

**COMPLETE PHILOSOPHICAL AND
THEOLOGICAL TREATISES
of
ANSELM of CANTERBURY**

Translated
by
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**The Arthur J. Banning Press
Minneapolis**

In the notes to the translations the numbering of the Psalms accords with the Douay version and, in parentheses, with the King James (Authorized) version. A reference such as "S II, 264:18" indicates "F. S. Schmitt's edition of the Latin texts, Vol. II, p. 264, line 18."

Library of Congress Control Number: 00-133229

ISBN 0-938060-37-6

Printed in the United States of America

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A Meditation on Human Redemption¹ *(Meditatio Redemptionis Humanae)*

0 Christian soul, soul raised up from grievous death, soul redeemed and freed by the blood of God from wretched bondage: arouse your mind, remember your resurrection, contemplate your redemption and liberation. Consider anew where and what the strength of your salvation is,² spend time in meditating upon this strength, delight in reflecting upon it. Shake off your disinclination, constrain yourself, strive with your mind toward this end. Taste the goodness of your Redeemer, be aflame with love for your Savior, chew His words as a honey-comb, suck out their flavor, which is sweeter than honey,³ swallow their health-giving sweetness. Chew by thinking, suck by understanding, swallow by loving and rejoicing. Rejoice in chewing, be glad in sucking, delight in swallowing.

Where, then, and what is the strength and might of your salvation? Assuredly, Christ has resurrected you. That Good Samaritan has healed you, that Good Friend has redeemed and freed you by [sacrificing] His own soul [life]. Yes, it was Christ. Therefore, the strength of Christ is the strength of your salvation. Where is the strength of Christ? Surely horns are in His hands; there His strength is hidden.⁴ Horns are indeed in His hands because His hands were nailed to the arms of the cross. But what strength can there be in such great weakness,⁵ what sublimity in such great humiliation, what worthy of reverence in such great contempt? But surely because it is [disguised] in weakness it is something hidden, because [veiled] in humiliation it is something concealed, because [covered with] contempt it is something unseen. 0 hidden might! A man appended to a cross suspends the eternal death impending over the human race; a man fastened to a cross unfastens a world affixed to endless death! 0 concealed power! A man condemned with thieves saves men condemned with demons; a man stretched out on a cross draws all things unto Himself!⁶ 0 unseen strength! One soul yielded up in the torment [of crucifixion]

¹Written in Lyon, France between the summer of 1099 and the summer of 1100. ²Psalms 139:8 (140:7). ³Psalms 18:11 (19:10). Psalms 118:103 (119:103). ⁴Habakkuk 3:4 (Vulgate). ⁵See II Corinthians 12:9. ⁶John 12:32.

draws countless souls [from the torments of] Hell; a man undergoes bodily death and abolishes spiritual death!

Why did you, O good Lord, gracious Redeemer, mighty Savior, why did You veil such great strength with such great lowliness? Was it in order to deceive the Devil, who by deceiving man thrust him forth from Paradise? Surely, Truth deceives no one; someone deceives himself if he does not know the truth, if he does not believe it. He deceives himself if, seeing the truth, he hates it or despises it; thus, Truth deceives no one. Well, then, [did You conceal Your power] in order that the Devil might deceive himself? Surely, just as Truth deceives no one, so it does not intend that anyone deceive himself, (even though we do say that Truth intends this when Truth permits it to occur). For You did not assume a human nature in order to conceal what was known about You but in order to reveal what was unknown about You. You said that You were truly divine and truly human, and You demonstrated this fact through Your works. The hiddenness was unavoidable, not deliberate. The reason that the event occurred as it did was not in order to be hidden, but in order to be performed in the right way. [It happened in that way] not in order to deceive anyone, but in order to be done as was fitting. If this event is called concealed, then it is called so only because it is not revealed to everyone. Although Truth does not manifest itself to everyone, it does not withhold itself from anyone. Therefore, O Lord, in becoming incarnate it was not Your purpose to deceive anyone or to cause anyone to deceive himself. You remained in the truth in every respect so that You might do what had to be done in the way it had to be done. Hence, let anyone who has deceived himself regarding Your truth complain not about You but about the falsehood in himself.

Did the Devil justly have against God or against man some claim which obliged God to act against him on man's behalf in this manner [i.e., by incarnation] before acting by open force, so that when the Devil unjustly killed a just man [Jesus] he would justly lose the power he was holding over unjust men? But surely God did not owe the Devil anything except punishment. Nor did man [owe the Devil anything] except requital, so that just as man by sinning permitted himself easily to be defeated by the Devil, so by keeping justice intact even on pain of death, he would defeat the Devil. But even this [conquering of the Devil] man owed only to

God; for he sinned against God, not against the Devil. Nor did he belong to the Devil; rather both man and the Devil belonged to God. But even in vexing man the Devil acted not out of zeal for justice but out of zeal for iniquity. God did not command [this vexation]; He [only] permitted it. God's justice, not the Devil's, required [man's punishment]. Therefore, the Devil had no claim which obliged God to conceal His power from him or to postpone its use against him in order to secure man's salvation.

Did some necessity compel the Most High thus to humble Himself as He did; was the Almighty compelled to toil in order to accomplish so great a thing? But all necessity and impossibility are subject to His will. Indeed, what He wills must occur; and what He does not will cannot occur. Therefore, He acted of His own will; and because His will is always good, He acted out of goodness alone. God did not need to secure man's salvation in the way He did; but human nature needed in that way to make satisfaction to God. God did not need to suffer such troubles; but man needed to be reconciled in this way. God did not need thus to humble Himself; but man needed in this way to be rescued from the depth of Hell. The Divine Nature did not need, and was not able, to be abased or to toil. It was necessary for human nature to do all these things in order to be restored to that end for which it was created. But neither human nature nor anyone other than God Himself was able to accomplish these things. Man is not restored to that end for which he was made unless he attains to the likeness of those angels in whom there is no sin. This attainment cannot possibly occur unless the remission of all sins is obtained. And remission occurs only by means of an antecedent complete satisfaction.

This satisfaction ought to be such that the sinner or someone on his behalf gives to God something of his own which is not owed—something which exceeds everything that is not God. For to sin is to dishonor God; and man ought not to dishonor God even if [as a consequence] it were necessary for everything that is other than God to be destroyed. Therefore, without doubt, unchanging truth and clear reason demand that the sinner give to God, in place of the honor stolen, something greater than that for which he ought not to have dishonored God. But human nature by itself did not have this payment. And without the required

satisfaction human nature could not be reconciled, lest Divine Justice leave a sin unreckoned-with in His kingdom. Therefore, Divine Goodness gave assistance. The Son of God assumed a human nature into His own person, so that in this person He was the God-man, who possessed what exceeded not only every being which is not God but also every debt which sinners ought to pay. And since He owed nothing for Himself, He paid this sum for others who did not have what they were indebted to pay.

For the life of that man [Jesus] is more precious than everything that is not God, and it surpasses every debt owed by sinners as satisfaction. For if putting Him to death [is a sin which] surpasses the multitude and magnitude of all conceivable sins which are not against the person of God, clearly His life is a good greater than the evil of all those sins which are not against the person of God. To honor the Father, that man [Jesus]—although not obliged to die, because not a sinner—freely gave something of His own when He permitted His life to be taken from Him for the sake of justice. [He permitted this] in order to show to all others by example that they ought not to forsake the justice of God even because of death, which inevitably they are obliged to undergo at some time or other; for He who was not obliged [to undergo] death and who, having kept justice, could have avoided death, freely and for the sake of justice endured death, which was inflicted upon Him. Thus, in *that* man human nature freely and out of no obligation gave to God something its own, so that it might redeem itself in others in whom it did not have what it, as a result of indebtedness, was required to pay.

In all these occurrences the divine nature [in the God-man] was not abased but the human nature was exalted. The divine nature was not weakened but the human nature was mercifully assisted. Moreover, in *that* man the human nature did not suffer anything out of necessity but suffered only voluntarily. That man did not succumb to any compelling force; but out of voluntary goodness, and for the honor of God and the benefit of other men, He bore mercifully and laudably what was inflicted upon Him out of malevolence. The requirement of obedience did not constrain Him, but His mighty wisdom disposed Him. For the Father by His command did not compel that man to die, but that man freely performed what He knew would please the Father and would be helpful to

[other] men. The Father could not compel Him with respect to that which He ought not to have required of Him. The very great honor which the Son with such a good will freely offered to the Father could not fail to please the Father. Therefore, when the Son freely willed to do what he knew would please the Father, in this way He displayed free obedience to the Father. Furthermore, since the Father gave the Son this good will—a will nonetheless free [i.e., even though bestowed by another]—the Son is rightly said to have received this will as the Father's command.¹ Therefore, in this way, the Son was obedient to the Father even unto death;² and He did as the Father gave Him commandment;³ and He drank of the chalice which the Father gave Him.⁴ For this is human nature's perfect and completely free obedience when [in Jesus] it freely submitted its own free will to the will of God and when it freely and without any constraint exercised the good will which it had received.

Thus, *that* man redeemed all other men when what He freely gave to God God reckoned for the debt they owed. Through this payment a man is redeemed from his faults not once only; rather, he is received as often as he returns again in worthy penitence. Nevertheless, this penitence is not promised to the sinner. But since [payment] was made on the cross, our Christ has redeemed us through the cross. Therefore, those who will to come to this grace with worthy affection are saved; but those who despise this grace are justly condemned because they do not pay the debt they owe.

Behold, O Christian soul, this is the strength of your salvation, this is the basis of your freedom, this is the cost of your redemption. You were in bondage, but in this way you have been redeemed. You were a servant, but in this way you have been set free. You are an exile who in this manner has been led back home, someone lost who has been found, someone dead who has been revived. O man, let your heart feed upon these thoughts, let it chew continually upon them, let it suck upon them and swallow them whenever your mouth receives the flesh and blood of your Redeemer. In this life make these thoughts your daily bread, your nourishment, your provision. For through these thoughts and only through them will you remain in Christ and Christ in you; and

¹John 10:18. John 15:10. ²Philippians 2:8. ³John 14:31. ⁴John 18:11.

only through them will your joy be full in the life to come.

But You, O Lord, You who underwent death so that I might live, how can I rejoice over my freedom, which results only from Your bonds? How can I be glad about my salvation when it comes only because of Your sorrows? How can I delight in my life, which is secured only by Your death? Shall I rejoice over what You have suffered and over the cruelty of those who have inflicted these sufferings upon You? For had they not done so, You would not have suffered; and had You not suffered, I would not have possessed these goods. On the other hand, if I grieve over Your sufferings, how can I delight in these goods for the sake of which Your sufferings occurred and which would not have existed had Your sufferings not occurred? But surely those wicked men were not able to do anything except because You freely permitted it; nor did You suffer except because You graciously willed to. And so, I ought to detest the cruelty of those wicked men, to imitate Your sufferings and death by grieving over them, to love Your gracious will by giving thanks, and in these ways to exult, free of distress, over the goods conferred upon me.

Therefore, O insignificant man, leave the cruelty of these men to the judgment of God, and meditate upon what you owe your Savior. Consider what your condition was and what has been done for you; reflect upon how worthy of love is He who has done this for you. Behold your need and His goodness; see what thanks you may give and how much you owe to His love. You were in darkness, on slippery footing, on the downward road to the chaos of Hell, from which there is no return. An enormous lead-like weight hanging from your neck was causing you to stoop. A burden too heavy for your back was pressing upon you. Invisible foes¹ were urging you onward with all their fury. Such was your helplessness and you did not know it, because you were conceived and born in that condition. O how desperate was that condition! To what a destination these forces were impelling you! Let the memory of it terrify you; tremble at the very thought!

O good Lord Jesus Christ, in this state I was neither seeking nor deliberating; but like the sun You shined forth upon me² and showed me my plight. You cast off the leaden weight which was

¹See Ephesians 6:12. ²See Psalms 79:4 & 8 (80: 3 & 7).

drawing me down; You removed the burden which was pushing me down; You repelled the foes who were impelling me onward, warding them off for my sake. You called me by a new name which You derived from Your name. Stooped over as I was, You stood me upright to face You, saying: "Be confident, I have redeemed You and given my soul [life] for you.¹ If you will cling to me, you will escape the evils of your former condition and will not fall into the abyss toward which you were hastening; instead, I will lead you to my kingdom and will make you an heir of God and a joint-heir with me."² Thereafter, You brought me under Your protection so that nothing might harm my soul against its will. And, lo, although I did not yet cling to You as You had exhorted, You still did not permit me to fall into Hell. But You awaited the time when I would cling to You and You would do what You had promised.

Yes, O Lord, such was my condition, and these things You have done for me. I was in darkness because I knew nothing—not even my very self. I was on slippery footing because I was weak and prone to sin. I was on the downward road to the chaos of Hell because in our first parents I had descended from justice to injustice (and injustice leads down to Hell), from happiness to the misery of this life (from which one falls into eternal misery). The weight of original sin was dragging me down; the unbearable burden of God's judgment was pushing me down; demons hostile to me were urging me on, as strenuously as they could, so that they might make me deserving of even greater condemnation because of added sins.

Being thus destitute of all help, I was illumined by You and shown my condition. For while I was not yet able to know my condition You taught all these things to others on my behalf; and later You taught these same things to me even before I inquired. You cast aside the leaden weight, the heavy burden, and the impelling foes, for You removed the sin in which I had been conceived and born,³ You removed also the condemnation of this sin, and You forbade evil spirits to constrain my soul. You gave me the name Christian, which derives from Your own name; through Your name I confess, and You acknowledge, that I am among the redeemed. You stood me upright and lifted me to the knowledge and love of You. You made me confident of my soul's salvation, for which You

¹See Matthew 9:22. ²Romans 8:17. ³Psalms 50:7 (51:5).

gave Your soul [life]. You promised me Your glory if I would follow You. And, behold, while I was not yet following You, as You had exhorted, but was even continuing to commit manifold sins, which You had proscribed, You awaited the time when I would follow You and You would give what You had promised.

Consider, O my soul, peer into, O my inmost being, how much my entire substance owes to Him. Yes, O Lord, because You created me I owe my entire self to Your love; because You redeemed me I owe my entire self; because Your promises are so great I owe my entire self. Indeed, I owe to Your love much more than myself—as much more as You are greater than I, for whom You gave Yourself and to whom You promise Yourself. I pray You, O Lord, make me to taste by loving, what I taste by knowing. Let me sense by affection what I sense by understanding. I owe more than my entire self, but I have no more to give; of myself I am not even able to give my entire self. O Lord, draw my whole self into Your love. The whole of what I am is Yours through Your creating; make it Yours through its loving commitment.

Behold, O Lord, my heart is before You. It strains, but can do nothing of itself;¹ do, O Lord, what it cannot do. Receive me into the inner chamber of Your love. I ask, I seek, I knock.² You who cause me to ask, cause me also to receive. You grant that I seek; grant that I also may find. You teach me to knock; open to me when I knock. If You deny to him who asks, to whom do You then give? If he who seeks seeks in vain, who then finds? If You keep [the chamber door] closed for one who knocks, for whom do You open? If You withhold Your love from one who implores, what do You give to one who does not implore? You cause me to desire; cause me also to obtain. O my soul, cling to Him, cling tenaciously. Good Lord, O good Lord, do not scorn my soul, which faints out of hunger for Your love. Revive my soul; let Your tender kindness satisfy it, let Your affection make it fat, let Your love fill it. Let Your love seize my whole being; let it possess me completely, because together with the Father and the Holy Spirit You are the only God, blessed forever.³ Amen.

¹See John 15:5. ²Matthew 7:7. ³Romans 1:25. Romans 9:5.