

Theologians You Should Know

Sunset Bible Church Adult Sunday School 2024

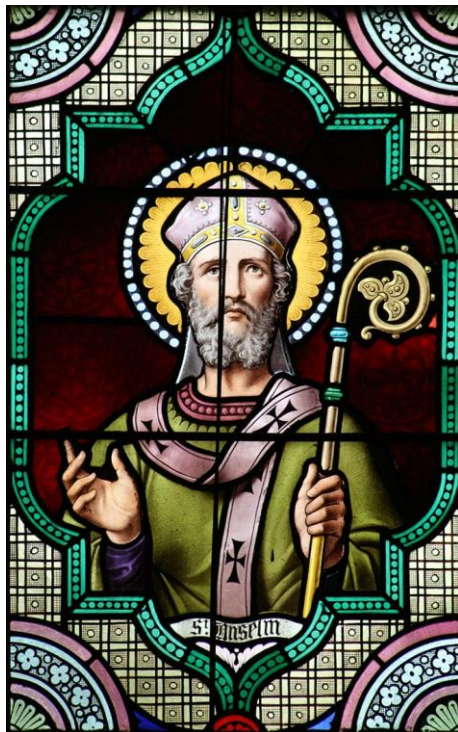
Matt Richey & Richard Price

Week 5: Anselm

*“Lord...we believe that Thou art a being than which nothing greater can be conceived.”
- Anselm*

“For I seek not to understand in order that I may believe; but I believe in order that I may understand, for I believe for this reason: that unless I believe, I cannot understand.” - Anselm

“Now then, little man, for a short time fly from your business; hide yourself for a moment from your turbulent thoughts. Break off now your troublesome cares, and think less of your laborious occupations. Make a little time for God, and rest for a while in Him. Enter into the chamber of your mind, shut out everything but God and whatever helps you to seek Him, and, when you have shut the door, seek Him.” - Anselm



Anselm

c. AD 1033-1109

Canterbury, England (born in Aosta, Italy)

Main Works:

Monologion

Proslogion

Cur Deus Homo

Major Events:

Great East/West Schism in Church (1054)

Named Archbishop of Canterbury (1093)

Pope calls for first Crusade (1095)

Defends the Western Church's belief in

Filioque at the Council of Bari (1089)

Seeks to excommunicate Henry I (1103)

Opening Discussion

- What does it mean to love the Lord your God “with all your mind” (Mark 12:30)?
- Anselm’s motto was “Faith Seeking Understanding.” How would you explain this?

Class Schedule

2/18 - Introduction	3/17 - Anselm	4/14 - John Calvin
2/25 - Justin/Irenaeus	3/24 - Thomas Aquinas	4/21 - John Owen
3/3 - Athanasius	3/31 - (Break for Easter)	4/28 - Jonathan Edwards
3/10 - Augustine	4/7 - Martin Luther	Now go and theologize!

The Life of Anselm

Why are we skipping all the way from Augustine, who died in AD 430 to Anselm, born in the early eleventh century? Surely, one would think, we must be skipping quite a few “theologians you should know.” In his book of that title (from which we take the title of this class), Micheal Reeves writes, “As Augustine lay dying in Hippo in 430, Vandal hordes surrounded the city. And for the next few hundred years such Germanic tribes kept Europe so unstable and illiterate that serious theological study was well nigh impossible. Thus no truly great theological mind emerged again until the eleventh century, in Anselm.”

Born in northern Italy, Anselm left home as a young adult and after wandering for several years, arrived at the Benedictine abbey of Bec in Normandy. He was drawn there because of the abbey’s prior, a man named Lanfranc, who ran a school of theology and had a reputation for scholastic excellence. The idea of mental stimulation excited Anselm, but he eventually shifted his attention from scholarly pursuits to monastic life. Again, Reeves writes, “The all-embracing life of the cloister was perfectly suited to Anselm, who was soon known for his severe personal austerity, seriousness, and precision...When he had arrived at Bec, Anselm had had minimal education, but his intense intellectual brilliance soon won him a name as an inspirational teacher, as exacting in his thought as he was in his lifestyle.”

In his life as a monk, Anselm gave himself to cultivated introspection on the horror of sin and the knowledge of God. However, approaching a holy God was thought to depend on a life devoted to piety and moral purity. As Reeves describes, “With no sense of spiritual security underlying the introspection, it was a theological system full of dread. The sense of sheer terror at the thought of committing any sin can be seen when, one day, Anselm ate pickled eel before remembering that eating raw flesh was against the Mosaic law. Seeing his deep distress, his friend Eadmer consoled him, saying, ‘The salt has removed the rawness of the flesh,’ to which Anselm responded, ‘You have saved me from being tortured by the memory of sin.’ The only hope of salvation was through the committed monastic life, and so Anselm wished that everyone would become a monk or a nun. Few would be saved, and most of those, he was sure, would be monks or nuns.”

After 3 years at the monastery, Lanfranc moved on. Despite Anselm’s inexperience, he was elected to succeed him as prior because of his intellectual gifts and devotion to monastic life. Due to Anselm’s intensity of devotion, just fifteen years after he was appointed prior, he was elected to become the father of the monastery. In what would become a theme in Anselm’s religious life, he resisted the appointment. Reeves writes, “He could hardly have been less pleased: upon his election, he threw himself prostrate on the floor, crying to be

freed from the burdens of that office.” For the next 15 years his theological productivity was halted by the administrative duties of his office, which Anselm proved abysmal at.

Discussion: *Have you ever had to turn from the things you deeply care about to fulfill a duty?*

Discussion: *Would you like monastic life devoted to moral purity and contemplation of God?*

“Worse was to come as, when visiting England in 1093, King William II, the ruthless and fiery son of the Conqueror, compelled Anselm to succeed his old master, Lanfanc, as archbishop of Canterbury. This would mean even more distractions than dealing with a few monks. Again Anselm was in tears at the prospect, so distraught that he gave himself a nosebleed as he protested to the king his inability. The king tried to force the archbishop’s pastoral staff into Anselm’s clenched fist, something that required the help of a number of bishops who were with him. Anselm was then lifted up, carried into the church, and acclaimed archbishop” (Reeves). Anselm proved a devoted monk, but a reluctant manager.



Struggling with the monarchy’s control over the church in England, Anselm sought the counsel of the pope. After the king refused to let him go to Rome, he eventually decided to go anyway, which led the king to bar him from reentering England. Reeves writes, “It was with a glimmer of hope, then, that Anselm arrived in Rome in 1098 and asked the pope to release him from the burden of his office. The pope flatly refused, instead ordering him to go to the Council of Bari in southern Italy, where representatives of the Greek and Latin churches were to meet in an attempt to heal the great schism of the East and West that had opened up a few decades earlier. There Anselm was instructed to defend the West’s view that the Spirit eternally proceeded from the Son as well as the Father.” (*Filioque Doctrine*)

Toward the end of his life, king William died and his younger brother, Henry I, invited Anselm to return to Canterbury. Anselm reluctantly complied but was soon seeking permission from the next pope to be relieved of his duties, for which Henry banished him. Anselm tried opening proceedings to excommunicate Henry, but the pope countered him. He returned to Canterbury and soon after succumbed to poor health and died peacefully.

Works of Anselm

Anselm represented a bridge between the meditative, contemplative theology of the monasteries and the intellectual theology of the *schola*, or scholastic style. Reeves writes, "Anselm has sometimes been called the modern father of scholasticism. Yet Anselm was a monk. And while later material of his, such as *Cur Deus Homo*, is written in a dialogue form that in some faint ways can resemble scholastic debate, his whole tone and approach to theology is that of the monastery, not the schools." Anselm had his own intellectual pursuits, a project he called "faith seeking understanding," but he was primarily an ardent admirer of God. Even through reason alone, Anselm held, one could apprehend, contemplate, and enjoy the beauty of God. Writes Reeves, "Anselm thus believed that by pure reason he could prove God's existence, attributes, and triune being as well as the fact that God had to send a God-man to die voluntarily in our place so we might be saved."

Monologion

While he was prior of Bec, some of Anselm's monks asked him to write on "how one ought to meditate on the divine essence." As Reeves writes, "The result was the *Monologion* (Soliloquy), or as it was originally entitled, 'A Pattern for Meditation on the Reason of Faith.' One thing the monks had stipulated for this meditation was that 'absolutely nothing in it would be established by the authority of Scripture.' all would be worked out by reason alone." This is Anselm's attempt to persuade the person who does not believe in the authority of Scripture (either because he has not been told or he refuses to believe), the reality of God and His attributes, including His triune nature, by reason alone.

Proslogion

Even Anselm saw his arguments in the *Monologion* unnecessarily complex. Thus, he set about trying to identify a simple argument for the existence and nature of God from reason alone. Reeves writes, "The search for this super-argument became an obsession with Anselm. He found himself unable to eat, sleep, or concentrate in chapel. He began to conclude that the whole idea must be a temptation from the Devil. Yet he found he could not let the idea go. Then, suddenly, during a middle-of-the-night service, it came to him." Anselm's argument (which has come to be known as "the ontological argument" for God's existence) was built on the formula of the Roman Stoic philosopher Seneca, who described God as being "that than which nothing greater can be thought." From this starting point, Anselm believed he could convince the "fool" from Psalm 14 that he was being irrational. Reeves writes, "When the fool had said in his heart, 'There is no God,' he had imagined a contradiction, that this being that cannot not exist does not exist. That shows he is stupid."

Cur Deus Homo (Why the God-Man?)

Much could be said about this work, but for our purposes it is sufficient to describe it as Anselm's arguments for the rationality of the doctrine of the Incarnation, as well as his defense of his Satisfaction Theory of the Atonement of Christ as a departure from the contemporaneously popular Ransom Theory, which made Christ's death a way to ransom humanity from Satan's rightful power over them due to their fall and consequent sin.

Please send any questions to Matt (matt@sunsetbible.com) or Richard (richard@sunsetbible.com)