ANSELM

Proslogion

History of Christian Philosophy
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CHAPTER TWO
God truly [i.e., really] exists.

Therefore, o Lord, You who give understanding to faith, grant me to understand—to the degree You know to be advantageous—that You exist, as we believe, and that You are what we believe [You to be]. Indeed, we believe You to be something than which nothing greater can be thought. Or is there, then, no such nature [as You], for the Fool has said in his heart that God does not exist? But surely when this very same Fool hears my words “something than which nothing greater can be thought,” he understands what he hears. And what he understands is in his understanding, even if he does not understand [i.e., judge] it to exist. For that a thing is in the understanding is distinct from understanding that [this] thing exists. For example, when a painter envisions what he is about to paint: he indeed has in his understanding that which he has not yet made, but he does not yet understand that it exists. But after he has painted [it]: he has in his understanding that which he has made, and he understands that it exists. So even the Fool is convinced that something than which nothing greater can be thought is at least in his understanding; for when he hears of this [being], he understands [what he hears], and whatever is understood is in the understanding. But surely that than which a greater cannot be thought cannot be only in the understanding. For if it were only in the understanding, it could be thought to exist also in reality—something which is greater [than existing only in the understanding]. Therefore, if that than which a greater cannot be thought could be thought not to exist, then that than which a greater cannot be thought would be that than which a greater can be thought! But surely this [conclusion] is impossible. Hence, without doubt, something than which a greater cannot be thought exists both in the understanding and in reality.

CHAPTER THREE
[God] cannot be thought not to exist.

Assuredly, this [being] exists so truly [i.e., really] that it cannot even be thought not to exist. For there can be thought to exist something which cannot be thought not to exist; and this thing is greater than that which can be thought not to exist. Therefore, if that than which a greater cannot be thought could be thought not to exist, then that than which a greater cannot be thought would not be that than which a greater cannot be thought—[a consequence] which is contradictory. Hence, something than which a greater cannot be thought exists so truly that it cannot even be thought not to exist. And You are this [being],
o Lord our God. Therefore, o Lord my God, You exist so truly that You cannot even be thought not to exist. And this is rightly the case. For if any mind could think of something better than You, the creature would rise above the Creator and would sit in judgment over the Creator—something which is utterly absurd. Indeed, except for You alone, whatever else exists can be thought not to exist. Therefore, You alone exist most truly of all and thus most greatly of all; for whatever else exists does not exist as truly [as do You] and thus exists less greatly [than do You]. Since, then, it is so readily clear to a rational mind that You exist most greatly of all, why did the Fool say in his heart that God does not exist?—why [indeed] except because [he is] foolish and a fool!

CHAPTER FOUR
How the Fool said in his heart that which cannot be thought.

Yet, since to speak in one's heart and to think are the same thing, how did [the Fool] say in his heart that which he was unable to think, or how was he unable to think that which he did say in his heart? Now, if he truly [i.e., really]—rather, since he truly—both thought [what he did] because he said [it] in his heart and did not say [it] in his heart because he was unable to think [it], then it is not the case that something is said in the heart, or is thought, in only one way. For in one way a thing is thought when the word signifying it is thought, and in another way [it is thought] when that which the thing is is is understood. Thus, in the first way but not at all in the second, God can be thought not to exist. Indeed, no one who understands that which God is can think that God does not exist, even though he says these words [viz., “God does not exist”] in his heart either without any signification or with some strange signification. For God is than which a greater cannot be thought. Anyone who rightly understands this, surely understands that that [than which a greater cannot be thought] exists in such way that it cannot even conceivably not exist. Therefore, anyone who understands that God is such [a being] cannot think that He does not exist.

Thanks to You, good Lord, thanks to You—because what at first I believed through Your giving, now by Your enlightening I understand to such an extent that [even] if I did not want to believe that You exist, I could not fail to understand [that You exist].

CHAPTER FIVE
God is whatever it is better to be than not to be. Alone existing through Himself, He makes all other things from nothing.

What, then, are You, o Lord God, than whom nothing greater can be thought? What indeed are You except that which—as highest of all things, alone existing through Himself—made all other things from nothing? For whatever is not this is less great than can be thought. But this [less greatness] cannot be thought of You. Therefore, what good is lacking to the
Supreme Good, through whom every good exists? Consequently, You are just, truthful, blessed, and whatever it is better to be than not to be. For it is better to be just than not-just, blessed than not-blessed.

CHAPTER SIX
How God is able to perceive even though He is not something corporeal.

Now, since to be able to perceive and to be omnipotent, merciful, and impassible is better than not to be [any of these], how are You able to perceive if You are not something corporeal, or how are You omnipotent if You cannot do all things, or how are You both merciful and impassible? For if only corporeal things are able to perceive (inasmuch as the senses have to do with a body and are in a body), how are You able to perceive, since You are not something corporeal but are Supreme Spirit, which is better than what is corporeal? But if perceiving is only knowing or only for the sake of knowing (for anyone who perceives knows in accordance with the characteristic capabilities of the respective senses—e.g., colors [are known] through sight, flavors through taste), then whatever in some way knows is not unsuitably said in some way to perceive. Therefore, o Lord, even though You are not something corporeal, truly You are supremely able to perceive in the sense that You know supremely all things—not [in the sense that You know] in the way that an animal does, by means of bodily senses.

CHAPTER SEVEN
How He is omnipotent even though He cannot do many things.

But how are You also omnipotent if You cannot do all things? Or how can You do all things if You are not able to be corrupted or to tell a lie or to make what is true be false—for example, [to make] what has already happened not to have happened—and, likewise, many [other] things? Or is the “ability” to do these things not power but lack of power? For anyone who is able to do these things is able to do what is disadvantageous to himself and what he ought not to do. And the more he is able to do these things, the more powerful are adversity and perversity over him and the less powerful he is against them. Therefore, anyone who in this way is able, is able not by a power but by a lack of power. For it is not the case that he is said to be able because he himself is able; rather, [he is said to be able] because his own lack of power causes something else to be powerful over him—or [for some other reason coinciding] with some other way of speaking (even as we say many things improperly—for example, when we substitute “to be” for “not to be” and substitute “to do” for “not to do” for “to do nothing”). For we often say to someone who denies that something is the case, “It’s as you say [it] is,” although we would say more properly, “It’s not, as you say it’s not.” Likewise, we say, “This man is sitting even as that man is [also] doing” or “This man is resting even as that man is [also] doing”—although sitting is not doing
anything and resting is doing nothing. So, then, when someone is said to have the power to
do or to experience what is not advantageous to himself or what he ought not [to do or to
experience], by “power” a powerlessness is understood. For the more he has the [alleged]
ability, the more powerful are adversity and perversity over him and the more powerless he
is against them. Therefore, o Lord God, You are more truly omnipotent because You are not
at all powerful through powerlessness and because nothing is powerful over You.

CHAPTER EIGHT
How He is merciful and impassible.
But how are you both merciful and impassible? For if You are impassible You have no
compassion. And if You do not have compassion, You do not have a heart sorrowful out of
compassion for the wretched—the very thing which being merciful is. And if You are not
merciful, from where is there such great consolation for the wretched? How, then, are You
and are You not merciful, o Lord, except because You are merciful from our point of view
but are not merciful in Yourself? Indeed, You are [merciful] according to our experience but
are not [merciful] according to Your experience. For when You behold us in our wretched
condition, we experience the effect of Your mercy; but You do not experience any emotion.
And so, You are merciful because You save [us] wretched [creatures] and spare [us] who have
sinned against You; and You are not merciful, because You do not experience compassion for
wretchedness.

CHAPTER TWELVE
God is the life by which He lives, and similarly for similar [attributes].
But, surely, whatever You are You are through no other than through Yourself. Therefore,
You are the life by which You live, the wisdom by which You are wise, the goodness by
which You are good both to those who are good and to those who are evil, and similarly for
similar [attributes].

CHAPTER FIFTEEN
He is greater than can be thought.
Therefore, o Lord, not only are You that than which a greater cannot be thought, but You
are also something greater than can be thought. For since there can be thought to exist
something of this kind, if You were not this [Being] then something greater than You could
be thought—[a consequence] which is impossible.
CHAPTER SIXTEEN
This is the inaccessible light in which He dwells.

Truly, o Lord, this is the inaccessible light in which You dwell.2 For, truly, there is not anything else which can penetrate this [light], so that it sees You therein. Truly, the reason I cannot stand to look at this [light] is that it is too resplendent for me. Nevertheless, whatever I see I see by means of this [light]—even as a frail eye sees what it does by means of sunlight, which it cannot stand to look at in the sun itself. My understanding is not able to comprehend this light, which shines forth too brilliantly. [My understanding] does not grasp it; and the eye of my soul cannot bear to gaze at length upon it. [My soul's eye] is dazzled by its splendor, overcome by its vastness, overwhelmed by its immensity, confounded by its capacity. o supreme and inaccessible Light, o complete and blessed Truth, how distant You are from me, who am so near for You! How far removed You are from my sight, though I am so present to Yours! You are everywhere present as a whole; and yet, I do not see You. In You I move, and in You I exist; and yet, I cannot approach You. You are within me and round about me; and yet, I do not experience You.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN
Harmony, fragrance, succulence, softness, and beauty are present in God in their own ineffable manner.

Amidst Your blessedness and light, o Lord, You are still hidden from my soul. Therefore, my soul still dwells in darkness and in its own unhappiness. For it looks in all directions but does not see Your beauty. It listens but does not hear Your harmony. It fills its nostrils but does not smell Your fragrance. It tastes but does not savor Your succulence. It feels but does not detect Your softness. For in Your ineffable manner, o Lord God, You have these [features] within You; and You have bestowed them, in their own perceptible manner, upon the things created by You. But the senses of my soul have been stiffened and deadened and impaired by the oldtime infirmity of sin.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN
There are no parts in God or in the eternity which He is.

And, behold, once again confusion!2 Behold, once again sorrow and grief beset me as I seek joy and gladness.3 My soul hoped for fullness; and, lo, once again it is overwhelmed with need. I desired to eat; and, lo, the more I hunger! I tried to mount upward to the divine light, but I lapsed downward into my own darkness. Indeed, not only did I fall into darkness but I feel enshrouded by it. I fell before my mother conceived me.1 Surely, I was conceived in darkness and born surrounded by it. Surely, once long ago we all fell in him2 in whom we all sinned. In him (who easily possessed but evilly lost for himself and for us) we all lost that
which when we desire we do not know how to seek, when we seek we do not find, when we
find is not what we are seeking. Help me, o Lord, because of Your goodness.3 “I have sought
Your countenance; Your countenance, o Lord, will I seek. Do not turn Your face from me.”4
Raise me out of myself and unto You. Cleanse, heal, focus, illumine5 the eye of my mind so
that it may behold You.6 Let my soul muster its strength and with all its understanding
strive once more unto You, o Lord. What are You, o Lord?

What are You? What shall my heart understand You to be? Surely, You are life, wisdom,
truth, goodness, blessedness, eternity—You are every true good. These are many things; and
my limited understanding cannot in a single view behold so many at one time in order to
delight in all together. How is it, then, o Lord, that You are all these things? Are they Your
parts, or, instead, is each one of them the whole of what You are? For whatever is composed
of parts is not absolutely one but is in a way many and is different from itself and can be
divided actually or conceivably (intellectu). But these [consequences] are foreign to You, than
whom nothing better can be thought. Hence, there are no parts in You, o Lord. Nor are You
more than one thing. Rather, You are something so one and the same with Yourself that in
no respect are You dissimilar to Yourself. Indeed, You are Oneness itself, divisible in no
respect (nullo intellectu). Therefore, life and wisdom and the other [characteristics] are not
parts of You but are all one thing; and each one of them is the whole of what You are and the
whole of what all the others are. Thus, since neither You nor the eternity which You are has
any parts, nowhere and never is there a part of You or of Your eternity; rather, You exist
everywhere as a whole, and Your eternity exists always as a whole.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO
He alone is what He is and who He is.
Therefore, o Lord, You alone are what You are, and You are who You are. For anything
having parts distinct from its whole, and anything in which there is something mutable, is
not altogether what it is. And what (1) began to exist from not-being, (2) can be thought not
to exist, (3) returns to not-being unless it exists through something else, (4) has a past which
it no longer is, and (5) has a future which it not yet is—this does not exist in the proper
and unqualified sense [of "existing"] But You are what You are, because whatever You once or in
any respect are, this You are always and as a whole.

And in a proper and unqualified sense You are who You are,1 because You have neither a past
nor a future, but only a present, and because You cannot be thought ever not to exist. And
You are life and light and wisdom and blessedness and eternity and many such good things.
Nevertheless, You are only one supreme good, altogether sufficient unto Yourself, needing
no one [else] but needed by all [other] things in order to exist and to fare well.
CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE
The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are equally this [supreme] good. It is the one necessary [Being], which is every good, complete good, and the only good.

You, God the Father, are this [supreme] good; and Your Word, i.e., Your Son, is this [supreme good]. For in the Word by which You speak of Yourself there cannot be anything other than what You are or anything greater or lesser than You. For Your Word is as true as You are truthful; and so, just as are You, it is Truth itself—not [a truth that is] other than You. You are so simple [in nature] that from You cannot be begotten anything other than what You are. The one Love common to You and to Your Son, viz., the Holy Spirit who proceeds from You both, is [also] this [same supreme good]. For this Love is not unequal to You or to Your Son; for You love Yourself and Your Son, and He loves Himself and You, in proportion to Your greatness and His. And what is not unequal to You and to Him is not something other than You and Him; nor can there proceed from Supreme Simplicity anything which is other than what the one from whom it proceeds is. But that which each of them (considered distinctly) is, this the Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—is as a whole and all together. For each, considered distinctly, is nothing other than a supremely simple oneness and a supremely singular simplicity which cannot be made multiple and cannot be different things.

Now, one thing is necessary, viz., the one necessary [Being] in which there is every good—yea, which is every good, one good, complete good, and the only good.