

God Who Sows the Seed and Gives the Growth

Anselm's Theology of the Holy Spirit

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(This is work in progress and is not for citation.)

So *Moses* having giving us an intimation of God, and the three Persons altogether in that *Bara Elohim*, before, gives us first notice of this Person, the Holy Ghost, in particular, because he applies to us the Mercies of the Father, and the Merits of the Son, and *moves upon the face of the waters*, and actuates, and fecundates our soules, and generates that knowledge, and that comfort, which we have in the knowledge of God.

– John Donne, Sermon preached at St Paul's upon Whitsunday, 1629

Introduction: The place of the Holy Spirit in Anselm's work

Judging from the secondary literature, no one has any use for Anselm of Canterbury as a pneumatologist. For philosophers Anselm is preeminently the patron saint of “perfect-being theology,” an approach to natural theology that emphasizes the character of God as “that than which a greater cannot be thought,” as in the famous argument of *Proslogion* 2.¹ Among theologians he is chiefly known, and generally derided, as a defender of a penal-substitution view of the Atonement.² What little commentary there is on Anselm's pneumatology is typified by this perfunctory dismissal by John Milbank, who blames Anselm, rather than Augustine, for the marginalizing of the Holy Spirit in Western Christendom:

¹For representative accounts of perfect-being theology, see Brian Leftow, “Anselm's Perfect-Being Theology,” in Brian Davies and Brian Leftow, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Anselm* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 132-156; Thomas V. Morris, “Perfect Being Theology,” *Nous* 21 (1987): 19-30; and Katherin A. Rogers, *Perfect Being Theology* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000).

²In fact Anselm's theory is not penal at all, and it's arguably not even substitutionary. For a more nuanced presentation than the standard one, see David Brown, “Anselm on Atonement,” in Davies and Leftow, 279-302.

It is he who deepens the Augustinian tendency to subordinate the persons to the substance, and who makes the Spirit proceed *a Patre Filioque tamquam ab uno principio*. For the *per Filium* is substituted the notion of a procession from Father and Son in virtue of their substantial identity as God. This move is on the road to modalism.³

As I shall show, Milbank's claim about Anselm's pneumatology and its modalist tendencies is completely mistaken, but it can serve as a fair representation of the light in which Anselm's pneumatology is considered, on the rare occasions that it is considered at all.

Such scholarly indifference, I have to admit, is a natural (if regrettable) consequence of a genuine feature of Anselm's work. For in at least one important sense, Anselm was not a systematic theologian. He did not set out to give a systematic presentation of the whole of Christian theology as he understood it; he was not in the business of writing *summae*. Much of his theological work was reactive, written in response to requests, as an answer to a challenge, or as polemic against newly-minted theological error. His only extended theorizing about the Holy Spirit is done in such reactive works. In the *Monologion* he answered a request from his monks to provide a pattern for meditating on what he called "the reason of faith" (*ratio fidei*),⁴ including Trinitarian faith. Consequently, what he has to say about the Holy Spirit in that work is limited to what can be known about the Holy Spirit within the life of the Godhead, so far as that is amenable to rational investigation. Similarly, *De processione Spiritus Sancti* was

³John Milbank, "The Second Difference: A Trinitarianism Without Reserve," *Modern Theology* 2 (1986): 213-234, at 214-215.

⁴The reason of faith' is perhaps not idiomatic English, but the best idiomatic translations of *ratio fidei* are misleading. 'The rational basis of faith' suggests something external: arguments in support of doctrinal formulations that have an apologetic or protreptic purpose. 'The logic of faith' suggests something internal: the rational coherence of the doctrines of faith, the way they "all hang together" logically. Anselm's *ratio fidei* means both these things at once; it refers to the intrinsically rational character of Christian doctrines in virtue of which they form a coherent and rationally defensible system.

written to defend the Latin Church's understanding of the Trinitarian processions, and so it focuses exclusively on issues surrounding the *filioque*.

Neither of these, obviously, amounts to a full-fledged pneumatology. My point in bringing up the reactive character of Anselm's theological treatises, however, is to emphasize that the absence of a pneumatological or spiritual treatise can by no means be taken as evidence that Anselm downplayed or neglected the Holy Spirit, or even that he did not have a systematic view of the Holy Spirit and the spiritual life – taking 'systematic' this time to mean well-worked-out and consistently integrated with other aspects of his theological views. Anselm never wrote a treatise on modality or on ethics either, but he was clearly passionately interested in both, and an attentive reader can find a fully developed view of both issues behind Anselm's scattered pronouncements and glancing references.

The argument of this paper is that the same is true of Anselm's theology of the Holy Spirit. Interpreting Anselm's references to the Holy Spirit in his prayers, meditations, and letters in light of his more abstract theologizing in the *Monologion*, we find that Anselm had a consistent understanding of the Holy Spirit as the teleological culmination of the Triune God. Within the Godhead, the Holy Spirit is figured as the "affection of mutual love" by which the divine Memory and the divine Understanding are made dynamic and kept from being *otiosa et penitus inutilis*. Less explicitly, it is by the Holy Spirit that the divine creativity emerges from "mere" knowledge into concrete activity. In the spiritual life, it is the Holy Spirit who energizes and makes fruitful the human nature that the Father has created and the Son has redeemed, so that rational creatures achieve their appointed end.

The Holy Spirit as the agent of teleological fulfillment

By the time the Holy Spirit appears on the scene in the *Monologion*, Anselm has established to his own satisfaction that there is one supreme essence, self-existent, simple, unconstrained by time or place, and immutable. This supreme essence “utters itself” and thereby gives birth to, or “begets,” a Word. This Word is itself the supreme essence, a Son consubstantial with the Father who begot him. We can properly characterize the Father as *memoria* and the Son as *Verbum* or *intelligentia*:

Indeed, since it cannot be denied that the supreme spirit remembers himself, nothing could be more appropriate than to use ‘memory’ to signify the Father, just as we use ‘Word’ to signify the Son; for it seems that a word is born from the memory, as is more clearly seen in the case of our own mind. For since the human mind is not always thinking of itself, as it always remembers itself, it is clear that when it does think of itself, its word is born from its memory. Hence it is evident that if it were always thinking of itself, its word would always be born from its memory. For to think of a thing we remember is to utter it in our mind; the word of that thing, then, is that very thought, formed out of our memory after the likeness of the thing. And so from this we can quite clearly understand that his coeternal Word is born from the eternal memory of the supreme substance, who always utters himself, just as he always remembers himself.⁵

In terms of the psychological analogy that Anselm is exploring here, the combination of *memoria* and *intelligentia* seems complete and self-contained: perfect consciousness eternally turned upon itself, producing perfect self-knowledge. But Anselm sees that more is needed for genuine perfection. Mere knowledge, however perfect, is teleologically stunted; it is not *for* anything.

The Holy Spirit first emerges in the *Monologion* in response to this lacuna, as the

⁵*Monologion* 48. All translations are my own.

teleological fulfillment of the Godhead. Anselm writes:

But behold! As I consider with delight the distinguishing characteristics and the common features of the Father and the Son, I find nothing that brings me greater delight to consider than their affection of mutual love (*mutui amoris affectum*). For how absurd it would be to deny that the supreme spirit loves himself, just as he remembers and understands himself, when even the rational mind can be shown to love itself and him in virtue of the fact that it can remember and understand itself and him! After all, the memory and understanding of a thing is idle and completely useless (*otiosa et penitus inutilis*) unless the thing itself is either loved or repudiated as reason requires.⁶

Now of course Anselm would not say that the Father and the Son would be “completely useless” without the Spirit in the same way that memory and understanding are completely useless without love. For he will proceed to argue for a robust doctrine of *perichoresis*⁷ and for the claim that each of the three persons “individually is essentially memory and understanding and love,”⁸ so that none of the persons needs another in order to remember, understand, or love. But in terms of the doctrine of appropriation (which for Anselm is underwritten by the psychological analogies), the Holy Spirit can be identified with the perfect love by which the self-contained and static divine wisdom is made dynamic and purposive.

⁶*Monologion* 49. The word ‘affection’ (*affectus*) is especially interesting here, since commentators have been inclined to deny any affect in Anselm’s God on the strength of *Proslogion* 8, in which Anselm argues that God does not feel the *affectus* of compassion, though we feel the *effectus* of his merciful action. In light of Anselm’s willingness to acknowledge affect in God in the *Monologion*, we should perhaps interpret the denial of compassion as a point about divine impassibility rather than a statement about divine emotionlessness in general. That is, compassion has to be excluded from the divine life, not because it is an emotion, but because it is a *reaction* to something external.

⁷*Monologion* 59: “It is joyous to behold how the Father, the Son, and the Spirit-of-both exist in each other with such equality that none of them exceeds another.”

⁸*Monologion* 60: “For since each of these three is individually the supreme essence and supreme wisdom so completely that each remembers and understands and loves through himself, it must be that none of these three needs another in order to remember or understand or love. For each of them individually is essentially memory and understanding and love, and whatever else is necessarily present in the supreme essence.”

The teleological impetus that the Spirit gives within the Godhead carries over into the Spirit's activity in redemption and sanctification. It is by the Holy Spirit that love is poured out into human hearts.⁹ Since faith is active through love (Gal. 5:6), and faith without action is dead (James 2:26), there is no living faith apart from the Holy Spirit:

Therefore, with however great a certainty so great a thing [as the Triune God] is believed, that faith will be useless (*inutilis*) and like something dead unless through love it is strong and alive. For a faith that is accompanied and attended by love will by no means be idle (*otiosa*) when it has the opportunity to act. . . . Therefore, since whatever acts, shows that it has life, without which it could not act, it is not absurd to say that an active faith is living, since it has the life of love without which it would not act, and that an idle (*otiosa*) faith is not living, since it lacks the life of love with which it would not be idle.¹⁰

Although Anselm does not actually mention the Holy Spirit in this passage in the *Monologion*, he makes the Spirit's role evident by returning to the vocabulary with which he had first introduced the Spirit thirty chapters earlier.¹¹ The divine love, the Holy Spirit, is the Giver of Life not only by bringing dynamism and purpose to divine wisdom but also by activating and energizing human belief.

The Holy Spirit as agent of supernatural fecundity and the teleology of human nature

In fact, Anselm's most pervasive way of figuring the Holy Spirit is as an agent of supernatural fecundity and growth, giving life beyond the capacity of the nature that receives the Spirit's fertilization. The key to understanding this aspect of Anselm's theology of the Holy

⁹Letter 434, alluding to Romans 5:5.

¹⁰*Monologion* 78.

¹¹Both *inutilis* and *otiosa* appear in the *Monologion* only in these two passages.

Spirit can be found in *De concordia*'s sustained meditation on 1 Cor. 3:9: "You are God's husbandry." Anselm first draws an analogy between the cultivation of the earth and the cultivation of the human soul:

Consider how the earth, without any effort on our part, brings forth countless plants and trees that do nothing to nourish human nature, or even kill us, whereas those that are most necessary to sustain our lives require tremendous effort and someone to cultivate them, and they do not grow without seeds. In the same way, human hearts require no teaching or effort in order to sprout, effortlessly, thoughts and wills that are in no way useful for salvation or are actually harmful; but it is only through seeds of the proper sort and with diligent cultivation that they conceive and produce the thoughts and wills without which we do not make progress toward the soul's salvation. This is why the Apostle calls those who benefit from this work of cultivation "God's husbandry."¹²

In order to make the analogy complete, Anselm needs to identify both the "seeds of the proper sort" and the "diligent cultivation" that is needed to make them fruitful. The seeds, he says, are of two kinds. The first is the word of God – although Anselm explains that properly speaking the seed is "not, indeed, the word, but the meaning that is perceived through the word. For a mere sound, without meaning, establishes nothing in the heart."¹³ The second kind of seed is "every meaning or understanding of rectitude that the human mind conceives through hearing or reading or through reason or in whatever other way."¹⁴

Both sorts of seeds are originally planted by the Holy Spirit. "The Holy Scriptures

¹²*De concordia* 3.6.

¹³*nihil constituit in corde*: There is an oblique reference here to the standard medieval definition of signification, derived from Boethius: *significare est constituere intellectum*. But since Anselm's ultimate point here is not about the signification of words but rather about their use in instigating right action, he does not talk of "establishing an understanding" but of "establishing [something] in the heart," i.e., in the will. This is a characteristically deft move on Anselm's part.

¹⁴*De concordia* 3.6.

[were] miraculously made fertile by the Holy Spirit,"¹⁵ and it is the Holy Spirit who teaches people things they do not learn from Scripture or from any human source: "human hearts are taught by the Holy Spirit things that they do not know either through themselves or through another creature."¹⁶ In his letters Anselm prays that the Holy Spirit will "persuade" his correspondent¹⁷ or rejoices that the Holy Spirit has taught his correspondent something, either through Scripture¹⁸ or directly.¹⁹

Being persuaded or taught is not a matter of coming to have a correct belief about something; it is a matter of having an upright will. And rectitude of will comes only as a result of grace. In this way it is the Holy Spirit who not only plants the seeds but is responsible for their "diligent cultivation":

Let us now look at some examples of how the word is a seed. When those to whom it is said, "If you are willing and listen to me,"²⁰ hear those words, they understand and conceive what is meant by willing and listening: namely, obeying. For someone who listens but does not obey is said not to listen. But they cannot obey unless they are willing. Now to will to obey is to will rightly. And no one can will rightly unless he has rectitude of will, which no human being has except through grace. But rectitude in willing something is only given to one who has the understanding to will and understands what he ought to will. And so we see that the words "If you are willing and listen to me" are a seed that in no way bears fruit through itself, apart from the

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶*De conceptu virginali* 11.

¹⁷Letters 10, 286, and 288.

¹⁸Letter 343.

¹⁹Letters 60 and 434. In Letter 434 the metaphor of supernatural fertilization is quite direct: *Quippe mea merita hoc impetrare apud dominum et apud homines nequeunt, ut sic diligar ab homine; sed spiritus sanctus, per quem caritas in cordibus servorum dei diffunditur, ipse animam tuam tali ac tanto fecundavit affectu.*

²⁰Isaiah 1:19.

addition of rectitude, but that rectitude itself is not given except by means of seeds.²¹

This is the sense in which, as St Paul says, God “gives the increase” (or grants the growth) to the seed that is planted by the preacher.

As we have already seen, the Holy Spirit’s work as the sower and cultivator of supernatural seed is not, for Anselm, in any way discontinuous from his function as the teleological culmination of the Godhead. Just as the Holy Spirit brings dynamism and purpose to the otherwise static and self-contained divine wisdom, so too the Spirit energizes and vivifies the human mind, precisely by planting and cultivating the seeds of right action. But the connection between the Holy Spirit as supernatural seed and the Holy Spirit as engine of teleological fulfillment goes deeper still, and is even more pervasive in Anselm’s thought. For right action is itself, in a sense, the *telos* of human beings. In giving rectitude of will, therefore, the Holy Spirit brings human nature to its teleological fulfillment.

The claim that right action is the *telos* of human beings is the cornerstone of Anselm’s moral theory. It is also deeply embedded in his Trinitarian theology. Indeed, the question of the human *telos* grows out of his Trinitarian speculations, and the role of the Holy Spirit in bringing human beings to their end is modeled upon, and isomorphic with, the Spirit’s role within the Godhead. When he comes to the close of his discussion of the Trinity in the *Monologion*, Anselm observes that “the mystery of so sublime a thing seems to me to transcend every power of human understanding.”²² Yet the very incomprehensibility of God threatens to

²¹*De concordia* 3.6. Granted, Anselm does not say explicitly in this passage that it is the work of the Holy Spirit to bestow rectitude of will, but the opening words of 3.7 make that clear.

²²*Monologion* 64.

undo all his arguments:

For if [our conclusion about the Trinity] has been explained by a sound argument, in what way is he ineffable? Or, if he is ineffable, how can our conclusions be correct? . . . [And] how could one reply to the point that was made earlier in this very discussion: that the supreme essence is so much above and beyond every other nature that even if sometimes words are applied to him that are common to other natures, their meanings are in no way common? For what meaning did I understand in all the words I thought, if not the common and familiar one? So if the familiar meaning of words is foreign to him, none of my reasoning applies to him. How then is it true that something has been discovered about the supreme essence if what has been discovered is vastly different from him?²³

Anselm resolves the paradox by distinguishing two kinds of knowledge of a thing and, correspondingly, two ways of talking about a thing. We can know something “properly, as the thing itself actually is”; and when we have such knowledge, we express the thing as it is. But there are other things that we cannot know properly, but only “through some likeness or image, as when we see someone’s face in a mirror.”²⁴ In such a case, our language, like our knowledge, will be indirect: “we signify through some other thing what we are . . . unable to express properly, as when we speak in riddles.” God is a thing of this second sort. Even though we can reach true conclusions about him, we never gain a proper grasp of his essence; we must understand him and speak of him through the conceptions and language we use for created things. So God is indeed ineffable, “because words can in no way express him as he is,” and yet knowledge of God remains possible; for “if reason can teach us to form any

²³*Monologion* 65.

²⁴*Ibid.* Anselm’s language in *Monologion* 65-68 repeatedly recalls (without ever quoting) 1 Cor. 13:12, which in the version Anselm knew reads as follows: “Now we see in a mirror, in a riddle, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know as I am known.”

judgment about him through some other thing, as in a riddle, that judgment is not false.”²⁵

So we always come to know God by knowing other things. The closer a thing is to God, the more satisfactory and informative an image of God it will be. For, Anselm says, “whatever among created things is shown to be more like him must be more excellent by nature. Hence, because of its greater likeness such a thing gives more help to the investigating mind in coming closer to the supreme truth, and because of its more excellent created essence it more fully teaches what that mind ought to believe about the Creator.”²⁶ The most excellent created essence, the one that is most like God, is the rational mind. For the mind is the only creature that can remember, understand, and love itself — or better still, remember, understand, and love God — and is thus “a true image of that essence who through his memory and understanding and love constitutes an ineffable Trinity.”²⁷ The mind can therefore serve as “a mirror for itself”; it cannot look upon God “face to face,” but by looking upon itself it sees an image of God.

This image of God is impressed upon the mind through its natural power; it is expressed by the mind through voluntary action. That is, the rational mind fulfills its God-given function to serve as a mirror or image for the contemplation of God when it wills to remember, understand, and love God. This is its preeminent activity and therefore ought to be what it preeminently wills, “for who would deny that whatever better things are in our power

²⁵*Monologion* 65.

²⁶*Monologion* 66.

²⁷*Monologion* 67.

should be more in our will?"²⁸ In fact, we can see that the very purpose for which the rational mind exists is to remember, understand, and love the supreme good. Anselm claims that being rational is the very same thing as having the power "to discern the just from what is not just, the true from what is not true, the good from what is not good, and the greater good from the lesser good."²⁹ But even when the rational nature exercises that power correctly and makes true judgments, its rationality is pointless unless the rational nature acts in accordance with those judgments. So, Anselm concludes,

it is quite obvious that every rational thing exists in order that it might love something more or less, or reject it altogether, according as its rational discernment judges that the thing is more or less good, or not good at all. So nothing is more evident than that the rational creature was made in order that it might love the supreme essence above all other goods, since he is the supreme good — indeed, that it might love nothing but him or [what it loves] for his sake, since he is good through himself, and nothing else is good except through him.³⁰

Knowing the purpose for which rational natures were created is central to Anselm's moral theory, because his central moral notions — rectitude, justice, and order — are understood in teleological terms. A thing is right or possesses rectitude when it achieves its intended purpose. Since the purpose of the rational nature is to love God above all else and for his own sake, and to love other things for God's sake, a rational nature possesses rectitude when it does just that. But Anselm prefers to talk not about the rectitude of a rational nature but about rectitude of will, since it is the will that loves (or fails to love) God in the right way.

²⁸*Monologion* 68.

²⁹*Monologion* 68. See also *Cur Deus Homo* 2.1.

³⁰*Monologion* 68. See also *Cur Deus Homo* 2.1.

Obviously, as Anselm sees, rectitude of will depends on rectitude of intellect; we are to “love something more or less, or reject it altogether, according as [our] rational discernment judges that the thing is more or less good, or not good at all.”³¹ But rectitude of intellect is for the sake of rectitude of will, and not the other way around.

Thus, rectitude of intellect comes from the seeds planted by the Holy Spirit, whether through Scripture or otherwise, and the rectitude of will that vivifies right belief is a gift of grace, of the Holy Spirit’s cultivation of the seeds that the Spirit himself planted. So on Anselm’s theory of the ultimate end of human nature, the work of the Holy Spirit is to bring about the teleological fulfillment of humanity, just as he brings about the teleological fulfillment of the Godhead. This is the full meaning of Anselm’s prayer, “May the Holy Spirit always be the guardian and guide of your heart and your life.”³² Or, as he also prays, “May the Holy Spirit guide your heart in truth”³³ – not *into* the truth, as though Anselm were praying for his correspondent to come to believe true things, but *in* truth. For we are *in* truth (which is to say, we are in rectitude) so long as we will what we ought to will, thereby fulfilling the purpose for which we were given wills in the first place.³⁴

³¹*Monologion* 68.

³²Letter 448: *Spiritus Sanctus sit semper custos et director cordis vestri et vitae vestrae.*

³³Letter 467: *Spiritus Sanctus dirigat cor vestrum in veritate.*

³⁴*De veritate* 4. The identification of truth with rectitude is a principal theme of *De veritate*. For the notion of ‘abiding’ or ‘remaining steadfast’ in the truth, see in particular chapters 4 and 5 of *De veritate* as well as *De casu diaboli* 2, 18, and 21.

The Holy Spirit as agent of supernatural fecundity and the teleology of God's plan of redemption

Yet the connections between the Holy Spirit as the agent of supernatural fecundity and the Holy Spirit as the engine of teleological fulfillment go deeper still. For the paradigmatic case in which the Holy Spirit sowed a supernatural seed was at the virginal conception of the God-man, and as Anselm tirelessly argues throughout *Cur Deus Homo*, God's plan for human beings would have been thwarted if no God-man had come to rescue us. Here, more than anywhere else, it is clear that a supernatural seed must be planted if nature itself is to be brought to fulfillment.

It is perhaps not surprising, then, that *On the Virginal Conception* emerges as the work in which Anselm most clearly delineates his distinction between natural and supernatural, so that the fully supernatural character of the virginal conception can emerge clearly – although, paradoxically, that supernatural intervention is necessary to bring the natural to fulfillment. Indeed, Anselm is very careful to draw his distinctions in such a way that a higher unity emerges; in the end, everything comes back to the will of God. As G. R. Evans rightly notes, “When Anselm makes distinctions, as he frequently does, he intends to show more clearly the underlying unity of what is being subdivided.”³⁵

Anselm says that there are three courses of events: natural, voluntary, and miraculous. Natural events come about by the activity of a created nature, voluntary events by the activity of a created will. Both natural and voluntary events are ultimately traceable to the divine will: “It was God's will alone that made the natures of things in the beginning, giving to some

³⁵G. R. Evans, *Anselm and a New Generation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), 136.

natures a will suited to them, so that natures and wills would fulfill their functions in the course of events in accordance with the order that God laid down for them.”³⁶ The difference between those events and properly miraculous events is simply that in the latter sort, God’s will “uses those natures and wills to accomplish what they would never do according to their characteristic role and purpose.”

Anselm offers several examples of such miraculous events:

It is the work of God’s will alone when the sea offers a dry path through itself to God’s people, when the dead arise, when water is suddenly turned to wine, when human hearts are taught by the Holy Spirit things that they do not know either through themselves or through another creature, when unwholesome wills are turned by the governance of grace alone from their own impulses to what is beneficial, and when many other things come about that neither a creature nor its will would do in its ordinary course of activity.

The virginal conception must be another example, because it is clear that reproduction through a man alone or a woman alone is not possible through human nature or human will as bestowed on Adam and transmitted to all his descendants. Anselm is particularly emphatic that this miraculous fertility is the work of the Holy Spirit. He first situates his account of the virginal conception in a firmly Trinitarian context:

To [Mary] God the Father entrusted the gift of his only Son, whom he loved as himself, as one begotten from his own heart and equal to himself, so that there should be by nature one and the same Son of both God the Father and the Virgin; and the Son himself chose to make her substantially his mother; and the Holy Spirit willed and worked so that the one from whom he himself proceeded would be conceived and born from her.³⁷

³⁶*On the Virginal Conception* 11.

³⁷*De conceptu virginali* 18. This Trinitarian reading of the redemptive work of Christ appears elsewhere in Anselm, most strikingly perhaps in Prayer 3, which begins: *Domine Iesu Christe, qui patre disponente, spiritu sancto cooperante, per mortem tuam spontanea voluntate misericorditer a peccato et morte aeterna mundum redemisti.*

Anselm then uses his controlling metaphor of the Holy Spirit as the sower of supernatural seed to capture the miraculous nature of the virginal conception:

There was in Adam the nature from which Christ would be propagated — though by God’s power, not Adam’s. For although will had sown the seed and nature had given it growth in our ancestors up to the Virgin Mother, so that the Virgin herself was brought into being by an order partly natural and partly voluntary, just as everyone else was, in her no creaturely will sowed her offspring, and no nature gave it growth. Rather, “the Holy Spirit” and “the power of the Most High”³⁸ miraculously propagated a man from a virgin woman.³⁹

In this way *On the Virginal Conception* establishes the pneumatological character of the virginal conception. Its teleological character had already been explored at length in *Cur Deus Homo*.⁴⁰ Interpreters have not in general paid close enough attention to the place of teleological considerations in the central argument of *Cur Deus Homo*, perhaps because they do not arise explicitly in the statement of the initial objections to which Anselm is responding. The initial objection posed by Boso on behalf of *infideles* is that on the Christian account of human redemption, God secures human salvation in an irrational and unseemly manner. To meet this objection it is not enough for Anselm to prove that God cannot save humanity without becoming incarnate and dying. For it would still be open to the unbeliever to say that in that case, it would have been seemlier and more reasonable for God to have left human beings unsaved, rather than subjecting himself to pain and human death in order to secure their salvation. Anselm must therefore argue not only that God can secure human salvation only

³⁸Luke 1:35.

³⁹*De conceptu virginali* 23.

⁴⁰Anselm finished *Cur Deus Homo* in 1098. He wrote *On the Virginal Conception* a year or two later, treating it expressly as a supplement or appendix to *Cur Deus Homo*.

through the death of a God-man, but also that if human beings fall into sin, God cannot simply leave them unsaved.

Teleological considerations play a crucial part in Anselm's case that God cannot fail to offer reconciliation to a fallen humanity. I have already noted Anselm's argument that human beings were created for the purpose of loving the good "in order that [they] might be happy in enjoying the supreme good, that is, God."⁴¹ In *Cur Deus Homo* Anselm argues that God's purpose for rational nature does not change simply because human beings have thrown away the justice with which they were created. So if God were to leave human beings in a state of injustice and unhappiness, he would fail in his purpose; he would have created human beings in vain. But "it is utterly foreign to [God] that he should allow any rational nature to perish entirely. . . . It is therefore necessary that he complete what he began in human nature. And as we have said, this can take place only through a perfect recompense for sin, which no sinner can make."⁴²

In this way Anselm argues that the fulfillment of God's purpose for human nature requires that he offer reconciliation through the death of a God-man. But does the teleological necessity of a God-man in turn require the work of the Holy Spirit in sowing the supernatural seed of the virginal conception? One might be tempted to think that God need not have become incarnate by means of the miraculous activity of the Holy Spirit; and in that case the connection I have been drawing between the Holy Spirit as agent of supernatural fecundity

⁴¹*Cur Deus Homo* 2.1.

⁴²*Cur Deus Homo* 2.4.

and the Holy Spirit as the agent of teleological fulfillment would here prove more tenuous than I have been making it out to be.

On this point it must be acknowledged that the evidence is somewhat equivocal. In *Cur Deus Homo* Anselm clearly seems to think that God could not have become incarnate otherwise than in a virgin woman descended from Adam.⁴³ If we take this line of reasoning as representing Anselm's considered thoughts on the matter, the connection between the two aspects of the Holy Spirit's agency in the work of redemption is as tight as I could possibly want: human nature is brought to its fulfillment precisely by means of the Spirit's supernatural fecundity in the womb of the Blessed Virgin. Unfortunately, in *On the Virginal Conception* Anselm explicitly says that "although the Son of God was most truly conceived from a most pure virgin, this did not happen by necessity, as if a just offspring could not reasonably be generated from a sinful parent through this sort of propagation." It was not necessary, but merely *fitting*, that the God-man should be born of a Virgin.⁴⁴

Yet even if we take Anselm's later account in *On the Virginal Conception* as his final say, the difference this makes for my purposes is nowhere near as great as I suggested above. Indeed, it could well be argued (and it would be very much in the spirit of Anselm to argue) that the gratuitousness of the Spirit's work in the virginal conception highlights, rather than undermines, the connection between his teleological and fecundative roles. The conception of

⁴³*Cur Deus Homo* 2.8. The arguments are too involved to rehearse here. Besides, they are, regrettably, far from the most compelling arguments in this work.

⁴⁴*De conceptu virginali* 18. *Cur Deus Homo* 2.8 lists several ways in which this is particularly fitting; *De conceptu virginali* 18 differs, not in raising considerations of "fittingness," but in opposing them to necessity.

the God-man would then take place by supernatural means, not because it had to, but because the dynamic agent of God's creative purpose is always and everywhere one and the same as the God who works by sowing a seed that transcends nature.

Conclusion: The place of the Holy Spirit in Anselm's work (revisited)

As the quotation from Milbank in the introduction suggests, the relative neglect of Anselm's pneumatology is attributable in large measure to the notion that Anselm was merely extending Augustine's Trinitarian speculations: departing from Augustine, if at all, only in ways that exacerbated pernicious tendencies already present in Augustine's thinking.⁴⁵ We can now see how mistaken that notion is. Anselm does indeed begin his Trinitarian speculations from the Augustinian psychological analogies, and it is those analogies that lead him to maintain that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son *ex eo in quo unum sunt*: in that respect in which they are one. Yet this conclusion does not, as Milbank suggests, put us on the road to modalism. The psychological analogies that for Anselm underwrite the appropriated names of *memoria*, *intelligentia/Verbum*, and *amor* require that each person be understood in relation to the other two. There can accordingly be no question of a single, undifferentiated unity that is successively memory, understanding, and love. There is unity in Anselm's Godhead, to be sure; but it is always a perichoretic unity, a dynamic *inter-relating*.

It is worth noting as well that Anselm is far from seeing any tension between the

⁴⁵On this point see also Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Pneumatology: The Holy Spirit in Ecumenical, International, and Contextual Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 48; and Congar, 3: 96-102.

doctrine of appropriation on the one hand and an orthodox understanding of the perichoretic unity of the Godhead on the other. Indeed, he actually uses the appropriated names as an essential part of an argument for that unity:

For indeed the supreme spirit understands and loves his whole memory, remembers and loves his whole understanding, and remembers and understands his whole love. Now by 'memory' we mean the Father, by 'understanding' the Son, and by 'love' the Spirit-of-both. Therefore, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit-of-both embrace one another and exist in one another with such equality that none of them is found to exceed another or exist apart from another.⁴⁶

Anselm's adaptation of the Augustinian psychological analogies thus affords him a particularly deft way of balancing the principle that the whole Trinity always acts together, as a unity, with the equally venerable principle that each Person has a distinctive role both within the Godhead and in the economy of creation, redemption, and transformation.

Anselm goes beyond (one is tempted to say, he improves upon) Augustine's theory in another way as well. For Augustine the Holy Spirit is the *vinculum amoris*, the *communio* of the Father and the Son. Complaints that this way of thinking "depersonalizes" the Spirit miss the mark. Anselm, it seems, seized upon the right criticism: if the work of the Holy Spirit within the Godhead is merely to bind or join, the Trinity remains teleologically incomplete. Indeed, the procession of the Holy Spirit seems superfluous, a theologically unmotivated doctrine. In memory and understanding we already have perfect self-consciousness eternally turned upon itself, producing perfect self-knowledge. What need is there for a "bond" between memory and understanding, as if thought were like hearing or vision and required some sort of

⁴⁶*Monologion* 59.

medium to join faculty and object?

For Anselm, by contrast, the Holy Spirit serves as the perfect love by which the self-contained and static divine wisdom is made dynamic and purposive. The procession of the Holy Spirit can therefore be seen as indispensable, a theological necessity rather than a theoretical embarrassment. And the same dynamism by which the Holy Spirit is Life-Giver within the Trinity also characterizes the Spirit's work in the economy of creation, redemption, and transformation. By planting supernatural seeds and giving them growth, the Holy Spirit vivifies all of creation and thereby brings all things – but especially God's rational creatures – to their appointed end.