THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ANSELM'S LAST WORK. AN ARGUMENT FOR *DE CONCORDIA*

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Abstract: In this paper I try to investigate why the commentators of Anselm's works have neglected his last treatise, De concordia praescientiae et praedestinationis et gratiae Dei cum libero arbitrio. Working on my doctoral project, the Romanian translation of this treatise, I found that the manner in which most of the commentators relate to De Concordia is rather superficial and dismissive. This unfortunate approach came first from some famous exegetes in the work of Anselm, such as Richard W. Southern and Gillian Evans, but again I have discovered a similar view in some recent papers from Thomas Ekenberg, and Eileen Sweeney. In this article I will try to understand the reasons for which De Concordia did not received a good reception as compared with other works by Anselm; but the ultimate task will be to provide an argument for the importance of this short anselmian treatise. My intention is not to render an exhaustive analysis of the work of Anselm, but to reassert the context of his last work in accordance with his way of thinking and previous treatises. In this respect, I will try to explain why I believe that the determining factor for the writing of De Concordia was Anselm's desire to clarify certain issues related to his conception of free will, issues that remain somewhat unresolved in his previous works. Understanding in this manner Anselm's last endeavour, will help us to switch from the attention on the change in his style of writing to the depth of his theological and philosophical thinking.

Keywords: Anselm of Canterbury, free will, grace, predestination, De Concordia

Introduction

As I stated above, my aim in this paper is to discuss about the reception of *De Concordia* among Anselm's commentators and to show why their lack of interest in his last treatise is caused by a prejudgment according to which Anselm's shift of style in writing has generated a decrease of his argumentative power[1]. I will elaborate my view first by presenting the conceptions of some of the most prominent commentators of Anselm and then I will try to develop my arguments hoping to reveal the importance of *De Concordia*. I will not dwell on the historicist interpretation that was offer often when commentators analyzed *De Concordia*, instead I intend to present the significance of this work in the light of Anselm's effort to frame an intelligible theory of free will in agreement with the official view of the catholic Church about human freedom, original sin, redemption, grace and divine omnipotence.

Even though Anselm tries to keep alive the Augustinian tradition on free will[2], he moved away from this path and he ushered a new conception in which he struggled to

[1] Gillian R. Evans, *Anselm and Talking about God*, (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1978), 193.

[2] This idea of Anselm's view on free will originating from the Augustinian tradition is generally shared by all of his commentators. At the same time, the differences between his approach and that of Saint Augustine are broadly acknowledged despite the various interpretations on the level of Anselm's fidelity with respect to Augustinian influence. For a more in-depth understanding of the relation between the ideas of Augustine on free will and those of Anselm, see Mary Clark, "Anselmian and Augustinian Doctrines of Freedom Compared", in Mary Clark, *Augustine: Philosopher of Freedom*, (New York: Desclé Company, 1958); Stanley G. Kane, *Anselm's Doctrine of Freedom and the Will,* (New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1981); Katherin Rogers,

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maintain the compatibility between free will and divine omniscience, at the same time trying to save the role of human responsibility and merit without falling into the trap of Pelagius' heresy. In the last couple of years the interpretations of Anselm's free will theory were developed in two main directions (with some significant distinctions within these approaches). On the one hand, we have those conceptions that proclaim Anselm as a libertarian thinker (this is a more modern turn on the classical terminology used by the commentators of medieval philosophy)[3]. On the other hand, there are many interpretations that are wary of such labelling and that are more centred on some specific problems concerning the argumentative line of Anselm's theory of freedom (some of the commentators from this group tend to consider that Anselm does not offer a truly intelligible answer for the compatible relation between free will and grace, free will and predestination, free will and divine omniscience)[4]. In all this studies the reader can notice that there are few references to *De Concordia* compared with the large attention for the other works that discuss about freedom and free will, such as *De Libertate Arbitrii* and *De Casu Diaboli*. One explanation for this unbalanced treatment it can be the fact that, at least at the first sight, this two latter works give a more detailed outlook for Anselm's understanding of freedom and free will. *De Libertate Arbitrii* and *De Casu Diaboli*, alongside *De Veritate* were actually written as three-folded treatises. The aim of Anselm was to offer an answer for an oldest debate initiated at the time of Augustine, with special attention for the reconciliation between free will and grace, something which Anselm probably considered that Augustine failed to deliver.

Another possible explanation for the lack of serious interest in *De Concordia* is that many scholars are truly convinced about the decrease of Anselm's argumentative power in his last two works, a situation which corresponds to his changing in style and method. With *De Processione Spiritus Sancti*, Anselm makes an attempt to cope with the "new fashion"[5] which

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Anselm on Freedom, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Thomas Gwodz, "Anselm's Theory of Freedom", in *The Saint Anselm Journal* 7.1 (Fall 2009); Daniel T. Rakus, "Alter Augustinus and the Question of Moral Knowledge", in *Revue des Études Augustiniennes*, 49 (1997); Peter I. Kaufman, "A Confirmation of Augustine's Soteriology: Human Will's Collaboration with Divine Grace according to Anselm of Canterbury," in *Medievalia* 4 (1978).

[3] Katherin Rogers, with her gritty attempt in *Anselm on Freedom*, is probably the best known advocate of this view. In some similar manner, we can find other anachronistic interpretations of Anselm's notion of freedom in the works of Eleonore Stump and Stanley G. Kane, even though their views are rooted in a more traditional fashion of interpreting medieval philosophical problems. See Eleonore Stump, "Augustine on Free Will", in *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, eds. Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 124-147; for Rogers and Kane see the works cited above.

[4] Jasper Hopkins, Stan Tyvol, and more recently Eileen Sweeney, Thomas Ekenberg, and Kristell Trego have noticed significant difficulties in Anselm's account of free will. A synthesis of Anselm's views on freedom can be found in the study of Sandra Visser and Thomas Williams, "Anselm's Account of Freedom", in *The Cambridge Companion to Anselm*, eds. Brian Davies and Brian Leftow, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 177-203. Although this study stress a strange interpretation, i.e. pointing out two definitions of free choice offered by Anselm, I admit that I share with Visser and Williams the opinion that for Anselm "there is no responsible agency unless there is an element of radical voluntarism somewhere", Visser and Williams, 198. See also Jasper Hopkins, *A Companion to the Study of Saint Anselm*, (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1972); Stan Tyvol, "Anselm's Definition of Free Will: A Hierarchical Interpretation", in *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, 80 (Spring, 2006); Eileen Sweeney, *Anselm of Canterbury and the Desire for the Word*, (Washington, DC.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2012); Thomas Ekenberg, *Falling Freely. Anselm of Canterbury on the Will*, (Uppsala: Uppsala Universitet, 2005); Kristell Trego, *L'essence de la liberté. La refondation de l'éthique dans l'œuvre de saint Anselme de Cantorbéry,* (Paris: Vrin, 2010).

[5] G. R. Evans, 194.

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arose especially in Paris. The result can be considered as a preamble for the form of scholastic method, recalling the literary form of *quaestiones* and *disputationes*. With this new approach, Anselm initiate the scholastic era of philosophical and theological writings. In this sense, he is frequently called the "the father of scholasticism". Before starting the investigation of *De Concordia's* reception among the scholars, let me note that we can perceive an anomalous evaluation of Anselm's works. In other words, if we admit that his last two treatises are lacking in polish and argumentative strength compared with his previous works, then it is quite improper to call Anselm "the father of scholasticisim" and, even more, to give him credit for the embracement of this new method if his writing style have brought some sort of narrowing of his discursiveness, such that *De Processione* and *De Concordia* are "less grand in rhetoric and goals"[6].

Some critical receptions for *De Concordia*

At the beginning of the second half of the twentieth century, the interest of scholars in Anselm's philosophy and theology has increased and different topics of his writings become equally important as the problematic of ontological argument. If we look at the studies and articles that were written from the '80s until now, we can discover that Anselm's thought is central in many discussion about free will and determination. In most of this scholarly works the main references are made from *De Libertate Arbitrii* and *De Casu Diaboli,* but also from *De Veritate,* which has a methodological importance for understanding terminological elements and argumentative threads that are recurring in the other two treatises mentioned above. From this viewpoint, *De Concordia* represent merely a resumption of previous works, but with a change in style and a special concern for the relation between free will and divine grace. It is also noteworthy the fact that Anselm is more inclined to use scriptural passages in *De Processione* and *De concordia* to sustain his arguments or to discuss about problematic features of Christian doctrine. This shift in Anselm's approach is generally viewed as a direct consequence of the request of Pope Urban II[7] to write in a way which conveys with the new tendencies of dialectics and which is more rooted into the fundamental themes of Christianity.

One of the first complain against the approach of Anselm in *De Concordia* belongs to Gillian R. Evans which observes that "Anselm's powers [were] much stretched by the effort to do justice to the claims of other men's view in these treatises of his middle years"[8]. For Evans, the endeavour of Anselm's last works was disturbed by his concern with the contemporary disputes so that he estrange himself from his proper style and furthermore he assumed new challenges which were, in fact, other people battles. His period as archbishop of Canterbury was marked with numerous conflicts and his power, vitality and focus were consumed in such a manner that he was unable to pursue anymore his previous projects in the same way as he once used to do. *De Concordia* dose not bring forth the same amount of complexity and linguistic analysis as the previous works of Anselm in which he dwells with free will. Evans probably thinks that *De Concordia* was not a completed project; hence, Anselm briefly covers some issues that are also present in *De Libertate Arbitrii* and *De Casu Diaboli* and he added a new subject related to the free will, i.e. the compatibility of free will with grace. One aspect that is ignored by Evans in her assumption that Anselm lost his touch at the time he was writing *De Concordia* and that Anselm was affected by the bad state of his

[6] Eileen Sweeney, 12.

[7] The arguments of *De Processione* were presented at the Council of Bari in 1098 as an answer for the *filioque* quarrel of the Greeks against the Latin Church. For more details about this period and the development of this work, but also about the relation between Anselm and Pope Urban II, see Richard W. Southern, *Saint Anselm: A Portrait in a Landscape*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

[8] G.R. Evans, *Anselm and Talking about God,* 193.

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health[9] is that only in *De Concordia* we can find the clear display of Anselm's famous two-wills theory[10].

Another surprising appraisal of *De Concordia* was made by Southern in his monographic study of Anselm, *Saint Anselm: A Portrait in a Landscape*. For Southern, Anselm has suffered in terms of creativity and genius after his move from the monastery of Bec to Canterbury. Again, we can observe that in play is the argument of his complex tasks as archbishop which prevents him from writing in an extensive manner. Southern assumes that he was forced by his new hierarchical function to adopt a stricter and reserved style of expression in writing[11]. Even though I admit that Anselm was confronted with various difficulties in his last years because he had greater responsibilities as an archbishop, I cannot agree that his creativity diminished in this period. Probably he did not have the time needed for elaborating a large treatise like *De Casu Diaboli* or *De Libertate Arbitrii*, but *De Concordia* can be considered a complex attempt to resolve the apparent incompatibility between free will and grace, predestination and divine omniscience.

Furthermore, I think that Anslem's major concern in this period was to grasp a intelligible theory for saving the role of human agency in the matter of redemption, unlike the option of Augustine, and to assert in a significant way the moral goodness of God. In *De Casu Diaboli* he tried to offer arguments why the responsibility of the fall resides only in the wrong action Satan. Likewise, only Adam and Eve were guilty for the original sin and God is not the source of bad things. In *De Concordia*, Anselm claims that God causes injustice inasmuch he is the creator of every action and movement, but God does not causes the character of an act as an unjust act; this distinction is crucial for a right understanding of God moral goodness so we can notice here an element of novelty with respect to the subject of free will.

In his challenging work, *Falling Freely. Anselm of Canterbury on the Will*,Thomas Ekenberg tries to "clarify Anselm's conception of will in relation to his views on ethics and metaphysics"[12]. For this task Ekenberg is using especially the three dialogues (*De Veritate*, *De Libertate Arbitrii*, *De Casu Diaboli*) which discuss about freedom and free will, pointing out very clearly at the beginning of his study that:

"I will primarily concern myself with the dialogues: while *De concordia* is at times illuminating in coming to grips with certain points of interpretation, it lacks the depth and rigor of argument of the dialogues"[13].

Actually, Ekenberg truly keeps his word in not being concerned with the arguments of *De Concordia*, therefore we can say that he is neglecting in his study the role of *De Concordia*, making references to this work only when he wants to stress something related to

[9] G. R. Evans and Brian Davies, "Introduction", x, in *Anselm of Canterbury. The major works*, eds. G. R. Evans and B. Davies, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

[10] In *De Concordia* (Book 3, 11–13), Anselm discusses about two wills that are natural for all human creatures: one is the will for benefit or advantage (*commoditas*), and the other is the will for rightness (*rectitudo*). This two wills are in conflict because after the original sin the men has deserted justice and he cannot preserved it on their one, therefore the will for benefit can overcome the will for rightness, even though the greatest benefit for men is to will for justice and keep it. The conflict here originates in the failure of human creatures to recognize that keeping justice for their own sake represents the most important act of willing. All quotations of Anselm's works are from the critical edition *Sancti Anselmi Opera Omnia*, ed. F. S. Schmitt, 6 volumes, (Rome and Edinburgh: Friedrich Frommann Verlag, 1938-1968).

[11] R. W. Southern, *Saint Anselm: A Portrait in a Landscape*, xxix, 14, 52, 230.

[12] T. Ekenberg, *Falling Freely. Anselm of Canterbury on the Will*, 14.

[13] T. Ekenberg, *Falling Freely. Anselm of Canterbury on the Will*, 21.

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the three dialogues. His reasons for this treatment of Anselm's last work are the lack of depth and rigor, so it seems that *De Concordia* is just used as "an additional point of reference"[14]. What it is striking in this approach is the fact that Ekenberg does not offer any argument for why he thinks that *De Concordia* is not as profound and complex as the three dialogues. Instead of some arguments we have only a quite simplistic labeling which represents, in fact, the assumption of some prejudices regarding *De Concordia*.

Finally, I have found a similar way of thinking in the most recent work of Eileen Sweeney, *Anselm of Canterbury and the Desire for the Word*. Sweeney's fascinating and ambitious book tries to understand Anselm's writings from a more unitary viewpoint. In other words, she asserts that "the Anselm's corpus, from his earliest prayer to last treatise, is a single project in which knowledge of self and God are inextricably linked"[15]. Although I agree with her hypothesis, I could not help noticing that she also has a dismissive attitude towards *De Concordia*. She think that this last treatise is liable to be evaluated as "incomplete not in content but in polish, in the integration of its different styles and questions"[16]. Moreover, she expresses her surprise in "how little *De Concordia* adds to *De Casu Diaboli*"[17]. For me is not clear how *De Concordia* is less important compared with *De Casu Diaboli* because this will be as saying that Anselm at most repeats himself and his last work is somehow superfluous. But then again, such a view is in total contrast with Anselm previous writings and with his general efforts to render a faithful way of reasoning. Furthermore, even Sweeney is acknowledging in some fragments later that the novelty of *De Concordia* compared with the three dialogues lies in important aspects, such as:

- the distinction between the will as instrument and will as inclination
- the use of Scripture in a more dynamic way
- the embracement of a style closer to Anselm's contemporary disputes[18].

Thus, the question remains how Sweeney does not really understand the contribution of Anselm's last work to his whole corpus?!

An argument for the importance of *De Concordia*

After the presentation of some crucial approaches to *De Concordia*, I will try to offer what I consider to be the most valuable argument for the importance of this short treatise. As we have seen, the main discontents are coming from two ideas:

1. Anselm's lack of time and his poor health in his days as archbishop of Canterbury
2. The change of his writing style, which probably occurred more or less as a consequence of his own decision.

How I will respond to these two points? First, I have to say that even with a poor health condition and with the concern about the local political and religious disputes, Anselm would have never written something that would have been liable to be considered hasty or having a weak rhetoric and argumentative line. He was always careful with the reaction generated by his works and, at times, he even stipulated how one should read his treatises[19].

The change of his writing style seems to be more important than the actual content of *De Concordia* for most of Anselm's commentators. I assume that provoking as it is, this shift

[14] T. Ekenberg, *Falling Freely. Anselm of Canterbury on the Will*, 68.
[15] E. Sweeney, *Anselm of Canterbury and the Desire for the Word*, 7.
[16] E. Sweeney, *Anselm of Canterbury and the Desire for the Word*, 346.
[17] E. Sweeney, *Anselm of Canterbury and the Desire for the Word*, 356.
[18] E. Sweeney, *Anselm of Canterbury and the Desire for the Word*, 366.
[19] Such is the case with the three dialogues about freedom, Anselm insisting that *De Veritate* should be readied first, and then *De Libertate Arbitrii* and, at last, *De Casu Diaboli*. See "Praefatio", in *Sancti Anselmi Opera Omnia*, ed. F. S. Schmitt, vol. I, (Rome and Edinburgh: Friedrich Frommann Verlag, 1938), 173-174.

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does not render the real intentions of Anselm in *De Concordia*. I believe that if we look at the development of his thinking, one might easily notice that Anselm is in a constant state of concern regarding the way in which he expresses his ideas and makes them clear. His attention to the linguistic analysis and the splendid use of dialectics may represent a hint for his relentless search to find an ideal way of expression for the delicate issues and subjects that he discussed in his works. I attribute Anselm's change in style not only to the recommendation of Pope Urban II to write more like his contemporaries, but also to his desire to grasp in a new way something that has remained unsolved in his previous writings. I really think that if Anselm was totally satisfied with his previous treatises about freedom, he would not have written *De Concordia*. The significance of this last treatise is that we can perceive not only a change in literary form, but also a change in tone because Anselm was more inclined to move from the personal realm of argumentation to an impersonal voice which probably stands for the authority of the Christian doctrine which he fully embraced. In this sense, we can observe the use of Scripture in a way that is different compared to his previous works and this reliance on scriptural passages may represent his desire for a new argumentative strategy. I do not imply that he has suffered a change in thought, he still believed in the things stated earlier in his life, but there is a chance that he became unsatisfied or distrustful with old literary style. Regardless the *real* motives that made him change his writing style; I assert that the philosophical and theological core of *De Concordia* is the discussion about the compatibility between free will and grace. Anselm never talked in the three dialogues about this problem and he sensed that this was crucial for a complete image of his ideas about human freedom, original sin, moral responsibility, and God goodness'. For me, *De Concordia* was written as an answer to the issues left open in his three dialogues. Even though one might suggest that his style was less brilliant and spectacular, compared with his previous works, I have to reply that we cannot judge a book just by its cover. It is odd to evaluate one's thinking based on the literary form of his books. I admit that a concise and witty style like in Anselm's previous works may influence some readers to be more easily convinced by his arguments, but since when the validity of arguments is given by their form of expression? I assiduously encourage every Anselm's reader to be more careful before making an assumption about the value and importance of his works. One has first to reflect at Anselm's way of thinking and at his ceaseless efforts in his attempt to find an ideal manner to express such delicate issues, before making an evaluation of the arguments advanced by him.

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