

‘Between Dialectic and the Sacred Scripture: Anselm of Canterbury and the Bible’*

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Despite the later medieval tradition attribution of biblical commentary on the New Testament to Anselm, Archbishop of Canterbury (1093-1109), he made no contribution to biblical commentary as a genre in its own right. Unlike Lanfranc, his master and predecessor as archbishop (1070-1089), Anselm wrote no commentary on the Pauline epistles. Unlike his near-contemporary Bruno of Segni (c.1050-1133) he wrote no commentary on the Pentateuch, Psalms, Isaiah, the Gospels and the Apocalypse.¹ That does not mean to say that Anselm made no contribution to the exegesis of scripture. On the contrary, exegesis plays an important, if not central, role in the elaboration of his theological vision. Anselm’s poetic and prosaic modes present a biblically infused language. As Sir Richard Southern observed, although there are few direct quotations from the Bible in Anselm’s work it is, ‘filled with biblical echoes’ and 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’.²

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¹ On Lanfranc and his commentary see Ann Collins, *Teacher in Faith and Virtue, Lanfranc of Bec’s Commentary on Saint Paul* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), the useful comments in H. E. J. Cowdrey, *Lanfranc, Scholar, Monk, and Archbishop* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 50-59, and the seminal discussions of Margaret Gibson ‘Lanfranc’s ‘Commentary on the Pauline Epistles,’ *Journal of Theological Studies* 22 (1971), 86-112 and ‘Lanfranc’s Notes on Patristic Texts,’ *Journal of Theological Studies* 22 (1971), 435-450. Lanfranc’s commentary is still available only in J. A. Giles ed. *Beati Lanfranci Cantuariensis archiepiscopi opera quae supersunt omnia*, 2 vols (Oxford: Parker, 1844) and L. D’Archery ed. *Beati Lanfranci Cantuariensis archiepiscopi opera omnia* (Paris: Ioannis Billaine, 1648) reprinted in *Patrologia Latina* 150. On Bruno of Segni, the study by R. Grégoire remains fundamental, *Bruno de Segni : Exégète Médiéval et Théologien Monastique* (Spoleto: Centro Italiano di Studi Sull’alto Medioevo, 1965). Bruno’s commentary on John is the subject of an analysis by William M. Wright IV, *Rhetoric and Theology: Figural Reading of John 9* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2009) pp. 123-128. Editions of Bruno’s texts are to be found in *Patrologia Latina*, 164 and 165.

² R. W. Southern, *Saint Anselm A Portrait in a Landscape* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990) p. 70. The question of Anselm’s citation of authorities, biblical and patristic, is an interesting one

Thought and language are the key elements to Anselm's engagement with scripture. The biblical sheen of much of his writing, especially in his prayerful and meditative mode, should not draw attention away from the role biblical learning plays in the architecture of his thought. A pertinent example is his treatise on truth, the *De veritate*. While the treatise is, in some manner, a philosophical discussion of truth, and, as the first chapter indicates, a guide as to how to read Anselm's earlier treatise the *Monologion*, its primary purpose is different.³ In the preface to the group of three treatises, of which that on truth is the first, that Anselm characterizes all three as 'pertaining to the study of Sacred Scripture'.⁴

This purpose is essential for any contextualisation of the treatise. Within the *De veritate* Anselm distinguishes between three levels of truthfulness: the truth of signification and statements (including opinion, the will, action, and the senses), the truth of being and the Supreme Truth. Crucial to the whole programme of thought is the centrality of God, as Supreme Truth. As Anselm puts it at the end of the treatise: 'Supreme Truth, existing in and of itself, is not the truth of anything; but when something accords with Supreme Truth, then we speak of the truth, or rightness, of that thing'.⁵ It is only the participation in Truth, which allows any truthfulness within

for its relation to his theological method. See G. E. M. Gasper, *Anselm of Canterbury and His Theological Inheritance* (Aldershot, Ashgate, 2004) pp. 36-42.

³ Sandra Visser and Thomas Williams in their *Anselm* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009) note that '...the unchallenged centrality of God in Anselm's philosophical explorations is nowhere more in evidence than in his account of truth.' p. 41; *De veritate*, 1, begins with the Student asking the Teacher for clarification of the *Monologion's* chapter 18, on truth, time, beginnings and endings.

⁴ Anselm, *De veritate*, Preface: 'Tres tractatus pertinentes ad stadium sacrae scripturae...'. Anselm is also insistent that the order of the treatises, the *De veritate*, the *De libertate arbitrii* and the *De casu diaboli*, be followed, castigating the 'rash individuals' who 'have transcribed them in a different order before they were completed' 'Licet itaque a quibusdam festinantibus alio sint ordine transcripti, antequam perfecti essent...'

⁵ Anselm, *De veritate*, 13: 'ita summa veritas per se subsistens nullius rei est; sed cum aliquid secundum illam est, tunc eius dicitur veritas vel rectitudo'. All quotations from Anselm works are taken from the standard critical edition of Anselm's works, *Opera omnia S. Anselmi Cantuariensis archiepiscopi*, ed. F.S. Schmitt, 6 vols. [vol. 1 printed at Seckau 1938; vol 2. at Rome 1940, all reset for the Nelson edn] (Edinburgh: Nelson, 1946-1961), and the translation of J. Hopkins and Herbert Richardson, *The Complete Philosophical and Theological Treatises of Anselm of Canterbury* (Toronto: Mellen Press, 1976), with occasional emendation. All quotations from the Bible are from the Vulgate and Douay-Rheims translation. Vulgate numbering for the Psalms has been retained throughout.

creation, including human existence and activity. Participation comes, in the case of grammatical construction, through its correctness; in the case of behaviour and being, through its alignment to uprightness and reasonableness, behaving, as Anselm might put it, as something ought.

The bearing of the treatise on truth on biblical study is to emphasize both its status as both a privileged text, and one also of human composition. Scripture remains authoritative, but its truth is dependent on its alignment with the Supreme Truth. In a fallen world, its interpretation must be painstaking, careful and meditative, and Anselm also leaves a place open in this arena to human reason. His position is clarified in his final treatise, the *De concordia*, completed in the final year of his life, 1109:

For, indeed, in our preaching, nothing which Sacred Scripture - made fruitful by the miracle of the Holy Spirit - has not sent forth or does not contain is conducive to spiritual salvation. Now, if on the basis of rational considerations we sometimes make a statement which we cannot clearly exhibit in the words of Scriptures, or cannot prove by reference to these words, nonetheless in the following way we know by means of Scripture whether the statement ought to be accepted or rejected. If the statement is arrived at by clear reasoning and if Scripture in no way contradicts it, then (since even as Scripture opposes no truth, so it favours no falsity) by the very fact that Scripture does not deny that which is affirmed on the basis of rational considerations, this affirmation is supported by the authority of Scripture. But if Scripture unquestioningly opposes a view of ours, then even though our reasoning seems to us unassailable, this reasoning should not be believed to be supported by

any truth. So, then, Sacred Scripture, in that it either clearly affirms them or else does not at all deny them, contains the authority for all rationally derived truths.⁶

It is this position regarding scripture, reason and truth to which the *De veritate* points.

The passage from the *De concordia* also contextualizes some of Anselm's most famous statements about the use, or not, of scripture within other of his earlier treatises. Anselm is famous for his insistence that he would establish positions of argument without reference to authorities and to the Bible. In the preface to *Monologion* he states quite clearly that, on the request of certain brothers within the community at Bec, Anselm has set down his observations in such a way

that nothing at all in the meditation would be argued on Scriptural authority, but that in unembellished style and by unsophisticated arguments and with uncomplicated disputation rational necessity would tersely prove to be the case, and truth's clarity would openly manifest to be the case, whatever the conclusion resulting from the distinct inquiries would declare.⁷

⁶ Anselm, *De concordia*, 3.6: 'Siquidem nihil utiliter ad salutem spiritualem praedicimus, quod sacra scriptura spiritus sancti miraculo foecundata non protulerit, aut intra se non contineat. Nam si quid ratione dicimus aliquando quod in dictis eius aperte monstrare aut ex ipsis probare nequimus: hoc modo per illam cognoscimus, utrum sit accipiendum aut respuendum. Si enim aperta ratione colligitur, et illa ex nulla parte contradicit - quoniam ipsa sicut nulli adversatur veritati, ita nulli favet falsitati -: hoc ipso quia non negat quod ratione dicitur, eius auctoritate suscipitur. At si ipsa nostro sensui indubitanter repugnant: quamvis nobis ratio nostra videatur inexpugnabilis, nulla tamen veritate fulciri credenda est. Sic itaque sacra scriptura omnis veritatis quam ratio colligit auctoritatem continent, cum illam aut aperte affirmat aut nullatenus negat.'

⁷ *Monologion*, Preface: 'quatenus auctoritate scripturae penitus nihil in ea persuaderetur, sed quidquid per singulas investigationes finis assereret, id ita esse plano stilo et vulgaribus argumentis simplici que disputatione et rationis necessitas breviter cogeret et veritatis claritas patenter ostenderet'.

The *Proslogion* equally searches for the argument or consideration ‘that requires nothing other than itself for proving itself’.⁸ Again, and later, in the *Cur Deus homo*, Anselm sets out the purpose of an approach, which emphasizes argument by reason:

In accordance with the subject-matter with which it deals I entitled it *Why God Became a [God-/]man*, and I divided it into two short books. The first of these contains the answers of believers to the objections of unbelievers who repudiate the Christian faith because they regard it as incompatible with reason. And this book goes on to prove by rational necessity—Christ being removed from sight, as if there had never been anything known about Him— that no man can possibly be saved without Him. However, in the second book—likewise proceeding as if nothing were known of Christ—I show with equally clear reasoning and truth that human nature was created in order that the whole man (that is, with a body and a soul) would some day enjoy a happy immortality.⁹

Why Anselm adopts these methods, and how successfully, is not the subject of the present discussion. The dialectical purpose and intent that inspires Anselm’s *Proslogion* in particular and that may be noted in the *Cur Deus homo* have been the subject of recent analysis.¹⁰ Anselm does not reveal as openly as he might, or as contemporaries

⁸ *Proslogion*, Preface: ‘...quod nullo alio ad se probandum quam se solo indigeret...’.

⁹ *Cur Deus homo*, Preface: ‘Quod secundum materiam de qua editum est, Cur deus homo nominavi et in duos libellos distinxi. Quorum prior quidem infidelium Christianam fidem, quia rationi putant illam repugnare, respuentium continet obiectiones et fidelium responsiones. Ac tandem remoto Christo, quasi numquam aliquid fuerit de illo, probat rationibus necessariis esse impossibile ullum hominem salvari sine illo. In secundo autem libro similiter quasi nihil sciatur de Christo, monstratur non minus aperta ratione et veritate naturam humanam ad hoc institutam esse, ut aliquando immortalitate beata totus homo, id est in corpore et anima, frueretur...’

¹⁰ See particularly Ian Logan, *Reading Anselm’s Proslogion* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009) and T. Holopainen, *Dialectic and Theology in the Eleventh Century* (Leide: Brill, 1996), ‘Logic and Theology in the Eleventh Century: Anselm and Lanfranc’s Heritage’, in *Anselm and Abelard: Investigations and Juxtapositions*, ed. Giles E. M. Gasper and H. Kohlenberger (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2006) 1-16, ‘Anselm’s *Argumentum* and the Early Medieval Theory of Argument’ *Vivarium*, 45 (2007) 1-29, and ‘The *Proslogion* in Relation to the *Monologion*’ *Heythrop Journal*, 50 (2009) 590-602.

and later medieval thinkers would, his dialectical skills and workings, but they are employed in these circumstances to demonstrate the solution to a question which he believes can be rationally answered.

Despite the insistence on the use of reason, and specifically dialectic, in these prefaces, the place that Anselm gives to biblical quotation within his theological scheme is striking. This applies as much to the *De concordia's* statement that scripture is ultimately more authoritative, because more closely aligned to the supreme authority, as it does to the absorption of biblical language in Anselm's prayerful and meditative modes.

In framing the discussion as to how Anselm offers biblical language to his audience the characterization made by Hans Urs von Balthasar between a 'lyrical' mode of spiritual expression and a more properly 'theological' is helpful. For von Balthasar the centrepiece of theological reflection, in its modes most urgent and most contemplative, is the totality of God's sharing of the tragedy of human life, in all of its fallenness, suffering and pain. By doing so, the tragic situation in which humanity finds itself is overcome.¹¹ The lyrical expression enables a mode in which the suffering of Jesus, and his human life can be recalled; theology is less emotional for von Balthasar, rendering the 'sober and the epic', describing historical events in their universal significance. As he states:

"Lyrical" here means the internal motion of the devout subject, his emotion and submission, the creative outpouring of himself in the face of the vivid representation, in its pristine originality, of what is a past event....strict theology seems unable to rise to this "lyrical" exuberance; it must always try to be as objective as

¹¹ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theodramatik*, vol. 2, *The Dramatis Personae: Man in God*, trans G. Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988, orig. publ. in German 1983), p. 54.

possible, “always ready” to “make a defense to anyone who calls you to account” regarding the Christian faith (I Pet 3:15) – including pagans and Jews and wavering or wayward Christians, who would gain little more lyrical effusions.¹²

Anselm’s prayerful theology, and theological prayer, is well suited to this distinction of modes. He operates in both a lyrical and theological manner in von Balthasar’s sense, and in doing so, reveals much about his use of scripture.

Two early works by Anselm offer a suitable series of examples in which to see his blending of exegesis and dialectic, and the multi-dimensional manner in which his biblical understanding comes into being. The first is the Prayer to Christ, prominent within the collection of prayers and meditations that form some of the earliest of Anselm’s written compositions, although the process of collection and revision occupied him until the early twelfth century. It is in the prayers and meditations that Anselm developed his particular devotional style, the examination of which was, in English scholarship, especially the purview of Sir Richard Southern and Benedicta Ward.¹³ The prayers for Southern exemplify ‘a characteristic combination of extreme fervor or expression, systematic completeness, practical restraint...the marks of the Anselmian revolution...warmth, even violence, of expression is accompanied by great precision of intention and severity of operation’.¹⁴ For Ward:

The *Prayers and Meditations* are not...full of direct quotation, but they are made up from the remembered language of the Bible: Anselm had so assimilated divine truth through reading, that the scriptures had become his spontaneous prayer. The texture

¹² von Balthasar, *Theodramatik*, vol. 2, p. 55.

¹³ B. Ward, *The Prayers and Meditations of St Anselm, with the Proslogion* (London: Penguin, 1973).

¹⁴ Southern, *Portrait*, p. 103. This is part of a longer discussion of the prayers and meditations, forming pp, 91-112.

of the *Prayers and Meditations* is composed of biblical words and images, and Anselm's personal devotion is given mysterious depth by this.¹⁵

While the extent to which Anselm's spirituality was as revolutionary as his theology is subject to debate, his importance in bringing together affective piety and systematic thought is well established. To that end the second work that will be considered is the *Proslogion*. One of Anselm's most famous works, its architectural strategies, construction and rhetorical evolution are founded in scripture.

That Anselm had started to compose some of the *Prayers and Meditations* by the 1070s is revealed in his short collection of extracts from the Psalms, compiled while still Prior of Bec, in the early 1070s, for Adelaide, daughter of William the Conqueror. Seven prayers including those to St Stephen and Saint Mary Magdalen accompanied the *Flowers of the Psalms*.¹⁶ However, Anselm's compilation did not circulate with his collections of prayers, and it is not a genre to which he returned.¹⁷ The *Prayer to Christ* itself may well have formed part of Anselm's earlier experiments, but it is first found in the collection of prayers that he sent to Countess Mathilda of Tuscany in 1104.¹⁸

The relationship between the prayers and Anselm's other works is a complex issue.¹⁹ There is an extent to which they should be regarded as a separate genre and expression, but at the same time they should not be divorced from Anselm's other

¹⁵ Ward, *Prayers and Meditations*, p. 46.

¹⁶ Anselm, *Ep.* 10.

¹⁷ Southern, *Portrait*, pp. 99-100.

¹⁸ Anselm, *Ep.* 325 to Matilda informs her that he is sending a copy of his prayers and meditations; from this the surviving copy now Admont, Stiftsbibliothek MS 289, was made in the early part of the twelfth century. See R. Fulton, 'Praying with Anselm at Admont: A Meditation on Practice', *Speculum*, 81 (2006), 700-733, esp. 705-706. On Anselm's support for devotion as practiced by noble women, lay and religious, is the subject of a recent study by Suzanne Schenk, *Ama et habe, Perspektiven des Heils in Anselms Korrespondenz mit Frauen* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2012). See also, S. N. Vaughn, *St Anselm and the Handmaidens of God. A Study of Anselm's Correspondence with Women* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2002).

¹⁹ The most sustained effort to situate and integrate the prayers within Anselm's larger corpus is the persuasive treatment offered in Eileen Sweeney, *Anselm of Canterbury and the Desire for the Word* (Washington D. C., 2012), especially pp. 13-37.

works. The fact that they were amongst the first of his written works is itself a complicating factor. The instinct to compartmentalize, categorize and understand Anselm's thought through the chronological order of his works is sensible: but in the case of the *Prayers* however, such an emphasis creates a tendency to treat them independently of works that appear to come later in Anselm's canon.²⁰ The formal collection of the prayers, and the development of a meditative mode of expression were activities that concerned him across the span of his writings, and addressed topics raised by the treatises through a different voice. In this connection Eileen Sweeney has recently re-directed attention to the holistic nature of Anselm's thought, an approach which is both appropriate and helpful for appreciating the place to be given to his *Prayers*. As she puts it: 'In Anselm's prayers the gap between desire and the thing desired - the sinful soul and God - is the widest and most untransversable, but the structure of the problem remains the same in his subsequent works'.²¹ Adopting a perspective that accounts for both change over time and the underlying unity of Anselm's thought allows particularly prayers to be viewed in their most fitting context

That the first record of the *Prayer to Christ* is in connection with the collection of 1104 should prompt consideration of its style and content. As Ward states the *Prayer to Christ* 'belongs most completely to the 'new style' of devotion of the eleventh

²⁰ Eadmer in his *Life of Saint Anselm*, ed. and trans. R. W. Southern (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962, with reprints), i. 8, remarks on Anselm's prayers at an early point in the first book: 'As for his prayers, which at the desire and request of his friends he wrote and published, anyone can see them without my speaking about them with what anxious care, with what fear, with what hope and love he addressed himself to God and his saints, and taught others to do the same [In orationibus autem quas ipse iuxta desiderium et petitionem amicorum suorum scriptas edidit, qua sollicitudine, quo timore, qua spe, quo amore Deum et sanctos eius interpellaverit, necne interpellandos docuerit satis est et me tacente videre]'. The context of the chapter is Anselm's preeminence in spiritual virtue and discipline. Eadmer lists and describes the works up to the *Proslogion* only later, at i.19. Anselm's other works are listed at their point of composition within his later life and ecclesiastical career. The *Prayers and Meditations* are the penultimate item in the great Canterbury collection of Anselm's works, now Bodley 271, listed in T.H. Bestul, 'The Manuscript Tradition of Anselm's *Cur Deus Homo*', *Studia Anselmiana*, 128 (1999) 285-307 at 307.

²¹ Sweeney, *Desire for the Word*, p. 36.

and twelfth centuries'.²² Anselm recalls a sense of despair at not having been able to witness Christ's life and passion. After alluding to the birth of Christ it is an extended mental recreation of his passion, resurrection and transfiguration that occupies the majority of the prayer, before ending on a strong eschatological note. A composition date closer to 1104 would place it after Anselm's multi-dimensional treatment of the atonement in a cluster of works from the 1090s, the *Epistola de incarnatione verbi Dei*, and especially the *Cur Deus homo* and its companion pieces, the *De conceptu Virginali* and the *Meditatio de humanis redemptionis*. It is not possible to be certain about the dating, but the possibility that the *Prayer to Christ* might post-date the *Proslogion* should not be overlooked.

The *Prayer to Christ* explores theological themes connected to the life, death, resurrection and transfiguration of Christ. The dominant motif, as stated above, is Anselm's authorial desire to have been present at the events of the passion, and his sorrow and self-deprecation that he was not allowed to be so. The theme of the whole prayer is indicated in the first biblical passage to which allusion is made. Christ, Anselm has made clear, is the end of his thoughts, of his life, emphasizing the unequal relationship between Creator and sinner 'by your powerful kindness complete / what in my powerless weakness I attempt'.²³ Psalm 37 (V) is then worked into Anselm's meditation on his desire that Christ should complete what he began: allowing Anselm to experience the full measure of joy, devotion and love.

My light, you see my conscience,

because, 'Lord, before you is all my desire',

²² Ward, *Prayers and Meditations*, p. 60, part of a useful summary of the prayer as a whole.

²³ *Prayer to Christ*, ll. 14-15; *Or. ad Chris.*, ll. 10-11: '...compleat tua potentissima benignitas quod conatur mea tepidissima imbecillitas'.

and if my soul wills any good, you gave it to me.²⁴

The Psalm, of which this is verse 10, is a lament for the miserable state of mankind, focused on the physical corruption of the body, and the sinful nature of the whole: ‘There is no health on my flesh....no peace in my bones....my sores are putrified and corrupted because of my foolishness.’²⁵ The object of desire is before the Psalmist, while his family and friends have left him abandoned and in exile. The second half of the Psalm is an appeal to God, for guidance, a proper hearing, and salvation, in the light of all struggles to come: ‘For I am ready for scourges, and my sorrow is continually before me...Attend unto my help, O Lord, the God of my salvation’.²⁶

Anselm uses Psalm 37 as the basis for the rest of the *Prayer to Christ*, structurally in terms of the way in which movement towards the object of desire is dependent on the grace of that object itself, and theologically in terms of the Christological valence with which he endows the Psalm. The Psalm is alluded to in the passion scene in Luke’s Gospel, underlining Anselm’s Christological purpose in so employing it to set the context and tenor of the prayer. Verse 12 (V) in which the Psalmist speaks of the exile and loneliness in which he has been left by his those who knew him well: ‘My friends and my neighbours have drawn near, and stood against me. And they that were near me stood afar off [cari mei et amici mei quasi contra lepram meam steterunt et vicini mei longe steterunt]’, has been matched traditionally with the Luke’s description of those who knew Jesus well standing to one side after his death: ‘And all his acquaintance and the women that had followed him from Galilee stood afar

²⁴ *Prayer to Christ*, ll.20-22; *Or. ad Chris.*, ll. 14-15: ‘Illuminatio mea, tu vides conscientiam mean, quia, ‘domine, ante te omne desiderium meum’; et tu donas si quid bene vult anima mea’.

²⁵ Ps. 37: 4, 6.

²⁶ Ps. 37: 18, 23.

off, beholding these things. [stabant autem omnes noti eius a longe et mulieres quae secutae erant eum a Galilaea haec videntes]’.²⁷

Additional support for the Christological reading is to be found in Augustine’s *Enarrationes in Psalmos*. While Anselm’s reading habits are difficult to trace precisely, it is highly likely that he would have had access to the *Enarrationes*.²⁸ Southern remarked on the similarity between the absorption of the Bible and that of Augustine’s works in Anselm’s intellectual and meditative practices.²⁹ Augustine’s thought was ingrained into Anselm’s, so much so that it is not easy to follow directions of travel which are clearly derived from the former in the latter. In the use of Psalm 37 in the *Prayer to Christ* a good case can be made for Anselm’s moving between scriptural texts and Augustine’s exegesis, with both serving to enlarge the space in which the prayerful, lyrical mode operates, using authority and reason within a response to scripture which is imaginative and carefully crafted.

Augustine is celebrated for his Christological interpretation of the Psalms, and this applies no less to Psalm 37.³⁰ Immediately in his commentary on the particular verse alluded to by Anselm, Augustine enshrines the connection between the Psalm and prayer. It is before Christ and the Father that all the desires of the Psalmist are laid, according to Augustine, who recalls Matthew 6.6 in this context: ‘the Father, who seeth

²⁷ Ps. 37: 12 and Luke 23: 49.

²⁸ Southern, *Portrait*, p. 58: ‘...if Anselm has had no other sources of inspiration than the Bible, the Rule of St Benedict, and Augustine’s *De Trinitate*, *Confessions*, *De Civitate Dei* and *Sermons on the Psalms*, he would have had all the inspiration he needed for everything of importance that he wrote’. The *Enarrationes* are present in the twelfth century library catalogue from Bec, and feature in Lanfranc’s *De corpore et sanguine Domini*. For an assessment of the library at Bec during Anselm’s period as monk, prior and abbot see Gasper, *Theological Inheritance*, pp. 81-106 and Appendix 1.

²⁹ Southern, *Portrait*, p. 73.

³⁰ Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, ed. Clemens Weidmann, CSEL 93/1 (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2011). Augustine, *Expositions of the Psalms*, The Works of Saint Augustine, 6 vols, ed. J. E. Rotelle, trans. M. Boulding (New York: New City Press, 2000-2004). Amongst a significant literature see R. Williams, ‘St Augustine and the Psalms’, *Interpretation*, 58 (2004) 17-27 and Michael Fiedorowicz, *Vox Totius Christi: Studien zu Augustin’s ‘Enarrationes in Psalmos’* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1997).

in secret, shall reward thee'. The full verse from Matthew comes from the sermon on the mount, immediately preceding the Lord's prayer:

But thou when thou shalt pray, enter into thy chamber, and having shut the door, pray to thy Father in secret, and thy father who seeth in secret will repay thee [tu autem cum orabis intra in cubiculum tuum et cluso ostio tuo ora Patrem tuum in abscondito et Pater tuus qui videt in abscondito reddet tibi]...

Matthew 6.6. is the spur to the opening of Anselm's *Proslogion* and it is striking to find the invocation explicit in Augustine's exegesis.³¹ The whole emphasis of Augustine's commentary is on prayer, on its mechanics, its origin, its direction and its fulfillment.

This very desire is your prayer, and if your desire is continuous, your prayer is continuous too. The apostle meant what he said, *Pray without ceasing* (1 Thess.17). But can we be on our knees all the time, or prostrate ourselves continuously, or be holding up our hands uninterruptedly, that he bids us, *Pray without ceasing*? If we say that these things constitute prayer, I do not think we can pray without ceasing. But there is another kind of prayer that never ceases, an interior prayer that is desire.³²

Augustine goes on to remark that the 'groaning of the heart' is the very expression of desire, and as such is not hidden from God, and offers the hope that such groaning

³¹ This might be taken to support the position that the *Prayer to Christ* was written before the *Proslogion*.

³² Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, Ps. 37, c. 14: 'Ipsum enim desiderium tuum, oratio tua est: et si continuum desiderium, continua oratio. Non enim frustra dixit Apostolus, Sine intermissione orantes (I Thess. V, 17). Numquid sine intermissione genu flectimus, corpus prosternimus, aut manus levamus, ut dicat, Sine intermissione orate? Aut si sic dicimus nos orare, hoc puto sine intermissione non possumus facere. Est alia interior sine intermissione oratio, quae est desiderium'; *Expositions of the Psalms*, trans. Boulding, pp. 156-157.

never ceases to sound in his ears. The rest of Anselm's prayer can be read in light of this commentary; the Christological frame, the expression of spiritual longing and distress through vivid physical imagery, and the constant seeking after truth which lies beyond the seeker's grasp, the inaccessible foundation on which all else is constructed.

Both the bible and Patristic writing can be seen to operate within the way in which Anselm sets up his *Prayer to Christ*, and in such a way to indicate the thematic structure and tonal dimensions of the whole text. Anselm's audiences for these works were intimate, the members of his own community, as well as those outside, and given the intensity with which he insisted that the *Prayers* be approached, it is not unreasonable to suggest that the biblical and exegetical resonances offer more help in and of themselves within the meditative reading process. On sending the prayers to Mathilda of Tuscany Anselm wrote instructing her that they:

...are arranged so that by reading them the mind may be stirred either to the love or the fear of God, or to a consideration of both; so they should not be read cursorily or quickly, but little by little, with attention and deep meditation. It is not intended that the reader should feel impelled to read the whole, but only as much as will stir up the affections to prayer.³³

With these injunctions in mind, it is possible to see the holistic nature of the *Prayer to Christ*. The interpretative framework is built around reference points, both scriptural and, it can be strongly suggested, from traditions of scriptural commentary, which

³³ *Letter to Countess Mathilda of Tuscany*, trans. Ward, *Prayers and Meditations*, p. 90; ed. Schimtt, vol. 3, p. 4: 'Quae quoniam ad excitandam legentis mentem ad dei amorem vel timorem seu ad suimet discussionem sunt ediate, non sunt legendae cursim vel velociter, sed paulatim cum intent et morose meditatione. Nec debet intendere lector quamlibet earum total legere, sed tantum quantum ad excitandum affectum orandi...'

capture and reveal the whole of the prayer, in its parts, each allusion to scripture resonating within this kaleidoscopic structure.

As the prayer moves towards the spiritual re-enactment, or rather, re-imagining of the passion and resurrection of Christ, a number of other scriptural allusions are made. These are most obvious in the use of the Gospel narratives, with an emphasis on John: the nails, the blood, the bitter gall Christ is given to drink, and the suffering of Mary are all recalled. Mary's sorrow is foreshadowed in Anselm's earlier overlaying of scriptural images:

Why, O my soul, were you not there
to be pierced by a sword of bitter sorrow
when you could not bear
the piercing of the side of your Saviour with a lance?³⁴

The sword of bitter sorrow are part of Symeon's words to Mary prophesying the redemptive work of her baby son, the sword here contrasted to the lance of John's passion.³⁵ Anselm's conflation of symbols to create the conceptual image does not so much dislocate the temporal sequence of the events to which allusion is made, as present them as a whole. Christ's birth and death are presented, in accordance with Luke's Gospel, as complete within each other.

The limits of human reason, by contrast to the limitless knowledge of Christ is a further theme with which Anselm dwells throughout the prayer, drawing this out from a

³⁴ *Prayer to Christ*, ll. 79-82; *Or. ad Chris.*, ll. 42-43: 'Cur, o anima mea, te praesentem non transfixit gladius doloris acutissimi, cum ferre non posses vulnerary lancea latus tui salvatoris?'

³⁵ Luke 2: 35: 'And thy own soul a sword shall pierce, that, out of many hearts thoughts may be revealed [et tuam ipsius animam pertransiet gladius ut revelentur ex multis cordibus cogitations]'. John 19: 34: 'But one of the soldiers with a spear opened his side; and immediately there came out blood and water [sed unus militum lancea latus eius aperuit et continuo exivit sanguis et aqua]'

number of different scriptural sources. At the mid-point of the prayer, Anselm offers the following comments just before the evocation of the passion:

Alas for me, that I was not able to see
the Lord of Angels humbled to converse with men,
and men exalted to converse with angels
when God, the one insulted,
willed to die that the sinner might live.³⁶

The allusion here is to Baruch 3.38: ‘Afterwards he was seen upon earth, and conversed with men’.³⁷ In its wider context the verse is part of a glorification of creation and the unknowable power and majesty of God, which serves to underline the enormity of God’s humility, as Anselm stresses. The passage from Baruch also emphasizes the wisdom of God, in the context of creation; and contrasts this to the fate of the giants, ‘those renowned men that were from the beginning, of great stature, expert in war’. They did not find the way of knowledge, and as a result ‘perished through their folly’.³⁸ Anselm’s scriptural quotation provokes a wider reflection on the distance between Creator and creation, and the importance of the miraculous incarnation of Christ. The subject of the *Prayer* is encapsulated within the quotation and its textual and meditative hinterland.

³⁶ *Prayer to Christ*, ll. 73-76; *Or. ad Chris.*, ll. 38-40: ‘Heu mihi, qui videre non potui dominum angelorum humilitatum ad conversationem hominum, ut homines exaltaret ad conversationem angelorum! Cum deus offensus sponte morebatur ut peccator viveret...’

³⁷ Baruch 3: 38: ‘post haec in terris visus est et cum hominibus conversatus est’.

³⁸ Baruch 3.26-28: 3.27-28: ‘The Lord chose not them, neither did they find the way of knowledge: therefore did they perish. And because they had not wisdom, they perished through their folly [non hos elegit Deus neque viam disciplinae dedit illis et perierunt eo quod non haberent sapientiam et perierunt propter insipientiam suam]’. It is to the character of the fool ‘insipiens’ that Anselm directs the *Proslogion*.

The reconciliation of fallen creation, and of sinful man, within Christ's suffering resurrection and transfiguration, take Anselm in an eschatological direction at the end of the *Prayer to Christ*. It is a movement in which it is possible to see Anselm in dialogue again with both scriptural and Augustinian authority. The final stanza of the *Prayer* evinces the hope that:

Perhaps my Redeemer will come to me,
because he is good,
he is kind, he will not tarry,
to whom be glory for ever. Amen.³⁹

Both Hebrews 10.37 and Romans 11.36 have resonance with Anselm's text here, as do the final words of the Apocalypse.⁴⁰ An eschatological ending is in keeping with an operating principle that truthfulness is dependent on the deeper truth of being and ultimately the Supreme Being. It may be that in this final allusion Anselm points to the position which his *De veritate* expounds more fully. If Romans 11.36 is taken as the controlling text, 'For of him, and by him, and in him, are all things: to him be glory for ever [quoniam ex ipso et per ipsum et in ipso omnia ipsi gloria in saecula]', Anselm may also be reinforcing a trinitarian reading, mirroring the christocentric opening. The *Prayer to Christ* concerns the operation of one person of the Trinity, but this allusion may form a statement of the inseparability of the three. This interpretation relies upon the Augustinian reading of the verse as trinitarian. As Lewis Ayres has shown,

³⁹ *Prayer to Christ*, 188-191; *Or. ad Chris.*, ll. 96-97: 'Veniet interea fortasse redemptor meus, quoniam bonus est; nec tardabit, quia pius est; ipsa gloria in saecula' saeculorum, amen'.

⁴⁰ Hebrews 10.37: 'For yet a little and a very little while, and he that is to come will come and will not delay [adhuc enim modicum quantulum qui venturus est veniet et non tardabit]; Romans 11.36: 'For of him, and by him, and in him, are all things: to him be glory for ever. Amen [quoniam ex ipso et per ipsum et in ipso omnia ipsi gloria in saecula amen]; Apocalypse, 22.20: 'He that giveth testimony of these things, saith: Surely, I come quickly: Amen. Come, Lord Jesus [dicit qui testimonium perhibet istorum etiam venio cito amen veni Domine Iesu]'.

Augustine asserts this in a number of early works, including the *De moribus* and the *De fide et symbolo*, and in so doing was probably following Ambrose's interpretation offered in the *De spiritu*, 'to bolster his account of an intelligible cosmos immediately sustained by the triune life'.⁴¹ Even if Anselm did not intend such a deep reading, it is striking to note that Augustine's commentary on Psalm 37, that with which Anselm began his prayer, moves the point of vision forward to one of eschatological hope. In this light Anselm's ending, with the hope that his redeemer will not tarry, can be seen as a fulfillment of the Psalm's final verses:

Forsake me not, O Lord my God: do not thou depart from me Attend unto my help, O Lord, the God of my salvation [ne derelinquas me Domine Deus meus ne elongeris a me, festina in auxilium meum Domine salutis meae].⁴²

The same concern for the consequences of the fall, not least in the imperfection of human reason, judgment and will, expressed in the *Prayer to Christ* are no less present in the *Proslogion*. The shattering effects of original sin provide another theme for constant meditation by Anselm, and it emerges powerfully at the beginning of the *Proslogion*. Anselm's dialectical and argumentative purpose in this treatise is introduced, as is well known, by a prayerful invocation of the consequences of original sin and the gulf between creator and his creation. How God is to be known, grasped, approached, are the questions with which Anselm dwells. The *Proslogion*, unlike the *Prayer to Christ*, creates a forum in which Anselm offers rational, logical discussion of the questions he has set himself. However, the extent to which these remain biblically

⁴¹ L. Ayres, *Augustine and the Trinity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 53-56, quotation from p. 56.

⁴² Psalm 37.22-23.

derived and their solution biblically inspired is a striking and key element in Anselm's theological approach. Dialectic and sacred scripture are not set against each other, although the former is presented as a different mode of investigation. The whole setting and construction of the treatise is important to consider, not merely, as has often been the case, commentary on chapters two, three and four, the so-called ontological argument.⁴³

The opening chapter is based around a compelling biblical narrative of exile and hope resonating with biblical experiences at a number of different levels. Anselm begins the *Proslogion* with reference to Matthew 6.6, within the opening sequence:

Come now, little man,
turn aside for a while from your daily employment,
escape for a moment the tumult of your thoughts.
Put aside your weighty cares,
lest your burdensome distraction wait,
free yourself awhile for God
and rest awhile in him.
Enter the inner chamber of your soul,
shut out everything except God
and that which can help you in seeking him,
and when you have shut the door, seek him.⁴⁴

⁴³ The literature on the *Proslogion* is too extensive to summarise here. See footnote 10 above for recent commentary on the dialectical aspects of the treatise. For discussion of the composition of the treatise see Giles E. M. Gasper, 'Envy, Jealousy and the Boundaries of Orthodoxy: Anselm, Eadmer and the Genesis of the *Proslogion*' *Viator*, 41(2010), 45-68. The capacity for the *Proslogion* to inspire philosophical reflection is striking, most recently Geo Siegwart, 'Gaunilo referiert Anselm. Aus dem Tagesgeschäft des Rekonstruktors', *Kriterion - Journal of Philosophy*, 27 (2013), 1-29. None of these treatments examine the biblical setting in which the philosophical discussion occurs.

⁴⁴ Anselm, *Proslogion*, 1; trans. Ward, p. 239; ed. Schimtt, vol.1, p. 97: 'Eia nunc, homuncio, fuge paululum occupationes tuas, absconde te modicum a tumultuosis cogitationibus tuis. Abice nunc

The verse from Matthew is an injunction to prayer:

But thou when thou shalt pray, enter into thy chamber, and having shut the door, pray to thy Father in secret, and thy father who sees in secret will repay you [tu autem cum orabis intra in cubiculum tuum et cluso ostio tuo ora Patrem tuum in abscondito et Pater tuus qui videt in abscondito reddet tibi].

The broader context of the passage is the sermon on the mount and the Lord's Prayer. Anselm begins his treatise, then, in prayer, in an environment where the presence of God is sought deliberately.

The first chapter of the *Proslogion* then moves through a sequence of quotations, drawn especially from the Psalms but including Exodus, Job, Jeremiah and Genesis, in which the consequences of the sin of Adam are explored, in powerful, lyrical language. The disfiguration caused by sin, the pain and distress, the clouding of knowledge and judgment, the sense of abandonment and exile on account of human weakness are amongst the main themes explored. Anselm constructs his theological questions around and in the words of the Psalms; each quotation used to deepen commentary and further questions. He moves, in total, through Psalms 26, 50, 77, 126, 121, 114, 37, 6, 12, 79, 44, 68; the direction and purpose of this sequence can be indicated in the following examples.

Psalm 50.11: **‘Turn away thy face from my sins and blot out mine iniquities [absconde faciem tuam a peccatis meis et omnes iniquitates meas dele].’** Anselm poses

onerosas curas, et postpone laboriosas distentiones tuas. Vaca aliquantulum deo, et requiesce aliquantulum in eo. ‘Intra in cubiculum’ mentis tuae, exclude omnia praeter deum et quae te iuvent ad quaerendum eum, et ‘clauso ostio’ quaere eum’.

questions bordering on the paradoxical, he loves to seek God, but does not know God's face leaving the sinner far short of the purpose for which God intended him.⁴⁵

Psalm 114.3: 'The sorrows of death have compassed me: and the perils of hell have found me. **I met with trouble and sorrow** [circumdederunt me funes mortis et munitiones inferni invenerunt me angustiam et dolorem repperi]'. The authorial voice has moved through a description of the wretchedness of the human state, those who used to eat the food of angels now eating the bread of sorrow; exile and blindness the consequence of disobedience. As Anselm expresses it, just before this verse from Psalm 114, 'I was going towards God, and I was my own impediment'.⁴⁶

Psalm 6: 'And my soul is troubled exceedingly: but you, **O Lord, how long?**[et anima mea turbata est valde et tu Domine usquequo]'. Beyond the half-way point of Anselm's spiritual odyssey, the despair of the sinner is still uppermost, Psalm 6 and then Psalm 79.4 (and 79.20): 'Convert us, O God: and shew us thy face, and we shall be saved [Deus converte nos et ostende faciem tuam et salvi erimus]' are referenced in quick succession.⁴⁷

Psalm 68 'Let not the tempest of water drown me, nor the deep water swallow me up: **and let not the pit shut her mouth upon me** [ne operiat me fluvius aquae et ne absorbeat me profundum et non coronet super me puteus os suum]'. As he reaches the climax of the opening chapter Anselm recalls his intense despair once more, but

⁴⁵ Anselm, *Proslogion*, 1, trans Ward p. 240, ll. 41-42; ed. Schmitt, vol. 1, p. 98.

⁴⁶ Anselm, *Proslogion*, 1, trans Ward, p. 242, ll. 94-95 and l. 93; ed. Schmitt, vol. 1, p. 99: 'Tendebam in deum, et offendi in me ipsum'.

⁴⁷ Anselm, *Proslogion*, 1, trans Ward, p. 242, ll. 100, 103; ed. Schmitt, vol. 1, p. 99.

couples this immediately with an appeal to the hope of grace, of God's showing himself to the supplicant.

Through these and other images, Anselm evokes the desolate and desperate state of mankind, and the concomitant need for Divine activity and grace; creation is contingent upon its creator. Anselm ends his opening with a quotation from Genesis 1.27, 'And God created man to his own image', to reinforce the point that the image remains, and that although blotted out, needs only for God to renew and redeem it. With that Anselm ends, finally invoking Isaiah 7.9 on faith and understanding.

This 'lyrical' introduction, to use von Balthasar's terminology, is important in how Anselm sets up his precise, dialectical argument about how God can be said to exist, that he is 'mind-independent' as Ian Logan has put it, and to establish his major and minor premises: that the God is 'mind-independent' and that he really exists, and is appropriately named. The bulk of the treatise is taken up with an exposition of how God is that than which a greater cannot be thought. Anselm has two opponents in this debate, the first the fool, who in Psalm 13, says in his heart, that there is no God, but also classical discussion of the nature of divinity and the world. Anselm's dialectical expertise is employed then to two related, and genuine, questions: how to counter the fool, and how to counter stoic thought. Both of these are countered in a dialectical framework, forcing the opponents to acknowledge the premises of the argument.⁴⁸

Within this exposition, Anselm returns to biblical support for his statements, occasionally counter-posing the dialectical and the lyrical or biblical. A good example of this is the juxtaposition of chapters 15 and 16; 15 recapitulates the dialectical argument,

⁴⁸ For an extended analysis of the dialectical positions, see Logan, *Reading the Proslogion*.

16 takes I Timothy 6.16 as its text and moves ideas around the inaccessibility in which God dwells.

The *Proslogion* ends, as Anselm began, in prayer, though on a laudatory rather than despondent note. Knowledge of God, in the rational demonstration that he has constructed is expressed joyfully, and compared to the ‘fullness of joy’ of John 16.

My Lord and my God,
my joy and the hope of my heart,
tell my soul if this is that joy
which you spoke to us about through your Son,
‘Ask and you will receive that you joy may be full’.
For I have found a fullness of joy
that is more than full.
It is a joy that fills the whole heart, mind, and soul,
indeed it fills the whole of a man,
and yet joy beyond measure still remains.⁴⁹

In the words of von Balthasar: ‘Anselm’s prayers are magnificent examples of this boldness in praying to God: at the crossroads of various possibilities, he insistently beseeches God for a specific answer to prayer summoning God, as it were, to be consistent, secure in the knowledge that, whatever happens, it will be God’s will, and it

⁴⁹ Anselm, *Proslogion*, 26; trans. Ward p. 265-266; ed. Schmitt, vol 1, p. 120: ‘Deus meus et dominus meus, spes mea et gaudium cordis mei, dic animae meae, si hoc est gaudium de quo nobis dicis per filium tuum: ‘petite et accipietis, ut gaudium vestrum sit plenum’. Inveni namque gaudium quoddam plenum, et plus quam plenum. Pleno quippe corde, plena mente, plena anima, pleno toto homine gaudio illo: adhuc supra modum supererit gaudium’.

will be for the best'.⁵⁰ To take von Balthasar further, Anselm manages in the *Proslogion* and in other treatises to unite the lyrical and in this case, the dialectical. The frame of the treatise is biblical: dialectic identifies what the argument is and how best to address it, the lyrical, and biblical, provides a reminder of both the reasons why this is beneficial, and of the limitations of human reason. Reason is framed and held within a scriptural landscape, outwith of which it is meaningless.

The same point on Anselm's methods was made by his companion and the composer of his *Vita*, Eadmer, who binds his scriptural exegesis and reasoned thought, in the context of spiritual discipline.

And so it came about that, being continually given up to God and to spiritual exercises, he attained such a height of divine speculation, that he was able by God's help to see into and unravel many most obscure and previously insoluble questions about the divinity of God and about our faith, and to prove by plain arguments that what he said was firm and catholic truth. For he had so much faith in the Holy Scriptures, that he firmly and inviolably believed that there was nothing in them which deviated from the path of solid truth. Hence he applied his whole mind to this end, that according to his faith he might be found worthy to see with the eye of reason those things in the Holy Scriptures which, as he felt, lay hidden in deep obscurity.⁵¹

⁵⁰ von Balthasar, *Theodramatik*, p. 296.

⁵¹ Eadmer, *Vita Anselmi*, i.7: 'Factumque est ut soli Deo caelestibusque disciplinis iugiter occupatus in tantum divinae speculationis culmen ascenderit, ut obscurissimas et ante suum tempus insolutas de divinitate Dei et nostra fide quaestiones Deo reserante perspiceret ac perspectas enodaret, apertisque rationibus quae dicebat rata et catholica esse probaret. Divinis namque scripturis tantam fidem habebat, ut indissolubili firmitate cordis crederet nihil in eis esse quod solidae veritatis tramitem ullo modo exiret. Quapropter summo studio animum ad hoc intenderat, quatinus iuxta fidem suam mentis ratione mereretur percipere, quae in ipsis sensit multa caligine tecta latere'.

Eadmer goes on to describe an occasion in which Anselm was puzzling on the prophets and in so doing saw through the church and dormitory walls. The truth of things, grounded as it is in the Supreme Truth, is the arbiter and fulcrum for the truth of statements. Both lyrical and theological, Anselm's majestic vision operates dialectically, but its purpose and meaning is the elucidation of scripture, and the invocation to prayer.