

## Saint Anselm's Prayer to Saint Paul

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*I propose in this paper to discuss Saint Anselm's Prayer to Saint Paul which he sent around 1072 to the Princess Adelaide, the daughter of King William the Conqueror. I will first propose that the literary structure and the spirituality of the Prayer exhibit Saint Anselm's urgent struggle with sin and temptation and his desperate desire for reconciliation with God. Second, I will argue that Anselm sought an infusion of grace, a renewal of faith, and a revival of good works in his life for the express purpose of being quickened in the virtue of hope so that he might not live in despair but, rather, in the confident expectation of the mercy and forgiveness of God and of the beatific vision. To accomplish these purposes, the paper will discuss the Prayer under three rubrics: 1) literary, 2) spiritual, and 3) theological.*

Around 1072, Abbot Anselm of Bec sent a letter to Princess Adelaide, the daughter of King William the Conqueror, in response to her request that he provide her with a small booklet of selected psalms, which he refers to as "Flowers of the Psalms" (*flores psalmorum*), for her prayerful reading and devotions.<sup>1</sup> Included with the psalms Anselm added seven prayers of his own composition for the purpose of "increasing love's flame" in her heart and teaching her "with what humility and with what a sense of fear and love the sacrifice of prayer should be offered."<sup>2</sup> The selection of psalms has not survived, but the seven prayers have been identified. They are the First Meditation ("To stir up fear") and the prayers to St. Stephen and St. Mary Magdalene, which are specifically mentioned in the letter; the other four prayers, which are considered by Southern, citing Dom André Wilmart,<sup>3</sup> to be part of the collection, are the prayers to St. John the Baptist, St. Peter, St. Paul, and the first of two prayers to St. John the Evangelist.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> R.W. Southern, *Saint Anselm: Portrait in a Landscape* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 92.

<sup>2</sup> Walter Fröhlich, *The Letters of Saint Anselm of Canterbury* Vol. I (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1990), 93.

<sup>3</sup> See Southern, n. 91. In inviting Adelaide, whom he addressed as "the servant and friend of your soul," to use his prayers, he clearly intended to direct her to enter into a deeper and more worthy prayer life than she might be practicing, however pious she was. This enhanced prayer life, through the use of Anselm's prayers, was to be based on a true understanding of herself as fallen and sinful like all human beings and to convince her, as politely and courteously as he could in addressing a royal personage, of the need for her prayer to be a genuine expression of her awareness of her sinful condition, of her love for God and of that true nobility of virtue which would unite her to the "King of Kings in eternal felicity." He appealed to her and admonished her to "strive with a humble mind towards that which alone can blessedly be kept for ever as long as you do not have it."

<sup>4</sup> Ann Marie Caron, RSM, has written on the Prayer to St. Mary Magdalene in "Saint Anselm of Canterbury's *Prayer to Saint Mary Magdalene*, "Friend of God and Apostle," *American Benedictine Review* 57:2 (June 2006), 141-64. No other prayers in this collection have been similarly examined, although see my "The *imago Dei* in Saint Anselm's Prayer to Saint John the Baptist," delivered at the Fourth Saint Anselm Conference, Saint Anselm College, April 17, 2009 (unpublished). The most recent study of any of Anselm's prayers is Michael David Elam, "The Value of Imperfection in Anselm of Canterbury's Marian Prayers," *American Benedictine Review* 64:3 (September 2013), 252-66.

This analysis places the Prayer to Saint Paul among the earliest of Anselm's prayers. It is also the longest of Anselm's prayers, comprising 486 lines.<sup>5</sup> As is generally the case in all of his prayers, Anselm is pleading with the main addressee, in this instance Saint Paul, to come to his assistance because of the pitiful state of his spiritual life: he is overwhelmed by sin and the loss of divine favor; he is fearful of the dread judgment that awaits him, especially insofar as he is a monk and a priest specially dedicated to the service of the Lord. But it is important to note that this Prayer, as do others, goes beyond a simple expression of pious penitential emotion and sentimentality to treat, in the words of G.R. Evans, "the problem of sin in its implications for the soul, and [draw] out of it a theology of redemption and the sacraments."<sup>6</sup> Evans continues:

In the face of judgement, Anselm seeks a forgiveness which will not only take away the fear of judgement, but also abolish all the consequences of sin in his own being. . . . The soul is enabled to turn to Christ and to begin to want the good, but with gladness and thanksgiving goes an awkward longing which is unsatisfied this side of heaven and which leads the soul on endlessly in search of a Lord already possessed. Anselm expresses the paradox in this way: 'Give me what you have made me want.'<sup>7</sup>

I propose in this paper to discuss Saint Anselm's Prayer to Saint Paul. I will first propose that the literary structure and the spirituality of the Prayer exhibit Saint Anselm's urgent struggle with sin and temptation and his desperate desire for reconciliation with God. Second, I will argue that Anselm sought an infusion of grace, a renewal of faith, and a revival of good works in his life for the express purpose of being quickened in the virtue of hope so that he might not live in despair but, rather, in the confident expectation of the mercy and forgiveness of God and of the beatific vision. To accomplish these purposes, the paper will discuss the Prayer under three rubrics: 1) literary, 2) spiritual, and 3) theological.

## **Part One: Literary**

There are several rhetorical elements in the Prayer that make it most interesting from a literary point of view, for example, Anselm's use of chiasmus,<sup>8</sup> gradatio (an extended anadiplosis),<sup>9</sup> and paronomasis.<sup>10</sup> For my purposes, though, I would like to point out two specific

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<sup>5</sup> *The Prayers and Meditations of St Anselm with the Proslogion*, trans. Sister Benedicta Ward, S.L.G. (London: Penguin Books, 1973), 141-156. Most of Anselm's prayers are about 100-300 lines; the shortest, addressed to God and the first in the collection, is only 32 lines. All translations of Anselm's prayers in this paper are from Ward.

<sup>6</sup> G.R. Evans, "Making the Theory Fit the Practice: Augustine and Anselm on Prayer (2)," *Epworth Journal* 19.1 (1992), 57-68, here 59.

<sup>7</sup> Evans, 60-61.

<sup>8</sup> E.g.: "I live this unhappy life, I am dead to that life of blessedness. I live in that which is vile to me, and I am dead to that which is better" (ll. 233-36).

<sup>9</sup> E.g.: "If only I could [dissolve entirely in tears], perhaps I might hope; hoping, I might pray; praying, I might obtain" (ll. 83-85).

<sup>10</sup> E.g., in several places in the Prayer (e.g., ll 91-134), Anselm juxtaposes "I hope" (*spero*) and "I despair" (*despero*). He also juxtaposes his own situation as an unhappy (*miser*) sinner (e.g., l 41) with the mercy (*misericordia*) of God which he desperately seeks through the intercession of St. Paul and Christ (e.g., l 136).

literary features. The first is the setting of the Prayer. The literary setting of the Prayer is that of a trial in a courtroom, a setting of which the reader is reminded throughout the prayer.<sup>11</sup> At the beginning of the Prayer, after addressing St. Paul with words of respect and honor, Anselm reveals his dire situation: he stands rightly and justly accused before God (ll. 21 and 28), who although he is most merciful is also most just. Anselm has not one but many accusers in the presence of God. First he stands accused by his own many sins (ll. 23-25). He is further accused by a long life of sin (l. 26). He is also accused by all the spirits, both good and evil (ll. 30-33). Finally he himself also stands as judge and accuser against himself (ll. 49-51). All seems lost: “Alas, whence have so many and so great evils poured in, that so rush down upon a wretch” (ll. 61-62).

In this seemingly hopeless and desperate situation in which he finds himself, Anselm turns to St. Paul as a powerful confidante and defender: “Sir, you are known to the world by these and many other words and deeds to be of great power before God and of immense pity towards men: to you I come, certainly a very great sinner and greatly accused before God, the powerful and strict judge” (ll. 15-21). Anselm will then throw himself upon the mercy of Jesus as well as his apostle Paul, appealing to his faith, however weak it might be, as his only defense: (ll. 171-4). This unhappy sinner seeks the mercy of God and he who is unable to pray needs someone to pray for him: “O God, who will pray for such a dead man?” (l. 269). He needs someone who has power because of the grace of God: “Sir, you are not powerless to raise the dead” (l. 289).

The second literary feature for consideration is the constant shifting of addressees. By title and overall intent the Prayer is addressed to St. Paul. The opening of the Prayer reads: “St. Paul, great Paul: one of the great apostles of God” (ll. 11-2). Throughout the prayer Anselm addresses St. Paul by name nine times and on one occasion calls him “friend of God” (l. 280). While for the most part Anselm speaks to St. Paul, he also directly addresses two other persons, Jesus Christ and God the Father. Indeed, from line 135 on, Anselm addresses St. Paul, Jesus, and God the Father in rapid succession, sometimes two or three of them at one time (e.g., l. 171: “Jesus, God, and you his apostle”). It is not unusual for Anselm in his prayers to address the specific saint and also God the Father and Jesus Christ, but the frequency and seemingly rushed way he does this in this Prayer suggest a heightened level of anxiety. It is as if he were not sure to whom to turn in his desperate need for reconciliation.

Further, Anselm addresses himself in the Prayer in an introspective mode. Again, this is not unusual in the prayers, but here he reminds himself that he is trapped in a desperate situation. He accuses himself of sinning willfully and grievously and thus of being unable to hope for a conversion of heart or for forgiveness. He calls himself an “unhappy little man” (l. 91: *infelix homuncio*) and a miserable sinner (l. 105: *miser peccator*) who ought simply to lie down in his misery: “Since of your own accord you have made yourself wretched, in justice it is right that you should always be wretched” (ll. 108-109). Later, still agonizing over his situation, he describes

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<sup>11</sup> St. Paul, by the grace of God, is a powerful intercessor, as Anselm is well aware, but one might wonder, too, if St. Paul’s own experience of being put on trial (e.g., Acts 21.27-22.34 before the Sanhedrin and Acts 24-26 before Felix, Festus and then Agrippa) may have influenced Anselm in using the theme of a trial in his appeal to St. Paul.

himself as a soul thrown backward by sin and forward by prayer (ll. 349-352). Here Anselm is explicit about the imagery that the multiple addressees and appeals had shown: he has been unanchored because of his sins and he is seeking a stable ground upon which to make his peace with God.

In two instances, he speaks allegorically to his sins: my evil sins (*peccata mea mala*; ll. 63-76) and my unhappy sins (*misera dilecta*; ll. 110-134). These sins, his sins, are the source of all the ills that flow into him and their sweet allure has buried, blinded, and hardened him such that all ways out of them have been closed off to him. Because of them, Anselm has become an expert in sinning (l. 128: *haec omnia expertus sum*). All that remains is for him to be sold to the merchants of hell (l. 125).

It is toward the end of the Prayer that the most beautiful imagery of address is introduced. Beginning with l. 358 through l. 486, Anselm addresses St. Paul and Christ as his mothers.<sup>12</sup> Anselm has scriptural bases in using this imagery for both Paul and Jesus.<sup>13</sup> St. Paul, in a letter addressed to the Thessalonians, writes: “When we were among you we were as gentle as any nursing mother fondling her little ones” (I Th 2.7). In addressing the city of Jerusalem, Christ says in Mt 23.37: “How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings.”<sup>14</sup>

Anselm addresses St. Paul in this intimate and affectionate way (ll. 360-365): “Who is that affectionate mother who declares everywhere that she is in labour for her sons? Sweet nurse, sweet mother, who are the sons you are in labour with and nurse, but those whom by teaching the faith of Christ you bear and instruct?” Shortly thereafter he addresses Christ in a similar manner (ll 397-400): “And you, Jesus, are you not also a mother? Are you not the mother who, like a hen, gathers her chickens under her wings? Truly, Lord, you are a mother.” As he draws his Prayer to a close, Anselm speaks to himself (ll. 465-467): “And you, my soul, dead in yourself, run under the wings of Jesus your mother and lament your griefs under his feathers” and then he turns to address Christ (ll.477-478): “Mother, know again your dead son, both by the sign of your cross and the voice of his confession.”

This maternal imagery enables Anselm to experience a calmness and a serenity that betoken the true believer who trusts in influence of St. Paul’s intercession and in the power of the Lord’s forgiveness, who believes that his Prayer will indeed be heard, and who is no longer held so utterly in the thrall and grasp of his sins.

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<sup>12</sup> Anselm also addressed Paul as a nurse, first at the beginning of the Prayer in l. 9 (“Among Christians you were like a nurse [nutrix]”) and then twice at the end of the Prayer in l. 359 (“nurse of the faithful”) and in l. 362 (“Sweet nurse, sweet mother...”). It is further interesting that in his *Vita Sancti Anselmi*, Eadmer of Canterbury refers to Anselm as a mother: “*Sicque sanis pater et infirmis erat mater*” (And so he was a father to the healthy and a mother to the infirm). See *The Life of St Anselm by Eadmer*, ed. and trans. R.W. Southern (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), I.xiii (p. 23).

<sup>13</sup> In addition, there is Old Testament justification for the use of this imagery: e.g., Dt 32.11; Ps 131.1-2; Is 49.15 and 66.13.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Lk 13.34.

## Part Two: Spirituality

As a son of St. Benedict, Anselm is aware of the centrality of prayer, both liturgical and personal, in the life of a monk. His personal prayers, though very original in his time, reflect the ideal of personal prayer St. Benedict expressed, for example, in the chapter of his Rule on the Oratory of the Monastery (52). After explaining that the oratory is for prayer and only for prayer, he directs that when the hour for the celebration of the Work of God concludes, the monks are to leave the oratory quietly so that anyone who wishes to remain to pray a bit longer may do so undisturbed. Then he writes: “If at other times someone chooses to pray privately, he may simply go in [to the oratory] and pray, not in a loud voice, but with tears and heartfelt devotion” (52.4). Prayer with tears is a common theme in St. Benedict’s remarks on personal prayer,<sup>15</sup> as if in imitation of Christ, who, according to the Letter to the Hebrews (5.7) “offered prayers and supplications with loud cries and tears to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence.”

Most of Anselm’s prayers carry this sense of “tears and heartfelt devotion.” As explained by Eileen Sweeney, “The detailed exploration of the saint’s experience and his own relationship to it is the fruit of extended meditation on the condition of both, and the result is an intense, emotional, and intimate form of prayer truly different in kind from its predecessors.”<sup>16</sup> Whereas earlier prayer forms before Anselm, based as they were almost exclusively on the Psalms, might conclude with simple requests to “pray for us sinners,” Anselm has made this petition for forgiveness of sins the center piece of most of his prayers. The Prayer to St. Paul is clearly devoted to this theme.

As shown above, Anselm’s moments of self-examination and introspection are interspersed with his addresses to St. Paul, Christ, and God. He is well aware of his sinful condition, but he is not simply asking for forgiveness and then moving on to other petitions. He is actually overwhelmed and nearly overcome by his sins, their number, their frequency, and their gravity, especially in the light of his baptismal promises, his monastic profession, and his priestly ordination. The overall movement of the Prayer begins with Anselm’s appeal to St. Paul to intercede for him, “a very great sinner and greatly accused before God” (ll. 19-20). Then the Prayer expresses Anselm’s growing sense that his desire for true and full contrition is near impossible for him, that in his sin he is unable even to approach the divine throne to ask for reconciliation with God: “Alas, how evil it is to despair and to be silent like this; and alas, how vain it is to cry out without hope, to strive without hope” (ll. 132-4). Even so, he prays that St. Paul will intercede for him.

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<sup>15</sup> *RBI1980*, ed. Timothy Fry, O.S.B. (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1981). Benedict also writes in 4.56-57: “Devote yourself often to prayer. Every day with tears and sighs confess your past sins to God in prayer.” Further in 20.3 he writes: “We must know that God regards our purity of heart and tears of compunction, not our many words.”

<sup>16</sup> Eileen Sweeney, “Anselmian Meditation: Imagination, Aporia, and Argument,” *The Saint Anselm Journal* 9.1 (Fall 2013), 2. See also her extensive study in *Saint Anselm and the Desire for the Word*. Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2012.

But the Prayer expresses an even deeper sense of urgency than this: Anselm regards himself as a spiritually dead man. Several times Anselm speaks not only of his despair and his loss of hope, but also of the death of his soul: “I came to you as a sinner to be reconciled, and lo, when I am in your presence I find that I am a dead man” (ll. 241-3). He is aware both of his sinful condition and of his inability to do anything about it. He is not only sterile in his faith; worse still, he is fertile in evil (ll. 207-10) and thus, tightly constrained as by a burial shroud, he finds to his horror that he is dead to eternal life. He writes (ll. 257-68):

For however much up till now  
I may not have been buried in hell,  
I am even now wound in the grave-clothes of sin.  
Certainly neither could I pray, nor did I know how.  
This was true, because I understood  
that I was cursed by all things,  
and I did not grieve, as if unfeeling.  
I knew through my rational nature,  
but I did not understand;  
death had made me insensitive.  
Indeed I was dead, and as a dead man I have come to you [St Paul];  
it is only now that I have realized that I am dead.

Though painfully aware of his pitiful and powerless position (ll. 331-2: “Dead soul, what can you show about yourself that is not sinful and wretched?”), still the change from despair to nascent hope comes to him in the simple, but spiritually eloquent sentence which follows: “Yet I pray, repenting and grieving” (l. 333). The reason for his hope and his willingness to continue to pray is that God is God and is by his loving nature compassionate and forgiving. So while Anselm himself is caught up in a maelstrom of agony and desperation over his sins, to the point of spiritual mortality, the Lord remains steadfast in his loving kindness. Anselm knows that he must abandon himself and entrust himself to the loving embrace of the Lord and to the powerful intercession of his holy one, St. Paul: “Do, mother of my soul, what the mother of my flesh would do. . . . Ask then, that this dead soul which you brought to life, may be restored to life, nor cease until he is given back to you, living” (ll. 456-7; 462-4).

While Anselm urgently desires to be brought back to life, he does not appear to be asking for complete exoneration, a full pardon, or a plenary indulgence, as it were. He is in no position to make such a request given his view of himself as a very great sinner accused by many, including the Lord. Rather his Prayer in the end is to be able to hold on to such hope as not to despair of full reconciliation.<sup>17</sup> This can be achieved only if St. Paul and Christ, as his spiritual mothers, will offer him comfort and consolation. He does not desire to become a perfect human being in an instant, but, though yet imperfect, one who can turn to Christ with confidence and be gradually

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<sup>17</sup> The image here, I would suggest, is that of the publican in Luke 18.9-14, who stood at a distance in the back of the Temple: “He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’”

refashioned, even while a sinful creature, as an adopted son of the Father. The Prayer concludes with these words addressed to Christ (ll. 477-86):

Mother, know again your dead son,  
both by the sign of your cross and the voice of his confession.  
Warm your chicken, give life to your dead man,  
justify your sinner.  
Let your terrified one be consoled by you;  
despairing of himself, let him be comforted by you;  
and in your whole and unceasing grace  
let him be refashioned by you.  
For from you flows consolation for sinners;  
to you be blessing for ages and ages. Amen.

### **Part Three: Theology**

In light of the theme of this conference, which recalls the beginning of the Reformation in 1517, it is interesting to examine Anselm's use of faith, grace, and good works in this Prayer to St. Paul. The obvious caveat probably need not be stated, but here it is anyway: this is a prayer; it is not a philosophico-theological treatise. Technical terms are neither defined nor given scriptural and/or doctrinal contexts or explanations. The purpose here, then, is to explore the terms in the setting of the Prayer; my argument is that Anselm uses them in an effort to reestablish himself in hope.

The term faith occurs most often in the middle of the Prayer and in that context it refers to his Christian faith. Anselm speaks of his faith in two general contexts: the first in the Pauline expression that "the just man lives by faith" (Rm 1.17)<sup>18</sup> and the second in the assertion of St. James that "faith without works is dead" (Jm 2.17). In regard to the first, Anselm speaks of himself as being clothed in faith and wrapped in faith. By this faith he had access to St. Paul, that he might intercede for him, and to the Lord, that he might spare him. But Anselm recognizes that by professing faith in Christ he may have fooled others into thinking that he must be alive in faith, a genuine and fervent disciple of the Lord, but these others do not see his sins. He is a charlatan in professing faith in Christ because he realizes his life of faith, as it were, is nothing more than a shield to hide his profound and appalling sinfulness. The Lord, however, is not to be fooled, nor is St. Paul. Anselm thus sees his faith, since it is not sincere, not as something by which he is clothed and wrapped as a sign of his fidelity but rather as something in which he has attempted to conceal his sins. Since he is dead in his sins, he cannot be alive by faith (ll. 189-97):

I thought to get hope through faith,  
and lo, I see that I have no hold upon faith.  
I had thought myself to be clothed in faith,

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<sup>18</sup> Hab 2.4; cf. Rm 3:21–22, Gal 3:11, and Heb 10:38.

and I know myself to be without it.  
I was confident that I was concealed in it,  
and I know myself to be far from it.  
For “faith without works is dead”;  
in truth, dead faith is not faith.  
He then who had dead faith has not faith.

What confirms for Anselm that his faith is dead is that he cannot produce any genuine actions or behaviors that are based on his love for Christ and his commitment to the great commandment of love. Since “faith without works is dead,” as the Scriptures teach,<sup>19</sup> and since his dead faith could not bring life to any of his works, his works in fact give the lie to his claim to be a man of faith: “Alas, the fertility of evil works forbids me to have hope; and the sterility of good works proves me to be without faith” (ll. 198-99). It is possible here that Anselm is thinking here of Jesus’ admonition in the Sermon on the Mount:

By their fruits you will know them. Do people pick grapes from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles? Just so, every good tree bears good fruit, and a rotten tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a rotten tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire. So by their fruits you will know them.<sup>20</sup>

He greatly fears he will not be known as a man of faith because he has naught but evil works and bad fruit, which reveal a soul bereft of faith, a “rotten tree,” fit only for the fires of hell. He who by faith ought to be grafted onto Christ, as the wild olive shoot is grafted onto the rich olive root,<sup>21</sup> finds himself in great despair because he judges his works to be evil: “It is impossible without faith which counts for nothing without good works to please God” (ll 204-06).

Although he grasps with his mind “how great and how much worse it is to die that death [of the soul] than to die the death of the flesh” (ll. 215-6), he is unable to align his life and behavior with his understanding of the spiritual life. Hence the need for grace.

The critical Pauline text on grace in this Prayer is II Cor 12.9: “My grace is sufficient for you.” This is a powerful verse for Anselm, caught up as he is in the throes of despair because of his sins and because of his inability to master them. Anselm reasons that if the grace of God were sufficient for St. Paul, who was able then to accomplish all things: “I have the strength for everything through him who empowers me” (Phil 4.13), then surely Anselm, a dead man, can live in the hope that he may be restored to the life of grace (ll. 289-99):

Sir, you are not powerless to raise the dead,

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<sup>19</sup> James 2.26.

<sup>20</sup> Mt 7.16-20.

<sup>21</sup> Cf Romans 11.17.



for by the witness of God  
The “grace of God is sufficient for you.”  
For if when you lived on earth it was sufficient for you,  
now that you stay in heaven  
it will not be insufficient for you.  
Why, sir, should what is offered to you  
be any longer cast down,  
dead without life,  
when God attests your power  
and you could attest his goodness?

“I beg you,” Anselm writes later, “let me experience the granting of that which the world rejoices to have known through you. . . . From whom shall he receive back the life he has lost if not from him from whom he first received it? In whom is there hope if there is not hope in God?” (ll. 307-9; 317-19).

Anselm sought out St. Paul because Paul has been all things to all people (I Cor 9.19ff):  
St. Paul, who will be good to the poor and sorrowful  
if he who promised to be weak with the weak be hard?  
Who will deign to pray for sinners if he disdains it  
who proclaimed himself to be made all things to all men?  
Or who will be heard if he is not heard,  
to whom the grace of God is sufficient?  
If goodness and power are deficient in him,  
in whom is the grace of God sufficient? (ll. 320-27)

Though still considering himself a dead soul, Anselm appeals to the Lord and St. Paul: “O you two, what will move you if all this does not?” (l. 328). And so Anselm will continue to pray to them, and, shortly after asking this question, will begin to address them as “mother” and “nurse.” Grace again is the reason for Anselm’s new-found confidence. Addressing both the Lord and St. Paul, he writes (ll. 439-45):

I give thanks that you brought me forth as a son when you made me a Christian:  
you, Lord, by yourself, you, Paul, through him;  
you by the doctrine you made,  
you by the doctrine breathed into you.  
You by the grace you have granted to me,  
you by the grace you accepted from him.

As he concludes his Prayer, Anselm addresses these words to Christ (ll 483-4): “In your whole and unceasing grace, let [me] be refashioned by you.” It is only this grace that enables Anselm to rise from the dead in faith and to perform good works as signs of his faith.

Faith, works, and grace are ordered to Anselm's recovering a spirit of hope for his future.<sup>22</sup> He who said that he was so used to his sins that he had ceased to "dissolve entirely in tears" over them did not find himself in a place to ask for a full recovery and a full reconciliation. What he is desperate for is such hope that he might, with God's grace leading to faith and thus to good works, begin the work of conversion.<sup>23</sup> If he could only weep over his sins, he wrote near the beginning of the Prayer, he might have hope: "If only I could do that [weep], perhaps I might hope; hoping, I might pray; praying, I might obtain" (ll. 83-85). But realizing the truth of his situation, he despairs: "When truly, because of my wretchedness, feeling and grief are not in me, how can I hope? Without hope, how can I pray? And without prayer, what can I obtain?" (ll. 86-90).

Describing himself as an expert [*expertus*] in the matter of his woeful spiritual condition, he realizes "how vain it is to cry out without hope, to strive without hope" (ll. 133-4). Again, "the fertility of evil works forbids me to have hope" (l. 198), and so hope is frustrated in him over and over again. He knows that hope is born of faith, which comes from grace, and yet he finds that he has no hold on faith: "I fall into yet another heavy ill. I thought to get hope through faith, and lo, I see that I have no hold upon faith" (ll. 188-90). But dead faith yields only dead works and therefore hope is moot.<sup>24</sup>

Yet all is not lost. Anselm's Prayer to St. Paul, based on his reflections on the writings of St. Paul in his *lectio divina*, encourages him to have trust: "Friend of God, the example of others makes me bold, your words draw me to have confidence" (ll. 280-1). And so he discovers that, having listened to the Word, some measure of hope is restored in him. He says to Jesus Christ: "You have spoken, and hearing you the dead man hopes. You have promised, and the dead man desires to pray. You have spoken, and by you it will be accomplished" (ll. 304-6). As he draws his Prayer to end, Anselm can write: "At least, if I may hope, I may pray as much as I can; nor cease until I obtain what I can" (ll. 458-9); and thus, speaking to St. Paul, who has such graceful standing before God, he can confidently say: "Certainly, if you will, you need not despair; and if you pray, you are able to obtain." He can in hope ask St. Paul, his powerful intercessor and advocate, to speak on his behalf: "Ask then, that this dead soul which you brought to life, may be restored to life, nor cease until he is given back to you, living" (ll. 461-4).

In the concluding lines of the Prayer Anselm does not specifically mention hope, but twice he mentions despair and juxtaposes it to comfort and consolation. Addressing Christ, he first writes: "For by the gentleness the badly frightened are comforted, by your sweet smell the despairing are revived" (ll. 473-4). A few lines later he adds: "Let your terrified one be consoled by you; despairing of himself, let him be comforted by you" (ll. 481-2). The Prayer concludes: "From you flows consolation for sinners; to you be blessing for ages and ages. Amen" (ll. 485-6).

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<sup>22</sup> The term "hope" as a noun (*spes*) and a verb (*spero*) occurs 19 times in the text; faith (*fides*), 21 times; grace (*gratia*), 8 times; works (*opera*), 5 times. Despair (*desperare*) occurs 10 times.

<sup>23</sup> See chapter 73 of the Rule of St. Benedict, in which St. Benedict describes his rule as "a little rule for beginners," that is, for those starting out on the monastic way of life.

<sup>24</sup> See ll. 91-150 for a carefully crafted word play between hope [*spero*] and despair [*desperare*; i.e., *de-spero*] as if they are in conflict with one another in a struggle for the soul of Anselm.

Anselm has found strength and solace in the words of St. Paul and in Christ who is the Word of God; he is able to begin to hope again and to take up again, in the words of St. Benedict, “the strong bright weapons of obedience in the service of the one true King.”

## **Conclusion**

I have attempted in this paper to examine St. Anselm’s Prayer to St. Paul from three perspectives, literary, spiritual, and theological, in order to argue that it is primarily a prayer for the gift of hope. Anselm’s prayers are meant to be prayed as a means of growth in the spiritual life; they are not written for unduly close scrutiny as are philosophical and theological texts. By sharing his personally composed and prayed orations with others, though, Anselm has, in a sense, invited us to enter deeply into his heart and soul and to explore his intimate and loving relationship with the Lord and with the saints and, in doing so, has invited us to read anew all his works as efforts on his part to show how his faith, in all aspects of his life, sought understanding.