Thomas Williams, ***Anselm: A Very Short Introduction*** (Very Short Introductions, No. 721; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), xviii + 118 pp., pbk, ISBN 9780192897817.

While Anselm's main contribution to distinctively English Catholic history consists in his having been Archbishop of Canterbury from 1093 till 1109, after his abbacy at Bec, he is revered, in England as elsewhere, as well as one of the outstanding thinkers of his generation. Professor Williams of Georgetown University [near Washington DC] has ably added another title to the incisive, instructive and inexpensive 'Very Short Introductions' series.

An introductory chapter describes Anselm's life. He was Italian, like his mentor Lanfranc, under whom he became an expert dialectician, though his first major work, the *Monologion,* did not quote Scripture or patristics. Later chapters cover, first, an examination of Anselm's relationship to God, and then a study of contributions, not only to philosophy, but also to, particularly systematic, theology.

God's greatness is particularly important in Anselm's *Proslogion* (which importantly is a prayer, not a tractate). *Inter alia,* he writes about how God can be both just and merciful. One important concept is God's aseity, whereby God is 'from himself', independent of anything else, 'a being of unsurpassable greatness' (25, see also 53-54). Thus God actually is, in himself, omnipotence, omniscience, impassibility, justice, mercy and so on. Williams competently discusses Anselm's academic disputes with the monk Gaunilo (41-47).

Anselm's interpretation of the Prologue to St John's Gospel (John 1: 1-18) develops John's own in terms of specific differentiation between speech and word. Anselm sees God's creative work as speech. As to the Word, 'where Augustine would say that the Word *contains* the blueprint for all creatures, Anselm says that the Word *is* the blueprint for all creatures' (60, emphasis original). Like John's, Anselm's understanding of truth is, most of all, deep and wide. Most creatures can 'do the truth' by natural actions (fire heats, horses graze and so on) but rational beings may or may not conform their wills to the truth. Their actions will thus be

worthy of praise or blame, in the contexts, not only of free choice, but also of justice. In this connection, Anselm sees original sin as inherited injustice (71), as part of his writing on sin and its results. He also uses the fall of some of) the angels to illustrate the fundamental option for or against God (70-80).

Williams' last two chapters include further coverage of Anselm's teaching on atonement, redemption, what people owe to God and the infinite generosity of God's mercy, particularly in his tractate *Cur Deus Homo* (Why a God-man?). Felicitously, Williams notes that, in Anselm, 'the blight of sin and its consequences, if it appears at all, gives way in due time to the good news of insight and grace' (95). This book packs a great deal of information into a brief, if densely printed, study.

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