

The Rediscovery of Anselmian Thought in the Nineteenth Century: A Portrayal of Johann Adam Möhler's Reading of Anselm

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For several centuries few theologians troubled to pay particular attention to Anselm of Canterbury, such was the degree that manualists dominated theological discourse. Anselm remained the exclusive preserve of philosophers. Their efforts culminated famously in Kant's rejection of the ontological argument, the name given to Anselm's proof of God's existence *post factum* as advanced in the *Proslogion*. The priest and theologian Johann Adam Möhler (1796-1838) was the first to recover Anselm of Canterbury's theological relevance for modernity. Unfortunately his significant achievement was already forgotten by the second part of the nineteenth century. Two intellectual currents formed the rich, intellectually vibrant background for Möhler's revival of interest in Anselm of Canterbury in the nineteenth century: idealism (ca. 1770-1830) and romanticism (ca. 1780-1845).

1. The Intellectual Milieu for Möhler's Retrieval of Anselmic Thought

Idealism supposes the dependence of reality on the recognizing subject. Thereby spiritual values, such as dignity, freedom, and insight become the highest goods. Ideas are the driving forces of human history, providing it with coherence and an indwelling entelechy. Matter can be explained by acknowledging its participation in the intellectual realm. Kant, Hegel, Fichte, and Schelling are but the most noted representatives of German idealism, a phenomenon that captured the imagination of the educated classes. In this system nature and mind are aspects of the Absolute¹.

¹ Cfr. S. PRIEST, *Theories of the Mind*, Harmondsworth 1991; G. VESEY (ed.), *Idealism, Past and Present*, Cambridge 1982.

All of multifarious reality is deducible from a metaphysical principle. All knowledge of particular things is a self-reflection of the free, self-constituting mind.

Seeming to oppose this view is Romanticism, which favors the particular and concrete over and against the general and abstract. It subscribes to a holistic and organic understanding of the world. Comprehending the particular and fragmented is valuable and superior to reason alone, which apprehends the totality of things in their essential interrelatedness. For the romantics, the Middle Ages were a favored epoch as it seemed to embody the individual's organic link with human history and nature. In this view, only the human mind, or spirit, is able to fuse all things together, while reason is superficial and conveys a distorted description of reality. This resentment of rationalism was a reaction to the Enlightenment's overemphasis on the geometric and rational. Appreciating spiritual unity was seen as becoming to the human mind². Therefore romantics shied away from exhaustive definitions and preferred true inwardness vis-à-vis verbalization. Inspired also by Pietism and Christian mysticism, Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834), the father of liberal Protestantism, memorably surrendered a rational accounting of faith in the sense of deduction and reasoning for «a sense and taste of the infinite» in his speeches on religion in 1799³. More generally, romanticism places great emphasis on the inward, personal experience of the totality of being as the key to understanding the meaning and purpose of the universe and one's own personal life.

Inspired to no small degree by Schelling, the Catholic Tübingen School of theology, under Johann Sebastian von Drey (1777-1853) and Möhler rediscovered the living community of believers and the Catholic Church as a living organism. While dwelling on the organic totality of faith as only Protestant romantics would, they affirmed also, in conscious opposition to Schleiermacher, the intelligibility of Christian faith. This explains the irresistible attraction that Anselm, some 700 years after his death, exerted on the young theologian and priest Johann Adam Möhler.

In 1827-1828, Möhler wrote three articles on Anselm's thoughts in the *Theologische Quartalschrift*, the famous and oldest Catholic theological periodical founded just a few years earlier (1817) in Tübingen. His friend and colleague Ignaz von Döllinger (1799-1890), the later *spiritus rector* of, but not party to, the Old Catholic schi-

² Cfr. J. BARZUN, *Classic, Romantic and Modern*, Garden City 1961.

³ F. SCHLEIERMACHER, *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers*, trans. John Oman, New York 1958, 15; L. DABUNDO (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Romanticism: Culture in Britain 1780's-1830's*, London 1992; S. PRICKETT, *Romanticism and Religion – the Tradition of Coleridge and Wordsworth in the Victorian Church*, Cambridge 1976; H. G. SCHENK, *The Mind of the European Romantics: An Essay in Cultural History*, London 1966.

sm, compiled these articles posthumously in *Gesammelte Schriften und Aufsätze*⁴. Earlier an English edition of this text appeared, translated by Henry Rymer in 1842, who at that time was still a student at St. Edmund's College⁵. These articles constitute the modern beginnings of Anselm research that continue to this day.

Remarkably, Anselm appears among the first authors whose works were printed. The first printed version of the *Opera* appeared in Nuremberg in 1491. Shortly thereafter one appeared in Basel in 1497, another in 1549 in Paris, and a third in 1560 in Cologne. The most recent collection available for Möhler was Gabriel Gerberon's, first published in 1699 in Paris, followed by a second edition published 1744 in Venice⁶. According to the original German edition of Möhler's articles on Anselm, he consulted one of the Gerberon versions for his studies⁷.

2. Human History as Struggle for Genuine Freedom

One can easily detect the historic background against which Möhler wrote in the

⁴ J. J. I. VON DÖLLINGER (ed.), *Dr. Johann Adam Möhler's Gesammelten Schriften und Aufsätze*, 2 vols., Regensburg 1839-1840.

⁵ J. A. MÖHLER, *The Life of St. Anselm, Archbishop of Canterbury; Contribution to a Knowledge of the Moral, Ecclesiastical and Literary Life of the Eleventh & Twelfth Centuries*, trans. Henry Rymer, London 1842. Henceforth *Anselm*.

⁶ Möhler used one of the two Gerberon editions as sources for both the Anselmic corpus and the *Vita Anselmi* by EADMER *Sanctus Anselmus Archiepiscopus Cantuariensis per se Docens: opus perutile theologis ac concionatoribus, qui in eo puras ac sublimis sententias habent tam moribus instituendis quam catholicis veritatibus explicandis aptissimas*, ed. Gabriel Gerberon, Delphis 1692 or *Opera omnia nec non Eadmeri monachi cantuarensis Historia novorum et alia opuscula labore ac studio D. G. Gerberon*, Venezia 1744. This information can be gleaned from Möhler's original article, *Anselm, Erzbischof von Canterbury, Ein Beitrag zur Kenntniß des religiös-sittlichen, öffentlich-kirchlichen und wissenschaftlichen Lebens im elften und zwölften Jahrhundert*, in *Theologische Quartalschrift* 3 (1827) 435-497; 4 (1827) 587-664; 1 (1828) 62-130; 3 (1827) 442. Other editions available during Möhler's time were: ANSELM, *Opera*, Nuremberg 1491; ANSELM, *Opera*, Basel 1497(?); *Omnia D. Anselmi Cantuariensis archiepiscopi, theologum omnium sui temporis facile principis opuscula*, Parisiis 1549; *D. Anselmi Cantuariensis archiepiscopi, theologum sui temporis facile principis, operum, quae quidem haberi potuerunt, omnium*, Coloniae Agrippinae 1560; *Divi Anselmi Archiepiscopi Cantuariensis opera omnia: quatuor tomis comprehensa*, ed. Jean Picard, Coloniae Agrippinae 1612; *Opera Omnia: extraneis in sacros libros commentariis exonerata*, ed. Théophile Raynaud, Lugduni 1630; *Sancti Anselmi ex Beccensi Abbe Cantuariensis Archiepiscopi Opera: nec non Eadmeri Monachi Cantuarensis Historia novorum, et alia opuscula*, ed. Gabriel Gerberon and others, Lutetiae Parisiorum 1675; *S. Anselmi, Archiepiscopi Cantuariensis...theologia commentarii et disputationibus, tum dogmaticis, tum scholasticis illustrate*, ed. José Sáenz de Aguirre, Romae 1688, 1690.

⁷ According to Josef Geisemann, Möhler used the first edition of the Gerberon version for *Symbolism*. J. A. MÖHLER, *Symbolik*, vol. 2, Darmstadt 1961, 18.

introduction: «[Anselm's] life was placed in that happy period of the history of the church, when she powerfully and successfully exerted all her force to escape from that melancholy thraldom, in which she had so long been held by the vicissitudes and revolution of all social institutions». The Church had «subdued the wild flowers of the barbarians»⁸. The French Revolution in 1789, the deleterious Napoleonic wars (1796-1815), and the ensuing secularization tore asunder religion and society as well as the organic unity of faith and society in Germany in 1803, during Möhler's own days, and are here alluded to by the author. As the Church had overcome the dark ages of the migration of peoples, he hoped that in the nineteenth century she would overcome the French Revolution and secularization. In language betraying his own romantic age, he wrote about the medieval Church: «during the strife of the most furious storms, her call resounded; she subdued all, and the contending elements, as if arrested by magic, fell into a calm at her feet»⁹. He perceived the Church as a person giving both the individual and society unity and meaning, that is, an overarching meaning to the totality of reality. He divined Anselm as a valiant, spiritual combatant for this noble cause:

The entire body of the contemporaries of Anselm displayed it in its whole; but he united within himself so many talents and powers, that, in every regard, he represented the whole, in which so many formed a part. This whole, divided into a multiplicity of manifestations, was the religious enthusiasm, the renewed yearning after divine and eternal things, which had been so long stifled in the miseries and woes of the times... The freedom of the individual presupposes the freedom of the body: for when an individual really forms, as he should, an organic member of the whole, his destiny is deeply and wonderfully implicated in the fate of the entire body¹⁰.

In the question of British investitures, he saw Anselm's selfless struggle for the Church's freedom expressing itself. To Möhler's mind such a profound «theology of human liberation»¹¹ could only develop within the confines of a cloister, home to spirituality in general and to meditation on matters divine in particular. He thereby rightfully defined the monastic community as Anselm's *Sitz im Leben* without contesting the title “Father of Scholasticism” later generations of philosophers and theologians had bestowed upon him.

In keeping with the history-oriented interests of his age, he dedicated the first

⁸ MÖHLER, *Anselm*, vii.

⁹ *Ibid.*, ix.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, x.

¹¹ Author's choice of expression.

two-thirds of his text to a biography of Anselm. Therein he summarized the content of Eadmer's *Vita Anselmi*. To a far lesser degree he referenced *Chronica Beccense* and the *Vita S. Lanfranci*¹². The concern of twentieth-century Catholic *ressourcement* à la de Lubac is already materially present in Möhler's sweeping vision of theology as the collective endeavor of numerous theologians from varied backgrounds, inspired by the one Holy Spirit and serving the one Church, which is the extension of the incarnation of the divine Logos, the eternal Son of God. He showed that Lanfranc had exhorted his student Anselm to study the church fathers and the classics¹³. Möhler made special mention of a heuristic principle: «in the midst of these exertions he did not forget, that without Christ, all knowledge of vice and virtue, of their origin and advances, is unavailing... and how his lessons were best told by his [Anselm's] life»¹⁴. Möhler stressed that, for Anselm, theology meant an existential and ethical struggle with evil. This spiritual combat for the good and true was, for Möhler, the epistemological key to understanding the *Proslogion*¹⁵. He knew that Anselm was ever mindful of humanity's postlapsarian state. The implication is that there is never a value-neutral position; the individual is inextricably positioned in the alternative between these two *et tertium non daretur*. Inextricably in a state of guilt, the created condition is one that is unable to reach truth on its own, even to the small degree contingent human cognition could have had before the fall¹⁶. Left to its own devices, human reason cannot reach truth. But did this make Anselm, in the eyes of Möhler, a fideist? How is an «illumination of the mind» as introspection to occur?

This illumination requires a loving asceticism on part of the seeker of truth. For this reason, Anselm sided with the reforms of Pope Gregory VII (ca.1015-1083), known as Hildebrand, who vigorously opposed simony and immoral life on part of the clergy and advocated celibacy. Also, following Gregory, he strongly opposed Berengar of Tours (1010-1088), who denied the actual change of bread and wine

¹² The paucity of bibliographical information Möhler provides does not always permit an ascertainment of his sources. They may have included EADMER, *De Vita D. Anselmi archiepiscopi Cantuariensis*, Anverpiae 1551; EADMER, *Vita D. Anselmi archiepiscopi Cantuariensis*, in *Sancti Anselmi ex Beccensi abbe Cantuariensis archiepiscopi Opera*, 2nd edition, correcta et aucta, Lutetiae Parisiorum 1721; *Vita S. Lanfranci and Chronica Beccense*, in *Beati Lanfranci Cantuariensis archiepiscopi et angliae primatis, ordinis S. Benedicti, Opera Omnia*, Lutetia Parisiorum 1648.

¹³ MÖHLER, *Anselm*, 8.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 29-34.

into the Body and Blood of Christ in the Eucharist¹⁷. Anselm's intimate correlation between rectitude of lifestyle and seeking truth confirmed, in Möhler's estimation, romanticism's true intuition of an intrinsic connection between the material and the spiritual realms¹⁸. Celibacy gains freedom from material goods. Renunciation is considered a prerequisite for the spiritual life. While both first and foremost contribute to the indispensable clarity of mind which a theologian needs in order to ponder divine matters, they also bring about the Church's freedom and, as a consequence, «the freedom of the people» entrusted to her charge. By collectively acquiring such spiritual freedom, Christians are able to live in accordance with their true desires. There is no gainsaying, in Möhler's judgment, Anselm locates humanity in a constant «conflict of the Spirit against the flesh». Thus Möhler interpreted Anselm's view of the Church: «In her alone, despite all clamours to the contrary, reside true and universal freedom and equality: in her that contempt which, notwithstanding all constitutional laws, is generally thrown upon the lower classes, is truly annihilated»¹⁹.

On this spiritual canvas, Möhler then portrayed Anselm's struggle with the secular ruler William the Conqueror (1028-1087) and his successors on the issue of fealty to the throne and investiture. Möhler detected in these trials not only loyalty to the Church or to Christ, but Anselm's undying fidelity to the whole of being. This expressed itself most convincingly in loyalty to the chair of Peter. Möhler showed that in Anselm's faith-sustained disposition there was no trite, nostalgic, or "antiquarian" reflex, but rather a conscious and heroic abiding in the whole for the sake of the particular that is nourished by an insight into faith's nature²⁰. There can be no contradiction between fidelity to God and the See of Rome on the one hand and loyalty to the body politic on the other. Only fidelity to the whole assures spiritual regeneration and safeguards the dignity of the individual. For this reason, Möhler rendered at great length the acrimonious struggle between the English rulers and Anselm.

¹⁷ Cfr. H. E. J. COWDREY, *Pope Gregory VII and the Anglo-Norman Church and Kingdom*, in G. B. BORINO ET AL. (eds.), *Studi Gregoriani per la Storia di Gregorio VII e della Riforma Gregoriana*, Roma 1947, vol. 9 (1972) 79-114.

¹⁸ MÖHLER, *Anselm*, 39-42.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 44. It is noteworthy that concurrent with his tripartite article on Anselm, Möhler wrote essays on priestly celibacy, which had at that time been questioned in a controversial memorandum published by professors in Freiburg. After a dearth of vocations, the publication of *On the Spirit of Celibacy* in 1828 inspired many men to join the Catholic priesthood. See J. A. MÖHLER, *Vom Geist des Zölibats. Beleuchtung der Denkschrift für die Aufhebung des den katholischen Geistlichen vorgeschriebenen Zölibates*, ed. D. HATTRUP, Paderborn 1993. Cfr. J. A. MÖHLER, *The Spirit of Celibacy*, Chicago-Mundelein 2007.

²⁰ MÖHLER, *Anselm*, 74ff.

In the second and last part of his book, Möhler introduced a definition of Scholastic theology «as the attempt... to demonstrate Christianity as rational, and all that is truly rational as Christianity»²¹. Obviously the (Augustinian-) Anselmic axiom *credo ut intelligam*, introduced in the first chapter of the *Proslogion*²², served as basis for this claim²³. Something akin to an Ignatian *sentire cum ecclesia* – albeit later in articulation – is fundamental to any serious theology²⁴. Anselm writes:

One who does not participate with the church in her belief of the divinity of Christ, nor consider him as the author of heavenly grace which regenerates mankind, will behold the doctrinal decrees and the speculative researches upon the Trinity and upon the relation between nature and grace as... useless subtleties... Infidelity... necessarily begets an incapacity for deep and refined inquiries into divine subjects, for the mind may often become so darkened as to be incapable of following such researches²⁵.

One must conclude that the underlying assumption for both Anselm and Möhler is that there is no real moral neutrality: the human being must make moral choices. The subjective commitment to the good leads to objective freedom and this in turn leads to objective insight. But this commitment remains paradoxical to the postlapsarian mind which is isolated from the whole of reality²⁶.

3. The Yield of Reading Anselm afresh: Anthropology

The result of such an unspiritual disposition is to be confused by false alternatives, such as between rationalism and supernaturalism. Only from a faith-filled per-

²¹ *Ibid.*, 122.

²² *Proslogion* 1: «I do not try, Lord, to attain Your lofty heights, because my understanding is in no way equal to it. But I do desire to understand Your truth a little, that truth that my heart believes and loves. For I do not seek to understand so that I may believe; but I believe so that I may understand. For I believe this also, that “unless I believe, I shall not understand” [Isa. 7:9]» (translation from *Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works*, eds. B. Davies and G. R. Evans, Oxford 1998, 87).

²³ Cfr. AUGUSTINE, *Ep. 120 ad Consentium*, 1, 3.

²⁴ For de Leturia, this central Ignatian concept is not merely a rational recognition, but at the same time an inner experience and appropriation filling the whole soul and satisfying it, assuring one of an instinctively secure behavior and ecclesial disposition. PEDRO DE LETURIA, *Estudios Ignacianos II*, Roma 1957, 153.

²⁵ MÖHLER, *Anselm*, 125f.

²⁶ This view comes remarkably close to Henri de Lubac's understanding of the paradox. Cfr. Hans Urs von Balthasar's succinct definition of that term in H. U. VON BALTHASAR, *The Theology of Henri de Lubac*, San Francisco 1991, 15.

spective can one arrive at three truths: (1) supernaturalism is rational, (2) Christian faith is the history of the concrete and particular, and (3) revealed dogmas are reasonable²⁷. The close nexus of spirituality and scholarly inquiry was well established for Möhler:

We are indeed presented with the soothing assurance that the most learned of the scholastic writers were also the most pious and interior Christians and the most faithful sons of the church. Thus Anselm, Hugh of St. Victor, Peter Lombard, Bonaventure, Thomas Aquinas, and many others are characters who, for practical morality, rank amongst the most beautiful and pleasing forms which history has preserved²⁸.

The basis for this he detected in Anselm's appreciation of Gen. 1:26, as found, for example, in Anselm's *Monologion*: «“Man acknowledges himself as the image of God; or, what is more correct, he is the image of God then only when he is conscious of him, knows him, and loves him. The highest destiny, the very being of man is, therefore, to love God; of which he is incapable, unless he be conscious of God and know him”. To erect this trinity in himself must therefore be the highest object of man»²⁹. This is the center of Anselm's anthropology for Möhler: the human “spirit” reminds itself involuntarily of its divine creator³⁰. The Blessed Trinity was perceived by Anselm as God's self-consciousness, intelligence, and charity. This divine tripartite constitution is found also in human beings. Augustine's concept of *memoria* was transposed by Möhler to mean self-consciousness. It should be noted that while in modernity ever since Descartes' self-awareness contains the moment of autonomous subjectivity, this was – in contradistinction to interiority – altogether unknown to both Augustine and Anselm.

The origin of Descartes' insight is not the external world of sense impressions, but the human spirit grasping itself and thereby God. The insight contains the two elements of spontaneity and synthesis of the multifariousness of experience³¹. This

²⁷ MÖHLER, *Anselm*, 127.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 129.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 131. The citation is from *Monologion* 67 and is one of few instances where Möhler quotes Anselm in the footnote in the original Latin: «Nam si mens ipsa sola ex omnibus quae facta sunt, sui memor et intelligens et amans esse potest: non video cur negitur esse in illa vera imago illius essentiae, quae per sui memoriam et intelligentiam, et amorem in trinitate ineffabilii consistit. Aut certe inde verius esse illius se probat imaginem, quia illius potest esse memor, illam intelligere et amare».

³⁰ For a presentation of Möhler's anthropology see J. A. MÖHLER, *Symbolism: Exposition of the Doctrinal Differences between Catholics and Protestants as Evidenced in their Symbolic Writings*, trans. James Burton Robertson, New York 1997, 23-201; H. SAVON, *Johann Adam Möhler: The Father of Modern Theology*, trans. Charles McGrath, Glen Rock 1966.

³¹ K. FLASCH, *Vernunft und Geschichte, Der Beitrag Johann Adam Möhlers zum philosophischen Verständnis*

has foundational ramifications for humankind. By being aware of God and knowing and loving Him, humankind becomes yet more what it was created to be, namely, the image of God. In Möhler's reading, Anselm argued that the inner depths of the human mind can arrive at some knowledge of God.

Surprisingly, Möhler did not expressly refer to the Augustinian sources for Anselm's anthropology³². (Nor did he refer to Plato, Plotinus, Marius Victorinus, Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite, or Bonaventure³³). Being aware of God, knowing Him and loving Him, were the highest achievements of the human spirit for Augustine. Möhler did not contrast this epistemological approach to the Aristotelian-Thomistic one, which emphasized the mediation of knowledge of God via the world of senses. Möhler did, however, consider Anselm's thoughts on this point the most speculative and profound in Christianity.

Like Bonaventure, he did not criticize Anselm for not distinguishing sufficiently between philosophy and theology (as did Thomas Aquinas). The Trinity's constitution as loving self-awareness contains an implication for the Trinitarian explication of human anthropology. This is the basis for the possibility of human beings being able to know and to love. Faith and reason form a cohesive unit for both Anselm and Möhler, while in modernity the two are perceived as mutually exclusive, separate realms. This close correlation of faith and reason permitted Möhler to regard favorably what is to modern eyes the too rational status of the central tenets of faith. The mysteries of faith became reasonable mysteries. By taking self-awareness as the point of departure, Möhler wanted to render Anselm more palatable to his contemporaries who were influenced by Schelling, Kant, and Hegel. The Augustinian/Anselmic understanding of both God and the human spirit consisting of, *memoria, intelligentia, et amor*, allowed Möhler to connect Anselm to a central motif of romanticism. The German term *das Gemüt*, while lacking an English or Latin equivalent, may be rendered «a noble feeling or sentiment that enables access to the whole of reality as something meaningful and beautiful»³⁴. This *Gemüt* is something divine implanted by

Anselms von Canterbury, in *Analecta Anselmiana*, vol. 1, ed. F. S. Schmitt, Frankfurt am Main 1969, 165-194. Cfr. AUGUSTINE, *De Trinitate*, X, 10: «memoria et intelligentia multarum rerum notitia atque scientiae continentur».

³² Cfr. AUGUSTINE, *Confessiones*, Books VII and X.

³³ Möhler's contemporary Hegel had defined the Blessed Trinity as the foundation of all of speculative philosophy. The Trinity is «die Grundlage der ganzen spekulativen Philosophie». G. F. W. HEGEL, *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 19, Stuttgart 1927-40, 138.

³⁴ This German term for the locale of interiority can be found in Meister Eckhart's concept of the *Seelenfünklein*. Hegel will define it as «Totalität des Geistes». Cfr. D. VON HEBENSTREIT, *Gefühl und Gemüt*, in *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, vol. 4, Freiburg i. Br. 1960, 581-583.

a charitable God in every human being. In cognition and subsequently in his whole existence, the human being expresses what is impressed in him. Möhler's experience of *Gemit* enabled him to relate Anselm surprisingly well to nineteenth-century readers (influenced as they were by the Kantian transcendental shift), without reducing Anselm's thoughts to whatever modern understanding might yield.

Countless twentieth-century studies of Anselm did not reflect this intimate connection between the human mind and divine being, of subjective and objective elements, as Möhler did so remarkably well. Either they were beholden to an Aristotelian neo-scholastic disposition or to one of linguistical analysis. Karl Barth even would argue that Anselm made no use of Augustine's teaching on *memoria* in order to justify his own thesis of an all-sovereign God and therefore the primacy of the ontic versus the noetic. A comparison of Möhler's and Barth's reading of Anselm reveals their underlying divergent understandings of the concepts of original sin and, consequently for Barth, the rejection of the *analogia entis*, a concept not defined by Anselm, but materially present in his thought. The unity of the subjective and objective, for both Anselm and his nineteenth-century reader Möhler, was found in the cogitating subject as the uncontested image of the Trinitarian divine self-consciousness. Barth embraced the *analogia fidei*³⁵.

4. Does Anselm “prove” God’s Existence?

Möhler continued in the vein of the *analogia entis* and argued that this led the thinking subject to accept the *magisterium*'s teachings. In his study he supplied no justification for the ecclesial foundation of cognition guided by faith. Faith is the supreme act of the human mind becoming self-conscious. It does not reflect on and actuate something accidental or superfluous, but reflects on the essence of humankind. «God is present to the mind as an innate idea and the essential support and ground of all intellectual activity»³⁶. The Anselmic *id quod maius cogitari nequit* is neither a solipsistic exercise nor a self-generated concept, nor does it come about by way of mediation of the senses, but it is an inner spiritual experience. God grants this phra-

³⁵ K. BARTH, *Anselm: Fides Quaerens Intellectum*, Pittsburgh 1985, 11.

³⁶ R. L. FASTIGGI, *The Divine Light Within: Reflections on the Education of the Mind to God in Augustine, Anselm, Bonaventure and Newman*, in *Faith Seeking Understanding: Learning and the Catholic Tradition*, ed. G. C. Berthold, Manchester, NH 1991, 195-206.

se to Anselm after his prayer. God is an unmediated presence *in* the human mind. Therefore, to call Anselm's proof a "proof" in the Thomistic understanding or that of the modern-day sciences fails to appreciate the *point d'appui* for the Anselmic argument. Anselm does not argue from the external effects of God as does Aquinas, but from the interior encounter with an immediate divine presence.

Möhler interpreted the Augustinian notion of *memoria* vaguely as self-awareness, without informing the reader whether he associates his interpretation of Anselm with Hegel or not. Möhler seemed to argue in the following vein: Anselm is optimistic regarding human reason's capacity and therefore favors speculation, but he never succumbs to the temptation of rationalism. It is not that one must first gain knowledge of the human self and subsequently of the external realm and finally of history and matters divine. By implication Möhler accused Cartesianism of following the wrong epistemological sequence. God is the source of all ultimate knowledge, granting insight into the totality of reality, but this does not occur outside of history or apart from a personal encounter with God. According to Möhler, Descartes failed to take into consideration a person's conscious awareness of his own historical reality or of his ability to gain insight into the totality of reality. Genuine insight requires an ability truly to know reality. As created in the image and likeness of the triune God, it belongs to the essence of human nature to know reciprocally both itself and God. Möhler interpreted Anselm, therefore, to hold that man is essentially a relational creature³⁷. This personal relationship between God and man is complemented by that of man and history. History, in turn, is assumed to be identical with the history of salvation. Thus, for Möhler, thinking from an idealist perspective, there also exists a relationship between reason and history. In spite of the multifarious distractions surrounding human beings, there is an authentic knowledge of God in our awareness of God. All knowledge of particular individual objects would fall short were they not connected to absolute knowledge.

By spontaneous spiritual efforts aided by grace, man is able to enliven certain innate ideas. Here Möhler demonstrated the influence of his teacher Drey: becoming aware of God and of oneself are but two aspects of the one and same activity³⁸. Faith enables a mature spiritual life to arise. Thus faith can advance to a knowledge which in turn grants insight into the reasonableness of human existence. In this qualified

³⁷ Cfr. J. R. GEISELMANN, *Die katholische Tübinger Schule*, Freiburg i. Br. 1964, 138.

³⁸ J. S. DREY, *Kurze Einleitung in das Studium der Theologie*, Frankfurt am Main 1966, 3: «Der Mensch wird sich Gottes bewußt, wie er sich seiner selbst bewußt wird». Cfr. J. R. GEISELMANN, *Kommentar zur Symbolik Möhlers, kritische Ausgabe*, vol. 2, Darmstadt 1961, 403.

sense, Möhler concluded that Anselm believed that spiritual life can prove Christian faith without resorting to scripture. Therefore, spiritual *rectitudo* allows for a pure reflection, apart from an explicit creedal tenet, as a basis to gain insight³⁹. Faith does not counteract reason, but on the contrary, allows an inborn rationality to be actuated to a degree reason could never achieve on its own. In support of this, Möhler appealed to Anselm, who wrote: «every truth of reason is supported by the scriptures, which they either directly favor or do not oppose»⁴⁰. Later Möhler asserted:

Every finite being is by nature an image of God: the more perfect, this image, the greater will be its knowledge of God. Hence the soul of man is most qualified to know God; and the more the soul shall know itself the more truly it will know God; and the more it neglects itself the less it will be qualified to reflect on God⁴¹.

To Anselm and Möhler it is crucial to acknowledge that «the gospel... [is] the holy work of God... considered objectively in the church». Thus both Anselm and his reader regard scripture as *sui generis*: it is God's work written and handed down by another divine work, namely the Catholic Church⁴². Möhler saw how Anselm trusted unreservedly the ecclesial intuition regarding the whole of reality. The gospel is not something idiosyncratic and wholly foreign to humankind, but «the revelation of the highest reason»⁴³, most congenial to human reason and an essential part of the creature made in the image and likeness of God. Because of this, one may not construe an artificial opposition between Christianity and philosophy. True insight develops in an acknowledgement of the wholeness or all-encompassing totality of reality, not from division of reality and knowledge: «faith is ruined by the abandonment of wholesome knowledge»⁴⁴. On the other hand, knowledge is fully apprehended in faith. Therefore, Möhler believed it was altogether unjustified to call «Anselm... the founder of natural theology... and the scholastic writers... rationalists»⁴⁵. On this point he is certainly in disagreement with rationalizing elements within theological writings of his own day. Certainly he had the rationalists Georg Hermes (1775-1831) and Anton Günther (1783-1863) in mind.

³⁹ MÖHLER, *Anselm*, 133.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 136. Cfr. *De Concordia* 3: 251, 28.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 161.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 138.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 139.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 141.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 142.

5. Faith and Reason as reciprocally conditioning Dimensions

It was Anselm's firm conviction that without faith true reasonableness or rationality cannot be found. Faith cultivates underdeveloped rationality to such a degree that human reason is able to explicate faith's implied reasonableness. Thus faith and reason and theology and philosophy meet and yet remain separate and distinct constituents of one reality. Christian faith is grounded in reason and reason comes to its own through faith, «thus inborn rationality remains buried in itself, unless enlightened by reason»⁴⁶. Faith always enjoys a chronological priority vis-à-vis a fully actualized human reason. It never dissolves wholly into reasonableness, or vice-versa, though such attempts to understand as approaching pure rationality confound every age. «What never could be done by the scholar of a great painter or statuary with the works of his master, is done by many with regard to the gospel»⁴⁷, wrote Möhler.

With a nod to Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729-1781), Möhler saw scripture as a dynamic process of revelation. Against Schleiermacher's and Friedrich Jacobi's rationalistic critique of scripture, he argued in favor of a simultaneity of humble acceptance of the biblical narrative and cognitional appropriation of faith. Although Möhler didn't mention him, it seems he was thinking of Hegel⁴⁸. He saw Anselm arguing in favor of a third way between the Scylla of rationalism and the Charybdis of sentimentalism, a way in which reason encounters through faith something that is in an inchoate manner present to reason but requires faith to articulate it. Yet, this articulation remains merely a tension-filled, ever asymptotic approximation; never does an identity of the contents of faith and reason occur⁴⁹. The two abide in a tension with one another that vivifies personal faith ever anew. Until the day of the beatific vision, this tension translates ever again into freedom for contingent human beings. Moreover, this tension enkindles an interior fervor on the part of the human *Gemüt* for God and liberates our reason so that we can enter into greater cognitional clarity.

Möhler considers the disjunction «of natural and positive theology at the commencement of the eighteenth century» to be the result of a loss of Christian identity.

⁴⁶ Here Möhler quotes *De Concordia* 6: 272, 28: «Sicut igitur terra non germinat naturaliter ea quae maxime necessaria saluti corporis nostri sine seminibus; ita terra cordis humani non profert fructum et justitiae sine congruis seminibus».

⁴⁷ MÖHLER, *Anselm*, 137.

⁴⁸ G. W. F. HEGEL, *The Encyclopedia Logic, with the Zusätze*, Indianapolis 1991, § 77.

⁴⁹ Möhler quotes Hegel's *Encyclopedia of Philosophical Knowledge* in a footnote *ibid.*, *Anselm*, on p. 151. In the English edition of Möhler's book Hegel is misspelled as "v. Heyel".

At this point he seems to imply that Hegelian dialectic is not something corresponding to an objective reality but rather the consequence of a decline in Christian culture⁵⁰.

6. God as the Self-Explication of Human Self-Awareness

Having established the non-contradiction between faith and reason in Anselm's theology as presented in the *Monologion*, Möhler discusses the monk's proof of God's existence as developed in the *Proslogion*. He goes immediately *in medias res* and discovers the possibility of pondering «the nonentity of God» as the central issue at hand⁵¹. As to every possible concept there is a corresponding possible content, there must be something commensurate corresponding to the concept of God. As it belongs to the natural concept of God not to be mere potentiality, God must exist. Möhler concluded that for Anselm, «God is that being, greater than whom nothing can be conceived; so no one, who unites this reflection with his thought of God, can imagine the nonentity of the Almighty»⁵². Without critical questioning, Möhler accepted Kant's understanding of Anselm's proof as ontological, although he did not embrace the disjunction between noumenal and phenomenal. Being and thought are equivalents because a «thought destroys itself if no being corresponds to the idea»⁵³. Arguing against a contemporary opponent to Anselm's proof, Möhler proposed that «God» was an entirely different kind of being than imagined «crowns»⁵⁴. The cognitive concept «God» is *sui generis*, that is, without parallel or equivalent. In both Anselm and Möhler one detects an operative manifestation of Augustine's theory of illumination:

All opposition to this so-called ontological evidence, and to this definition given by Anselm of the most perfect being, is unavailing, since it is deeply implanted in the human mind as it is inculcated by all philosophy, however unwillingly and without design, as a principle of indispensable belief⁵⁵.

⁵⁰ MÖHLER, *Anselm*, 143f.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 147.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 150.

⁵⁴ Kant famously substituted for Gaunilo's imagined islands, "thalers" – a German coin of the day.

⁵⁵ MÖHLER, *Anselm*, 152.

Möhler affirmed that this intellectual insight merits being predicated as proof (“evidence” in the translation). In Möhler’s judgment, the age that rejected the proof rejected it because of its own endemic, deeply fragmented existence. Here one sees again Möhler applying his heuristic principle: only a spirituality tempered by asceticism can rise to such lofty speculative heights as Anselm had attained:

The desire to demonstrate the existence of God appears impossible, save in an age which, on subjects of faith, is in the last degree divided against itself; but this cannot be said of St. Anselm and his times; his arguments are throughout scientific discussions, researches into truths already believed⁵⁶.

Referring to *De libertate arbitrii*, he concluded that were one to hold that God did not exist, the affirmation of anything’s existence would collapse⁵⁷. Nevertheless, and for precisely this reason, the being of God cannot be expressed in any relative term. It would be downright nonsensical to attribute to God degrees of perfection. The perfection of all attributes coincides completely with God, as God is self-identity⁵⁸.

God alone is no accident and all other terms but «God» reflect something accidental. «How the greatest being can become less than it is, is inconceivable. How the greatest good can descend beneath itself, is beyond comprehension». This established the fact that the term «God», and in fact God himself, stands out unparalleled, without any *analogon*. The consequence is «therefore, the world is not created from God, and without God there is nothing, so God has by himself produced the world from nothing». Möhler thus is in agreement with Anselm that God and immanence never meet on the same level. God’s eternal «Word of the highest being, is not the similitude of things, but the essential truth of their being; their absolute and simple being is in him, and they are but its resemblances»⁵⁹. Möhler does justice to Anselm by interpreting his *oeuvre* within Platonic and Augustinian parameters. As the human being, an ensouled creature, is created in the image and likeness of God, «it is not unreasonable that the mind of the Most High should in the same Word express itself and the united creation»⁶⁰.

Having seen the incomprehensibility of God affirmed in Anselm’s writings, Möhler also considered figurative speech. That such human speech does not entirely miss

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 153. Möhler cites the Latin from *Monologion* 14: «Consequitur ut, ubi ipsa non est, nihil sit».

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 154. At this point Möhler quotes from *Monologion* 16-17 extensively.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 157. Cfr. *De libertate arbitrii* 10 and *Monologion* 31.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 159. Cfr. *De libertate arbitrii* 34.

the intended object lies in the subject's nature being an image of God⁶¹. Yet this is not where the movement of the human mind stops. It leads, as Möhler found in the *Monologion*, to charity:

Faith is dead, unless animated and fortified by love. A dead faith is essentially different from that which is animated: a dead faith is contented with receiving what is proposed for belief; an animated believes it in itself [*credere quod credi debet; credere in id quod credi debet*]. Without love, therefore, no true faith can exist⁶².

In conscious opposition to the then popular manualists in the tradition of Francisco Suárez, Luis de Molina and Domingo Bañez, Möhler joined Anselm in emphasizing the pivotal dimension of personal faith. The cognitively perfect being is God who must necessarily exist. This was for Möhler not strictly speaking an exterior scientific proof. Rather, God is the self-explication of human thought⁶³.

7. *Rectitudo* as the desired human Condition

Möhler then pondered the question of the origin of sin as presented by Anselm, referencing *De conceptu virginali et originali peccato*. The abilities to sin and to seek happiness originate in the same capacity. While the ability to persevere in grace is granted by God, the sinner and Satan willfully reject this gift. As in «rational creation, goodness and happiness are necessarily inseparable»⁶⁴, the sinner «is of necessity unhappy». Ontologically, man is in an ethical dilemma from which he cannot extricate himself. Yet this ethical conundrum is precisely his chance for salvation. The option for evil can only be overcome by being just. But one cannot acquire justice on one's own. This requires divine action: «God is the fountain of all justice»⁶⁵.

Drawing then on *De libertate arbitrii*, Möhler illustrated that for Anselm, «the lack of justice prepares man for vice. Evil consists in the consent to sin, not

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 161.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 162. The reference is probably to *Monologion* 78.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 165.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 166.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

in the sensation it provokes». Punishment consists essentially in God withholding justice. Injustice, like evil, is by and of itself nothing positive but merely the crying absence of justice: «Original sin is, therefore, our want of justice implanted in Adam with reason». This has ontic and epistemic consequences:

After the first sin, therefore, man is reduced to simple nature – that is, he possesses reason, will, &c., as they are without grace, these powers not becoming by original sin anything different from what they are in themselves. As it is through grace alone that man can wish, perform or know anything really good, so the absence of justice must necessarily be accompanied by consequences the most fatal⁶⁶.

Möhler discovered Anselm arguing that in the postlapsarian state human reason, unaided by grace, is blind. However much there may be a desire to recognize God, it would amount to a silly exercise in futile solipsism was a human being to attempt to rise to a conclusion on matters concerning the existence of God unaided by grace. Indeed «it would be the height of impiety»⁶⁷.

Möhler saw Anselm introducing a helpful distinction. The consequences of original sin belong to the present nature of humankind, but sin presupposes the personal will of the individual. In addition, he discovered in the Benedictine monk's thoughts something illuminating: freedom (*libertas*) did not consist in the ability to choose between good and evil, but in abiding in God's divine will. Otherwise one would have to define God as not free. Thus, human freedom is not a fact of brute human existence, but a dynamic, or more precisely, a spiritual quality human beings must strive to attain ever again. For Anselm, as for Möhler, freedom comes close to being a supernatural virtue. Interpreting Anselm, Möhler wrote, «Freedom is essentially the power of persevering in good for the sake of the good; for assuredly man is gifted with freedom, for the sake of his perseverance in goodness, not of his degeneration into evil»⁶⁸. While God does not deprive humankind of the freedom to will the good and to desire to behold God, «[t]here is a difference between the freedom of the sinful and that of the just man»⁶⁹. Later he stated even more strongly that «[a]fter his fall, [man] is really [*actu*] without it, but still capable of recovering it»⁷⁰. Thus Anselm was able to find a singular correspondence between freedom and grace. Freedom

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 168.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 169.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 171.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 172.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 173.

was the ability to seek the good for its own sake. This good was God. Thus freedom (*libertas*) led to righteousness (*rectitudo*).

8. Concluding Observations

Möhler closed his reflections on Anselm with a note on theodicy. He discovered that God in Anselm's eyes was outside time. He was necessarily good, while human beings strive for the good in freedom. Sin was simply the lack of a good moral quality and not in and of itself something positive.

Möhler summed up his objectives: he desired to «effect a change in the judgment of some upon a period in the history of Christian theology which may justly lay claim to an acquired fundamental knowledge; and... excite in others a desire to share in the rich treasures concealed in scholastic literature, and to treat philosophically the dogmas of Christianity»⁷¹. Möhler's book on Anselm may be read like a paraphrase of excerpts from Anselm's *oeuvre*, but he was cognizant of the value of primary sources and the requirement to subject these texts to a close reading.

Möhler did not directly address the vexing question of whether Anselm had been a philosopher or theologian, or whether in different works he wrote as one but not as the other. Indirectly, however, Möhler did respond to this question by way of showing the close relationship of faith and reason in such a way that both retain their relative autonomy but relatedness to each other. Barth had argued that Anselm exclusively had a theologian's concern, coming close to subscribing it to the *analogia fidei*⁷². Etienne Gilson rejected this interpretation, but hesitated to categorize Anselm as a philosopher⁷³. F. S. Schmitt, who edited the critical edition of Anselm's writings, considered Anselm a Christian apologetic *sui generis*⁷⁴. Möhler showed how Anselm was inspired by scripture but often argued apart from the biblical testimony. By not reducing Anselm to either a philosopher or a theologian, Möhler also did not yield to

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 177f.

⁷² BARTH, *Anselm. Fides Quaerens Intellectum*. For a similar position, see S. VANNI ROVIGHI, *S. Anselmo e la Filosofia del sec. XI*, Milano 1949, 59.

⁷³ E. GILSON, *Sens et Nature de l'Argument de Saint Anselme*, in *Archives d'Histoire Doctrinale et Littéraire du Moyen Age* 9 (1934) 5-51. Gilson perceived in Anselm a Christian gnostic à la Clement of Alexandria who was mindful that the Blessed Trinity and the incarnation cannot be subjects of philosophical inquiry.

⁷⁴ F. S. SCHMITT, OSB, *Die wissenschaftliche Methode in Anselms Cur Deus Homo*, in *Spicilegium Beccense*, Paris 1959, 350.

Kantianism, empiricism or rationalism. He beheld no insurmountable gulf between reason, historic contingency, and faith.

It would be interesting to know how Möhler would have responded to the nature-spirit dualism propagated by Anton Günther (1783-1863) and particularly his and Rosmini-Serbati's (1797-1855) forms of the ontological argument. How would he have protected God from becoming the guarantee of human ideas, as ontologism advocated⁷⁵?

Unfortunately, Kurt Flasch missed the moral point of Möhler's lengthy discussion of Anselm's life as a demonstration of one grounded in moral uprightness (*rectitudo*)⁷⁶. The Anselmic correlation of faith, spirituality, and reason as the basis for his epistemology is to Möhler's mind convincingly demonstrated. While it is certainly true that Möhler was not left uninfluenced by Hegelian thought, one should be careful not to subsume Möhler under Hegel's understanding of the Spirit's self-explication in history. Perhaps there is too great a proximity in Hegel's view between Trinity and world, idea and its immanent manifestation. When God received in man an image of himself, the image remained image. Here an investigation into Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite and to what degree Anselm was influenced by him and whether Möhler was mindful of it would be required.

Möhler did not further problematize the viability of transposing eleventh-century thought into the nineteenth century. He held the Church and anyone sanctioned by her by way of canonization to be living in organic continuity with the primordial Church of Pentecost, enlivened by the Holy Spirit. The Anselmic *rationes necessariae* have deceived many. Möhler refrained from addressing this issue. All truth is historic, or more precisely stated, it is salvific and historic.

Möhler's lasting achievement was to avoid the fateful disjunction between rationalism and fideism, a disjunction which has preoccupied the majority of twentieth-century Anselm scholars, with the exceptions of Rudolf Allers, Dieter Henrich, and Raymond Klibansky. In opposition to a naïve dialectical understanding that obliterates or cancels out the subjective in favor of a greater synthesis, Möhler forged a unity of objective reality and subjective consciousness that can only come about in the subjective individual.

⁷⁵ D. CLEARY, *Ontologism*, in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 10, New York 1967, 701-703.

⁷⁶ Flasch wrote «Ihre breiten biographischen Partien sind für uns ohne Interesse...» in *Vernunft und Geschichte*, 170. Flasch seems significantly influenced by Bernhard Lakebrink in his reading of both Anselm and Möhler, *Anselm von Canterbury und die Hegelsche Metaphysik*, in *Parusia, Studien zur Philosophie Platons und zur Problemgeschichte des Platonismus, Festgabe für Johannes Hirschberger*, Frankfurt am Main 1965, 455-470.

The Augustinian teaching on *memoria* was for Möhler the heuristic key to understanding Anselm. For this reason Möhler was able to assume an anti-rationalistic stance. Thereby he was able to acknowledge Anselm both as philosopher and as a theologian. For Möhler, there does exist a trajectory in intellectual history from Anselm, via the school of Chartres, to Nicholas de Cusa and eventually to Hegel. Anselm indeed presumed the Blessed Trinity as an object of speculative thought, without subsuming it under theology⁷⁷. This led to an enrichment of the *Gemüt*, «an internal, deep emotion of the minds of men»⁷⁸. With the aid of Anselm, Möhler overcame the transcendental idealism of Lutheran Kant, where the *Ding an sich* remained ever elusive. There was a nexus between object and subject as, according to Catholic anthropology, the image of God was not completely destroyed in the human being⁷⁹. Only spirit-gifted human freedom is able to encompass both “history and reason”. Thus, Möhler was able to grasp the necessity of reason and the contingency of external, historical evidence as one event and yet maintain that divine revelation approached human beings from without⁸⁰. The discovery in Anselm’s *oeuvre* of the image of God residing in man, even after the fall, as an essential rational human faculty formed the central basis for Möhler’s magisterial book, *Symbolism*, comparing the Christian creeds. Over and against Deistic naturalism, which perceived nature per se as the human essence, the human being remained a creature endowed with spirit (*Geist*). This was the foundation for his supernaturalism, which was both theocentric and anti-enlightenment. If this was the case, then the Church as the voluntary assembly of such spirit-gifted creatures was God’s work of art⁸¹.

Mindful of the human mind’s Trinitarian constituents, Möhler would echo Anselm’s words in the *Proslogion* 1: «I acknowledge, Lord, and I give thanks that You have created Your image in me so that I may remember You, think of You, love You»⁸².

⁷⁷ FLASCH, 192.

⁷⁸ MÖHLER, *Anselm*, xi.

⁷⁹ According to Catholic understanding, original sin did not completely destroy free will, but merely weakened it. According to Luther, once deprived of free will, human nature becomes completely corrupt.

⁸⁰ J. A. MÖHLER, *Symbolik*, ed. J. R. Geisemann, vol. II, Darmstadt 1961, 364.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 660.

⁸² P1, in *Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works*, Davies and Evans eds., 87.