

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

Translated
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[TWO LETTERS CONCERNING ROSCELIN]

TO JOHN THE MONK¹

Brother Anselm, to lord and beloved brother John: may he always make progress toward the better things.

Because I have been wanting to speak about the matter more fully, I have delayed so long in replying to the letter which Your Love sent me regarding that man [viz., Roscelin,] who makes the following claim: "In God, either the three persons are three things or else the Father and the Holy Spirit were incarnate with the Son." But being hindered by many demands upon my time since receiving your letter, I have not been at liberty [to write at length]. Thus, for the moment, I send a brief reply about this matter. However, I intend to deal with the topic more fully in the future, if God will deign to grant me the opportunity.

As for his claim, then, that the three persons are three things: he wants it to be interpreted either in accordance with three *relations* (i.e., in accordance with the fact that God is spoken of as the Father and the Son and the spirit who proceeds from the Father and from the Son) or else in accordance with that which is called God [i.e., in accordance with God's *deity*]. Now, if he is saying that the three relations are three things, he is saying it superfluously. For no one denies that in this respect the three persons are three things—provided we carefully discern in what sense these relations are called things, and what kind of things they are, and whether or not they affect the substance, as do many accidents. Yet, because of his adding that the will or power of the three persons is one, he seems not to understand in the foregoing respect the three things of which he is speaking. For these three persons have their will or power not in accordance with their relations but in accordance with the fact that each of the persons is God. Now, if he says that the three persons are three things with respect to the fact that each of them is God, then either he wants to establish three gods or else he does not understand what he is saying. May these remarks temporarily satisfy Your Love as an indication of what I believe regarding the aforementioned claim. And may you continue

¹Letter #129, written between 1091-1092.

always to fare well.

Concerning your request to dwell with me before you set out for Rome: as far as regards my love for Your Honor, be assured that I would gladly consent. But, as I see it, [your sojourn] would be of little use to you, on account of my busy schedule; and, in fact, it would be a hindrance to you. For I am absolutely certain that unless you remain with the bishop [viz., with Fulk, bishop of Beauvais] until you set out, he will be of little or no assistance to you with respect to what you are obliged to do. Nor am I able to do anything which would be of benefit for the journey you are to undertake.

TO FULK, BISHOP OF BEAUVAIS¹

To his lord and very dear friend Fulk, venerable bishop of Beauvais: brother Anselm, by title abbot of Bec, [sends] greeting.

I hear—but nevertheless cannot entirely believe—that the cleric Roscelin makes the following claim: "In God, either the three persons are three things—[existing] in separation from one another (as do three angels) and yet [existing] in such way that there is one will and power—or else the Father and the Holy Spirit were incarnate. Moreover, [the three persons] could truly be called three gods if custom allowed ' it." He maintains that Archbishop Lanfranc (of venerable memory) was of this opinion and that I am presently of it. I have been told that on account of all this a council is to be called in the near future by Rainald, venerable archbishop of Rheims. Accordingly, since I anticipate that Your Reverence will be present there, I want to instruct you on how you ought to answer on my behalf if the matter needs [my response].

Archbishop Lanfranc's life, known to many religious and wise men, sufficiently excuses him from the above charge (for no such thing was ever before said about him); and his absence and death prohibit any new accusation concerning him. Concerning me, however, I wish all men to have the following true opinion. I hold those doctrines which we confess in the creeds when we say: "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Creator [of heaven and earth] "; and "I believe in one God, Father Almighty, Maker [of heaven

¹Letter #136, written between 1091-1092.

and earth]"; and "Whoever wishes to be saved: before all things it is necessary that he hold the Catholic faith." [And I hold] the doctrines which follow [from these creeds]. I believe with my mind and confess with my mouth these three bases of the Christian confession which I have just mentioned. [And I so believe and confess them] that I am certain that whoever wishes to deny any part of them, and whoever expressly asserts as true the blasphemy which I mentioned having heard that Roscelin is stating, is anathema—whether he be a human being or an angel. And I will say by way of confirmation: as long as he persists in this obstinacy let him remain anathema, for he is not at all a Christian. But if he was baptized and was brought up among Christians, then he ought not at all to be given a hearing. No explanation for his error should be demanded of him, and no explication of our truth should be presented to him. Rather, as soon as his falsehood is known beyond doubt, either let him anathematize the poison which he produces and spews forth or let him be anathematized by all Catholics unless he recants. For it is pointless and most foolish to call back into the uncertainty of unsettled questions that which is most firmly established upon a solid rock—[to do so] on account of every single man who lacks understanding. For our faith ought to be rationally defended against the impious, but not against those who admit that they delight in the honor of the name "Christian." From these latter it must be rightly demanded that they hold firmly to the pledge made at baptism, but to the former it must be demonstrated rationally how irrationally they despise us. For a Christian ought to advance through faith to understanding, instead of proceeding through understanding to faith or withdrawing from faith if he cannot understand. But when he is able to attain to understanding, he is delighted; but when he, is unable, he reveres what he cannot apprehend.

I request that this letter of mine be taken by Your Holiness to the council already mentioned; or, if perhaps you are not going, I ask that it be sent through one of your men of learning. If the matter has need of my name, then let my letter be read aloud in the hearing of the entire assembly. But if [the matter does] not [have need of my name], there will be no necessity for making my letter public. Farewell.