

## Three Thinking Churchmen, Part I: Saint Anselm

### Slide 1:

St. Anselm was born in the midst of an escalating struggle between the Catholic Church and the rulers of newly emerging national states.

In 1093, despite his defense of the Church's rights and property against the encroachments of the English king, St. Anselm was coerced into becoming the Archbishop of Canterbury, the highest ranking church authority in medieval England. In large part, the position the Church and the King forced on him was the culmination of two life-long efforts:

First, he steadfastly defended the Church's rights over the monarchy, refusing for instance, to accept the pallium from William II, an act which Anselm believed would have made the Church subservient to the King. Rather than allow a secular power, the King, to invest him with the office, St. Anselm took the pallium up from the altar himself and draped it around his own shoulders.

For this, Anselm went into voluntary exile, not to return until after William II's death. On his return to England a short honeymoon with Henry the 1st ensued, but again Anselm was exiled for refusing to accept Henry's right to investiture, his right to grant Church authorities their spiritual office in England.

### Slide 2:

However, more importantly, the second reason Anselm became Archbishop of Canterbury, was his intellectual prowess in the service of the Church. Anselm was known for his rejection of anti-intellectualism and his arguments for "rational" Christianity, a Christianity which supported its faith with reasoned and logical argument. He argued that the rational analysis of doctrine and belief would not lead to skepticism and doubt, but rather lead to a stronger understanding of faith and Christian responsibility.

The best known example of Anselm's faith-based reasoning, the first of many "ontological arguments for the existence of God," argues from a basic principle accepted as inherently true to a conclusion which must follow given that true principle. Here is Anselm's "ontological argument."

### Slide 3:

#### Syllogism

Embracing deductive proofs which assume that the human mind can understand through reasoning and logic, early scholastic thinkers took Anselm's famous dictum as their motto: "credo ut intelligam," or "I believe so that I may understand." All in all, reason and logical argument, often seen by his medieval contemporaries as yielding religious doubt, becomes, under the influence of St. Anselm, the foundation of stronger belief.

This may seem a common-sensical current of thought to us today, but this was a sea change in human intellectual effort, leading toward a new faith in individual intellect rather than a blind trust in traditional authorities. This new dependence on one's own mental effort to understand the world will

be the catalyst for the breakdown of aristocratic social and political control and stimulate the emergence of new republics and more democratic social structures. In addition, this reasonable approach to experience and reality will result in new forms of scientific investigation which will transform the world with technological innovation.

Most famously, in the *Proslogion* (Addition), Anselm proposed the famous Ontological Argument, according to which god is understood as "*aliquid quod maius non cogitari potest*" ("that than which nothing greater can be conceived"). The being so conceived must necessarily exist in reality as well as in thought, he argued, since otherwise it would in fact be possible to conceive something greater—namely, something exactly similar except that it really does exist. Thus, at least for Anselmian believers guided by a prior faith, god must truly exist as the simple, unified source of all perfections, a reality that excludes corruption, imperfection, and deception of every sort.