

Anselm, from *Proslogion*

Chapter 1: Encouraging the Mind to Contemplate God

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I acknowledge, Lord, and I give thanks that you have created in me this your image, so that I can remember you, think about you and love you. But it is so worn away by sins, so smudged over by the smoke of sins, that it cannot do what it was created to do unless you renew and reform it. I do not even try, Lord, to rise up to your heights, because my intellect does not measure up to that task; but I do want to understand in some small measure your truth, which my heart believes in and loved. Nor do I seek to understand so that I can believe, but rather I believe so that I can understand. For I believe this too, that “unless I believe I shall not understand” (Isa. 7:9).

Chapter 2: That God Really Exists

Therefore, Lord, you who give knowledge of the faith, give me as much knowledge as you know to be fitting for me, because you are as we believe and that which we believe. And indeed we believe you are something greater than which cannot be thought. Or is there no such kind of thing, for “the fool said in his heart, ‘there is no God’” (Ps. 13:1, 52:1)? But certainly that same fool, having heard what I just said, “something greater than which cannot be thought,” understands what he heard, and what he understands is in his thought, even if he does not think it exists. For it is one thing for something to exist in a person’s thought and quite another for the person to think that thing exists. For when a painter thinks ahead to what he will paint, he has that picture in his thought, but he does not yet think it exists, because he has not done it yet. Once he has painted it he has it in his thought and thinks it exists because he has done it. Thus even the fool is compelled to grant that something greater than which cannot be thought exists in thought, because he understands what he hears, and whatever is understood exists in thought. And certainly that greater than which cannot be understood cannot exist only in thought, for if it exists only in thought it could also be thought of as existing in reality as well, which is greater. If, therefore, that than which greater cannot be thought exists in thought alone, then that than which greater cannot be thought turns out to be that than which something greater actually can be thought, but that is obviously impossible. Therefore something than which greater cannot be thought undoubtedly exists both in thought and in reality.

Chapter 3: That God Cannot be Thought Not to Exist

In fact, it so undoubtedly exists that it cannot be thought of as not existing. For one can think there exists something that cannot be thought of as not existing, and that would be greater than something which can be thought of as not existing. For if that greater than which cannot be thought

can be thought of as not existing, then that greater than which cannot be thought is not that greater than which cannot be thought, which does not make sense. Thus that than which nothing can be thought so undoubtedly exists that it cannot even be thought of as not existing.

And you, Lord God, are this being. You exist so undoubtedly, my Lord God, that you cannot even be thought of as not existing. And deservedly, for if some mind could think of something greater than you, that creature would rise above the creator and could pass judgment on the creator, which is absurd. And indeed whatever exists except you alone can be thought of as not existing. You alone of all things most truly exists and thus enjoy existence to the fullest degree of all things, because nothing else exists so undoubtedly, and thus everything else enjoys being in a lesser degree. Why therefore did the fool say in his heart “there is no God,” since it is so evident to any rational mind that you above all things exist? Why indeed, except precisely because he is stupid and foolish?

Chapter 4: How the Fool Managed to Say in His Heart That Which Cannot be Thought

How in the world could he have said in his heart what he could not think? Or how indeed could he not have thought what he said in his heart, since saying it in his heart is the same as thinking it? But if he really thought it because he said it in his heart, and did not say it in his heart because he could not possibly have thought it - and that seems to be precisely what happened - then there must be more than one way in which something can be said in one’s heart or thought. For a thing is thought in one way when the words signifying it are thought, and it is thought in quite another way when the thing signified is understood. God can be thought not to exist in the first way but not in the second. For no one who understands what God is can think that he does not exist. Even though he may say those words in his heart he will give them some other meaning or no meaning at all. For God is that greater than which cannot be thought. Whoever understands this also understands that God exists in such a way that one cannot even think of him as not existing.

Thank you, my good God, thank you, because what I believed earlier through your gift I now understand through your illumination in such a way that I would be unable not to understand it even if I did not want to believe you existed.

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Translation by David Burr