

It was a matter of logic and the nature of Being: "If, therefore, that than which nothing greater can be conceived is only in the mind, that than which a greater cannot be conceived is that than which a greater can be conceived [i.e., something that actually exists], and this certainly cannot be." Or to rephrase, "What cannot be thought not to exist" is greater than "what can be thought not to exist," so, "That than which nothing greater can be thought" is "that which cannot be thought not to exist."

Another monk, Gaunilo, replied to Anselm in "A Plea for the Fool," reasoning that although one can imagine in the mind the most beautiful island, this does not prove such an island to exist.

Anselm answered that the objection applied to islands and anything that has beginning, end, or composition of parts—such "can be thought of as not being"—but the objection does not apply to God. One must distinguish perfection in its own kind from Absolute Perfection. The argument applies to Being itself, not to particular objects: Perfect Being exists necessarily.

Ever since Gaunilo, the ontological argument has been controversial in philosophy. Does the argument's formal logical validity correspond to reality, or is the argument only a playing with words, a mental construct? Thinkers as diverse as Descartes, Spinoza, and Hegel have followed Anselm; others as varied as Aquinas and Kant have not accepted the argument.

Anselm also made a major contribution to explaining the atonement, the central doctrine of Christianity, but also its least authoritatively transcribed doctrine (never the subject of conciliar definition). *Cur Deus Homo* ("Why the God-Man") offered a logical proof for the satisfaction theory of the atonement. An epoch-making treatise, it is the most coherent statement of what has been the dominant Western explanation of the basis of Christian faith.

God's honor bulks large in Anselm's *Cur Deus Homo*. Sin is so serious because sin is against God, who demands unswerving allegiance. At the same time, God is also concerned for human welfare. Along with the feudal idea of owing God his due, there is God's purpose of human fellowship with himself.

God's purpose was temporarily thwarted by human sin. As the sinner, only a human being ought to make satisfaction for sin, but so great is the offense (since it was against the supreme God) that only God can make the satisfaction. Hence, the need for the God-Man, one both God and man.

Jesus Christ as a human being needed to do no more than remain righteous, but he did something more—he died. Death was the punishment for sin, so as a sinless person Christ had no need to die. Christ

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made his death an offering (sacrifice) to God, presented of free will and not of debt. He offered himself as a man; but what he did as a man was multiplied infinitely in its worth, for he was also Deity. He offered an infinite satisfaction for sin.

Using contractual language, Anselm then says Christ could will the reward for his deed over to human beings as a means of redeeming them.

Anselm drew his imagery from feudalism, but his theory was not simply a reflection of Germanic legal theory. As a student of Augustine, Anselm employed motifs older than feudalism. More of the conceptual basis of his theory was due to a shift that had occurred in sacramental doctrine.

In the ancient church the principal point in a person's religious life and the means by which forgiveness was obtained was baptism. Baptism gave the imagery of victory in the water over the forces of evil that contributed so powerfully to the classical theory of the atonement as a victory won over the Evil One.

That imagery derived from baptism as an individual's decision to renounce a former way of life was no longer meaningful, however, in an age when baptism was a routine act administered to infants. Access to the altar where communion with the death and resurrection of Christ was obtained came now by penance, which was the sacrament where persons were conscious of having their sins declared forgiven.

The eleventh and twelfth centuries saw the doctrinal formulation of the sacraments of eucharist (transubstantiation) and of penance (satisfactions and "redemptions"—see chapter 20). Hence, sacrifice and satisfaction became key categories and provided the imagery for Anselm's theory of the atonement.

With the view that the eucharist is consubstantial with Jesus Christ, it offered more of a participation with Christ than was associated with baptism, and this participation was not with the victorious Christ of early Christian baptism but with the sinless humanity that went to the cross. The center of interest now was Christ on the cross.

The earliest representations of the crucifixion (from the fifth century and after) pictured the victorious Christ reigning from the cross. Art from the late eleventh century began to recover an emphasis on the humanity of Christ, entailing a new interest in his sufferings and wounds that came to fuller expression in the thirteenth century.

The New Testament employs a number of images to convey the reality of atonement—justification, reconciliation, sacrifice, redemption, victory—but strictly speaking offers no "theory" of how the atonement is effected.

Three of the most prominent theories were present in the

1. The ransom theory of Jesus Christ's death, which was a theory in the "satisfaction" theory of Bernard of Clairvaux.
2. The moral influence theory, which was a theory of the atonement championed by Bernard of Clairvaux in the twelfth century.
3. The sacrifice theory, which was a theory of the atonement championed by Tertullian, who viewed the atonement as a sacrifice.

As a rational doctrine, the ransom theory seems to allow God to demand Christ's death over divine mercy. As a theory, it is operative in only a limited way.

The very person who declined not only the significance, but a personal devil almost good. Even as the devil does the devil.

On the positive side, that Jesus Christ died for the identification of the atonement with a "God-man."

The expression of redemption from the cross and at the middle Ages.

V. PETER ABELARD

Abelard came to his sense of superiority. William of Champeaux's argument into

Three of the major theories of the atonement popular in the West were present in the early twelfth century.

1. The ransom theory (variously formulated), according to which Jesus Christ paid the ransom to release mankind from the slavery to the devil that resulted from sin, was the most popular theory in the church fathers and so has been called the "Classic" theory of the atonement. It continued to be maintained by Bernard of Clairvaux, who lived intellectually in patristic theology (chapter 22).
2. The moral-exemplary theory of the atonement has had fewer champions throughout history, but it was advanced in the twelfth century by Abelard (below).
3. The sacrificial or satisfaction theory had an initial statement by Tertullian, but found its classic formulation in Anselm. It was the view that eventually won the largest following.

As a rational demonstration of the atonement, Anselm's exposition seems to allow God merely to acquiesce in turning the benefits of Jesus Christ's death over to the world, but Anselm affirms this is an act of the divine mercy. As with any rational theory of the atonement, God is operative in only a minimal way so that the whole transaction is almost impersonal.

The very personal aspects of the ransom theory of the atonement declined not only because baptism and its earlier imagery had lost its significance, but also because of philosophical Realism. It made a real personal devil almost impossible, for in Realism evil is the absence of the good. Even as the divine mercy has a more formal appearance, so too does the devil.

On the positive side, Realism made possible an abstract "humanity" that Jesus Christ could assume. This too, however, had its down side, for the identification of Christ with his brothers and sisters is not so evident with a "God-Man."

The expression of human involvement and human feelings in redemption formerly given to Jesus was now given to Mary. Mary at the cross and at the tomb became two favorite pictures of the later Middle Ages.

V. PETER ABELARD (1079-1142)

Abelard came from a knightly background that perhaps contributed to his sense of superiority. He studied under Roscellinus (a Nominalist), William of Champeaux (an exaggerated Realist who introduced dialectic argument into his instruction in metaphysics and theology).