

Anselm *Proslogion*

Prologue

After I had published, at the urging of some of my brethren, a short work as a pattern for meditation on the rational basis of faith, adopting the role of someone who, by reasoning silently to himself, investigates things he does not know, I began to wonder, when I considered that it is constructed out of a chaining-together of many arguments, whether it might be possible to find a single argument that needed nothing but itself alone for proof, that would by itself be enough to show that God really exists; that he is the supreme good, who depends on nothing else, but on whom all things depend for their being and for their well-being; and whatever we believe about the divine nature. And so I often turned my thoughts to this with great diligence. Sometimes I thought I could already grasp what I was looking for, and sometimes it escaped my mind completely. Finally, I gave up hope. I decided to stop looking for something that was impossible to find. But when I tried to stifle that thought altogether, lest by occupying my mind with useless speculation it should keep me from things I could actually accomplish, it began to hound me more and more, although I resisted and fought against it. Then one day, when my violent struggle against its hounding had worn me down, the thing I had despaired of finding presented itself in the very clash of my thoughts, so that I eagerly embraced the thought I had been taking such pains to drive away.

Therefore, thinking that what I had rejoiced to discover would please a reader if it were written down, I wrote about it and about a number of other things in the work that follows, adopting the role of someone trying to raise his mind to the contemplation of God and seeking to understand what he believes. Since I had judged that neither this work nor the one I mentioned earlier deserved to be called a book, or

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to bear the name of an author, and yet I did not think they ought to be sent out without so much as a title by which they might induce someone who came across them to read them, I gave each a title. The first I called "A pattern for meditation on the rational basis of faith"; the second I called "Faith seeking understanding." But since both works had been transcribed under these titles by several readers, I was encouraged by a number of people (especially by Hugo, the Most Reverend Archbishop of Lyons, Apostolic Legate to France, who commanded me by his apostolic authority) to put my own name on these works. And so, in order to do so more suitably, I named the first *Monologion*, which means a speech made to oneself, and the second *Proslogion*, which means a speech made to another.

Chapter 1

A rousing of the mind to the contemplation of God

Come now, insignificant mortal. Leave behind your concerns for a little while, and retreat for a short time from your restless thoughts. Cast off your burdens and cares; set aside your labor and toil. Just for a little while make room for God and rest a while in him. "Enter into the chamber" (Matthew 6:6) of your mind, shut out everything but God and whatever helps you to seek him, and seek him "behind closed doors" (Matthew 6:6). Speak now, my whole heart: say to God, "I seek your face; your face, Lord, do I seek" (Psalm 27:8).

Come now, O Lord my God. Teach my heart where and how to seek you, where and how to find you. Lord, if you are not here, where shall I seek you, since you are absent? But if you are everywhere, why do I not see you, since you are present? Truly "you dwell in inaccessible light" (1 Timothy 6:16). And where is this "inaccessible light"? How am I to approach an inaccessible light? Who will lead to it, so that I can see you in it? And by what signs am I to seek you? Under what aspect? I have never seen you,

O Lord my God; I do not know your face. What shall he do, O Lord Most High? What shall he do, this distant exile from you? What shall your servant do, deeply troubled by his love for you and "banished far from your face"? (Psalm 51:11) He longs to see you, but your face is too far away from him. He desires to enter your presence, but your dwelling is inaccessible. He wants to find you, but he does not know where you are. He aspires to seek you, but he does not know your face. Lord, you are my God, and you are my Lord, but I have never seen you. You have made me and remade me, you have given me every good thing that is mine, and still I do not know you. I was created so that I might see you, but I have not yet done what I was created to do.

How wretched human beings are! They have lost the very thing for which they were created. Hard and terrible was their fall! Alas! Think what they have lost and what they have found; think what they left behind and what they kept. They have lost the happiness for which they were created and found an unhappiness for which they were not created. They left behind the only source of happiness and kept what brings nothing but misery. Once "human beings ate the bread of angels" (Psalm 78:25), for which they now hunger; now they "eat the bread of sorrows" (Psalm 127:2), which once they did not know. Alas for the common lamentation of human beings, the universal outcry of the children of Adam! He was satisfied to the full; we sigh with hunger. He had everything he needed; we go begging. He happily possessed those things and abandoned them in misery; we unhappily do without them and miserably desire them, but alas, we remain empty-handed. Why did he not preserve for us, as he could easily have done, what we so woefully lack? Why did he thus shut us out from the light and cover us with darkness? Why did he take away our life and inflict death upon us? What wretches we are! Think whence we have been cast out, whither we have been driven; thrown down from so great a height, and buried so deep. From our homeland into exile; from the vision of God into our blindness; from the joy of immortality into the bitterness and terror of death. What a wretched change! From such great good into such great evil! O woeful loss, woeful sorrow, all is woeful!

Alas, wretched man that I am, one of the wretched children of Eve, far from the presence of God. What

have I undertaken, and what have I accomplished? Where was I heading, and where have I come to? What was I reaching toward, and what do I long for? "I have sought the good" (Psalm 122:9), and "behold, confusion!" (Jeremiah 14:19). I was heading for God but stumbled over myself. I sought rest in my solitude but "found trials and sorrows" (Psalm 116:3) deep within. I wanted to laugh as my mind rejoiced, but I am forced to "cry out as my heart weeps" (Psalm 38:8). Joy was hoped for, but look where the sighs are closing in.

"How long, O Lord?" (Psalm 6:3) "How long, O Lord, will you forget us? How long will you turn your face from us?" (Psalm 13:1) When will you look favorably upon us and hear us? When will you "enlighten our eyes" (Psalm 13:3) and "show us your face"? (Psalm 80:3, 7, 19) When will you give yourself to us again? Look favorably upon us, O Lord; hear us, enlighten us, show yourself to us. Give yourself to us again, that it might go well for us; for without you it goes so badly for us. Take pity upon our toils and strivings after you, for without you we can do nothing. You call us; come to our aid. I beseech you, Lord: let me not sigh in despair, but let me breathe hopefully again. I beseech you, Lord: my heart is made bitter with its desolation; sweeten it with your consolation. I beseech you, Lord: in my hunger I began to seek you; let me not depart from you empty. I have come to you starving; let me not leave unsatisfied. I have come as a beggar to one who is rich, as a pitiful wretch to one who has pity; let me not go back penniless and despised. If indeed "I sigh before I eat" (Job 3:24), grant that I might eat after I sigh. Lord, I am bent double; I can only look down. Raise me up so that I can turn my gaze upwards. "My sins are heaped up over my head" and entangle me; "like a heavy burden" they weigh me down (Psalm 38:4). Extricate me; lift my burdens, "lest like a pit they swallow me up" (Psalm 69:15). Let me look up at your light, whether from afar or from the depths. Teach me how to seek you, and show yourself to me when I seek. For I cannot seek you unless you teach me how, and I cannot find you unless you show yourself to me. Let me seek you in desiring you; let me desire you in seeking you. Let me find you in loving you; let me love you in finding you.

I acknowledge, Lord, and I thank you, that you have created in me this image of you so that I may

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remember you, think of you, and love you. Yet this image is so eroded by my vices, so clouded by the smoke of my sins, that it cannot do what it was created to do unless you renew and refashion it. I am not trying to scale your heights, Lord; my understanding is in no way equal to that. But I do long to understand your truth in some way, your truth which my heart believes and loves. For I do not seek to understand in order to believe; I believe in order to understand. For I also believe that "Unless I believe, I shall not understand."¹

Chapter 2

That God truly exists

Therefore, Lord, you who grant understanding to faith, grant that, insofar as you know it is useful for me, I may understand that you exist as we believe you exist, and that you are what we believe you to be. Now we believe that you are something than which nothing greater can be thought. So can it be that no such being exists, since "The fool has said in his heart, "There is no God"?" (Psalm 14:1; 53:1) But when this same fool hears me say "something than which nothing greater can be thought," he surely understands what he hears; and what he understands exists in his understanding,² even if he does not understand that it exists [in reality]. For it is one thing for an object to exist in the understanding and quite another to understand that the object exists [in reality]. When a painter, for example, thinks out in advance what he is going to paint, he has it in his understanding, but he does not yet understand that it exists, since he has not yet painted it. But once he has painted it, he both has it in his understanding and understands that it exists because he has now painted it. So even the fool must admit that something than which nothing greater can be thought exists at

1. [Anselm is here quoting St. Augustine, who was fond of using this verse (which is an older translation of Isaiah 7:9) in explaining his views on the relationship between faith and reason.—T.W.]

2. The word here translated "understanding" is "*intellectus*." The text would perhaps read better if I translated it as "intellect," but this would obscure the fact that it is from the same root as the verb "*intelligere*," "to understand." Some of what Anselm says makes a bit more sense if this fact is constantly borne in mind.

least in his understanding, since he understands this when he hears it, and whatever is understood exists in the understanding. And surely that than which a greater cannot be thought cannot exist only in the understanding. For if it exists only in the understanding, it can be thought to exist in reality as well, which is greater. So if that than which a greater cannot be thought exists only in the understanding, then that than which a greater *cannot* be thought is that than which a greater *can* be thought. But that is clearly impossible. Therefore, there is no doubt that something than which a greater cannot be thought exists both in the understanding and in reality.

Chapter 3

That he cannot be thought not to exist

This [being] exists so truly that it cannot be thought not to exist. For it is possible to think that something exists that cannot be thought not to exist, and such a being is greater than one that can be thought not to exist. Therefore, if that than which a greater cannot be thought can be thought not to exist, then that than which a greater cannot be thought is *not* that than which a greater cannot be thought; and this is a contradiction. So that than which a greater cannot be thought exists so truly that it cannot be thought not to exist.

And this is you, O Lord our God. You exist so truly, O Lord my God, that you cannot be thought not to exist. And rightly so, for if some mind could think something better than you, a creature would rise above the Creator and sit in judgment upon him, which is completely absurd. Indeed, everything that exists, except for you alone, can be thought not to exist. So you alone among all things have existence most truly, and therefore most greatly. Whatever else exists has existence less truly, and therefore less greatly. So then why did "the fool say in his heart, "There is no God,"" when it is so evident to the rational mind that you of all beings exist most greatly? Why indeed, except because he is stupid and a fool?

Chapter 4

How the fool said in his heart what cannot be thought

But how has he said in his heart what he could not think? Or how could he not think what he said in his heart, since to say in one's heart is the same as

to think? But if he really—or rather, *since* he really—thought this, because he said it in his heart, and did not say it in his heart, because he could not think it, there must be more than one way in which something is ‘said in one’s heart’ or ‘thought.’ In one sense of the word, to think a thing is to think the word that signifies that thing. But in another sense, it is to understand what exactly the thing is. God can be thought not to exist in the first sense, but not at all in the second sense. No one who understands what God is can think that God does not exist, although he may say these words in his heart with no signification at all, or with some peculiar signification. For God is that than which a greater cannot be thought. Whoever understands this properly, understands that this being exists in such a way that he cannot, even in thought, fail to exist. So whoever understands that God exists in this way cannot think that he does not exist.

Thanks be to you, my good Lord, thanks be to you. For what I once believed through your grace, I now understand through your illumination, so that even if I did not want to *believe* that you exist, I could not fail to *understand* that you exist.

Chapter 5

That God is whatever it is better to be than not to be; and that he alone exists through himself, and makes all other things from nothing

Then what are you, Lord God, than whom nothing greater can be thought? What are you, if not the greatest of all beings, who alone exists through himself and made all other things from nothing? For whatever is not this is less than the greatest that can be thought, but this cannot be thought of you. What good is missing from the highest good, through which every good thing exists? And so you are just, truthful, happy, and whatever it is better to be than not to be. For it is better to be just than unjust, and better to be happy than unhappy.

Chapter 6

How God can perceive even though he is not a body

Now it is better to be percipient, omnipotent, merciful, and impassible than not. But how can you perceive if you are not a body? How can you be

omnipotent if you cannot do everything? How can you be both merciful and impassible? If only corporeal things can perceive, because the senses exist in a body and are directed towards bodies, then how can you perceive? For you are not a body but the highest spirit, which is better than any body.

But if to perceive is just to know, or is aimed at knowledge—for whoever perceives knows according to the appropriate sense, as, for example, we know colors through sight and flavors through taste—then it is not inappropriate to say that whatever in some way knows also in some way perceives. Therefore, Lord, although you are not a body, you are indeed supremely percipient in the sense that you supremely know all things, not in the sense that an animal knows things through its bodily senses.

Chapter 7

In what sense God is omnipotent even though there are many things he cannot do

But how are you omnipotent if you cannot do everything?³ And how can you do everything if you cannot be corrupted, or lie, or cause what is true to be false (as, for example, to cause what has been done not to have been done), or many other such things?

Or is the ability to do these things not power but weakness? For someone who can do these things can do what is not beneficial to himself and what he ought not to do. And the more he can do these things, the more power misfortune and wickedness have over him, and the less he has over them. So whoever can do these things can do them, not in virtue of his power, but in virtue of his weakness. So when we say that he “can” do these things, it is not because he has the power to do them, but because his weakness gives something else power over him. Or else it is some other manner of speaking, such as we often use

3. [This chapter is full of word play in the Latin that does not all come across in English. The words for “power” (*potentia*), “weakness” (*impotentia*), and various forms of the verb “can” (*posse*)—also translated here as “have power”—all share a common stem. And the word for omnipotent (*omnipotens*) means literally “able to do everything” (*omnia potens*).]

in speaking loosely. For example, we sometimes say 'to be' instead of 'not to be,' or 'to do' instead of 'not to do' or 'to do nothing.' For often when someone denies that something exists, we say "It is as you say it is"; but it would seem more correct to say "It is not as you say it is not." Again, we say "This man is sitting just as that man is doing" or "This man is resting just as that man is doing"; but to sit is not to do anything, and to rest is to do nothing. In the same way, then, when someone is said to have the "power" to do or suffer something that is not beneficial to himself or that he ought not to do, by 'power' we really mean 'weakness.' For the more he has this "power," the more power misfortune and wickedness have over him, and the less he has over them. Therefore, Lord God, you are all the more truly omnipotent because you can do nothing through weakness, and nothing has power over you.

Chapter 8

How God is both merciful and impassible

But how are you both merciful and impassible? For if you are impassible, you do not feel compassion, and if you do not feel compassion, your heart is not sorrowful out of compassion for sorrow; and that is what being merciful is. But if you are not merciful, how is it that you are such a comfort to the sorrowful?

So how, Lord, are you both merciful and not merciful? Is it not because you are merciful in relation to us but not in relation to yourself? You are indeed merciful according to what we feel, but not according to what you feel. For when you look with favor upon us in our sorrow, we feel the effect [*effectum*] of mercy, but you do not feel the emotion [*affectum*] of mercy. So you are merciful, because you save the sorrowful and spare those who sin against you; but you are also not merciful, because you are not afflicted with any feeling of compassion for sorrow.

Chapter 9

How the one who is completely and supremely just spares the wicked and justly has mercy on them

But how do you spare the wicked if you are completely and supremely just? For how does the one who is completely and supremely just do something that is

not just? And what sort of justice is it to give everlasting life to someone who deserves eternal death? How then, O good God, good to the good and to the wicked, how do you save the wicked if this is not just and you do not do anything that is not just?

Or, since your goodness is incomprehensible, does this lie hidden in the "inaccessible light where you dwell"? (1 Timothy 6:16) It is indeed in the highest and most secret place of your goodness that the spring is hidden whence the river of your mercy flows. For although you are totally and supremely just, you are nonetheless kind even to the wicked, since you are totally and supremely good. You would be less good if you were not kind to any wicked person. For it is better to be good both to the good and to the wicked than to be good only to the good, and it is better to be good to the wicked both in punishing and in sparing them than to be good only in punishing them. So it follows that you are merciful precisely because you are totally and supremely good. And while it may be easy to see why you repay the good with good and the evil with evil, one must certainly wonder why you, who are totally just and lack for nothing, give good things to your evil and guilty creatures. O God, how exalted is your goodness! We can see the source of your mercy, and yet we cannot discern it clearly. We know whence the river flows, but we do not see the spring from which it issues. For it is out of the fullness of goodness that you are kind to sinners, while the reason why you are just lies hidden in the heights of goodness. True, out of goodness you repay the good with good and the evil with evil, but the very nature of justice seems to demand this. When you give good things to the wicked, however, one knows that he who is supremely good willed to do this, and yet one wonders why he who is supremely just could have willed such a thing.

O mercy, from what rich sweetness and sweet richness you flow forth for us! O immeasurable goodness of God, how intensely ought sinners to love you! You save the just whom justice commends and set free those whom justice condemns. The just are saved with the help of their merits, sinners despite their merits. The just are saved because you look upon the good things you have given them, sinners because you overlook the evil things you hate. O immeasurable goodness that thus "surpasses all understanding"! (Philippians 4:7) Let the mercy that proceeds from

your great riches come upon me. Let that which flows forth from you flow over me. Spare me through your mercy, lest you exact retribution through your justice. For even if it is difficult to understand how your mercy coexists with your justice, one must nonetheless believe that it is in no way opposed to justice, because it flows out of your goodness, and there is no goodness apart from justice—indeed, goodness is actually in harmony with justice. In fact, if you are merciful because you are supremely good, and supremely good only because you are supremely just, then you are indeed merciful precisely because you are supremely just. Help me, O just and merciful God, whose light I seek, help me to understand what I am saying. You are indeed merciful because you are just.

So, then, is your mercy born of⁴ your justice? Do you spare the wicked because of your justice? If it is so, Lord, if it is so, teach me how it is so. Is it because it is just for you to be so good that you cannot be understood to be better, and to act so powerfully that you cannot be thought to act more powerfully? For what could be more just than this? And this would certainly not be the case if you were good only in punishing and not in sparing, and if you made only those not yet good to be good and did not do this also for the wicked. And so it is in this sense just that you spare the wicked and make them good. And finally, what is not done justly should not be done, and what should not be done is done unjustly. So if it were not just for you to be merciful to the wicked, you should not be merciful; and if you should not be merciful, you would act unjustly in being merciful. But if it is wrong to say this, it is right to believe that you act justly in being merciful to the wicked.

Chapter 10

How God justly punishes and justly spares the wicked

But it is also just for you to punish the wicked. For what could be more just than for the good to receive good things and the wicked bad things? So how is it both just that you punish the wicked and just that you spare the wicked?

4. [Reading "*nascitur*" for "*noscitur*."]

Or do you justly punish the wicked in one way and justly spare them in another? For when you punish the wicked, this is just because it accords with their merits; but when you spare the wicked, this is just, not because it is in keeping with their merits, but because it is in keeping with your goodness. In sparing the wicked you are just in relation to yourself but not in relation to us, in the same way that you are merciful in relation to us but not in relation to yourself. Thus, in saving us whom you might justly destroy, you are merciful, not because you experience any emotion, but because we experience the effect of your mercy; and in the same way, you are just, not because you give us our due, but because you do what is fitting for you who are supremely good. And so in this way you justly punish and justly pardon without any inconsistency.

Chapter 11

How "all the ways of the Lord are mercy and truth," and yet "the Lord is just in all his ways"

But is it not also just in relation to yourself, O Lord, for you to punish the wicked? It is certainly just for you to be so just that you cannot be thought to be more just. And you would by no means be so just if you only repaid the good with good and did not repay the wicked with evil. For one who treats both the good and the wicked as they deserve is more just than one who does so only for the good. Therefore, O just and benevolent God, it is just in relation to you both when you punish and when you pardon. Thus indeed "all the ways of the Lord are mercy and truth" (Psalm 25:10), and yet "the Lord is just in all his ways" (Psalm 145:17). And there is no inconsistency here, for it is not just for those to be saved whom you will to punish, and it is not just for those to be condemned whom you will to spare. For only what you will is just, and only what you do not will is not just. Thus your mercy is born of your justice, since it is just for you to be so good that you are good even in sparing the wicked. And perhaps this is why the supremely Just One can will good things for the wicked. But even if one can somehow grasp why you can will to save the wicked, certainly no reasoning can comprehend why, from those who are alike in wickedness, you save some

rather than others through your supreme goodness and condemn some rather than others through your supreme justice.

Thus you are indeed percipient, omnipotent, merciful, and impassible, just as you are living, wise, good, happy, eternal, and whatever it is better to be than not to be.

Chapter 12

That God is the very life by which he lives, and so on for similar attributes

But clearly, you are whatever you are, not through anything else, but through yourself. Therefore, you are the very life by which you live, the wisdom by which you are wise, and the very goodness by which you are good to the good and to the wicked, and so on for similar attributes.

Chapter 13

How he alone is unbounded and eternal, although other spirits are unbounded and eternal

Everything that is at all enclosed in a place or a time is less than that which is subject to no law of place or time. Therefore, since nothing is greater than you, you are not confined to any place or time; you exist everywhere and always. Since this can be said of you alone, you alone are unbounded and eternal. So how can other spirits also be said to be unbounded and eternal?

And indeed you alone are eternal, because you alone of all beings do not cease to exist, just as you do not begin to exist. But how are you alone unbounded? Is it that a created spirit is bounded compared to you but unbounded compared to a material object? Surely something is completely bounded if, when it is wholly in one place, it cannot at the same time be somewhere else. This is true only of material objects. On the other hand, something is unbounded if it is wholly everywhere at once, and this is true of you alone. But something is both bounded and unbounded if, when it is wholly in one place, it can at the same time be wholly in another place, but not everywhere; and this is true of created spirits. For if the whole soul were not present in each part of its

body, it would not as a whole sense each part. Therefore, Lord, you are uniquely unbounded and eternal, and yet other spirits are also unbounded and eternal.

Chapter 14

How and why God is both seen and not seen by those who seek him

Have you found what you were seeking, O my soul? You were seeking God, and you have found that he is the highest of all beings, than which nothing better can be thought; that he is life itself, light, wisdom, goodness, eternal happiness and happy eternity; and that he exists always and everywhere. If you have not found your God, how is he the one whom you have found, whom you have understood with such certain truth and true certainty? But if you have found him, why do you not perceive what you have found? Why does my soul not perceive you, O Lord God, if it has found you?

Or has it not found him whom it found to be light and truth? For how did it understand this, if not by seeing that light and truth? Could it have understood anything at all about you except by "your light and your truth"? (Psalm 43:3) Therefore, if it has seen the light and the truth, it has seen you. If it has not seen you, it has not seen the light or the truth. Or perhaps it was indeed the light and the truth that it saw, but it has not yet seen you, because it saw you only in part and did not "see you as you really are" (1 John 3:2).

O Lord my God, you who have fashioned and refashioned me, tell my longing soul what you are besides what it has seen, that it might see purely what it longs to see. It strives to see more, but beyond what it has already seen it sees nothing but darkness. Or rather, it does not see darkness, for "in you there is no darkness" (1 John 1:5); it sees that it cannot see more because of its own darkness. Why is this, Lord, why is this? Is its eye darkened by its own infirmity, or is it dazzled by your splendor? Surely it is both darkened in itself and dazzled by you. Indeed it is both obscured by its own littleness and overwhelmed by your vastness. Truly it is both pinched by its own narrowness and vanquished by your fullness. How great is that light, for from it flashes every truth that enlightens the rational mind! How full is that truth,

for in it is everything that is true, and outside it is only nothingness and falsehood! How vast it is, for in one glance it sees everything that has been created, and it sees by whom and through whom and how it was all created from nothing! What purity, what simplicity, what certainty and splendor are there! Truly it is more than any creature can understand.

Chapter 15

That God is greater than can be thought

Therefore, Lord, you are not merely that than which greater cannot be thought; you are something greater than can be thought. For since it is possible to think that such a being exists, then if you are not that being, it is possible to think something greater than you. But that is impossible.

Chapter 16

That this is the "inaccessible light where he dwells"

Truly, Lord, this is the "inaccessible light in which you dwell" (1 Timothy 6:16). For surely there is no other being that can penetrate this light so that it might see you there. Indeed, the reason that I do not see it is that it is too much for me. And yet whatever I do see, I see through it, just as a weak eye sees what it sees by the light of the sun, although it cannot look at that light directly in the sun itself. My understanding cannot see that light. It is too dazzling; my understanding does not grasp it, and the eye of my soul cannot bear to look into it for long. It is dazzled by its splendor, vanquished by its fullness, overwhelmed by its vastness, perplexed by its extent. O supreme and inaccessible light, O complete and blessed truth, how far you are from me while I am so close to you! How far you are from my sight while I am so present to yours! You are wholly present everywhere, and yet I do not see you. "In you I move and in you I have my being" (Acts 17:28), and yet I cannot come into your presence. You are within me and all around me, and yet I do not perceive you.

Chapter 17

That in God there is harmony, fragrance, savor, softness, and beauty in his own ineffable way

Still, O Lord, you are hidden from my soul in your light and happiness, and so it still lives in its darkness and misery. It looks around, but it does not see your beauty. It listens, but it does not hear your harmony. It smells, but it does not perceive your fragrance. It tastes, but it does not know your savor. It touches, but it does not sense your softness. For you have these qualities in you, O Lord God, in your own ineffable way; and you have given them in their own perceptible way to the things you created. But the senses of my soul have been stiffened, dulled, and obstructed by the long-standing weakness of sin.

Chapter 18

That there are no parts in God or in his eternity, which he himself is

Once again, "behold, confusion!" (Jeremiah 14:19) Behold, once again mourning and sorrow stand in the way of one seeking joy and happiness. My soul hoped for satisfaction, and once again it is overwhelmed by need. I tried to eat my fill, but I hunger all the more. I strove to rise to the light of God, but I fell back down into my own darkness. Indeed, I did not merely fall into it; I find myself entangled in it. I fell before "my mother conceived me" (Psalm 51:5). I was indeed conceived in darkness; I was born enshrouded in darkness. Truly, we all fell long ago in him "in whom we all sinned" (Romans 5:12). In him, who easily possessed it and wickedly lost it for himself and for us, we all lost what we desire to seek but do not know; what we seek but do not find; what we find but is not what we sought. Help me "because of your goodness, O Lord" (Psalm 25:7). "I have sought your face; your face, Lord, will I seek. Turn not your face from me" (Psalm 27:8-9). Lift me up from myself to you. Cleanse, heal, sharpen, "enlighten the eye" (Psalm 13:3) of my soul so that I may look upon you. Let my soul gather its strength, and let it once more strive with all its understanding to reach you, O Lord.

What are you, Lord, what are you? What shall my

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heart understand you to be? Surely you are life, you are wisdom, you are truth, you are goodness, you are happiness, you are eternity, and you are every true good. These are many things; my narrow understanding cannot see so many things in one glance and delight in all of them at once. How then, Lord, are you all these things? Are they parts of you? Or rather, is not each of them all that you are? For whatever is composed of parts is not completely one. It is in some sense a plurality and not identical with itself, and it can be broken up either in fact or at least in the understanding. But such characteristics are foreign to you, than whom nothing better can be thought. Therefore there are no parts in you, Lord, and you are not a plurality. Instead, you are so much a unity, so much identical with yourself, that you are in no respect dissimilar to yourself. You are in fact unity itself; you cannot be divided by any understanding. Therefore, life and wisdom and the rest are not parts of you; they are all one. Each of them is all of what you are, and each is what the rest are. And since you have no parts, and neither does your eternity, which you yourself are, it follows that no part of you or of your eternity exists at a certain place or time. Instead, you exist as a whole in every place, and your eternity exists as a whole always.

Chapter 19

That God is not in a place or a time, but all things are in him

But if by your eternity you have been, and are, and will be, and if to have been is not the same as to be in the future, and to be is not the same as to have been or to be in the future, then how does your eternity exist as a whole always?

Is it that nothing of your eternity is in the past in such a way that it no longer exists, and nothing is in the future as if it did not exist already? So it is not the case that yesterday you were and tomorrow you will be; rather, yesterday, today, and tomorrow you *are*. In fact, it is not even the case that yesterday, today, and tomorrow you *are*; rather, you are simply outside time altogether. Yesterday, today, and tomorrow are merely in time. But you, although nothing exists without you, do not exist in a place or a time;

rather, all things exist in you. For nothing contains you, but you contain all things.

Chapter 20

That he is before and beyond even all eternal things

Therefore you fill and embrace all things; you are before and beyond all things. And indeed you are before all things, since "before they came into being, you already are" (cf. Psalm 90:2). But how are you beyond all things? In what way are you beyond those things that will have no end?

Is it because they can in no way exist without you, whereas you do not exist any less even if they return to nothingness? For in this way you are in a certain sense beyond them. And is it also because they can be thought to have an end, whereas you cannot at all? Thus they do in one sense have an end, but you do not in any sense. And certainly what does not in any sense have an end is beyond what does in some sense come to an end. And do you not also surpass even all eternal things in that both your and their eternity is wholly present to you, whereas they do not yet possess the part of their eternity that is yet to come, just as they no longer possess the part that is past? In this way you are indeed always beyond them, because you are always present somewhere they have not yet arrived—or because it is always present to you.

Chapter 21

Whether this is "the age of the age" or "the ages of the ages"

So is this "the age of the age" or "the ages of the ages"?⁵ For just as an age of time contains all temporal things, so your eternity contains even the very ages of time. This eternity is indeed "an age" because of its indivisible unity, but it is "ages" because of its boundless greatness. And although you are so great, Lord, that all things are full of you and are in you,

5. [That is, is it more correct to identify God's eternity as "saeculum saeculi" or as "saecula saeculorum"? Both expressions (usually translated into English as "world without end" or "for ever and ever") were found in Scripture and in the liturgy.]

nonetheless you have no spatial extension, so that there is no middle or half or any other part in you.

Chapter 22

That he alone is what he is and who he is

Therefore, you alone, Lord, are what you are; and you are who you are. For whatever is one thing as a whole and something else in its parts, and whatever has in it something changeable, is not entirely what it is. And whatever began to exist out of nonexistence and can be thought not to exist, and returns to nonexistence unless it subsists through some other being; and whatever has a past that no longer exists and a future that does not yet exist: that thing does not exist in a strict and absolute sense. But you are what you are, since whatever you are in any way or at any time, you are wholly and always that.

And you are the one who exists in a strict and absolute sense, because you have no past and no future but only a present, and you cannot be thought not to exist at any time. And you are life and light and wisdom and happiness and eternity and many such good things; and yet you are nothing other than the one supreme good, utterly self-sufficient, needing nothing, whom all things need for their being and their well-being.

Chapter 23

That this good is equally Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; and that this is the "one necessary thing," which is the complete, total, and only good

This good is you, O God the Father; it is your Word, that is to say, your Son. For there cannot be anything other than what you are, or anything greater or less than you, in the Word by which you utter yourself. For your Word is as true as you are truthful, and therefore he is the same truth that you are and no other. And you are so simple that nothing can be born of you that is other than what you are. And this good is the one love that is shared by you and your Son, that is, the Holy Spirit, who proceeds from you both. For this love is not unequal to you or to your Son, since you love yourself and him, and he loves

himself and you, as much as you and he *are*. Moreover, the one who is equal to both you and him is not other than you and he; nothing can proceed from the supreme simplicity that is other than that from which it proceeds. Thus, whatever each of you is individually, that is what the whole Trinity is at once, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; for each of you individually is nothing other than the supremely simple unity and the supremely united simplicity, which cannot be multiplied or different from itself.

"Moreover, one thing is necessary" (Luke 10:42). And this is that one necessary thing, in which is all good—or rather, which is itself the complete, one, total, and unique good.

Chapter 24

A conjecture as to what sort of good this is, and how great it is

Bestir yourself, O my soul! Lift up your whole understanding, and consider as best you can what sort of good this is, and how great it is. For if particular goods are delightful, consider intently how delightful is that good which contains the joyfulness of all goods—and not such joyfulness as we have experienced in created things, but as different [from that] as the Creator differs from the creature. If created life is good, how good is the life that creates? If the salvation that has been brought about is joyful, how joyful is the salvation that brings about all salvation? If wisdom in the knowledge of created things is desirable, how desirable is the wisdom that created all things from nothing? In short, if there are many and great delights in delightful things, what kind and how great a delight is there in him who made those delightful things?

Chapter 25

What great goods there are for those who enjoy this good

O those who enjoy this good: what will be theirs, and what will not be theirs! Truly they will have everything they want and nothing they do not want. There will be such goods of both body and soul that "neither eye has seen nor ear heard nor the human heart" (1 Corinthians 2:9) conceived. So why are you wander-

ing through many things, you insignificant mortal, seeking the goods of your soul and of your body? Love the one good, in which are all good things, and that is enough. Desire the simple good, which is the complete good, and that is enough. What do you love, O my flesh? What do you long for, O my soul? It is there; whatever you love, whatever you long for, it is there.

If it is beauty that delights you, "the righteous will shine like the sun" (Matthew 13:43). If it is swiftness or strength, or the freedom of a body that nothing can withstand, "they will be like the angels of God" (Matthew 22:30); for "it is sown an animal body, but it will rise a spiritual body" (1 Corinthians 15:44), with a power that is not from nature. If it is a long and healthy life, there is a healthy eternity and eternal health, for "the righteous will live for ever" (Wisdom 5:15) and "the salvation of the righteous is from the Lord" (Psalm 37:39). If it is satisfaction, "they will be satisfied when the glory of God has appeared" (Psalm 17:13). If it is drunkenness, "they will be drunk with the abundance of the house" (Psalm 36:8) of God. If it is music, there the choirs of angels sing unceasingly to God. If it is some pleasure, not impure but pure, God "will give them to drink from the torrent of his pleasure" (Psalm 36:8). If it is wisdom, the very wisdom of God will show itself to them. If it is friendship, they will love God more than themselves and one another as themselves, and God will love them more than they do themselves; for they will love God and themselves and one another through God, and God will love himself and them through himself. If it is concord, everyone will have but one will, for there will be no will among them but the will of God. If it is power, they will be omnipotent through their wills, just as God is through his. For just as God can do what he wills through himself, so they will be able to do what they will through God; for just as they will will only what God wills, so he will will whatever they will—and what he wills cannot fail to be. If it is wealth and honor, God will "set his good and faithful servants over many things" (cf. Matthew 25:21, 23); indeed, they will be called, and will truly be, "sons of God" (Matthew 5:9) and "gods" (Psalm 82:6, John 10:34). Where his Son is, there they too will be, "heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ" (Romans 8:17). If it is true security, they will be certain that they will never in any way lose this

security—or rather, this good; just as certain as they are that they will never give it up voluntarily, and that the loving God will never take it away against their will from those who love him, and that nothing more powerful than God will separate them from God against their will.

What great joy is there where so great a good is present! O human heart, O needy heart, heart that has known troubles, that is indeed overwhelmed by troubles: how greatly would you rejoice if you abounded in all these things! Ask your inmost self whether it can even comprehend its joy at such great happiness. And yet surely if someone else whom you loved in every respect as yourself had that same happiness, your joy would be doubled, for you would rejoice no less for him than for yourself. And if two or three or many more had that same happiness, you would rejoice as much for each of them as you would for yourself, if you loved each one as yourself. Therefore, in that perfect charity of countless happy angels and human beings, where no one will love anyone else less than he loves himself, each one will rejoice for each of the others just as he does for himself. If, then, the human heart will scarcely comprehend its own joy from so great a good, how will it be able to contain so many and such great joys? And indeed, since the more one loves someone, the more one rejoices in his good, it follows that, just as everyone in that perfect happiness will love God incomparably more than himself and all others with him, so everyone will rejoice inconceivably more in God's happiness than in his own, or in that of everyone else with him. But if they love God so much with "their whole heart, mind, and soul" (Matthew 22:37) that their whole heart, mind, and soul are too small for the greatness of their love, they will truly rejoice so much with their whole heart, mind, and soul that their whole heart, mind, and soul will be too small for the fullness of their joy.

Chapter 26

Whether this is the "fullness of joy" that the Lord promises

My God and my Lord, my hope and the joy of my heart, tell my soul whether this is that joy of which you tell us through your Son, "Ask and you shall

receive, that your joy may be full" (John 16:24). For I have found a joy that is full and more than full. Indeed, when the heart, the mind, the soul, and the whole human being are filled with that joy, there will still remain joy beyond measure. The whole of that joy will therefore not enter into those who rejoice; instead, those who rejoice will enter wholly into that joy. Speak, Lord, tell your servant inwardly in his heart whether this is the joy into which your servants will enter who "enter into the joy of the Lord" (Matthew 25:21). But surely the joy with which your chosen ones will rejoice is something "no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor has it entered into the heart of man" (1 Corinthians 2:9). Therefore, Lord, I have not yet expressed or conceived how greatly your blessed ones will rejoice. They will indeed rejoice as much as they love, and they will love as much as they know. How much will they know you then, Lord, and how much will they love you? Truly in this life "eye has not seen, nor has ear heard, nor has it entered into the heart of man" how much they will love and know you in that life.

O God, I pray that I will know and love you that I might rejoice in you. And if I cannot do so fully in this life, I pray that I might grow day by day until my joy comes to fullness. Let the knowledge of you grow in me here, and there let it be full. Let your love grow in me here, and there let it be full, so that my joy here is great in hope, and my joy there is full in reality. O Lord, by your Son you command us—or rather, you counsel us—to ask, and you promise that we will receive, "that our joy may be full." Lord, I ask what you counsel us through our "Wonderful Counselor" (Isaiah 9:6). Let me receive what you promise through your truth, "that my joy may be full." O truthful God, I ask that I may receive, "that my joy may be full." Until then, let my mind ponder on it, my tongue speak of it. Let my heart love it and my mouth proclaim it. Let my soul hunger for it, my flesh thirst for it, my whole being long for it, until I "enter into the joy of my Lord," who is God, Three in One, "blessed for ever. Amen" (Romans 1:25).