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Prayers And Meditations Of St. Anselm With The Proslogion (Penguin Classics)



Synopsis

Mostly written between 1070 and 1080, before he became Archbishop of Canterbury, the prayers and meditations of Anselm of Aosta created a tradition of intimate, intensely personal devotional works written in subtle and theologically daring prose. While the "Prayer to God" is based on the Lord's Prayer, the "Prayer to Christ" is inspired by ardent private emotion and other prayers invest saints with individual attributes, with John the Baptist as the friend, Peter as the shepherd and Mary Magdalene as the forgiving lover, among many others. The meditations include a searching exploration of the state of the soul and a lament on the loss of purity, and the Proslogion discusses the mysteries of faith. With their bright imagery, beautiful language and highly original thought, the works of Anselm have secured a lasting place in both religious and secular literature. For more than seventy years, Penguin has been the leading publisher of classic literature in the English-speaking world. With more than 1,700 titles, Penguin Classics represents a global bookshelf of the best works throughout history and across genres and disciplines. Readers trust the series to provide authoritative texts enhanced by introductions and notes by distinguished scholars and contemporary authors, as well as up-to-date translations by award-winning translators.

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Customer Reviews

Text: English, Latin (translation)

Translated and with an introduction by Benedicta Ward with a foreword by R. W. Southern.

St. Anselm's prayers and meditations are a great departure point for lectio divina, which is why he wrote them. His prayer to St. Benedict is very moving, as is the prayer to St. Paul. St. Anselm sent these prayers to friends, in order to provide them with a foundation for their own prayer life--the idea is that these prayers will naturally lead the reader into deeper and more personalized prayer. If you are interested in lectio divina, and are looking for very spiritual reading from one of the great masters, this is your book!

Excellent, both as a prayer starter and a theological/ philosophical treatise. I would recommend this book too anyone who would like to find joy in learning about God--with a certainty of His existence. Very readable.

Anselm (+1109) may be designated "of Aosta" (his birthplace) or "of Canterbury" (his archbishopric). He can be considered the most important Christian theologian and philosopher in the West between Augustine (+430) and Aquinas (+1274). (Franciscans would be insistent on mentioning Bonaventure, who died in the same year as Aquinas; at the General Audience on 17 March 2010, Pope Benedict XVI gave an interesting comparison and contrast between Aquinas and Bonaventure, which can be found online with minimal Google skills.) Before Anselm became Archbishop of Canterbury in 1093, he had become abbot of Bec in 1078. All these dates are significant because it seems that most of the prayers and meditations had been written by the time Anselm became abbot. Somewhat later, we are told, is the Meditation on Human Redemption (pp. 230-237 in this edition), important in the theological development of satisfaction atonement theory. Also included in this edition is the Proslogion (pp. 238-267), which is based on Anselm's ever-controversial Ontological Argument for the existence of God. Richard H. Schmidt, in *God Seekers: Twenty Centuries of Christian Spiritualities*, says: "Anselm's Prayers and Meditations are powerful testimonies to his searching, passionate faith. Here he moves beyond speculating and analyzing. Anselm wrote no prayer manual, but he produced written prayers 'to stir up the mind of the reader to the love or fear of God.' Like his theology, Anselm's prayers and meditations strive for both clarity and spiritual purification and were in their day startling in their originality. ...They are longer than most liturgical prayers, emotional, and deeply personal... They have about them a sense of urgency, intensity, and spontaneity, even though they are in fact carefully literary compositions. ...[They] comprise one of the classics of Christian devotional literature." (pp. 95-96) (Schmidt's entire chapter on Anselm in this quoted book, pp. 92-103, though brief, is insightful; it also contains brief

portions of the prayers and meditations in a somewhat different translation. Selections from the Proslogion, including the Ontological Argument--"certainly that than which nothing greater can be conceived cannot exist only in the understanding," etc.--are also to be found.)In addition to Schmidt's very cogent remarks, please consider the following from pages 81 and 82 of the introduction to the book under review. "[Anselm] changed the whole atmosphere of Western spirituality for the rest of the Middle Ages and beyond. But Anselm himself was no revolutionary theologian; rather he was a bridge, a link with the tradition of the undivided church. [The cataclysmic Schism of 1054 or East-West Schism occurred when Anselm was in his early twenties.] In many ways his clear and independent mind gave new life to traditional teaching, and carried it through into a new age."Can it be argued that the twenty-first century needs an Anselm to give new life to traditional teaching and carry it through into a new age?

If you want a chance to experience the devotion in Anselm's prayers and meditations (as it was meant to be experienced), then this is the one (English) translation that you must have (assuming you can't read the original Latin). This book allows one to feel the essence of worship that is necessary in understanding Anselm's thought. I've read some other translations (especially those of the Proslogion), and only this edition can claim to be the prayer that Anselm meant them to be. The brief introduction featured in the book is also worth reading, although it doesn't give all the details, it does allow one to understand why Anselm has been misunderstood by so many, and it gives one a chance to understand him better.

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