completeness of Christ's work. Consider just one verse, Ephesians 5:2: "And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God." There is Christ, priest and victim, the one who freely, actively gave his life for us—an act of total self-sacrifice pleasing and, Anselm might add, beautiful to the Father. Christ is our sacrificial substitute at the cross, doing something that we could not and will not be called to do, that he might represent us as a faithful high priest before the Father and serve as a model for our daily dying and rising with him.

A Few More Thoughts on Faith Seeking Understanding

What, then, of the relation between faith and reason that we began with? Having impressionistically sketched the issues in the *Monologion*, *Proslogion*,

105. Though see now, and decisively, McCall, *Forsaken*, 13–91.

and *On the Incarnation of the Word*, we looked more in depth at freedom, necessity, and fittingness in *Why God Became Man* on the assumption that the notion of the sorts of things God "must" do might help uncover the reasons driving Anselm's faith. We could not improve on, and so conclude with, the following judgment of Sandra Visser and Thomas Williams:

> Anselm does not assume any incompatibility, even a prima facie one, between faith and reason; nor does he assign a distinctive role to each.[106] So rather than saying that Anselm has a view about the relationship between faith and reason, it is perhaps better to say that he has a view about "the reason of faith": the *ratio fidei*. "The reason of faith" is perhaps not idiomatic English, but the best idiomatic translations of *ratio fidei* are misleading. "The rational basis of faith" suggests something external: arguments in support of doctrinal formulations that have an apologetic or protreptic purpose. "The logic of faith" suggests something internal: the rational coherence of the doctrines of faith, the way they "all hang together" logically. Anselm's *ratio fidei* means both these things at once; it refers to the intrinsically rational character of Christian doctrines in virtue of which they form a coherent and rationally defensible system. . . .
>
> Anselm holds that the doctrines of the Christian faith are intrinsically rational because they concern the nature and activity of God, who is himself supreme reason and exemplifies supreme wisdom in everything he does. And because human beings are rational by nature, we can grasp the reason of faith.[107]

This is a lovely sketch of Anselm's take on faith and reason; one wonders, though, whether its rosy conclusion—that by virtue of our rational constitution, "we can grasp the reason of faith"—belies the sheer intellectual difficulty of following Anselm's lead. Faith may make sense, but who among us is smart enough to follow that sense through to its logical conclusion? Might it not be that Anselm is just right, but nevertheless inimitable? Perhaps he is a Mozart—utterly, beautifully ordered in his work, but the kind of prodigy that invites admirers rather than imitators.[108]

One reason for this is Anselm's failure—and I regard it as something of a failure—to tether his reflection more explicitly to Scripture. The absence

106. For Anselm "theological knowledge was a single science; it operated by reason under the guidance of faith; but the arguments, insofar as they were based on cogent reasons, could be meaningful to those who lacked faith" (Dulles, *History of Apologetics*, 103).

107. Visser and Williams, *Anselm*, 13–14.

108. See, possibly, Southern, *Saint Anselm*, 440, 443; Visser and Williams, *Anselm*, 73. The worry about such virtuosity in biblical exegesis, coupled with the suggestion that the brilliance of such virtuosos cannot be distilled to a methodology capable of imitation, comes from Brevard Childs, "Toward Recovering Theological Exegesis," *Pro Ecclesia* 6 (1997): 19, cited in R. Wright, "Karl Barth's Academic Lectures on Ephesians," vii–viii.

of direct biblical engagement obscures the sources of Anselm's assumptions and therefore shrouds his work from view. We cannot think his thoughts after him when we do not know where his thoughts came from. Perhaps a shared horizon can be assumed for Anselm and those for whom he wrote, which would render his sources transparent to the reader, but this is not the case for us today, when so few are biblically literate—which only magnifies the need for guidance in moving from Scripture to philosophical and theological conclusions. Nor, though, is it enough to simply lay bare these moves by an anemic and naive appeal to biblical proof texts, which themselves often function as wax noses easily shaped to fit the needs of the moment. Engagement with Scripture requires careful interpretation, not casual enlistment. Theology needs must serve the interpretation of the Bible; the Bible need not, and may not, bend the knee to theology. Scripture is the rudder of theology's ship; it is not merely authoritative ballast.

"I do not think that anyone deserves to be rebuked," writes Anselm, "if, after becoming well-grounded in the faith, he has conceived a desire to exercise himself in the investigation of its logic." After all, "the understanding which we gain in this life stands midway between faith and revelation."[109] In this, Anselm's *meditatio* anticipates the heavenly beatific vision.[110] "*Intellectus* [or understanding]," writes Karl Barth, "is the limited, but fully attainable, first step towards that vision which is the eschatological counterpart of faith. Therefore *fides* is essentially—*quaerens intellectum*."[111] And so, in *Why God Became Man*, Anselm resolves, "Insofar as the heavenly grace deigns to allow [him], to arise to contemplate the logic of our beliefs."[112] As he put it in a letter to Fulk, bishop of Beauvais, soon after getting wind of Roscelin's heresy: "For a Christian ought to progress through faith to understanding, not reach faith through understanding—or, if he cannot understand, leave faith behind. Now if he can achieve understanding, he rejoices; but if he cannot, he stands in awe of what he cannot grasp."[113]

If Anselm is virtuosic—even prodigious—in his ability to abstract and analyze the logic of faith, we may nevertheless follow his lead in finding in meditation the vehicle by which the Spirit moves us from faith to understanding. Let us consider meditation that posture of patient attention to Scripture in which the Spirit deepens our delight in the God of the gospel through sustained and expansive exposure to God's ways with the world. In one sense, it is not that

109. In the commendation of *Why God Became Man* to Pope Urban II.
110. See Southern, *Saint Anselm*, 114, 127.
111. Barth, *Anselm*, 21.
112. In the commendation of *Why God Became Man* to Pope Urban II.
113. Cited in Visser and Williams, *Anselm*, 19.

meditation—or, for that matter, the beatific vision itself—tells us something new about God. After all, God has spoken definitively in his Son, the Word who is the last word about God. In another sense, though, it is when faith becomes sight that we will declare, with Job,

> I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear,
> but now my eye sees you;
> therefore I despise myself,
> and repent in dust and ashes. (Job 42:5–6)