



FAITH & REASON

THE JOURNAL OF CHRISTENDOM COLLEGE

Fall 1988 | Vol. XIV, No. 3

ANSELM'S INTELLECT AND THE EMBRACE OF BEC

Dom Paschal Baumstein, O.S.B.

Saint Anselm's decision to enter the monastery of Bec is a relatively unexamined aspect of his story. Eadmer, Anselm's contemporary biographer, wrote a plausible and edifying explication of the selection; historians since the twelfth century have accepted it virtually without question. Yet Eadmer's reasoning is oddly discordant when considered within the line of rational process that so clearly marks Anselm's life and thought. In that context, the appeal of Bec assumes a very different character. Rather than a place to negate his pride, as Eadmer suggests, Bec becomes a singularly congenial vision of the approach to God, the sort of principled premise Anselm favored throughout his life. It must be considered that the tone of mortification that is usually applied to Anselm's selection should be complemented by the reality and recognition of a particularly fulfilling choice.



ANSELM OF CANTERBURY (1033-1109) HAS NO RIVAL AS PREMIER INTELLECT OF HIS age. His was not the mind of a traditional scholar, however; indeed, he generally eschewed the authoritative references and classical allusions that marked contemporary erudites. For Anselm, the ideal premise rested amid the indisputable certainty of divine revelation; an innate and instinctive facility for logic¹ was the instrument that developed and exposed his points. His mind was a strikingly original instrument, agile and acute. "The most luminous and penetrating intellect between Augustine and Aquinas"² is Dom David Knowles' verdict, "peculiarly lucid and penetrating,"³ perhaps "the only monk in the whole long history of monasticism who can claim a place among the very greatest thinkers of the world."⁴ Even Sir Richard Southern, a scholar not noted for effusive praise, finds that Anselm radiates "saintly and intellectual splendour."⁵

While Anselm's mind is usually considered from its manifestation in his writings, its role was no less obvious in his life. Indeed, a striking consistency in rational method may be perceived from Anselm's earliest days through his last. It is seen in his departure from his father's house, the character of his abbacy, the failure of his political role as archbishop. These episodes lend an unmistakable and vivid insight into the character and values of Anselm and his mind.

Seldom studied, but no less significant, is Anselm's decision to enter the Benedictine Abbey of Bec. This is a peculiarly well-documented choice, by virtue of the work of Eadmer of Canterbury (c. 1055-1124), Anselm's contemporary biographer. Background, context, and alternatives are recorded by Eadmer. The preference for Bec is portrayed as a resignation to the humility of intellectual obscurity.⁶ In the context of hagiography, humility serves as a sound rationale, and a laudable one as well. The problem is that Eadmer makes no allowance for the ordinary intellectual dynamics that so consistently characterized Anselm's thought and life. To overlook such a factor, especially when dealing with a person like Anselm, invites misjudgment. The clarity, purity, and integrity of his intellect were

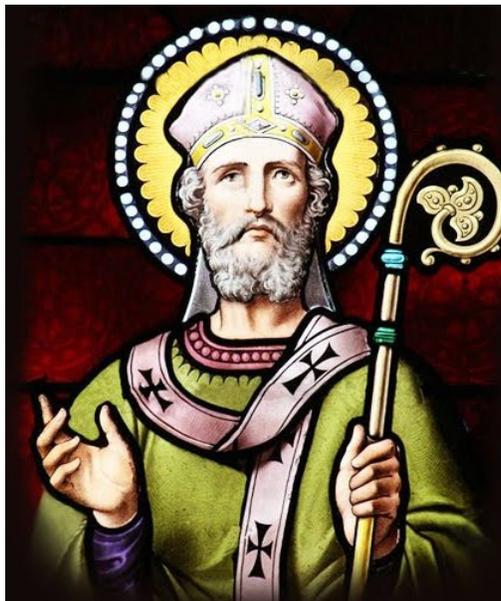
that uncompromising. They must be considered in the evaluation of this episode; moreover, it must be conceded that they complement the ordinary reasoning, suggesting a fuller and richer rationale.

ANSELM'S INTELLECT

Anselm's intellect explains the direction of his life with greater clarity than do the simple facts of Eadmer's biography. Anselm's mind was first demonstrated in his boyhood in the attraction God held for him, a focus centered on the attribute of unicity. This quality and its implications incited Anselm to seek out the One God.⁷ The two elements of that episode were to characterize his intellect and life throughout his days: first, he grasped concepts intuitively, focusing on principle rather than accidents or manifestations; second, action was determined by the truth or principle of the issue, not by the practicality or the temporal attractions of such a course; action followed naturally on the principle itself. Thus Anselm's thought was characterized more by the abstract than the concrete; its practical ramifications proceeded implicitly from principle. Neither in his writings nor in the details of his life was Anselm inclined to justify an act by explaining it; there was an important distinction between facts that may explain, and principles that will justify. Act, for Anselm, was tied to principle.

This same point may be illustrated by Anselm's performance much later as Archbishop. Believing the primacy of Canterbury over all Britain was a legacy of principle rather than of occupancy, Anselm was uncompromisingly dedicated to its security. Neither benefits nor expediency - nor indeed Roman consistency on the issue - could be cited in defense of his position. Only the principle justified his course.⁸

There seems to be an almost studied imitation, throughout Anselm's life and reasonings, of God's attribute of simplicity, of the lack of parts and process. Anselm drew the line from God to himself with as little distraction or intersection as possible. It was an effort to direct the human will to follow the divine will, without the intrusion or intermediacy - or possible confusion - of his own fallible appetites and desires. Few saints



followed a comparable course. Saint Bernard would take a more affective approach; Saint Teresa, a more existential one. Saint Benedict, however, the patron of Western monasticism, in the seventh chapter of his Rule, conceived of a virtuous course nurtured so that it "function[ed] naturally and as if by habit." This last was the approach embodied in Anselm's schema.

To some degree, this method makes Anselm's logic difficult to chart. His path from abstract principle to concretization can prove remarkably unencumbered. His expositions reveal no taste for syllogistic logic, nor does he, in the strict sense, give more than a passing acknowledgment to the services of dialectic.⁹

Anselm's logic was ordinarily a translation. Taking form or principle, he devised its translation into act; this dynamic occurred naturally, he believed, not manipulatively. The best known of these facile translations of Anselm's is the Proslogion's so-called "proof" of God's existence. There, the reality of God was linked to Divinity (principle), as defined. Facts, such as Aquinas would use in his "proofs", were inadequate in Anselm's design. Principle had to be prior; act did not legitimate principle. Purity of Reason, Anselm maintained, could never demand doubt, not even a moment of theoretical abstinence, regarding the provisions vouchsafed in Revelation. Reason served Truth over philosophy.

Also of importance in understanding Anselm's mind is his use of sources. He seldom appealed to authority, preferring instead a starting point drawn from the treasury of Revelation, and declining or deducing his conclusions through reason or, more specifically, by logic. He seems not to have been gifted or perhaps inclined for the scholarly multiplication of references.¹⁰ The originality of his thought - and surely no adjective is more commonly applied to Anselm than "original" - has been described as "a most brilliant development in the intellectual history of the West."¹¹ Yet it is not the originality that invests his thought with its arresting freshness, but its purity. Anselm did not use reason as a mathematician's tool; he treated it as a grace, and as the singular element of human nature that was most perfectly in the image of

God.¹² He underscored this understanding in the *Proslogion*, for example, in his excitement regarding “faith seeking understanding.” He was not detached from his intellectual work or its subject, but consistently enthused and passionate, as well as logical and reasoned.¹³

This is because, identifying the rational faculties as grace and as image of God, Anselm did not acknowledge a necessary division between faith and reason; they enjoyed a special integration, virtually suggesting “meditation as a way of doing theology.”¹⁴ The implication is essential for understanding Anselm: for him, thought, like the soul, is to be returned to God, with purity and integrity in evidence and vigorously effective. Anselm even referred to his intellectual work as “contemplative reason.”¹⁵ Its dialogue, as this implies, was not with evidence, facts, or temporal circumstances, but with Truth.¹⁶ Therein lay its extraordinary character. In Anselm’s vision, the root of a problem rested not in what man could see, but in the divine principles that underscored the reality.

Anselm’s intellect, the process of his reason, pervaded his life and its decisions. Its impact cannot be ignored by students of either his thought or acts. This is especially true in reference to the decision by which Anselm sought to chart the course of his life, his selection of the monastery to which he would vow stability. Here, as in every other facet of his life, the quest for intellectual purity and simplicity was remarkably evident.

JOURNEY TO BEC

Anselm¹⁷ was born in 1033, in the Piedmont city of Aosta. It was Burgundian then, but destined to enter the orbit of the House of Savoy. His stern father, Gundulf, revelled in affluence and secular endeavors. Ermenburga, Anselm’s mother, provided an example of greater substance; she was noted for her well-reasoned judgment and piety; apparently, her impact outweighed Gundulf’s.¹⁸

When, as a child, Anselm was first moved by the fact of God’s unicity, a prescient meditation ensued. Anselm envisioned himself spiritually ascending a great mountain, atop which he found God. Divinity fed him with the “whitest of breads.” This experience marked his spirit; it also occasioned a turn in his intentions, leaving him more seriously inclined toward virtue and mature responsibility.¹⁹

By the age of fifteen, Anselm had decided to become a monk. That life, he maintained, would allow him to perpetually address the divine will and majesty; moreover, its clear focus on the values of eternity necessarily labeled it a most perfect form of human occupation. Perfection and purity of effort were essential values for him. Not one to tarry, Anselm immediately implored a local abbot to receive him in the cloister. The boy did not seek the permission of Gundulf, however, a fact noted by the abbot. Choosing caution over this potential vocation, the abbot rejected Anselm. In response, the boy approached God, begging for himself a serious illness that might promote a merciful change in the abbot’s judgment. God responded favorably; the abbot did not. The infirmity proved insufficient barter. According to Eadmer, providence did not ordain that the incipient monk should be bound by the practices and customs of that particular monastery.²⁰



Anselm accepted his health back,²¹ and found his own will being thwarted - his fervor for professional religion decreased. Youthful diversions began supplanting study and piety. Then the sobering influence of Ermenburga was removed by her untimely death.²²

Eadmer perceived clear evidence of providential concern for the boy in what happened next. Gundulf manifested a divinely inspired disdain for his son.²³ The persecution that resulted was so vigorous that the twenty-three year old Anselm, with only a servant and few possessions in tow, left home and inheritance.²⁴ The departure appears to have been surreptitious,²⁵ but there is no evidence that such caution was warranted. Gundulf did not pursue his son across the Alps. In transit, Anselm’s physical resources faltered; his provisions were promptly exhausted, and he was reduced to the promise of death by freezing. While eating some snow, however, presumably to be his last meal, Anselm found again that “whitest of breads” with which he had been fed and invigorated as a child.²⁶ His spiritual and physical renewal effected, young Anselm set off on the search for God.

For three years he wandered through Burgundy and France, finally presenting himself at the school of Lanfranc (c. 1010-1089), at the Norman Abbey of Notre

Dame at Bec.²⁷ Although he approached Bec with a vision of academic achievements, the monastic life soon reasserted its appeal. Thus two voices competed for his attention: the allure of the intellectual life was unmistakable; while the summons of God towered above it.

BEC

Bec was incomparable. Not only was its school among the most distinguished in Northwestern Europe, perhaps anywhere in Europe outside of Italy, but its Benedictine cloister held an unrivaled, primitive integrity. Bec stood outside both the eremitic vision of contemporary reformers and the vigorous elaborations of Cluny and her daughters. Knowles describes Bec's Benedictinism as "a new birth, almost a new order."²⁸

The freshness that marked this monastery was not entirely born through design. Bec was founded by the knight Herluin (c. 995-1078)²⁹ At age thirty-seven, after about two decades in the service of Gilbert, Count of Brionne, Herluin began turning his heart and mind to sacred matters. After experimenting at court with poverty and penance, he renounced his position; then, on a family estate near the village of Bonneville, Herluin constructed a small, private monastery. By age forty he was becoming adept at manual labor and was learning to read. Longing, however, to be a true monk, vowed in a coenobium, he presented himself at two or more established monasteries, intending each time to beg admission. The disedifying gentlemen of these cloisters, however, proved repugnant to him, their observance being at odds with the integrity of his monastic vision.

Herluin was saved from definitive disillusionment when he witnessed, after so long a wait, a worthy example. On one of his visits to a cloister, he saw a single monk remain in choir after the rest of the brethren had retired. That brother sat vigil through the night, unaware of Herluin's presence, cognizant only of God. This lone monk's example restored Herluin's monastic resolve, but apparently also convinced him to aim toward greater fidelity than the existing monasteries seemed to encourage. He turned to God anew, intending to pursue and realize the principles, more than the glory and historical fruit, of the monastic vocation. Of course the approach was never so explicitly stated, but the execution was unfailingly clear. Saint Benedict's Rule, not the vicissitudes of monastic development, was the ideal guide of the monk, and the bedrock of Herluin's vocation.

The Bishop of Lisieux invested Herluin in the monastic habit and subsequently ordained him a priest. Later, as disciples - only two, initially - appeared, Herluin was appointed abbot. Then, after a fire in the enclosure, Herluin's Abbey was moved to a site outside Brionne, near a stream called "Bec".

In a sense, Herluin's ignorance became the magnificent virtue on which the Abbey of Bec was erected. The Abbot was a rude fellow; trained as a man-at-arms, unschooled in general, and specifically untutored in monasticism; he had neither background nor education to serve him in promoting a monastic observance. In the cloisters he had visited, standards for imitation had not been found. Since learning to read, he had studied Christianity and monasticism only on a most rudimentary level. Thus Herluin brought to Bec a vision of monasticism that was imposingly unencumbered by tradition and, to a significant degree, by history. When he embraced the *Rule* of Benedict, and as abbot swore to promulgate it, his perspective was relatively uninfluenced by the adaptations - no matter how reasonable or salubrious - of centuries of experience and experimentation. There were for him the Rule, his abbatial character and duty, and the purity and integrity he believed should characterize monasticism. The result has eloquently been described as "the most living community of [its] age."³⁰

There was a striking contrast between Bec and the reigning cloister of the period, Cluny. This was in evidence not merely in size and externals, but in fundamental Benedictine philosophy and the sources on which that monastic theory was nurtured. At Bec, in a manner uncharacteristic of either its time or Benedictine history in general, "the growth was pure and vigorous," not subjected to tradition's ordinary domination.³¹ Thus Bec's austerity was spiritual and constitutional, as well as physical; it rested in the tenor of the observance, not merely in the extreme paucity of the community. Herluin did not appeal to the unfolding of tradition, as did Cluny, nor did he sponsor a vigorous reverence for the monastic fathers, as would Citeaux soon afterwards. Herluin seems to have held the Rule in one hand, Scripture in the other, and simply set about the work of monasticism. He was innocent of the discipleship that ordinarily would have marked such an adventure and colored its vista. Bec was distinguished from its contemporaries by a penetrating directness, an austerity that was more than physical.

Herluin had another quality that promoted Bec,

provided for the extraordinary dispatch that marked its rise to prominence, and that would later affect Anselm: Herluin had an empathetic “ability to discover in the young a zeal and talent for learning.”³² Reverence for scholarship might have been no surprise in an untutored man like this abbot. The integration of erudition with his austere and simple monastic vision was, however, a bold step. For Herluin himself had no gifts by which to direct this activity.

A less humble man would never have invested such significance in a venture that would of necessity be entrusted to a subordinate, particularly to a subordinate with talents that supplied for the Abbot’s well-known deficiencies.

The director of Bec’s school was Lanfranc of Pavia. Like his abbot, Lanfranc³³ was a late vocation; he entered Bec in 1042, an imposing reputation for scholarship enriching his dowry. Lanfranc approached the monastery out of a pious resolution, the result of an assault by brigands that led to an evening of solitary woodland bondage. During his first three years at Bec, Lanfranc affixed a more religious hue to his previous scholarship. He then determined to quietly abandon the coenobium in favor of an eremitical vocation. Lanfranc was influenced in this decision by the advent of prospective students who disrupted the peace of Bec as they implored him to lecture. While naming the younger man to the office of Prior, the monastery’s second highest position, and in creating a school at Bec, Herluin persuaded his learned confrere to stay in the cloister. Lanfranc cannot have been surprised to find himself the academy’s first Master.³⁴

Lanfranc’s educational enterprise was a new chapter in Herluin’s monastic vision; nevertheless, since its good work could be accomplished within the environment of the cloister,³⁵ it was certainly not at odds with the abbot’s sense of purity and integrity. No less of interest to the monks, the school provided income,



for which the need was great. Moreover, the school soon brought other, and no doubt less anticipated dividends: it provided, by attracting intelligent young nobles to its door, contacts with affluent, prominent, and powerful families; thus interest in Bec and her needs was aroused, security stimulated, and an excellent reputation established. Then, when Lanfranc participated in the heresy-condemnation of Berengarius of Tours (c. 1000-1088),³⁶ his fame and repute were given their definitive boost. His prominence rose further when he helped solve some marital entangle-

ments suffered by Duke William of Normandy (c. 1028-1087), later William I of England. Lanfranc’s varied, efficiently pursued interests served to secure Bec’s fiscal and corporate legitimacy. Of his many talents, it was probably scholarship that initially attracted Anselm, but the Master’s spirited pursuit of Berengarius was of current interest in the days when the younger man’s path turned toward Normandy. Anselm would certainly have been attracted by a victory on behalf of truth.

ANSELM’S PROBLEM

Anselm studied under Lanfranc at Bec for a period of about one year, during which the Master proved a stern but efficacious taskman. Soon, Anselm began reconsidering a religious vocation for himself, reasoning that the severity of monastic life could be no more trying than the rigors he endured as a pupil at Bec; furthermore, to suffer these trials as a man in vows would provide greater protection against temptation.³⁷ Anselm again determined to become a monk.

By Anselm’s perception, two monasteries contended for his vocation. One, of course, was Bec, with which his familiarity was greatest and his edification uncompromised. The second was Cluny, the most visible monastery of the day. Interestingly, Anselm considered dismissing both houses because of his own intellectual pride: At Bec his rational faculties would always be overshadowed by Lanfranc’s; at Cluny the severity

of the observance, the “*districtio ordinis*”,³⁸ would effectively preclude any scholarly endeavors.³⁹ This pride, of course, was a sin and demanded rejection.⁴⁰ In need of guidance, Anselm chose Lanfranc as his counsellor. Lanfranc, in his turn, recommended that the vocation be commended to the discernment of Mauritius, Bishop of Rouen.⁴¹

Moving from his earlier intellectual pride, Anselm articulated three vocational options for his counsellors: He might be a coenobitical monk, an eremite, or return to his patrimony in Aosta.⁴² Any of these three courses could be justified as meeting his natural talents, so the question pertained more to the grace of vocation than to the faculties of nature. Mauritius, who had ties with, as well as reverence for, Bec, recommended coenobitical life, and Herluin’s monastery in particular. Yet the issues were more complex for Anselm. The Bishop’s advice helped clarify the question, but Anselm was not one to settle so complex a matter solely on the basis of opinion, even authoritative opinion such as this.

THE PATRIMONY

The practicality of claiming the patrimony followed on Gundulf’s timely and reverent death.⁴³ Presumably, Anselm, should he take this option, would open a school on his Aosta property, and with his rather felicitous background - he was monied, had local prominence, and had been educated at the feet of the great Lanfranc - there should be no problem attracting pupils.

There is no direct evidence to explain Anselm’s rejection of this option. In later years at least, there was an emotional attachment to Bec, of course; might this already have surfaced, creating an affective interest in that abbey? There is no way to know with certainty. We are certain, however, that Anselm’s tastes were focused on cloister more than school. It is not unreasonable that this would have rendered expendable the only non-monastic alternative he considered. Unquestionably, of the three options, this was the one least seriously examined.

EREMITICISM

Becoming a hermit was not only personally appealing to Anselm, it was the form of religious life his century recognized as most fervent and ideally reformed. Eremitical life would also have allowed time for scholarship, contemplation, writing, disciples (if Anselm

wished), and all the integrity he could manifest. Either the semi-corporate eremiticism of Camaldoli or an isolated mountain cell must have held a definite allure for a temperament such as Anselm’s. If when fleeing his father, Anselm had gone south into Italy rather than crossing the Alps, the unquestioned enthusiasm and integrity of contemporary eremiticism would have been in an ideal position to vaunt itself.

Four years later, however, Anselm was conscious of a greater complexity in the issues. He admitted the appeal of this life, as had Lanfranc before him, and to a lesser degree had Herluin. Yet he, like they, shied away from it.

There is no concrete evidence, beyond the Bishop’s advice, to explain Anselm’s turn from the hermitage. There is little foundation from which to draw conclusions either, at least in the data supplied by Eadmer. Yet a theory may be posited from what we know of Anselm’s intellect and his standards for dissecting the questions with which he dealt.

Throughout his career’s discernments, Anselm resisted facile appeals to authority and tradition. The presence of his arguments was rational, not authoritative. Even though Anselm frequently exposed his Augustinian sympathies, for example, citations of the virtually unassailable Lumen magistrorum were seldom offered. Anselm’s arguments boasted rational integrity more than linear glory.

The eremitical life, Anselm would have recognized, was peculiarly difficult to justify through logical exposition. Its rationale proceeded from the perspective of history, from the practicality of reclusion lent the pursuit of Christian integrity. Hermits possessed a distinguished and impressive lineage. None of these factors, however, were vital elements in logical argumentation. Eremiticism was a practical innovation in Christianity - “*fuga in solitudinum*”, in Augustine’s famous appraisal. It was not a mode of life whose strength rested in reason or logic. Its Scriptural supports (primarily mention of the Lord and the Baptist) were also weak, since the transient nature of those desert experiences required note. This did not affect eremiticism’s legitimacy, of course; neither did it necessarily cast disrepute on the historical development or ambitions of Christian hermits. Yet it would be a very trenchant point in a system of reasoning like Anselm’s, especially in regard to his own course. His habitual em-

phasis on the purity of rational evidence would have been keenly sensitive to the conflict between contemporary eremitical life and its roots.

While the support and probity that were the eremite's were considered unassailable, and indeed were in particular evidence in Anselm's day, the reasoning that supported them was distinctly non-Anselmian. The demands of the coenobium, Benedictine obedience, and Bec's simplicity, however, were particularly compatible with the Anselmian concept of intelligent adaptation to the ways, as well as the call, of God. The Benedictine union of Gospel and *Rule* identified the cloister, and Bec in particular, as both an ideal environment for living Christianity, and a splendid mesh of Anselm's ambitions and those of God. This was a neater design than either the hermitage or academic life provided. It was also a paradigm of the sort of economy Anselm instinctively embraced.

Anselm's was, moreover, that natively monastic personality that thrived on the precise practical advantages that cloistered life should effect: lack of distraction, clarity of guidance, ready opportunity for submission to God's will, clear moral rectitude (in potential) with minimal interference from outside. These were, of course, concepts of an intellectual purist, of one with the sophisticated, abstract mentality Anselm epitomized. They are also more distinctively coenobitical than eremitical when translated into practice.

CLUNY

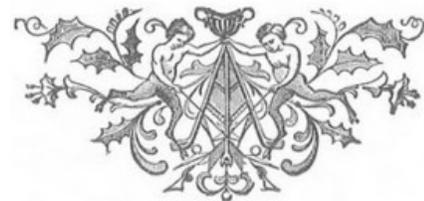
The selection of Bec over Cluny also was a significant aspect of Anselm's vocational discernment. Of all the monasteries of Europe, only these two seem to have been considered by him. Yet he rejected Cluny, the monastery that presented - to use his standards - the greatest opportunity for him to uproot and thus to secure the abandonment of his intellectual pride.

Obedience to his counsellors would not have been a significant determinant. In his analysis, Anselm portrays obedience as a tool, as a means in the pursuit of God and His will. Obedience is tied to the proper ordering of human freedom, not to blind submission.⁴⁴

Anselm must also have considered that Cluny, more than Bec, approximated his untiring ambition to be associated with the best or more perfect in life. In both

professional avidity and visible evidence, the Cluny of Anselm's time proposed itself as the modern epitome of black Benedictinism, a fruition of splendor and adoration of Divinity that the Rule and its interpreters had husbanded through five centuries. Yet the Norman, not the Burgundian, abbot won the profession and love of Anselm.

Providence, God's mystery of design, is of course the real reason behind the selection of Bec. Providence, however, does not dictate a course; rather, it works in concert with the individual. To the human element falls the burden of both identifying and responding to God's will. This is a path of discernment restricted to rational beings; the faculty of reason cannot be divorced from these proceedings. Thus the role of the intellect must be acknowledged and assigned precedence. This is especially true with Anselm. No other approach offers full justice to the selection of Bec over Cluny, Aosta, and the hermitage.



APPLIED REASON

Anselm's vocational decision is ordinarily represented by historians as a combination of four factors: 1) humility (since at Bec he would be overshadowed by Lanfranc), 2) obedience (to Lanfranc and Mauritius), 3) Bec's edifying observance, and 4) that monastery's encouragement of scholarship. These four reasons may all be found, with different levels of emphasis, in Eadmer, and few historians have challenged the rationale they propose. Nevertheless, a complement is required. Alone, these four reasons strike a jarring note, for they would demand that we conclude that Anselm acted in a manner inconsistent with the rational process of his whole life, an intellectual quality as distinct as handwriting or fingerprints, a factor that marked his early life as clearly as his final days. While for most people, reasoning may suggest regularity in neither pattern nor process, consistency of intellectual character is among the signets of Anselmian legitimacy.⁴⁵ Anselm's intellect did not employ multiplications of existential examples, such as these four, very practical and terrestrial reasons. He centered on theory and principle. Act, or illustrations such as these four

“reasons”, appeared only afterward. That requires that Eadmer’s assessment of Anselm’s rationale be reconsidered.

Eadmer’s reasons cannot stand alone, without the supportive and enriching perspective of Anselm’s intellect. The first reason, humility, is discredited by Anselm’s choice of the lesser (in this context) of his two coenobitical options. The second reason, obedience, is invalidated by Anselm’s unusual concept of that virtue, wherein it orders human freedom rather than subjugates it. Bec’s observance, the third of the reasons, is the most credible rationale; yet in the context of Anselm’s rational process, this cannot stand as a motivation, only as an explanation. Its focus on externals rather than principle must temper its importance. The fourth reason, Bec’s intellectual climate, stands on too ephemeral and exterior a footing to ever be seriously considered by Anselm.

Eadmer’s analysis of the selection of Bec is improperly focused. The four reasons must be placed in the context of Anselm’s thought, not confined to the structure of Eadmer’s history. Within this more appropriate perspective, it is evident that these are four *explanations* rather than *reasons*. They are the sort of propositions with which Anselm concretized principles - in his letters, for example - to clarify his thoughts for inferior, or at least less abstract, intellects. The distinction is important. Each of the four explanations for the choice of Bec focuses on a practical concern, not a principle. That reverses Anselm’s procedure. For a biographer they are essential facts of the case. They explain what Anselm did, however, without giving the reasons that motivated his choice. In particular, they do not explain why this young man chose Bec over Cluny.

The importance of Anselm’s intellectual character, as it relates to his vocation, must not be underestimated, nor can it judiciously be ignored. The Anselmian thirst for purity - an essential characteristic of both his intellectual and practical ambitions - is the field on which Bec and Cluny were separated, and where Bec stood alone, with her peculiar, theoretical foundation. The differences in the Benedictinism of these two abbeys posed a clear font of Anselmian compatibility against an equally obvious contrast with his approach to life and thought. The Cluniac observance was won by process, and characterized by ceremonial multiplication. It proudly traced its roots to Benedict of Aniane’s interpretation of monasticism,⁴⁶ and by Anselm’s time was portrayed as a

grand fruition of the Rule, enriched by history and developed by experience. By comparison, Bec was naive and immature in design. It appealed not to the wisdom of the ages nor to supposedly providential elaboration, but directly to Gospel and Rule. For a mind like Anselm’s, a more consonant approach to monasticism than Bec’s is unimaginable. The austerity and purity of Bec’s ideals, in the perspective of the twenty-seven year old Anselm no less than in his later years, must have stood in bold contrast to the emphasis on traditions, customs, and historical development that characterized Cluny.⁴⁷

ANSELM’S DECISION

In this quality, in the brand of Benedictinism sponsored by Bec, Anselm’s intellect surely recognized a home. For him, that mystery of mutual adoption that denotes the religious vocation, especially in that most familial of Orders, the Benedictines, must have seemed singularly inviting. Contrary to Eadmer’s characterization, Anselm’s embrace of Bec must have been a move fraught with satisfaction and fulfillment. There was a truly personal element in the choice, one which Eadmer ignored, but which was essential to Anselm and the workings of his extraordinary intellect.

Bec was alluring for Anselm, if he acted by his customary standards, not primarily because of the observance, Herluin’s edifying example, the erudition of Lanfranc, not the promise of intellectual anonymity, nor the certitude of obedience. Rather, the innocence of Bee, its simple premises and austere Benedictinism, were more likely to lend focus to his quest.⁴⁸ To Anselm, the Norman monastery seemed unique and extraordinary, firmly rooted as it was in principles peculiarly congenial to his own.

At Bee more than any other Benedictine monastery, an intellectual compatibility existed for Anselm to enjoy. That quality lay not in the school or scholarship, however, as it might be so tempting to suppose, but in the union of principle and praxis. Herluin’s monastery approached God as Anselm instinctively did, “with a mind not committed to any system of the past,”⁴⁹ and with a ready translation of principle (in this case, in the *Rule* and Gospel) into practice (in this case, monasticism). Bee epitomized the rational process that was so native to Anselm. It offered the simplicity Cluny could not. Later, through this quality, Bee would nurture Anselm’s gifts toward full fruition.

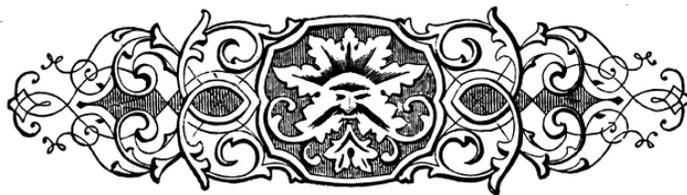
While his writings are ordinarily cited alone as evidence, Anselm's pure Benedictinism permeated his intellect and life on every level. Perhaps the most prominent example is his abbacy. When he succeeded Herluin as abbot of Bee, the clear role of theory and principle received its clearest and most consistent expression. Anselm vigorously gave himself, as had his predecessor, to following the unembroidered design of Benedict. Indeed, it has been suggested that were a vote taken "among all Benedictines as to whom they would choose as the nearest approach in history to the ideal of an abbot as presented in the Rule of Saint Benedict, Anselm would surely head the poll by a comfortable majority."⁵⁰

Surprisingly, that statement is not hyperbolic. Anselm exhibited as abbot, and apparently even as a monk-bishop, an heroic fidelity and integrity regarding the principles of Benedict of Nursia, principles which he embraced by vow and predilection at Bee. These qualities provided an enrichingly warm and pacific environment for his spirit; they enhanced the innocent, integral, and purely-drawn simplicity that marked both his writings and his intellectual perspective. Despite the humiliation that seemed inevitable when Anselm chose Bee, a more fulfilling choice could not possibly have been envisioned. It was a unique embrace, a virtually ideal union of providential design and natural propensity in an environment of peerless spiritual, practical, and intellectual compatibility.

A final problem must be satisfied regarding Anselm's vocational decision. What was the *districtio ordinis* of Cluny that he rejected so assuredly? Ordinarily, evaluations associate it with the time-consuming character of Cluniac observance, a condition that forbade all hope, Anselm thought, of intellectual work. In this case, however, it may more reasonably be posited that the "severity" or "strictness" to which Anselm objected lay in the Cluniac interpretation. Unlike the purity and simplic-

ity of the Customary in Normandy, the formalism and ritual character of Cluny must have seemed singularly incompatible. Anselm would have been keenly sensitive to the fact that the "strict ordering" of Cluny, while laudable, edifying, and potentially and provenly sanctifying, was not methodologically or conceptually what Benedict envisioned.⁵¹ Benedict's *Rule* modified much of the severity of his contemporaries and predecessors; he diminished much of the ritualism of the "Rule of the Master"; Benedict specified his unwillingness to ordain what was "harsh or burdensome"⁵² while warning the abbot not to drive the sheep too hard.⁵³ As he vowed himself to observe this Rule, Anselm would certainly have considered the integrity and fidelity with which Benedict's vision was actualized. It was not the rigor of Cluny that Anselm rejected,⁵⁴ but the impurity of her standards. No matter how edifying the result, Anselm must have found its rationale personally unappealing.

"The simplicity of the Rule," Knowles observes, was considered "the ideal to be aimed at by all who had the spiritual interests of the monastery most at heart ...[That] same desire can be seen in the arrangements made by Herluin in the first stages of the growth of Bec."⁵⁵ Surely that is the key to Anselm's choice: It was not a preference for intellectual humiliation, although that might, he thought, be the result; it was instead an embrace of the unique purity and integrity of Bec and its Benedictine path to God. Anselm found at that Abbey an extraordinary compatibility. Herluin's simplicity was born of a dearth of experience and historical awareness, while Anselm's thirst for that same simplicity sprang from a finely honed intellect and a vivid personal quest for the Simple Being who is God. At Bec these two visions merged. Only there could Anselm foresee a life without compromise or mitigation. For him that was not *districtio ordinis*, not "strictness"; it was integrity, purity, simplicity.



NOTES

1Anselm's logic is quite different from that of his master, Lanfranc. There is a particularly concise discussion of this in: Richard W. Southern, *Saint Anselm and His Biographer*. • *A Study of Monastic Life and Thought, 1059-c. 1130* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1963), pp. 16-24. The length of D.P. Henry's study allows the helpful inclusion of illustrative quotations: Desmond Paul Henry, *The Logic of Saint Anselm* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1967).

2David Knowles, *The Monastic Order in England: A History of Its Development From the Times of Saint Dunstan to the Fourth Lateran Council, 940-1216* [second edition] (Cambridge: The University Press, 1966), p. 96.

3David Knowles, "Bec and Its Great Men," *Downside Review*, LXX (October 1934), p. 582. As was Knowles' practice, most of the material in this article randomly appeared in his other works, also.

4David Knowles, *Saints and Scholars: Twenty-Five Mediaeval Portraits* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1962), p. 31. Knowles is making here, of course, the proper distinction between monks and such types of religious as friars. This essay is only revised and redrawn from writings in other Knowles volumes.

5Richard W. Southern, *Biographer*, p. 345.

6Cf. Eadmer of Canterbury, *Vita Anselmi*, chapter v. The most readily available edition is the Latin/English text prepared for the Oxford Mediaeval Texts Series: Eadmer, *The Life of Saint Anselm, Archbishop of Canterbury*; edited, translated, and annotated by Richard W. Southern (Oxford: Clarendon Press, [1962] 1979). This is hereafter note as VA.

7Ibid., i.

8The trials of Anselm's episcopacy are considered at some length in Eadmer of Canterbury, *Historia Novorum in Anglia*. A good English translation is available: Eadmer, *Eadmer's History of Recent Events in England*, translated by Geoffrey Bosanquet (London: The Cresset Press, 1964).

9There is an interesting discussion of this quality in Southern, *Biographer*, p. 48.

10Cf- discussions in *ibid.*, pp. 32ff., 204ff., 346ff, etc.

11Knowles, "Bec", p. 584.

12Cf. discussion in Anselm, *Monologion*, lxvi.

13Only when he writes from the requirements of issues not rooted in his own motivations (as in the "Reply to Gaunilo" and the epistle on "The Incarnation of the Word") does his fervor seem to cool.

14Benedicta Ward, "Anselm of Canterbury and His Influence," *Christian Spirituality: Origins to the Twelfth Century*, edited by Bernard McGinn and John Meyendorff; in the Series "World Spirituality," volume xvi (New York: Crossroad, 1985), p. 201.

15Anselm, *Proslogion*, xxvi.

16Cf. discussion in: Southern, *Biographer*, p. 55. And in: Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics; Volume II. Studies in Theological Styles - Clerical Styles*, Translated by Andrew Louth, et al., edited by John Riches (New York: Crossroad, 1984), p. 212.

17VA. is the standard contemporary source of Anselm's life.

18The couple seems to have had but one son. A daughter, Richeza, is mentioned in Anselm's epistle no. 67. Cf. discussion in Southern, *Biographer*, p. 8.

19VA., ii.

20 VA., iii. Eadmer also notes that Anselm was destined to fulfill his vocation in other service.

21Ibid.

22VA., iv. Gilbert Crispin, in the *Vita Herluini* (V.H., hereafter), suggests that a desire for Church preferments may have motivated Anselm's weakened resolve. The Latin text of V.H. is found in P.L., vol. CL. A fine translation is available in Sally N. Vaughn, *The Abbey of Bec and the Anglo-Norman State, 1034-1136* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 1981), pp. 67-86.

23Gundulf did not die with this Deadly Sin on his soul. He spent his last few days as a monk (VA., i), perhaps at the monastery that rejected his son.

24VA., iv.

25Cf. for example, *Southern's discussion: Southern, Life*, p. 7, n. 1.

26VA., iv.

27VA., v.

28Knowles, "Bec", p. 567.

29What follows is taken from the V.H.

30G.G. Coulton, *Five Centuries of Religion; Volume I: Saint Bernard, His Predecessors and Successors, 1000-1200 a.d.* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1923), p. 94.

31Ibid., xxxiv-xxxv

32Knowles, *Monastic*, p. 91.

33What follows is taken from the *Latin Life of Lanfranc* (P.L., volume CL, pp. 29-58), anonymous but commonly attributed to Milo Crispin, a twelfth century monk of Bec. It also is among the translations in Vaughn, op. cit.

34A single Master of note, to whom disciples/students were attracted, embodied the ordinary concept of a school of this sort at the time. Thus the generally poor educational attainments of the other monks of Bee would have been no hindrance to the commencement of this apostolate.

35Benedict recommends this in his *Rule* (RB, hereafter), chapter iv.

36Lanfranc was particularly involved in this from 1050 through 1062. The final condemnation, considered a fruit of Lanfranc's labors, occurred in 1079.

37V.A.,v.

38Ibid.

39Ibid.

40Ibid.

41VA, vi. Bec lay within the Province of the Archbishop of Rouen.

42Ibid.

43Ibid.

44For an intriguing analysis of Anselm on freedom, cf. Von Balthasar, pp. 211-259.

45Cf. discussion in Southern, *Biographer*, p. 31.

46The lineage of Cluny from Benedict of Aniane's reform to Anselm's period would be traced thusly: Benedict of Aniane founded a dozen monasteries, one of which was Saint Savin, near Poitiers. It did not, we are told, compromise his dicta. Around 870, Savin restored the Abbey of Saint Martin in Autun. From there the monk Berno was sent in 876 to re-establish the monastery at Baume, doing so according to Benedict of Aniane's principles as lived at Saint Martin. Berno later became abbot there, then founding abbot of Cluny in c. 909. The abbots of Cluny progressed [n.b., almost all of these dates are subject to scholarly disputation; also, both Aymard and Mayeul seem to have begun their respective reigns as what we now term "coadjutors"] thusly: Berno (909-927), Odo (927-942), Aymard (942-954), Majolus (954-993), Odilo (993-1048), and for most of Anselm's life the aptly destined Hugh the Great (1049-1109).

47 Noreen Hunt offers a concise rendering of Cluny's foundation on the principles of Benedictine tradition. Cf. Noreen Hunt, *Cluny Under Saint Hugh, 1049-1109* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1968), p. 20.

48Cf. discussion in Knowles, *Monastic*, pp. 89-92.

49Cf. David Knowles, *The Evolution of Mediaeval Thought* (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1962), p. 100.

50Knowles, *Saints*, p. 32. This statement appears in Knowles' works in various forms, casting the saint as both the ideal Benedictine monk and as the ideal Benedictine abbot, depending on the context.

51Cf. discussion in Cuthbert Butler, *Benedictine Monachism: Studies in Benedictine Life and Rule* [second edition] (Cambridge: Speculum Historiale, [1924] 1961), pp. 24-26, 43.

52RB, *Prologue*.

53RB, 1xiV.

54Indeed he later praised the adoration of God and the strenuous observance of the Cluniacs. Hugh the Great was a friend, and his abbey more favored than Bec during the uncertainties of Anselm's exiles. But the observance, while laudable, apparently was not personally appealing.

55Knowles, *Monastic*, p. 404.