

St. Anselm – A Brief History

- The Church of St. Anselm was founded in April 1922.
- The First Pastor: Reverend James J. Smyth
- First Church Building opened: July 1923
- School Dedicated: October 30, 1927 by Bishop Thomas E. Molloy
- Present Church dedicated: October 31, 1954 by Bishop Thomas E. Molloy
- Feast Day of St. Anselm is April 21

Saint Anselm, Archbishop of Canterbury-Doctor of the Church 1033 – 1109 A.D. Theologian & Philosopher

He was born at Aosta, a Burgundian town on the confines of Lombardy and in 1060 he entered the Benedictine Monastery of Bec in Normandy to study under Stephen Lanfranc, whom he succeeded in office, first as Prior of Bec, and then as Archbishop of Canterbury. During these years he acquired a reputation for learning piety. To the duties of prior he added those of teacher. At first his promotion to the office vacated by Lanfranc gave offense to some of the other monks who considered they had a better claim than the young stranger did. But Anselm overcame their opposition to gentleness, and ere long had won their affection and obedience. It was likewise during this period that he composed some of his philosophical and theological works.

Anselm is the most important Christian theologian in the West between Augustine and Thomas Aquinas. His two great accomplishments are his *Proslogium* (in which he undertakes to show that reason requires that men should believe in God) and his *Cur Deus Homo?* (in which he undertakes to show that Divine Love responding to human rebelliousness requires that God should become a man).

In 1087, while still at Bec, his chief achievement in philosophy was the ontological argument for the existence of God put forth in his *Proslogium*. Starting from the notion that God is “that than which nothing greater can be thought”, he argues that what exists in reality is greater than that which is only in the mind; wherefore, since “God is that than which nothing greater can be thought”, He exists in reality. A monk named Gaunilo of Marmoutier disputed this argument and later followed by philosophers (Thomas Aquinas, Immanuel Kant, Rene Descartes, Baruch Spinoza, Gottfried Leibniz and some contemporary philosophers have offered similar arguments.)

His Monologion and Proslogion both deal extensively with his ontological proofs for God's existence, and the hierarchical order of the universe. King William II of England had no fondness for the Church and at the death of Lanfranc he kept the See of Canterbury vacant until he was gravely ill, whereon he promised to let Anselm be made Archbishop. Anselm was made Archbishop (4 December 1093), the King recovered and the two began to dispute the extent of the King's right to intervene in Church matters. Anselm went into exile in 1097 and remained in Italy for three years until the King died in 1100. After the King's death Anselm returned to England at the invitation of the new King Henry I, only to quarrel with Henry about the lawful extent of the King's control over the selection of Bishops and Abbots. Anselm was again in exile from 1103 until 1106. In 1107 a compromise was reached, and Anselm returned home to Canterbury, where he lived his last few years in peace. He died Wednesday of Holy Week, 21 April 1109, among his Monks at Canterbury. His body, it is said still lies in the Cathedral Church there, in the Chapel now known as St. Anselm's, on the southwest side of the high altar. He was canonized in 1163 and declared a Doctor of the Church by Clement XI in 1720 for his merits in the field of theology.

His active work as a Pastor and Stalwart Champion of the Church makes Anselm one of the chief figures in Religious History.

A Prayer of Anselm

My God

I pray that I may so know you and love you that I may rejoice in you.

And if I may not do so fully in this life let me go steadily on to the day when I come to that fullness....

Let me receive that which you promised through your truth, that my joy may be full.