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ANSELM OF CANTERBURY'S *QUATTUOR MODI VOLENDI* OR HOW TO AVOID ACCUSING GOD OF SIN AND EVIL

ANZELMA Z CANTERBURY *QUATTUOR MODI VOLENDI* LUB JAK UNIKNAĆ OSKARŻENIA BOGA O GRZECH I ZŁO

ABSTRACT

The paper is an attempt to put into focus the problem discussed by Kathryn R. Rogers and Hugh McCann whether or not Anselm of Canterbury makes God responsible for sin and evil. The obvious Anselmian text to refer to is that of the *Philosophical Fragments*, in which Anselm presents his understanding of the four ways of willing something (*quattuor modi volendi*), something which neither Rogers nor McCann seem to take into account.

The whole purpose of Anselm's distinguishing between four types of willing is to enable one to interpret properly passages of Scripture where God's will is referred to and, one may add, to help scholars such as Rogers and McCann find a simple way out of the labyrinth, in which, it would seem, they have lost themselves in.

Artykuł stanowi próbę podjęcia dyskusji nad problemem, który omawia K. R. Rogers i H. McCann: czy Anselm z Canterbury obarcza Boga odpowiedzialnością za grzech i zło? Naturalny punkt odniesienia w tej kwestii stanowi dzieło *Philosophical Fragments*, w którym Anselm przedstawia swoje rozumienie czterech sposobów chcenia czegoś (*quattuor modi volendi*), czego jak się wydaje zarówno Rogers jak i McCann nie biorą pod uwagę.

Celem dokonanego przez Anzelma rozróżnienia czterech rodzajów chcenia jest umożliwienie właściwej interpretacji fragmentów Pisma Świętego dotyczących woli Bożej oraz, możemy dodać, aby pomóc uczonym takim jak Rogers i McCann znaleźć proste wyjście z labiryntu, w którym, jak się wydaje, zagubili się.

In the October 2011 issue of *Faith and Philosophy*, we have a continuation of the polemic between Kathryn R. Rogers and Hugh McCann regarding the problem of whether or not Anselm of Canterbury makes God responsible for sin and evil. The last rebut is by Rogers and is entitled, *Anselm against McCann on God and Sin: Further Discussion*¹.

¹ K.A. Rogers, "Anselm against McCann on God and Sin: Further Discussion", *Faith and Philosophy* 28 (2011), 397-415. Previous discussion: H. McCann, "The Author of Sin?" *Faith and Philosophy* 22 (2005), 144-159; K.A. Rogers, "God is Not the Author of Sin: An Anselmian Response to McCann", *Faith and Philosophy* 24 (2007), 300-310; H. McCann, "God, Sin and Rogers on Anselm: A Reply", *Faith and Philosophy* 26 (2009), 420-431.

The first impression one has after reading Rogers' text is one of disbelief: how do Rogers and (it would seem) McCann² manage to discuss Anselm's thought without referring to one of his essential writings on the topic?

The Anselmian text in question is to be found in the *Philosophical Fragments*, in which Anselm presents his understanding of the four ways of willing something (*quattuor modi volendi*). This text was published in an English translation by D.P. Henry in *Anselm of Canterbury. The Major Works*³. There is an earlier translation by J. Hopkins in his well known *[A] Companion to the Study of St. Anselm*⁴. Earlier still and probably the first English wording of the text is presented by Imelda Choquette in "Voluntas, Affectio and Potestas in the Liber de Voluntate of St. Anselm"⁵. Here she remarks that Anselm's "distinction is important in relation to God's will (...) and he [Anselm] takes the opportunity here for a little exegesis by way of illustrating this distinction".

The whole purpose of Anselm's distinguishing between four types of willing is to enable one to interpret properly passages of Scripture where God's will is referred to and, one may add, to help scholars such as Rogers and McCann find a simple way out of the labyrinth, in which, it would seem, they have lost themselves.

My intention here is to bring to the forefront Anselmian texts which seem to have been disregarded in the Roger-McCann discussion and which, in my opinion, are key texts to be consulted, if the problem they raise is to stand a chance of being solved⁶.

The Anselmian source texts referred to

Anselm considers the subject of the will of God in several of his works: *De libertate arbitrii*; *De casu diaboli*; *Epistola de Incarnatione Verbi*; *Cur Deus Homo?*; *De conceptu virginali*; *De Concordia* as well as in the *Philosophical Fragments*. He also wrote on this topic in his *De voluntate* and in the spurious *De voluntate Dei*, which, although it may be of doubtful authorship, is in line with Anselmian thought.

As regards our problem, the most important are the short texts Anselm wrote and which are part of the *Philosophical Fragments*, namely "A. The four senses

² I have not been able to obtain the texts of the previous parts of this discussion and am not aware whether Rogers or McCann actually made use in them of Anselm's *Philosophical Fragments*. The argumentation in the last of the episodes would rather convince me that they did not take into account this work.

³ *Anselm of Canterbury. The Major Works*. Edited with an Introduction by Brian Davies & G.R. Evans, OUP, 1998, 475-477.

⁴ J. Hopkins, *A Companion to the Study of St. Anselm*, Minneapolis 1972, 233-235.

⁵ I. Choquette, "Voluntas, Affectio and Potestas in the Liber de Voluntate of St. Anselm" *Mediaeval Studies*, 4, (1942), 61-81.

⁶ I would like express my gratitude to Dr. Tadeusz Grzesik whom I consulted as one who has translated into Polish the part of Anselm's *Philosophical Fragments*, (unpublished) to which I refer in my paper.

of 'to will'" and "B. Scriptural uses of the senses of 'to will' related to the styles of 'to do'"⁷. It was Dom F.S. Schmitt OSB who first discovered and wrote about the *Philosophical Fragments* in 1936⁸. In 1969, together with Sir Richard Southern, he published a critical edition of the text⁹. The only extant manuscript is kept in the library of Lambeth Palace, the London residence of the archbishops of Canterbury.

As Dom Schmitt points out, the *Philosophical Fragments* is an unfinished work (unvollendetes Werk), but the ideas he presents in it seem to have been thought out fully and, as such, are essential to his thought.

In presenting Anselm's distinction regarding the modes of willing, Choquette refers to Anselm's *Liber de voluntate* and all she really does is to give a translation of this text without specifying that she is quoting Anselm word for word. Her merit is that she was probably the first to give us an English translation of it. She seems to be unaware of Dom Schmitt's paper mentioned above. The *Liber de voluntate*, to which Choquette refers, gives only three of the four subdivisions that we have in the *Philosophical Fragments*: it lacks the *voluntas concedens*. Choquette translates these as follows: the efficient will, the will of approbation and the will of permission.

In her comparative study of Augustine's and Anselm's idea of freedom, Mary T. Clark¹⁰ like Choquette does not take the *Philosophical Fragments* into consideration. However, she refers to the *De voluntate Dei* and points out a fourth Anselmian mode of willing found in this short treatise, the *voluntas concedens*, which she translates as "yielding".

The four types of willing (*quattuor modi volendi*)

Anselm distinguishes the following ways of willing something:

1. **Voluntas efficiens: efficient** (Choquette/Hopkins¹¹), **effective** (Henry), **accomplishing** (Clark);

2. **Voluntas approbans: approving** (Hopkins/Clark), **approbative** (Henry), **of approbation** (Choquette);

3. **Voluntas concedens** (omitted in the *De voluntate*): **conceding** (Hopkins), **concessive** (Henry), **yielding** (Clark);

4. **Voluntas permittens: permissive** (Hopkins), **permitting** (Henry/Clark), **of permission** (Choquette).

In general, it may be said that Anselm lists these four ways of willing starting with the strongest form of willing, the *voluntas efficiens*, and ending with the weakest, the *voluntas permittens*.

⁷ Anselm, *The Major Works...*, 475-477.

⁸ F.S. Schmitt, "Ein neues, unvollendetes Werk des hl. Anselm von Canterbury", *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie und Theologie des Mittelalters*, XXXIII, 3, (1936).

⁹ *Memorials of St. Anselm*, eds. R.W. Southern & F.S. Schmitt OSB, Oxford 1969, 334-351.

¹⁰ Mary T. Clark, *Augustine. Philosopher of Freedom*, New York 1958, 163.

¹¹ I have given the translations by I. Choquette, M.T. Clark, D.P. Henry and J. Hopkins of these terms.

Preliminary remarks

1. In the *De libertate arbitrii*, Anselm says, “Every willing person wills his own willing” (Nam omnis volens ipsum suum velle vult)¹². If so, then this will also be the case of God’s willing: He wills his own will.

This may be called God’s *voluntas propter se* and is the will we pray for in the *Pater noster*, that it may be done on earth as it is in heaven. If heaven is heaven, it is because God’s will is perfectly accomplished there. And if earth is not heaven, it is because we are responsible for creating obstacles for His will to be done, owing to our disobedience.

From our point of view, we may also distinguish a different aspect of God’s will (one which takes into account human weakness) - a *voluntas propter aliud*, and in this category we may place the *voluntas concedens* and *voluntas permittens*: God does not approve of our action, but lets us have our own way, His *voluntas propter aliud* allows our *voluntas propter se* to come into effect and thereby honours the gift of freedom, which He bestowed upon the human being. Any concessions He may make are due to our sinfulness, which is a result of our disobedience.

2. In the *Cur Deus Homo?* Anselm gives a general trait of God’s will, “for the will of God is never irrational” (*Voluntas namque Dei nunquam est irrationabilis*)¹³. Anselm, as most of the Scholastics, stresses the importance of the intellect in the act of willing, although not yet calling it an “*appetitus rationalis sequens intellectum*”. All God’s willing, therefore, is reasonable and we would be mistaken to make Him responsible for evil or sin, which of their essence are “anti-divine”. God cannot will anything against Himself and this reason alone would suffice for those speculating on His will to refrain from accusing Him of willing evil or sin. Even when evil does occur, God’s goodness can make it serve a good purpose, as Anselm tells us in the *De Concordia*, “Assuredly, he causes the afflictions by which he tries and purifies the just and punishes the wicked”¹⁴, however, God is not the author, inventor or source of evil and, Anselm continues, “just as God does not cause unrighteousness, so too he does not cause something to be unrighteous”¹⁵.

The primus modus volendi: voluntas efficiens

In the *De voluntate Dei* V, this way of willing is described as follows, “*efficiens voluntas in Deo facit quidquid vult*” (The accomplishing will in God does whatever it wills)¹⁶.

Of all the English translations, Mary Clark’s, who calls it the “accomplishing will”, seems the most appropriate. For this strongest expression of the will, Anselm

¹² Anselm, *The Major Works...*, 181, [*On Free Will (De libertate arbitrii)*, chap. 5].

¹³ Anselm, *The Major Works...*, 274, [*Why God became man (Cur Deus homo?)* I, 8].

¹⁴ Anselm, *The Major Works...*, 448, [*De concordia*, I, 7].

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ PL 158, col. 584 [My own translation].

gives two examples from Scripture: “Omnia, quaecumque voluit, fecit”; “Cui vult, miseretur”¹⁷.

This is the sort of willing, for which God is fully responsible as something completely dependent on Him without any external intervening factor. Whatever is willed in such a way, will surely come to pass as caused by divine reason and is therefore not subject to human judgement. The *voluntas efficiens*, in other words, does not allow for anything, which is not divine, to influence it: it is perfect, eternal and unchangeable; it is beyond our reach and therefore difficult to grasp. If we hope to come to understand God’s will, it will only be by accepting it and by humbly trying to live according to it, as Anselm advises in his prefatory comment given in the *Epistola de Incarnatione Verbi*,

No Christian ought to argue how things that the Catholic Church sincerely believes and verbally professes are not so, but by always adhering to the same faith without hesitation, by loving it, and by humbly living according to it, a Christian ought to argue how they are, inasmuch as one can look for reasons. If one can understand, one should thank God; if one cannot, one should bow one’s head in veneration rather than sound off trumpets¹⁸.

The phrase “sound off trumpets” conveys a heartier meaning in the original Latin “non immitat cornua ad ventilandum”: one should not ventilate one’s horns.

Divine Truth, as divine willing, are to be approached in an act of homage and it would be unbecoming not to do so; humility is essential factor, if we are to understand the ways of the Almighty, as Anselm reminds us, “And we ought to become little ones by humbly obeying the testimonies of God, so that we learn the wisdom that ‘the trustworthy testimony of the Lord, manifesting wisdom to the little ones’ gives”¹⁹.

This unadulterated form of the will of God is something to be revered as coming from on high, something which only God understands perfectly.

Newman’s well known hymn puts this well,

Praise to the Holiest in the height
And in the depth be praise,
In all His words most wonderful,
Most sure in all His ways²⁰.

¹⁷ Respectively: Ps. 115,3; Rom. 9,18.

¹⁸ Anselm, *The Major Works...*, 235, [*On the Incarnation of the Word, (Epistola de Incarnatione Verbi)* I]. (Nullus quippe Christianus debet disputare, quomodo quod catholica ecclesia corde credit et ore confitetur non sit, sed semper eandem fidem indubitanter tenendo, amando et secundum illam vivendo humiliter quantum potest quaerere rationem quomodo sit. Si potest intelligere, deo gratias agat; si non potest, non immitat cornua ad ventilandum sed submitat caput ad venerandum). [My own underlining].

¹⁹ Ibid., 236. (Et prius per humilem oboedientiam testimoniorum dei debemus fieri parvuli, ut discamus sapientiam quam dat testimonium domini fidele, sapientiam praestans parvulis).

²⁰ J.H. Newman, *The Dream of Gerontius*, (1865) [www.newmanreader.org].

Only God may be “most sure in all His ways” and human beings should not, as the ancient Greeks, take Him to be subject to the whims and failings that they themselves are subject to.

The secundus modus volendi: voluntas approbans

This mode of God’s willing is not problematic in respect of understanding it in relation to the human being, it merely expresses divine approval of human action, which is in accordance with divine law. Man appreciates and accepts in obedience what God wills (*quod vult Deus*), and God acknowledges this by His approval. “*Approbans est, quae approbat aliquid, et haec ad hominem pertinent et ad Deum*” (The approving is one which approves something and which pertains both to man and to God)²¹.

The tertius modus volendi: voluntas concedens, and quartus modus volendi: voluntas permittens

The third and fourth types of willing are the most problematic. In the *De voluntate Dei* these are described respectively as: “*Concedens est, quae concedit ut fiat aliquid*”; “*Permittens voluntas est, quae permittit aliquid fieri, etsi displiceat quandoque*”(The yielding is that which allows for something to happen. The permitting will is one which allows for something to be done, even if at some time it is displeased with it)²².

Human nature, weakened by original sin, allows our “horns” to grow and get in the way and become the cause of other manifestations of God’s willing exemplified by the third type, the *voluntas concedens* and by the fourth type, the *voluntas permittens*.

In such instances, God’s will is never of the first or second type, as He neither approves nor is responsible for what is the result of man’s *voluntas propter se*. Having given the human being free will, God does not suspend this gift when man wills something which displeases God or does not merit His approval. Of course, He could take away our free will, but that would be an irrational manifestation of His will, something quite unbecoming of the One whose “*voluntas nunquam est irrationabilis*”.

The attitude of the third and fourth type of willing is clearly depicted in the parable of the prodigal son in the Gospel²³ (although Anselm does not use this example in this context). The father concedes and lets his son have the part of his inheritance, which is his due, knowing perhaps all too well that his son has the “talent” to waste it. He nonetheless tolerates this demand made by his son, permitting him to have his own way. The reason behind this might be that it would be an opportunity

²¹ PL 158, col. 584 [My own translation].

²² Ibid. [My own translation].

²³ Luke, XV, 11-32.

for the son to learn from his own experience that his *voluntas propter se* leads to his ruin. In this case, we certainly cannot blame the father for what happened later (just as God cannot be blamed for the evil committed by human beings), although we could perhaps speculate as to whether the father should or should not have complied to his son's demands. The son was well within his rights to act as he did (otherwise the father would not have yielded to his son's demand) and to will as he wanted to, although this proved to be the cause of his own misfortune.

For the third mode, omitted in the *De voluntate*, and which Clark renders as the "yielding will"²⁴, the example given in the *De voluntate Dei* is that of God conceding marriage to men who do not choose the better option, "Concedente autem voluntate vult Deus, ut homo qui melius non proposuit, uxorem ducat"²⁵.

In the *Philosophical Fragments*, however, Anselm gives a different non-Scriptural example, when he refers to the situation of "a creditor who is willing to excuse a debtor, and to accept barley in place of the corn that the debtor is unable to restore to him"²⁶.

When explaining the fourth mode, the *voluntas permittens*, Anselm uses the following example: "Whom he wills, he hardens"²⁷.

The most problematic of modes of willing is the fourth, as it would seem that by it God might be in a certain way the author of evil and sin. Our doubts, before we even begin to speculate on the subject, should be dispelled by a sentence taken from Scripture "Whoever has a haughty look and an arrogant heart I will not endure"²⁸.

On this occasion, one needs to have recourse to Scripture in order to interpret properly the meaning of any ambiguous statement. This is of capital importance, as it quite often constitutes the Achilles tendon of philosophers discussing a theological issue, as in case of the Rogers - McCann dispute. Here in addition to understanding the different *modi* of God's willing, one has also to avoid a perverse interpretation of Scripture, of which Anselm warns in the *Epistola de Incarnatione Verbi*²⁹. "And all should be warned to approach questions concerning the sacred text of Scripture carefully"³⁰. The problem has many dimensions, starting with the basic one. In *Cur Deus Homo?* Anselm points out that, "From different viewpoints (...) the same action is both just and unjust. (...) In this way, therefore, the devil is said to harass mankind justly, because God permits this justly, and man suffers it justly"³¹. On no account should one be led to think that the devil acts justly, for "the devil was not acting in this way at the command of God, but

²⁴ Clark, *Augustine...*, 163.

²⁵ PL 158, col. 584.

²⁶ Anselm, *The Major Works...*, 475, [*Philosophical Fragments* A, 3].

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 476.

²⁸ Ps. 101, 5.

²⁹ Cf. Anselm, *The Major Works...*, 238, [*On the Incarnation of the Word*, (*Epistola de Incarnatione Verbi*) 2].

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 237.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 273, [*Why God became man (Cur Deus homo?)* I, 7].

with the permission of God's incomprehensible wisdom, by which He orders even bad things in a way that is good"³². Here, one would agree with Rogers' criticism of McCann's idea of the theodicy of sin, that "the act of sin is willed by God for as a necessary means to a greater good"³³. God never wills evil or sin as such. One only needs to refer to Anselm, to realize how strongly he expresses his view as regards the seriousness of sin, "I have no alternative but to admit that, for the sake even of preserving the whole of creation, there is nothing which I ought to do contrary to the will of God"³⁴.

The whole of chapter 21 of the first book of *Cur Deus Homo?* treats of "How heavy the weight of sin is" and cannot be overlooked when considering God's willing in respect of evil and sin. Anselm's horror of sin is evident in many of his writings, he stresses the seriousness of anything, which is contrary to God's will: Anselm would rather see the whole of creation annihilated than even the slightest disobedience committed against God's will. This he could not have expressed in the *Cur Deus Homo?* with greater emphasis.

The purpose of Anselm's distinguishing between four modes of willing is to help one to interpret properly passages of Scripture where God's will is referred to. Without such a discernment, we may unwittingly accuse God of being responsible for evil and sin.

To recapitulate, the first and second modes of will (accomplishing and approving), are the only ones for which God is responsible – His *voluntas propter se* and which are not conditioned by the human will. The other two modes of willing (i.e. yielding and conceding) are God's *voluntas propter aliud*, focusing on human beings and showing God's patience and tolerance of our evil ways. The words of the Nicene Creed "propter nos homines et propter nostram salutem" (for us men and for our salvation) remind us of the soteriological character of God's will, who is intent on saving mankind, **a will that we discover in the four different modes**, working for our salvation.

The divine plan of salvation is in itself a mystery, revealed to human beings in the life and death of Jesus Christ. To fully understand God's will in this respect, and why he chose to redeem mankind in the way He did, will always be beyond our comprehension and many a person considering this may marvel, why He who was without sin was crucified for the sake of sinners. However, this was part of God's plan to redeem mankind from sin and evil. If this essential part of the Gospel message is not viewed in a context of God's *voluntas propter aliud*, then even Anselm's distinguishing of the different types of willing is to no avail if we lack the *intellectus fidei*.

The great event of Good Friday was achievable owing to God's *voluntas concedens*; even His Son accepted this expression of the Father's will, although he found this most difficult in the Garden of Gethsemani, "take this cup from me.

³² Ibid.

³³ Rogers, "Anselm against McCann..." 412.

³⁴ Anselm, *The Major works...*, 306, [*Why God became man (Cur Deus homo?)* I, 21].

Yet not what I will, but what you will”³⁵. Obedience unto death is the example given to mankind by the Son. Evil’s triumph on Good Friday was short-lived, and it was through Jesus Christ that the disobedience which tempted Adam and Eve to sin, was overcome by the Son’s perfect submission to the will of the Father, which brought about the salvation of mankind.

In our contemporary postmodernist world any talk of sin seems irrelevant, as there is no absolute truth to adhere to: everything is relative. And so the real problem is not just one of referring to relevant texts of Anselm when discussing his understanding of the will of God, it is also one of *intellectus fidei*, which accepts Divine Revelation as the Truth, and one of a life lived accordingly: it fully involves the human being, so much so that Boso, Anselm’s student who is the interlocutor in the dialogue, on hearing Anselm’s conclusion, “This is how seriously we sin, whenever we knowingly do anything, however small, contrary to the will of God. For we are always in his sight, and it is always the teaching he gives us that we should not sin”, exclaims, “To judge from what I am hearing, we live very dangerously”³⁶.

Słowa kluczowe: wczesna scholastyka, Anselm z Canterbury, *intellectus fidei*,
cztery sposoby chcenia

Keywords: early scholastics, Anselm of Canterbury, *intellectus fidei*,
four modes of willing

³⁵ Mark, 14:36.

³⁶ Anselm, *The Major works...*, 306, [*Why God became man (Cur Deus homo?)* I, 21].