

Faith and Conscience—The Surest of Arguments for the Existence of God

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ABSTRACT In the first part of my paper, I shall consider how Anselm of Canterbury's so-called ontological argument has been misapprehended by those treating it as a proof for the existence of God. In the second part, I shall focus on Chapter One of the *Proslogion* and on the *Epistola de incarnatione Verbi* to show what Anselm's real purpose was regarding the problem of the existence of God. I shall support my view by referring also to the thought of John Henry Newman and Henri de Lubac.

KEYWORDS conscience; existence of God; faith; *fides quaerens intellectum*; metaphysics; ontological proof; *quaerere Deum*

I. THE ADULTERATION

A question which, I think, should be asked at any conference devoted to proofs for the existence of God (whether ontological or other), is whether they are of any use as far as ascertaining God's existence is concerned: are proofs for the existence of God useful or are they just a pastime for idle philosophers?

Ever since the ancient Sceptics declared dogmatism to be abhorrent to the enlightened mind, dogmatic certainty has become a "res non grata" for philosophers. In effect, any serious consideration of Revealed Truth is frowned upon by all but philosophers of the Jewish, Christian or Arab traditions. In this respect, Roger Scruton remarks, "for most philosophers of our tradition, there is little more to the question of God than the flimsy proofs for his existence."¹ He is sceptical as to the use of proofs for the

1. Roger Scruton, *An Intelligent Person's Guide to Philosophy* (London: Duckworth, 1996), 91.

existence of God and derides less sceptical logicians by calling them “half-crazed.” Speaking of Anselm’s so-called ontological argument, he says, “nobody has been able to prove very much about the argument at all.”² This would imply that the whole idea is unconstructive, and is just a waste of time.

Therefore, the simple answer to our question is “no.” Ontological proofs for the existence of God are of no use as they are unable to achieve what they intend. If they were to be of any use, it would be in a situation where belief in God was already present and the believer was trying to explain the reasons for his faith, as in the case of the Anselmian *Fides quaerens intellectum*.

If the average believer (regardless of creed) were to attend our conference devoted to “Ontological Proofs Today,” he³ might well consider us to be something like a gathering of Martians.⁴ We talk like beings from outer space, and no one who is “down to earth” cares much for what we say: it has little practical import for those who believe in God; they would not know whether we even accept God’s existence as real! Being “down to earth” is unnatural for Martians anyway, although, having studied philosophy at some time, they should be aware of an important aspect of philosophical study stressed by the Ancient Stoics: philosophy’s proper calling is to serve a practical purpose. Epictetus, for example, understood philosophy’s role as one of healing and educating the human being. This idea, however, would be denounced by Martians as being politically incorrect.

John Henry Newman understood the situation and is as outspoken about Martians as Scruton:

Logic makes but a sorry rhetoric with the multitude; first shoot round corners, and you may not despair of converting from a syllogism. Tell men to gain notions of a Creator from His works, and, if they were set about it (which nobody does) they would be jaded and wearied by the labyrinth they were tracing. Their minds would be gorged and surfeited by the logical operation. Logicians are more set upon concluding rightly, than on right

2. *Ibid.*, 93.

3. I shall refrain from using the “s/he” form of the personal pronoun as I think it is unworthy of the academic tradition.

4. I shall use this term to stand for the “half-crazed logicians” Scruton has in mind. A “Martian” is one capable of the *διάνοια* level of discussion, but unable to understand the higher ambition of metaphysical speculation. Any serious scholar of Anselm despises Martians for the way they adulterate his thought.

conclusions. They cannot see the end for the process. . . . To most men argument makes the point in hand only more doubtful, and considerably less impressive.⁵

Newman is “forever stressing, in one guise of another, the one idea that belief is something other than the result of a logical process; it is precisely not ‘a conclusion from premises.’”⁶

The problem of the existence of God was once part of our education regarding knowledge of the truth and of discerning between good and evil, thus helping keep our spirit in good health, as Epictetus would suggest. It is this wider context of the problem of God’s existence, which must be taken into account, if any discussion of it is to be useful. Anselm’s idea of *fides quaerens intellectum* is, in my opinion, the only sensible way to approach our enterprise. The truly practical answer to the problem is *fides* and not any ontological proof.

Henri de Lubac, acting, it would seem, as a mouthpiece for all believers, declares, “No proof gave me my God, and no critique can take him from me.”⁷ These are words, which Martians cannot grasp: they are unable to express them in their own language of logical notation. Their problem is considerable and perhaps unsolvable, although they continue at each conference to imagine that they are actually doing something useful to solve it. Theirs is not the honesty of approach, present in Newman when he says,

The being of God . . . is as certain to me as the certainty of my own existence, though when I try to put the grounds of that certainty into logical shape I find a difficulty in doing so in mood and figure to my satisfaction.⁸

He goes on to note:

I am far from denying the real force for the arguments in proof of a God, drawn from the general facts of human society and the course of history, but these do not warm me or enlighten me . . . were it not for this voice,

5. John Henry Newman, *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent* (New York; London; Toronto: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1947), 71–72.

6. Josef Pieper, *Belief and Faith: A Philosophical Tract*, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (London: Faber and Faber, 1963), 26.

7. Henri de Lubac, *The Discovery of God*, trans. Alexander Dru (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1960), 180.

8. John Henry Newman, *Apologia pro vita sua: Being a History of His Religious Opinions* (London; New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1890), 241.

speaking so clearly in my conscience and my heart, I should be an atheist, or a pantheist, or a polytheist when I looked into the world.⁹

The world of conscience and heart is *terra incognita* to Martians and this is, I think, the core of the problem.

I would also note that not all arguments for God's existence are of an *a posteriori* type and that some are properly described as non-rational, i.e. based on premises other than those of logic. We need also to consider the idea that there is a special type of argument which is metaphysical, *a priori* and Anselmian. The inability to sense metaphysical speculation at work in Anselm prevents one from fully appreciating the content of Anselm's achievements and leads to an adulteration of his thought.¹⁰ The Martian does not make allowance for the fact that Anselm's argument is a masterpiece of metaphysics, although he would credit Anselm with dialectical abilities. Dom F. S. Schmitt, the editor of Anselm's *Opera Omnia*, discerned the *animal metaphysicum* in Anselm and did not hesitate to characterize his work as a "monumental metaphysical construction" ("ein monumentales metaphysisches Gebäude").¹¹

Without recourse to metaphysics, nothing much may be achieved in the study of Anselm's *ratio*, as his *Id quo maius cogitari non potest* is a masterpiece of metaphysics and not of logic. The problem we are dealing with here is not one of logic, but of metaphysics based on Revelation. Only those with methodological awareness, such as Anselm, Newman, de Lubac and others, see this clearly. De Lubac shows such discernment when he "puts logic into its place" and says that reasoning according to logical principles in order to prove the existence of God is not superfluous, "but that the thought, which is our affirmation of God, is not the conclusion of an argument."¹²

"True metaphysics is the science *par excellence* of the real and the concrete."¹³ Maurice Blondel helps one realize what we are dealing with when we study arguments for the existence of God, that the proofs of God "are not so much an invention as an inventory, not a revelation so much as an

9. Ibid.

10. Cf. Tadeusz Grzesik, "Anselm of Canterbury—The First Accomplished Theologian of the Middle Ages (The Metaphysical Foundation of Anselm's *theologizare*)," *Acta Mediaevalia* 20 (2007).

11. Franciscus Salesius Schmitt, "Anselm und der (Neu-)Platonismus," in *Analecta Anselmiana: Untersuchungen über Person und Werk Anselms von Canterbury* (Frankfurt am Main: Minerva, 1969).

12. de Lubac, *The Discovery of God*, 41.

13. Ibid., 70.

elucidation, a purification and a justification of the fundamental beliefs of humanity.”¹⁴ The fundamental beliefs of humanity bring one closer to the real and concrete than any logical speculation can do.

The matter is also one of methodological discernment. The subject of “God” belongs to theology based on Revelation. Philosophy may speculate on it, but its conclusions are not even capable of proving that there is a God! Such, too, was Newman’s understanding: logic cannot constitute a determining factor where supernatural faith is concerned. This would seem to be the reason why he chose as his motto for the *Grammar of Assent* the words: “Non in dialectica complacuit Deo salvum facere populum suum” (“It did not please God to save His people by dialectic”).¹⁵

However, Newman does not wish to do away with logic completely (and, like Anselm, would certainly not be inclined to join Clarembald of Arras in exclaiming: “A dialecticis libera nos, Domine”). He senses its proper role with regard to faith:

The heart is commonly reached, not through the reason, but through the imagination, by means of direct impressions, by the testimony of facts and events, by history, by description. Persons influence us, voices melt us, looks subdue us, deeds inflame us. Many a man will live and die upon a dogma: no man will be a martyr for a conclusion. . . .¹⁶

When Newman says this, we realize that his idea of the human being is not limited to that of Aristotle’s ζῷον λογιστικόν. Newman thinks more in holistic terms and his concept takes into account not only the rational aspect put forward as essential by the Stagirite.

Newman’s particular regard for the conscience is well known, as is the fact that he takes the conscience to be an argument for the existence of God. In this regard, he seems to be following Anselm, who in his reply to Gaunilo, advocates faith and conscience as decisive factors in respect of assenting to God’s existence. This is something more than relying on simple ratiocination. It is a practical approach referring Gaunilo to the *fides quaerens intellectum* idea, “fide et conscientia tua pro firmissimo utor argumento.”¹⁷ Faith and conscience are the true arguments, to which Anselm

14. *Ibid.*, 64 n.10.

15. Newman, *Grammar of Assent*: iii. 16. *Ibid.*, 70–71.

17. Anselm of Canterbury, *Pro Inspiente*, 1 (Schmitt I.130.16). Text cited according to the edition of Franciscus Salesius Schmitt, in *S. Anselmi Cantuariensis archiepiscopi Opera Omnia*, vol. 1 (Seckau: Ex officina abbatiae seccoviensis, 1938, reprint, Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1946; Stuttgart; Bad Cannstatt: F. Fromann Verlag, 1968), 130–39.

points and none other. What is contained in his *ratio* of the *Proslogion*, is a way of faith seeking understanding, and not of God's existence proved in terms of logic. Anselm's attitude is practical: he knew well that to accept God's existence is a matter of faith and of the grace of God.

In the *Grammar of Assent*, Newman sees the insufficiency of logical arguments, albeit appreciating their use for other purposes:

Logic then does not really prove; it enables us to join issue with others; it suggests ideas; it opens views; it maps out for us the lines of thought; it verifies negatively; it determines when differences of *opinion* are hopeless; and when and how far conclusions are probable; but for genuine proof in concrete matter we require an *organon* more delicate, versatile, and elastic than verbal argumentation.¹⁸

He then sensibly concludes:

Life is for action. If we insist on proofs for everything, we shall never come to action: to act you must assume, and that assumption is faith. . . . Life is not long enough for a religion of inferences; we shall never have done beginning, if we determine to begin with proof.¹⁹

Dogmatism, although rejected by philosophers, has a practical purpose in the *fides quaerens intellectum*, one appreciated by Newman as that which gives something to understand and not something to prove and such, he says, "is the difference between the dogmatism of faith and the speculations of logic."²⁰

Unaided reason is insufficient as a working tool when it comes to matters pertaining to God. Realizing this is essential, if we are not ourselves to become the Martians. Anyone who believes in God's existence might well admit that, from their point of view, those not graced with the gift of faith waste their time, when they speculate on the existence of God. Their enterprise lacks a practical dimension. Academics participating in such a conference as ours should ask: what is the purpose of deliberating on arguments for the existence of God when they give no certainty and certainly do not achieve much by way of making one assent to His existence. Is there anything constructive in dealing with "Ontological Proofs Today"? It does

18. Newman, *Grammar of Assent*, 206.

19. *Ibid.*, 72.

20. John Henry Newman, *Discussions and Arguments on Various Subjects*, new ed. (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1891), 297.

not cross the Martian's mind that there could be, as Newman says, "an *organon* more delicate, versatile and elastic than verbal argumentation."²¹

Our enterprise may have academic value, but the exceptional subject of God does not easily lend itself to a dispassionate treatment: it rarely leaves us indifferent. Although one may understand why the believer wishes to engage in speculating on the subject of God in order to confirm what he already believes, it is difficult to see why the self-declared atheist bothers with such a subject. It seems absurd to be occupied with the effectiveness of reasons for the existence of a being whose existence one categorically denies.²² If something doesn't exist, what is the point of talking about it?

After the fall of communism in Central Europe, Professor Bocheński was asked by someone: what is the point of working in Soviet Studies, now that the system has fallen? Bocheński's replied: "Rubbish is rubbish, but scholarship of rubbish is not rubbish!"²³ At least rubbish is something, but what is a non-existent God?

Anselm's methodological awareness must be taken into account when studying any of his texts. He did not lack discernment when dealing with problems on the border of *Sacra Pagina* and philosophy. This is particularly evident when we read the preface to his *Monologion*. One is not therefore surprised that M. J. Charlesworth feels the need to warn readers of the *Proslogion* that they

cannot hope to understand the *Proslogion* and its argument without knowing something of St. Anselm's thought in general and above all of how he conceived of the relationship between knowledge through religious faith and knowledge through unaided philosophical reason.²⁴

If Anselm's thought is adulterated today, it is because of the Martians having dealt with it in the way that they do, knowing little about Anselm's thought in general and, in effect, speaking of Anselm *remoto Anselmo*.

The brilliance of logic or of any other secular science does not touch the heart of the problem of God's existence: it only deals with what is effable, and certainly does not instill within us a keen sensibility to the influences of the unseen world. Theology may make use of logic, but in its attempt to

21. See footnote 18.

22. I stress this point owing to the fact that one of the advertised participants at this conference is a self-declared atheist.

23. Józef Maria Bocheński, *Wspomnienia* (Kraków: Philed, 1994), 263.

24. Anselm of Canterbury, *St. Anselm's Proslogion*, trans. and intr. Max J. Charlesworth, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979), 22.

grasp the Absolute, there is little logic can achieve if it ignores the premises offered it by Revealed Truth.²⁵

Robert Jastrow, a contemporary astronomer, physicist and cosmologist may be said to think in similar terms when he writes,

For the scientist who has lived by his faith in the power of reason, the story ends like a bad dream. He has scaled the mountain of ignorance; he is about to conquer the highest peak; as he pulls himself over the final rock, he is greeted by a band of theologians who have been sitting there for centuries.²⁶

I don't quite know where Jastrow took this "bad dream" from, but it seems to evoke the idea Bernard of Chartres launched in the 12th century: we are like dwarves sitting on a giant's shoulders. If we see farther than others, it is only because we are perched on the giant, and thanks to the view that his height offers us.

I would contend that the role of the giant is played by Christian Revelation, which we may take advantage of or ignore, when we speculate on the being of God.

John Paul II had this in mind when he said in *Fides et Ratio* that "the truth, which is Christ, imposes itself as a universal authority which holds out to theology and philosophy alike the prospect of support, stimulation and increase."²⁷ Reason, if it is to remain objective, must "try to be in some sort coextensive with everything that is presented to it, including the data of revelation," which oblige it to "make fresh starts" by helping it to "become aware of its congenital insufficiency."²⁸

Thomas Aquinas is on the matter: "quae enim supra rationem humanam sunt, non credimus, nisi Deo revelante."²⁹ It would be impertinent for human beings to presume they can say something conclusive about God

25. Cf. John Henry Newman, *Certain Difficulties Felt by Anglicans in Catholic Teaching*, "New impression" ed., vol. 2 (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1914), 81: "Theology both uses logic and baffles it; and thus logic acts both for the protection and for the perversion of religion. Theology is occupied with supernatural matters, and is ever running into mysteries, which reason can neither explain nor adjust. Its lines of thought come to an abrupt termination, and to pursue them or to complete them is to plunge down the abyss. But logic blunders on, forcing its way, as it can, through thick darkness and ethereal mediums."

26. Robert Jastrow, *God and the Astronomers* (New York: Norton, 1978), 116.

27. John Paul II, *Fides et ratio* [Encyclical letter of the Supreme Pontiff John Paul II: To the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Relationship Between Faith and Reason] (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 1998), §92.

28. Maurice Nédoncelle, *Is There a Christian Philosophy?*, trans. Illtyd Trethowan (London: Burns & Oates, 1960), 96–97.

without referring to what He reveals about Himself. We may, of course, disregard what Christian Revelation teaches, but even then it might be worthwhile to consider Pascal's thought:

Si vous ne vous souciez guère de savoir la vérité, en voilà assez pour vous laisser en repos. Mais si vous désirez de tout votre coeur de la connaître, ce n'est pas assez; regardez au détail. C'en serait assez pour une question de philosophie; mais ici . . . il va de tout.³⁰

Anselm of Canterbury lived in an intellectual milieu which was quite different from that of our post-modern world. We may still come across remnants of his world, such as the motto of Oxford university "Dominus illuminatio mea," but very few *academici oxonienses* would really know what such a motto, practically speaking, implies.

Today, theology is no longer honored as the queen of the sciences, and philosophy is hardly in a better position itself: suffice it to browse in any bookshop in the West—instead of a theology shelf, you will find one for the occult, instead of philosophy, you'll have one for feminism or social studies at best.

In order to understand Anselm, we must leave aside any anachronisms distorting our view of the intellectual milieu of the Middle Ages and attempt to recreate its climate of thought, which would demand that God and Revealed Truth be reinstated in their position of pre-eminence.

The point I wish to make here is that we unnecessarily deprive ourselves of the support of Revealed Truth especially in matters divine, and that there do not seem to be any good reasons for us doing so. We may blame the Cartesian reform for this paradigm—asserting that by introducing the principle of a rationalistic philosophy, it denied God the right to make known by revelation truths which exceed the natural scope of reason. Whether this was Descartes' intention is another matter: nonetheless, theology was, as a result, dethroned.

Aquinas (who took much from Anselm³¹) works in much the same intellectual climate as Anselm and says that the argument from authority is weakest of all where human authority is concerned, but the argument from the authority of God, the revealer, is more solid and powerful than

29. Thomas Aquinas, *Contra gentiles*, lib. 1 cap. 9. Text cited according to the edition S. *Thomae Aquinatis Summa contra gentiles: seu De veritate Catholicae fidei* (Torino: Marietti, 1922).

30. Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, Lafuma 150; Brunschvicg 226.

31. Cf. Tadeusz Grzesik, "The Anselmian Roots of Aquinas," *Acta Mediaevalia* 20 (2009).

any other.³² Despite acknowledging our limitations regarding matters divine, we decline to look for help there, where most of our academic ancestors did. “Dominus illuminatio mea” is an empty motto for Martians today and yet it is an essential clue to our problem. Because God cannot be compared to any other being, His unique nature demands that we accept Divine Revelation as something which illumines our minds. “God being without principle, cannot be affirmed by virtue of a principle distinct from Himself.”³³

No one has seen God, as the Apostle John says,³⁴ but some have experienced Him, whereas others have not and this is not so much a matter of science, it is rather one of honesty and of the human will expressed in choice and assent. Without the support of faith and conscience, God is an enigma.

Those who are undecided regarding Divine Revelation, are, as Newman remarks astutely, greatly inclined to “wait quietly” to see whether proofs of the actuality of revelation will drop into their laps, as though they were in the position of arbitrators and not in that of the needy. “They have decided to test the Almighty in a passionless judicial fashion, with total lack of bias, with sober minds.”³⁵

For is not this the error, the common and fatal error, of the world, to think itself a judge of Religious Truth without preparation of heart? “I am the good Shepherd, and know My sheep, and am known of Mine.” “He goeth before them, and the sheep follow Him, for they know His voice.” “The pure in heart shall see God:” “to the meek mysteries are revealed;” “he that is spiritual judgeth all things.” “The darkness comprehendeth it not.” Gross eyes see not; heavy ears hear not. But in the schools of the world the ways towards

32. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I q.1, a. 8, ad 2: “Licet locus ab auctoritate, quae fundatur super ratione humana, sit infirmissimus, locus tamen ab auctoritate quae fundatur revelatione divina est efficacissimus.” Text cited according to the edition of Bernardo Maria de Rubeis and Charles René Billuart, *S. Thomae Aquinatis Summa theologiae*, 5 vols. (Torino: P. Marietti, 1885–86).

33. de Lubac, *The Discovery of God*, 41.

34. 1 John 4:12.

35. Citation after Josef Pieper, *Faith, Hope, Love*, trans. Richard and Clara Winston and Mary Frances McCarthy (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1997), 65–66. [Editor’s note: The text cited by the paper’s author is a re-translation into English of a passage by Newman in his *Grammar of Assent*. The book cited here collects three essays by Pieper. The citation appears in the essay “On Faith: A Philosophical Treatise,” translated by Richard and Clara Winston, and cited above in its separate earlier edition as *Belief and Faith: A Philosophical Tract*. The actual Newman citation runs: “those who resolve to treat the Almighty with dispassionateness, a judicial temper, clearheadedness, and candour.” Newman, *Grammar of Assent*, 426.]

Truth are considered high roads open to all men, however disposed, at all times. Truth is to be approached without homage.³⁶

Even if we might be inclined to think that the first part of what Newman says doesn't apply to our contemporaries, as they could not take the trouble to wait for proofs of the actuality of revelation, the second part is evidently true: how can truth be approached with due reverence if nothing is accepted as objective or absolute truth? The relativism and political correctness that reign in our academic world cannot entirely do away with reverence for truth. Maurice Blondel assesses this correctly, saying:

Truth, for him who rejects or refuses to live by it, is no longer the same as for the person who feeds upon it, but it still is; although entirely different in the one and the other case, its reign is not impugned in either case.³⁷

Let us, however, return to our mediaeval roots and the sober world of Anselm and Aquinas. The example they both give us is one of theological speculation based on Christian Doctrine as taught by the Catholic Church. If we disregard Christian Revelation, we may be liable to commit anomalies distorting the image of God. Origen warns us in this respect: "Περὶ Θεοῦ καὶ τᾶληθῆ λέγειν κίνδυνος οὐ μικρὸς"³⁸ ("to speak of God truly is no small danger").

Peter Henrici pertinently reminds us of the essentially religious context of Anselm's famous argument, when he says,

Le contexte religieux est essentiel pour l'argument anselmien. C'est l'argument d'un croyant, d'un moine, qui médite sur la foi . . . agissant comme

36. John Henry Newman, *University Sermons: Fifteen Sermons Preached before the University of Oxford 1826–43* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1970), 198.

37. Maurice Blondel, *L'action: Essai d'une critique de la vie et d'une science de la pratique* (Paris: F. Alcan, 1893), 438. [Editor's note: cf. English translation: Maurice Blondel, *Action (1893): Essay on a Critique of Life and a Science of Practice*, trans. Oliva Blanchette (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1984).]

38. Origen, *Selecta in Psalmos*, Migne PG, 12.1080a. [Editor's note: the passage, drawn here from a work usually attributed to Origen, is introduced in Greek as a quote. The text quoted by the author of the passage may be found in *The Sentences of Sextus*, a Hellenistic Pythagorean collection, known from two Greek manuscripts, as well as from ancient Latin and Syriac translations. The edition of Henry Chadwick numbers the sentence as 352. See *The Sentences of Sextus*, ed. Henry Chadwick (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959, reprint, 2003).]

quelqu'un qui s'efforce à élever son âme à la contemplation de Dieu et qui cherche à comprendre ce qu'il croit.³⁹

However, there is another dimension of understanding Anselm's *ratio*: one which may furnish us with a quite new orientation with regard to this problem.

II. THE ANTIDOTE

Speaking at an Anselmian conference held in Lublin in 1996, Helen S. Lang expressed an opinion, which is worth quoting here: "The quest for God, which constitutes the central truth of the *Proslogion*, is nothing other than re-establishing, insofar as is possible, the direct relation to God, lost in the fall."⁴⁰ This is a point which the average "ontological argument scholar" tends to overlook when reading Anselm. Lang went on to explain how Anselm proposed to achieve this:

It must be conducted by leaving aside everything but God and what can help in the search for Him. . . . The content of the argument is at the outset restricted to what is divine, or related to the divine. And through the soul we are able to establish the most direct, immediate relation to God. Indeed, when Anselm urges that we enter the soul and exclude everything except God, he implies that God is already present within the soul.⁴¹

De Lubac thinks in similar terms:

The idea of God cannot be uprooted, because it is, in essence, the Presence of God in man. One cannot rid oneself of that Presence. Nor is the atheist a man who has succeeded in doing so. He is only an idolater who, as Origen [*Contra Celsum*, 2.40.10–11 Borret (Migne PG 11.861b)] said, "refers his indestructible notion of God to anything rather than to God himself."⁴²

39. Peter Henrici, "Ontologie et religion : De S. Anselme à Blondel," *Archivio di filosofia* 58 (1990).

40. Helen S. Lang, "Language as Participation in Anselm's *Proslogion*," in *St. Anselm, Bishop and Thinker*, ed. Roman Majeran and Edward Iwo Zieliński (Lublin: University Press of the Catholic University of Lublin, 1999), 212. The whole of this paper would serve as an "antidote" for the purposes of enlightening Martian-minded scholars.

41. *Ibid.*

42. de Lubac, *The Discovery of God*, 181.

In the first chapter of the *Proslogion*, Anselm suggests: “intra in cubiculum mentis tuae.”⁴³ This hints at something which, for Anselm, Newman, De Lubac and all Catholics, has a deeper meaning: Christian revelation teaches that we are made in the image and likeness of God. It is therefore not without reason that we may think that there is a divine constitutive element within us: a presence of God within the human soul.

Bearing this in mind, we may view Anselm’s *ratio* of the *Proslogion* in a different way than we usually do: as something which is not meant to be a proof of God’s existence.

We all know the verse from Psalm 14 which caught Anselm’s attention: “Dixit insipiens in corde suo: non est Deus.” Monks, who recite the psalms everyday as part of the Divine Office, came across it regularly. Anselm, who was Prior and then Abbot at Le Bec—for thirty years in all—was known for being concerned not only for his monks’ spirituality, but also for their education. He wrote his *Monologion* at their express request and in its sequel, the *Proslogion*, he tries to come to terms with the fact that someone (wise or not) could say in his heart: there is no God. The *insipiens* is denying the presence of God in the human being—a truth accepted by all Christians.

Anselm did not have to prove God’s existence to his monks, least of all to himself: to maintain that he did (as the Martians do), is to misunderstand his purpose. Those in doubt should remember that the original title of the *Proslogion* was *Fides quaerens intellectum*—Anselm’s *point de depart* was faith. He did not start his work, as Aquinas did, with the question: “An Deus sit?” (“Does God exist?”). He did not aim at converting anyone to belief in God, as this is the result of God’s grace working within us and not of any logical argument or proof. Edith Stein, a convert to theism and Catholicism, knew of this from personal experience and in the case of arguments or proofs for the existence of God, pertinently asked: “How many unbelievers, after all, have become believers on the strength of the Thomistic proofs of the existence of God?”⁴⁴ (a question Jean Paul Sartre also asked). She would have been keenly aware of the problem of the *insipiens* as she herself, as a Carmelite nun, recited the psalms daily:

To believers who in their faith are certain of their God it seems so impossible to think of God as non-existent that they confidently undertake to convince even the *insipiens*.⁴⁵

43. Anselm of Canterbury, *Proslogion*, 1 (Schmitt I.97.7).

If we read Gaunilo's reply to Anselm's *Proslogion*, we should also notice that it was written "pro insipiente" and not "pro incredulo." Certainly the idea of there being a proof here is not Anselm's, and thus in effect adulterates his thought.

Whether God is in our heart or not is our own affair: we may choose to believe or not to believe. I contend that the problem is not one of arguments or proofs for the existence of God, it is rather one of choosing between belief and unbelief. In *Finite and Eternal Being*, Stein remarks that

The way of faith . . . is not the way of philosophical knowledge. It is rather the answer of another world to a question which philosophy poses. But philosophy has also its own specific way: it is the way of discursive reasoning, the way or ways in which the existence of God is rationally demonstrated. . . . A Christian philosophy will regard it as its noblest task to prepare the way for supernatural faith.⁴⁶

The process by which supernatural faith comes to touch human beings is a mystery: the mystery of God's grace working where it can. However, the *praeambula fidei* is less mysterious, and readily explained by those who experience the act of belief. To such as these belong Anselm, Newman and Stein—all of whom, it seems, would give testimony that those who believe enjoy the grace which may be called the intelligence given by faith.

Anselm is specific on this point when he says,

Nimirum hoc ipsum quod dico: qui non crediderit, non intelliget. Nam qui non crediderit, non experietur; et qui expertus non fuerit, non cognoscet.⁴⁷

It is with this in mind, moreover, that Anselm refers Gaunilo to his faith and conscience.

Lang speaks of the "quest for God" as constituting the central truth of the *Prologion*.⁴⁸ The *quaerere Deum* is evident to all who have read the first chapter of the *Proslogion*.

44. Edith Stein, *Finite and Eternal Being: An Attempt at an Ascent to the Meaning of Being*, trans. Kurt F. Reinhardt (Washington, D.C.: Institute of Carmelite Studies Publications, 2002), 110. 45. *Ibid.* 46. *Ibid.*, 59, 28.

47. Anselm of Canterbury, *Epistola de incarnatione Verbi*, I (Schmitt II.9.5–6). Text cited according to the edition by Franciscus Salesius Schmitt, in *S. Anselmi Cantuariensis archiepiscopi Opera Omnia*, vol. 2 (Roma: [Sansaini], 1940, reprint, Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1946; Stuttgart; Bad Cannstatt: F. Fromann Verlag, 1968), 3–35.

48. Lang, "Language as Participation," 212.

Anselm, who believes in God and loves Him, is at great pains to look for the object of his love. This first chapter has something in it of the flavor of the biblical Cantic of Canticles. Its ambience is one of earnestly seeking the face of the beloved: it is full of pathos and passion, showing how deeply Anselm is attached to his Lord and how much he craves for the One he loves. We are, indeed, in a quite different world here from that of the Martians. The only problem is, have they ever registered this fact when dealing with Anselm's so-called ontological argument?

Faith prompts us to look for God and, in doing so, to admit our limitations in this respect. This in turn helps us realize that we need help from above, to "make use of the giant" and to "ascend intellectually to those things," to use Anselm's words of the *Epistola de incarnatione Verbi*, that first need the ladder of faith.⁴⁹

Quaerere Deum is an undertaking which inspires those who believe in God: they have realized His greatness and know that He is "semper maior" and, as such, always constituting a challenge to the human mind. This is the climate of *Proslogion* Chapter 1, which sets the tone for the whole of the work. The problem, therefore, of the *Proslogion* is not whether we may prove God's existence, but whether we are actually looking for God as Anselm is—whether we are holistically committed in doing so.

The *quaerere Deum* remains insignificant for many an academic studying Anselm's *ratio*: they prefer to treat it as an occasion for philosophizing without committing oneself personally to God. This was noticed by Newman:

Knowledge of premises, and inferences upon them,—this is not to *live*. It is very well as a matter of liberal curiosity and of philosophy to analyze our modes of thought; but let this come second, and when there is leisure for it, and then our examinations will in many ways even be subservient to action. But if we commence with scientific knowledge and argumentative proof, or lay any great stress upon it as the basis of personal Christianity, or attempt to make man moral and religious by Libraries and Museums, let us in consistency take chemists for our cooks, and mineralogists for our masons.⁵⁰

Especially for logicians of such a mould, Anselm's argument has become a playground or an entertaining puzzle, which has little in common with

49. Anselm of Canterbury, *Epistola de incarnatione Verbi*, I (Schmitt II.7.10–12).

50. Newman, *Discussions and Arguments*, 295–96.

quaerere Deum or, indeed, with their own *modus vivendi*. Such academics are quite often not even interested in Anselm's thought and rarely, if ever, attend conferences devoted to him. That is why I am more inclined to be convinced by what a Benedictine scholar, such as Franz Salesius Schmitt, Robert Pouchet, or David Knowles, says about Anselm than by, for example, a brilliant atheist professor of philosophy who lacks the experience and commitment lived out in *quaerere Deum*. Of course, I cannot deny the latter knowledge of Anselm, but he does not have the intelligence of faith and that of a life lived accordingly. Just as faith and brilliance do not always go together, so too in the case with atheism: an added handicap is the defect of unbelief, which lacks the perspective given to those who are perched on the shoulders of a giant.

But the Anselm of *Proslogion* 1 is not pure guts: he ably and admirably combines *fides* and *intellectus* and ends this first chapter by concluding,

Fateor, domine, et gratias ago, quia creasti in me hanc imaginem tuam, ut tui memor te cogitem, te amem. Sed sic est abolita attritione vitiorum, sic est offuscata fumo peccatorum, ut non possit facere ad quod facta est, nisi tu renoves et reformes eam. Non tento, domine, penetrare altitudinem tuam, quia nullatenus comparo illi intellectum meum; sed desidero aliquatenus intelligere veritatem tuam, quam credit et amat cor meum. Neque enim quaero intelligere ut credam, sed credo ut intelligam. Nam et hoc credo: quia "nisi credidero, non intelligam."⁵¹

Henri de Lubac, in an inspiring article entitled "Seigneur, je cherche ton visage,"⁵² points out that Anselm begins the *Proslogion* by making his own words taken from Psalm 26: "Quaero vultum tuum, Domine, vultum tuum requiro" ("I seek Your countenance, O Lord, Your countenance I seek"). De Lubac goes on to remark that Anselm's aim is not only to achieve "l'intelligence spirituelle" as was the case with Origen and Augustine, but that Anselm differs by wishing to attain to an "intelligence de la foi," which would be an "intelligence dialectique," one allotting reason an important part. Indeed, in the *Epistola de incarnatione Verbi* Anselm makes quite clear his appreciation of the role of reason, "In eorum quippe animabus ratio, quae et princeps et iudex debet omnium esse quae sunt in homine."⁵³

This power is allowed autonomy and that is why Anselm is a philoso-

51. Anselm of Canterbury, *Proslogion*, 1 (Schmitt I.100.12–19).

52. Henri de Lubac, "Seigneur, je cherche ton visage": Sur le XIVe chapitre du *Proslogion* de saint Anselme," *Archives de Philosophie* 39 (1976).

53. Anselm of Canterbury, *Epistola de incarnatione Verbi*, I (Schmitt II.10.1–2).

pher in the way we understand today. But where we stop and fall short, Anselm continues: for him God is the highest instance of reason and one continually to be referred to in the quest for truth. His wishing to see the face of God is tantamount to coming to a full knowledge of the truth. In the *Cur Deus homo*, chapter 8, Anselm declares: “the will of God is never irrational” (“voluntas namque dei numquam est irrationabilis”).⁵⁴ God’s reasons may not always be evident to human beings, but He is never irrational, and the more we open ourselves up to His Revelation, the more we seek Him, the better chance we stand to understand the truth.

This is the “intelligence de la foi” of which de Lubac speaks. De Lubac distinguishes two types: one, which applies to the whole of Christian Doctrine and its nature is contemplative and inclined to mysticism; the other is used regarding the problem of God and is more inclined to logic and reason and, as De Lubac says, is more in accord with our present-day understanding of speculation. This, we may think, is the reason why the *Proslogion* has attracted so many philosophers to comment on it. To quote Scruton again, with regard to Anselm’s famous *ratio*, it is “indeed, . . . the one argument for God’s existence that is still alive, and which perhaps always was alive, even before Anselm gave explicit voice to it.”⁵⁵

In the prefatory comment Anselm makes in the *Epistola de incarnatione Verbi*, we see his concern for the proper disposition of mind and heart in those who wish to treat of the “loftiest questions regarding Christian Revelation” (“in altissimas de fide quaestiones assurgere”).⁵⁶

The prelude to studying *Sacra Pagina* in Anselm’s time was grounding in the *trivium*. Poor philosophical aptitude was seen by the Church as being at the root of many a heresy. Even centuries later, Francis Bacon seems to agree on this point, when he says, “a superficial tincture of philosophy may incline the mind to atheism, yet a further knowledge brings it back to religion.”⁵⁷

54. Anselm of Canterbury, *Cur Deus homo*, 8 (Schmitt II.59.11). Text cited according to the edition of Franciscus Salesius Schmitt, in *S. Anselmi Cantuariensis archiepiscopi Opera Omnia*, vol. 2 (Roma: [Sansaini], 1940, reprint, Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1946; Stuttgart: Bad Cannstatt: F. Fromann Verlag, 1968), 37–133.

55. Scruton, *An Intelligent Person’s Guide*, 21.

56. Anselm of Canterbury, *Epistola de incarnatione Verbi*, I (Schmitt II.7.10)

57. Francis Bacon, *Advancement of Learning*, in *Advancement of Learning, and Novum Organum*, Revised ed. (London; New York: The Colonial Press, 1900), 5 (in Book 1). Cf. the passage in the author’s longer Latin version, Francis Bacon, *De dignitate et augmentis scientiarum libri IX*, (Londini: in Officina Ioannis Haviland, 1623), 8 (in Book 1): “Quin potius certissimum est, atque experientia comprobatum, leues gustus in Philosophia, mouere fortasse ad Atheismum, sed pleniore haustus ad Religionem reducere.” Cf. also a French translation

Of great importance for Anselm are the following directives given in the *Epistola de incarnatione Verbi*: solidity of faith, a loving adherence to it, and a life humbly led in accordance with it.⁵⁸ Any lack in respect of these is considered a defect which hinders proper understanding of Christian Revelation. The theologian therefore is required not only to know his subject, but to be fully committed to it in mind and heart. This is poignantly expressed by Anselm's contemporary, William of Saint-Thierry, "Sed in hac questione Deum videndi, plus plus mihi videtur valere vivendi modus, quam loquendi."⁵⁹

Faith, too, is not just a matter of academic knowledge. In many of his works, Newman shows deep interest in the structure of faith. He is continually stressing—as Joseph Pieper notes—the one idea that belief is something other than the result of a logical process: "This idea has been summed up most cogently by Newman in his Oxford University addresses *We Believe because We Love*."⁶⁰ Anselm speaks in a similar vein in *Proslogion* 1, when he refers to "that truth which my heart believes and loves."⁶¹

To explain the role of love as the basis of belief is beyond the scope of my paper, it being, in essence, a matter personal to each believer. It is, however, possible to identify what Newman held to be instrumental in the ascent to Revealed Truth.

Hilda Graef observed that

By basing Christian belief and with it the spiritual life on the evidence of conscience on the one hand and on the acceptance of converging probabilities on the other, Newman freed them from the strait-jacket of logic used in the theological textbooks which he held incapable of dealing with the facts, and assigned them to the province of what he calls the *illative sense*. Which may roughly be explained as the faculty in us which enables us to reach conclusions which are certain without the apparatus of syllogisms.⁶²

from the era, Francis Bacon, *Neuf livres de la dignité et de l'accroissement des sciences*, trans. Gilbert de Golefer (Paris : Jacques Dugast, 1632), 11: "Une legere cognoissance de la Philosophie, peut tourner un homme à l'Atheisme ; de mesme que son entiere et parfaite intelligence, le peut ramener à la vraye religion."

58. Anselm of Canterbury, *Epistola de incarnatione Verbi*, I (Schmitt II.6.10–7.2): "Nullus quippe Christianus debet disputare, quomodo quod catholica ecclesia corde credit et ore confitetur non sit ; sed semper eandem fidem indubitanter tenendo, amando et secundum illam vivendo humiliter quantum potest quaerere rationem quomodo sit."

59. William of Saint-Thierry, *Aenigma fidei*, Migne PL 180.398c.

60. Pieper, *Belief and Faith*, 31.

61. See footnote 51.

Newman was concerned with showing the reasonableness of faith as it actually exists in the great mass of believers, most of whom may know nothing of abstract philosophical argument. So, too, did Anselm in his own time: they both tried to help realize not only how we come to believe, but also the power of faith and its meaning in our lives.

When considering the true test of the utility of a religion, Leslie Stephen concludes:

Faith lays so powerful a grasp upon the soul, that it survives even in the midst of moral and mental degradation . . . If the power of saving souls be the true test of the utility of a religion, that is not the genuine creed which makes men most decorous, but that which stimulates the keenest sensibility to the influences of the unseen world. The hope of ultimate pardon may make murder more frequent, but it gives a better chance of saving the murderer's soul at the very foot of the gallows.⁶³

This certainty, given by faith, has the power to save, because “[o]f all points of faith, the being of God is, . . .” as Newman says, “encompassed with the most difficulty, and yet borne in upon our minds with the most power.”⁶⁴ Like Anselm, he too stresses the necessity of properly preparing the heart before dealing with matters divine: “For is not this the error, the common and fatal error, of the world, to think itself a judge of Religious Truth without preparation of heart?”⁶⁵

“Prius ergo fide mundandum est cor.”⁶⁶ Anselm sees this as essential in his prefatory comment of the *Epistola de incarnatione Verbi*: the human heart needs to be cleansed by faith and obedience to the Lord's precepts. These commandments are for Anselm and all believers an expression of rectitude that is to be honored by all who “seek him with a sincere heart.”

This aspect of the problem is very important for the *quaerere Deum* and one which Martians must take into account if they are to be sensible in what they say. We may value their involvement, but only on condition that they contribute to the understanding of the problem in a way which does not distort Anselm's thought. They, of course, could nevertheless con-

62. Hilda C. Graef, *God and Myself: The Spirituality of John Henry Newman* (London: P. Davies, 1967), 177–78.

63. Leslie Stephen, *An Agnostic's Apology, and Other Essays*, 2nd ed. (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1903), 176.

64. Newman, *Apologia pro vita sua*, 239.

65. Newman, *University Sermons*, 198.

66. Anselm of Canterbury, *Epistola de incarnatione Verbi*, I (Schmitt II.8.7).

clude that his argument is not an ontological one at all (which would make sense), and restrict themselves to studying the ontological arguments of other thinkers.

Rectitude is an essential idea in Anselm's philosophy: he defines truth in his *De veritate* as "rectitudo sola mente perceptibilis"⁶⁷ and this is a matter of Absolute truth, real truth and not the "dictatorship of relativism" (to use Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger's expression).

Our problem, as human beings and academics, is, I would contend, one of God and Truth, which are the foundation of our certainty, if our lives and study are to make sense.

A few years ago, I read in some magazine what a retired professor from Alabama said regarding truth and the university. He could now honestly speak out, as being retired, he was out of reach of the university authorities: "The last thing we could be concerned about at my university was truth: truth was that, which those giving funds for the university decreed."

A situation such as this would have been judged absurd by Anselm, who in *Proslogion* 3 says,

Si enim aliqua mens posset cogitare aliquid melius te, ascenderet creatura super creatorem, et iudicaret de creatore; quod valde est absurdum.⁶⁸

We are not called to create the truth, (i.e. "to be above the Creator"), nor may we pretend that it does not exist; we may only aspire to come to a full knowledge of it. *Quaerere Deum* and *quaerere veritatem* are closely linked to each other. The denial of one brings about the denial of the other. We are subject to both and may not be judges of either of them.

In a speech given to academics during his visit to Cracow in 1997, John Paul II said, "[m]an has a lively awareness of the fact that *the truth is above and beyond him*. Man does not create truth; rather truth discloses itself to man when he perseveringly seeks it. The knowledge of truth begets *a spiritual joy (gaudium veritatis)*, alone of its kind."⁶⁹

67. Anselm of Canterbury, *De veritate*, 11 (Schmitt I.191.19–20). Text cited according to the edition by Franciscus Salesius Schmitt, in *S. Anselmi Cantuariensis archiepiscopi Opera Omnia*, vol. 1 (Seckau: Ex officina abbatiae seccoviensis, 1938, reprint, Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1946; Stuttgart; Bad Cannstatt: F. Fromann Verlag, 1968.), 169–99.

68. Anselm of Canterbury, *Proslogion*, 3 (Schmitt I.103.4–5).

69. John Paul II, "Address at the Meeting with the Rectors of the Polish Universities" (official English translation, Collegiate Church of Saint Ann, Warsaw, June 8, 1997), §4, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/travels/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_08061997_universities_en.html.

To conclude, Anselm of Canterbury's example is to be heeded, if we are to learn something about God and speak of Him sensibly. For him, the doctrines of Christianity were an opportunity and an invitation to think, to learn and to receive the intelligence which faith itself gives. In all this, he realized that this process is one requiring perseverance in the *quaerere Deum* and a maturity of spirit which comes upon us with time and experience:

Nam et illi [patres ecclesiae], quia "breves dies hominis sunt," non omnia quae possent, si diutius vixissent, dicere potuerunt; et veritatis ratio tam ampla tamque profunda est, ut a mortalibus nequeat exhauriri. . . . Denique quoniam inter fidem et speciem intellectum quem in hac vita capimus esse medium intelligo: quanto aliquis ad illum proficit, tanto eum propinquare specie, ad quam omnes anhelamus, existimo.⁷⁰

However, should we not wish to follow Anselm's example, then let us at least heed George Braque's warning: "Les preuves fatiguent la vérité."

Romano Guardini, whose understanding of Anselm is commendable, would seem to offer an antidote to all Martians, when he says,

The essence of true understanding is not a fruit of argument, but of obedience and faith. . . . Only one attitude towards him [Christ] is justifiable: readiness to hear and to obey. Not because of any lack of independence or of perspicacity, but because criticism of Christ according to human standards is utterly senseless. . . . Faith is as essential to our understanding of him [Christ] as the eye is to colour and the ear to sound.⁷¹

In a paper on "Saint Anselm of Canterbury and Romano Guardini," Emery de Gaál offers the following insight, which may serve as a summing up of everything that I have sought to convey in this paper:

Anselm presents not a "colorless tinkering with terms," but a grateful discovery of the personal, dynamic, "self-revealing God" combining "event, content and effect." Unless this is consciously beheld and credibly lived, theology is merely one science among others—rational, perhaps rationalistic, but certainly skeptical and under the spell of the *Zeitgeist*. By heeding Anselm's

70. Anselm of Canterbury, *Cur Deus homo*, *Commendatio* (Schmitt II.40.2–12).

71. Romano Guardini, *The Lord*, trans. Elinor Castendyk (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1954), 533–34.

programmatic “credo ut intelligam,” theology comes into its own. All theology must arise from an inner believing certitude. This is the basis for “a real illumination, expanding and ordering reason through grace, a true elevation of insight beyond its natural confines.”⁷²

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72. Emery de Gaál, “St. Anselm of Canterbury and Romano Guardini,” *Saint Anselm Journal* 2, no. 1 (2004).

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