

Heroes of the Faith

SAMPLE

About the Editor

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Roland Ashby, Director, Anglican Media Melbourne, and Editor,
The Melbourne Anglican.

Heroes of the Faith

**55 men and women
whose lives have
proclaimed Christ
and inspired the faith
of others**

Edited by Roland Ashby



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Foreword

At a time when the Church in the West needs to recover its confidence and reclaim its voice in the public square, this book is a welcome reminder of the great force for good that Christianity has been, and continues to be, in the world.

Through the lives of the remarkable men and women insightfully portrayed here, the reader is given a glimpse of the love of Christ and its power to transform. Each profile is a profound testimony to the belief that ‘God is, and God is love’, in the words of one of the book’s subjects, John Main.

Jesus promised to send us his Spirit (John 14:15–21). If you doubt that he did, then read this book. The reality and power of this Spirit is clearly evident in the lives described here – a Spirit that has inspired an often world-changing and selfless love that can ‘move mountains’.

This book is alive with this Spirit, a flame of love that burns brightly in the lives of all the Christian saints, and so I warmly commend it to you.

The Most Reverend Dr Philip Freier

Anglican Archbishop of Melbourne and Primate of Australia

Preface

This book is a celebration of lives that have been transformed by a living faith in Jesus Christ. Most of the articles first appeared in the series ‘Heroes of the Faith’ in *TMA* (*The Melbourne Anglican*, the award-winning monthly newspaper of the Anglican Diocese of Melbourne, Australia. See www.tma.melbourneanglican.org.au)

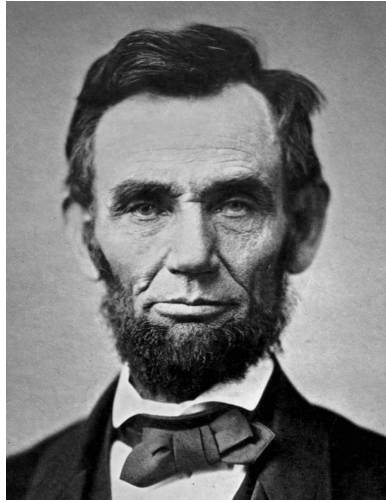
The writers were invited to write an outline of their subject’s life, reflect on their subject’s spirituality, and describe how their subject helped to shape their own beliefs and life.

The heroic subjects of the articles span a huge range of time, experience and theological thought, from venerable figures of antiquity such as Saint Augustine and the Desert Fathers and Mothers, through to inspiring leaders of our era, including Desmond Tutu and Mother Teresa.

Each essay reflects in a unique way the light, love and enduring truth of Jesus Christ and his message, and together the essays represent a rich and powerful unity in a diversity of Christian experience and witness.

The writers, too, come from all fields of life, including law, academia, journalism and the arts, and enhance our understanding of their subjects through their own personal experience and insights.

Roland Ashby



Abraham Lincoln

A firm belief in a just and omnipresent God

With the recent 150th Anniversaries of Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation and Gettysburg Address in 1863 and his assassination in 1865, a tribute to him as a man of firm and enduring faith is timely. David Harper AM, a former judge of the Court of Appeal, Supreme Court of Victoria, Australia, assesses the place of faith in the life of this remarkable statesman.

He was not counted as a hero of the faith, or of anything much, before 1 January 1863. And what he accomplished then, on New Year's Day over 150 years ago, did not receive universal acclaim. One of his critics, a noted Episcopalian named Jefferson Davis, described the Emancipation Proclamation as 'the most execrable measure in the history of guilty men'.

Like Davis, many others – within and beyond the Christian congregations of the Confederate States of America – were very frightened people. The objects of their fear were the slaves. With many Southern theologians voicing

support, Southern whites insisted that the Negro was significantly advantaged by being in bondage. It brought with it the care and comfort with which their Christian masters blessed them. But – as many in the South also believed – most slaves were not intelligent enough to appreciate how lucky they were. If freed, they might demonstrate their lack of gratitude in ways extremely prejudicial to the life, liberty and happiness of their former owners.

Abraham Lincoln (1809–1865) did not share these concerns, although – with the subtlety that characterised his thinking about ethics and morality – he recognised that not only slaves but masters too were captive to slavery's bondage. When on 1 December 1862, a month before the Emancipation Proclamation took effect, he presented Congress with his proposals for dealing with the difficult racial issues faced by both North and South, he clothed those proposals in language that Davis and his constituents would not have recognised:

In giving freedom to the slave we assure freedom to the free – honourable alike in what we give, and what we preserve. We shall nobly save, or meanly lose, the last, best hope of earth. Other means may succeed; this could not fail. The way is plain, peaceful, generous, just – a way which, if followed, the world will forever applaud, and God must forever bless.

For the one eighth of the population of the then disunited States of America who were slaves, and for millions of their fellow countrymen and women, New Year's Day 1863 *was* blessed by God. Before the civil war began, a few slaves may have dared to dream of emancipation. As a reality, however, freedom was not even a faint glow on the narrow horizons within the confines of which their lives were bound and trussed.

The reference to God in Lincoln's Congressional address was but one instance of innumerable others. God, by reference if not by reality, is now a given in American politics. With Lincoln these references came from the essence of his being. Lincoln, perhaps as much as any politician before or since, had the statesman's capacity for rigorous intellectual and practical engagement with ultimate concerns. It was, as these things are, an innate quality. But its continuing development required the constant input of a constantly maturing mind and heart. That Lincoln nurtured, cultivated and harvested this gift through the four exhausting years of civil war, against the unimaginable pres-

asures of his office, is one of the small miracles of the 19th century. And if he deserves being categorised as a hero of the faith, it is because his belief in a just and omnipresent God provided him with the essential framework without which his extraordinary capacity for moving seamlessly between the temporal and the timeless could not have borne the rich fruit it did.

Lincoln's parents were members of a sect known as Separate Baptists. According to Ronald White, the Dean and Professor of American Religious History at San Francisco Theological Seminary, they were distinguished from other Baptists 'in that they accepted no creed but the Bible'. This may explain Lincoln's lifelong habit of Bible reading, and therefore his deep familiarity with it. Although diffident when speaking about matters that he regarded as private, he was, writes Richard Carwardine, Rhodes Professor of American History at the University of Oxford, recognised by those who knew him well as 'naturally religious'. But he developed a distaste for intra- and inter-sect bickering, and never formally joined any congregation. He indulged his interest in theology by seeking the friendship of intelligent and cultivated clerics in the two cities in which he spent most of his adult life: Springfield Illinois and Washington DC. In Springfield, these were the Episcopalian Charles Dresser and the Presbyterian James Smith; in Washington, Phineas Gurley, a scholar of the 'Reformed' school of theology as taught at Gurley's alma mater, the Princeton Theological Seminary. Ronald White describes Gurley as 'an overlooked figure in the Lincoln story'.

Lincoln was born on 12 February 1809. Slavery was the dominant national issue in the lives of all Americans who, like Lincoln, lived through the first six decades of the 19th century. It was known in the South as well as in the North as the 'peculiar institution', perhaps because it was peculiarly multidimensional. It had moral, political, economic and social aspects, each one of them a potent source of emotional responses that when combined, as they generally were, left little room for rational thought, let alone rational debate.

It was that small niche of rationality that Lincoln, perhaps instinctively, strove to occupy. Few in his time, including Lincoln himself, accepted that he succeeded – certainly not completely. Reputable historians generally agree, however, that he got about as close as anyone could.

He began from a firm moral base. He was, as he told Albert Hodges, an editor of a Kentucky newspaper, in a letter dated 4 April 1864, 'naturally an-

ti-slavery'. He continued: 'If slavery is not wrong, nothing is wrong. I cannot remember when I did not so think, and feel.'

The letter was in response to a request from Hodges to put in writing the substance of the points Lincoln had made during a meeting on 26 March at the White House at which Hodges and the then Governor of Kentucky (a slave State) were present. In the letter, Lincoln set out his reasons for issuing the Emancipation Proclamation, and for authorising the recruitment of black soldiers and sailors into the armed forces of the Union. Given the opposition these measures aroused not only in border States such as Kentucky, but more generally throughout the North, Lincoln added that he had initially 'hoped for greater gain than loss; but of this, I was not entirely confident'. A year's trial, however, had confirmed the correctness of the decision.

The letter's final paragraph is typically Lincoln: modest, even-handed and with penetrating insight:

I add a word which was not in the verbal conversation. In telling this tale I attempt no compliment to my own sagacity. I claim not to have controlled events, but confess plainly that events have controlled me. Now, at the end of three years' struggle, the nation's condition is not what either party, or any man, devised or expected. God alone can claim it. ... If God now wills the removal of a great wrong, and wills also that we of the North as well as you of the South shall pay fairly for our complicity in that wrong, impartial history will find therein new cause to attest the justness and goodness of God.

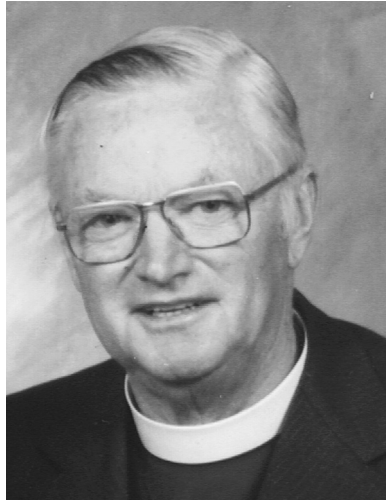
Eleven months later, on 4 March 1865, Lincoln spoke at his second inauguration. He was the first President since Andrew Jackson in 1832 to be elected for a second term. The civil war was as good as won. Most politicians would have been triumphant in their humility. In the North, the prevailing sentiments were self-righteous pride coupled with contempt for the rebels. But, as Lincoln appreciated, attitudes such as these would be grave obstacles to an orderly and peaceful national reconstruction. In the meantime, the new birth of freedom about which Lincoln had spoken at Gettysburg, and the childhood of which began with the Emancipation Proclamation, was far from its maturity. The truth, proclaimed with such confidence in the Declaration of Independence on 4 July 1776 – that all men are created equal – might have

been cerebrally self-evident to most. It was, almost 89 years later, viscerally denied by even more: in the North by many millions, if not most; and in the South by the overwhelming majority.

Lincoln, almost certainly alone among those then in power in America, knew that if meaning was to be given to the events leading up to civil war, to the war itself, and to ‘a just, and a lasting, peace, among ourselves, and with all nations’, both North and South would have to recognise their complicity in the great crimes of slavery and of Negro oppression more generally. Both would need to resist the temptation to be judgemental. If, to adopt the expression Lincoln employed at his first inauguration, the ‘better angels of our nature’ were to prevail, both must proceed ‘with malice towards none; with charity for all; [and] with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right’. But this message would not be especially popular with Northerners besotted by victory. It was with typical courage and wisdom that on 4 March 1875, Lincoln spoke to an audience who expected something very different:

If we shall suppose that American slavery is one of those offences which, in the providence of God, must needs come, but which, having continued through His appointed time, He now wills to remove, and that He now gives to both North and South this terrible war, as the woe due to those by whom the offence came, shall we discern therein any departure from those divine attributes which the believers in a Living God always ascribe to Him?

Among what the historian Doris Kearns Goodwin described as Lincoln’s ‘extraordinary array of personal qualities’ was his ability to form and – far more than most politicians – to give practical reality to his judgements, by reference to what he perceived to be the justice of a just God. He continues to set the measure against which the highest standards of public service are to be assessed.



Bishop Alfred Stanway

His creed: ‘Prayer, care and you’re there’

In January 2011, shortly before he died, Bishop John Wilson wrote this profile of one of his special mentors and ‘Heroes of the Faith’, the missionary strategist Bishop Alfred Stanway (1908–1989). We are proud to publish Bishop Wilson’s final article in tribute to both him and Bishop Stanway. John W. Wilson was an author, an Old Testament Scholar, and a former Vicar General and Bishop of the Southern Region in the Anglican Diocese of Melbourne, Australia. He died on 22 January 2011 after a long battle with cancer.

I have many heroes in the faith – men and women from the earliest days of the church on – to inspire and instruct. What a wonderful heritage is ours! I am wary of having gurus, one or two persons to whom we always turn. No one is perfect and, as the Scripture says, ‘we all make many mistakes’ (James 3:2). Also times change and each generation requires fresh thinking and new perspectives.

One person whom I regard as a special mentor is Bishop Alfred Stanway. Alf was Deputy Principal of Ridley College, Melbourne, Australia, when my wife Jill, I and our children arrived there in 1973 after almost five years in the United States. We soon became great friends. He and his wife Marjory lived in an apartment directly under ours. We were on the same wavelength, with almost identical ideas about Ridley's potential future. We both found it easy to make friends among the students and university tutors.

Alf was my senior in every way of course. He had started his working life at 15 in accountancy, was converted through the ministry of C. H. Nash, had a call to go to Africa as a missionary, and was required by the Church Missionary Society to do teacher training as well as theological study. He left for Kenya in 1937. Marjory followed in 1939.

Jill and I had a great respect for Marjory. She was an intelligent woman, highly competent in the Swahili language, an artist, and one who gave an extraordinary level of support to Alf. They had no children and Marjory joked that the Lord knew Alf was more than enough to cope with.

In Kenya, he was made an archdeacon and had much to do with education. Then in 1950, the Archbishop of Canterbury appointed him Bishop of Central Tanganyika, a huge diocese at the time. It was here that his dynamic ideas were given full scope.

Alf elicited remarkable loyalty from many who worked with him. One of his first decisions was to give the missionaries new beds! He argued that people cannot be expected to do a proper day's work if they can't sleep at night.

'Upgrade' was one of his constant themes. If equipment was being thrown out in Australia as obsolete, why should the expense be undertaken to send it to Africa where it was likely to hinder progress? He would not condone sloppy administration and poor accounting practices. He held to high levels of transparency and honesty. But his organisational principles were people-centred, following those of Jesus, for whom the needs of people were always the priority.

He was criticised for his speedy handing over of responsibility to Africans, but he insisted that 'when history is written, it will be seen we did it too slowly'. It was really the Africanisation of the church that made him decide it was time to return to Melbourne. But under his leadership, the church had grown several times over.

He was a great believer in Christian literature as a tool for evangelism and for building up the life of the church. 'Whenever the Gospel is preached, liter-

ature will be needed.' He founded Central Tanganyika Press and on his return to Australia he was instrumental in the establishment of ACLS, the Australian Christian Literature Society, now part of SparkLit.

In its early years, ACLS concentrated on sending Kevin Engel across the world to help strengthen Christian publishing and bookselling in places such as the Southern Sudan, Madagascar and Argentina. In the case of Argentina, ACLS brought staff to Australia for training and experience here. Alf argued that separate and focused organisations were needed because when Christian literature is left to large agencies, it is usually neglected and often fails because of a lack of encouragement and support.

Alf was a long-time supporter of women's ministry, making this clear by his vote at the 1968 Lambeth Conference of Anglican bishops. As with many issues, he was able to cut through a tangle of arguments to what was at the heart of the matter. To him the preaching of the Gospel was primary and God was obviously calling women as well as men to this task, and they needed to be supported.

Alf loved succinct statements that summed up his philosophy. One that has never ceased to influence me is 'pray first or get nowhere fast'. Prayer was always a top priority. 'Prayer, care and you're there.'

Other sayings that characterise Alf include: 'The right use of money is the best guarantee of a fresh supply'; 'You will need all your intelligence to keep things simple'; 'learn to win by losing'; 'Nothing is too great for God's power; nothing is too small for God's love.'

To the great surprise of Alf and Marjory, he was invited on the recommendation of John Stott to be the founding President of Trinity Episcopal School for Ministry in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The school as yet did not exist, but it was as though all Alf's experience to date was a preparation. So he responded positively and in 1975 they moved to America. Over the next few years the school was established and continues to flourish.

In his next retirement, he and Marjory moved to Glen Waverley, where they made a lot of new friends and had a significant Bible study group in their home. Alf was now afflicted with Parkinson's disease, which in time robbed him of his ability to communicate, except with the help of his former missionary colleague, Margaret McKechnie. It was Margaret who enabled us to put together his book *Prayer: A Personal Testimony*. Alf and Marjory gradually divested themselves of their earthly possessions and Alf would say 'Next stop heaven!'

When I was appointed bishop, Alf wrote to me (thanks to Margaret) a letter of encouragement and wisdom. Among other things he said:

What are great moments – confirmation, marriage, ordination – should never be allowed to become just another service. Make every service count in the cause of Christ and it will lift the service from routine to worship.

Make sure your ministry is marked by encouragement. When you visit a pastor make it a pastoral visit. Learn to be encouraged by the blessing of others...

It is always right to be generous.

I continue to give thanks for Alf and Marjory. Our lives have been wonderfully blessed through their friendship and Christian example. I continue to regard Alf as a special mentor. I am glad that Dr Audrey Grant has all but completed a major biography and study of Alf's life and ministry. He was undoubtedly one of Australia's greatest missionary strategists as well as a humble, faithful follower of the Lord Jesus Christ and one who has left us a good and Godly heritage.

Reference:

Alfred Stanway, *Prayer: A Personal Testimony*, Acorn Press, 1991



Saint Anselm

His discovery of a new name for God

Saint Anselm, an 11th century monk and scholar who reluctantly became Archbishop of Canterbury in 1093, was an outstanding theologian who wrestled with doubt and belief, and who produced a brilliant theological argument for God's existence that has been rigorously debated ever since. The Reverend Dr Graeme Garrett, a member of the adjunct faculty of Trinity College at the University of Melbourne, Australia, reflects on this theological great, his influence on his own faith, and his relevance for today.

I always felt a bit of an outsider at school. Raised in a strict Brethren family, I accepted faith in God as a given. But the same faith was an embarrassment faced with the secularism of my classmates. Debates erupted from time to time, but went nowhere. In my last year, I stumbled across a little book by (I think) Alasdair MacIntyre. In it he sketched the main arguments for the existence of God – from design, from origins, from conscience, and so on. The

one that got to me – despite the unintelligibility of its label – he called the ‘ontological argument’. From memory it went something like this:

If we are going to discuss the existence of God, it is important to agree on what we are talking about. So, can we agree that God, if there is a God, is such that nothing greater than God can be conceived? That seemed reasonable. God as 2IC would be ridiculous. Alright, said MacIntyre, let us set out some of the attributes that befit God so understood. A lot of ‘all’ words appeared. God would be all-powerful, all-knowing, all-present, all-good, and so on. And let us suppose this God does *not* exist. We’ll call this idea of God ‘G1’. Now think of a second idea of God, ‘G2’. G2 has all the attributes of G1 – power, knowledge, goodness, etc. But this God *does* exist. [Hang in there – it gets better!] On the assumption that it is a greater thing to exist than not to exist, G2 as an idea of God significantly trumps G1. G2 has all the qualities of G1 with the added bonus of *existence*. But since we agreed that God is that than which nothing greater can be thought, G1 – the idea of the non-existent God – is ruled out. That leaves G2 – the idea of God as existing – in command of the field. I was amazed and elated. I couldn’t wait to try it on my atheist mates. They looked bored. They wouldn’t accept the conclusion. But couldn’t quite fault the logic. A schoolboy stalemate.

MacIntyre said a man named Anselm discovered the argument and that it had created a storm ever since. I had no idea who Anselm was. Faced with the indifference of my youthful interlocutors, I lost interest. Years later I found that Anselm was one of the great saints of the church. A man who lived, thought and spoke faith in God with a clarity and power rarely matched. A man worth knowing.

Anselm was born near Aosta on the border of Lombardy and Burgundy (now in Italy) in 1033. Little is known of his parents or childhood. An early biographer notes that his mother died when he was a young man. After that he lost his way for a time, left home and wandered aimlessly in Burgundy and France. In 1059 he entered the famous Benedictine monastery at Bec, situated south-west of Rouen in Normandy. The young Anselm rose quickly to positions of authority, becoming Prior in 1063 and Abbot in 1078. During thirty years at Bec, despite heavy administrative and pastoral responsibilities, Anselm produced many of the writings that built his reputation as ‘first theologian’ of the age. These include *Monologion* (Soliloquy) in 1076 and *Proslogion* (Address) in 1077–78. His character and intellect earned him an international

reputation as a wise counsellor. When William the Conqueror was dying in 1087, he called for Anselm to hear his confession.

Under considerable pressure and with great reluctance, Anselm was enthroned as Archbishop of Canterbury in 1093. He regarded himself primarily as a monk and scholar, unfitted for the demands of office in a major bishopric. Nevertheless, he proved a courageous and astute ecclesiastical shepherd, staunchly defending the spiritual independence of the church against powerful opposition from both William Rufus and Henry I. It is remarkable that during this time of stress and strife, Anselm managed to keep up his intellectual work, producing a stream of books including his most influential, a study of the atonement entitled *Cur Deus Homo?* (Why did God become human?). He died on 21 April 1109.

Anselm was many things: monk, scholar, bishop, statesman, counsellor. But from the outset his influence on me has been theological. A sketch of the full range of his thought is impossible, so I will concentrate on the famous 'theological tract' (Anselm's term!) *Proslogion*. As heavy-weight theology goes, *Proslogion* is mercifully brief. And of its 22 pages, the really influential bit is a mere two pages long. But those pages are dynamite. They contain that elusive 'ontological argument' MacIntyre referred to.

Anselm was a practical man. He understood that faith is a way of life, not a set of beliefs. But he also cherished the significance of theology. In an unforgettable phrase he defined theology as *fides quaerens intellectum* – 'faith in search of understanding'. Theology is not speculation about God; not a study of the history of religious ideas; not literary or historical commentary on biblical texts. It may contain such elements. But at heart theology is a struggle for understanding the faith of the living community of Christ. This theological quest is personal. If I am a part of Christ's church, I have to be involved with the *fides quaerens intellectum*. I can't flick-pass the job to you, or to Anselm. Here are the opening words of the *Proslogion*:

Come now, insignificant man, fly for a moment from your affairs, escape for a little while from the tumult of your thoughts. Put aside now your weighty cares and leave your wearisome toils. Abandon yourself for a while to God and rest for a little in Him. Enter into the inner chamber of your soul, shut out everything save God and what can be of help in your quest for Him and having locked the door seek Him out (Matthew 6:6).

These words speak of resting in God and entering the inner chamber of the soul. It sounds nice enough. But not for a minute are ease and peace what Anselm meets there. Like Jacob grappling with the angel by the brook Jabbok, the Divine Wrestler threw Anselm around in Bec and Canterbury. Jacob's theological problem was guilt and fear. Anselm's was doubt and belief. But the belligerent angel is the same. Anselm was pursued by the question of the reality of God. He describes the battle thus:

But as often and as diligently as I turned my thoughts to this, sometimes it seemed to me that I had almost reached what I was seeking, sometimes it eluded my acutest thinking completely, so that finally, in desperation, I was about to give up what I was looking for as something impossible to find. However, when I decided to put aside this idea altogether... then, in spite of my unwillingness and my resistance to it, it began to force itself upon me more and more pressingly. So it was that one day when I was quite worn out with resisting its importunacy, there came to me, in the very conflict of my thoughts, what I had despaired of finding, so that I eagerly grasped the notion which in my distraction I had been rejecting.

The battle felt overwhelming. But life, not death, was the outcome. Jacob found the courage to cross the Jabbok. Anselm found his astonishing argument. Both were a blessing. But both came through struggle.

What was it for Anselm? Six little Latin words: 'Now we believe that You [God] are *aliquid quo nihil maius cogitari possit* (something than which nothing greater can be thought).'

Is that what all the fuss has been about? Why? Karl Barth in his book on the *Proslogion* sums it up. Anselm's phrase, "something than which nothing greater can be thought" does not say *that* God is, nor *what* he is, but rather, in the form of a prohibition that man [*sic*] can understand, *who* he is'. In short what Anselm is given in his struggle is a *name* of God. The famous phrase is 'on no account the condensed formula of a doctrine of God that is capable of later expansion but it is a genuine description..., one Name of God, selected from among the various revealed Names of God for this occasion and for this particular purpose...'. This is theology. We struggle to know the name of God, who God really is, and knowing that, learn something more of what God is

and how God acts in the world. Exactly what that implies for Anselm has been hotly debated, and at a level of sophistication that is way out of my reach. (Just recall the names of some of those involved – Aquinas, Descartes, Leibniz, Hegel, Kant, Barth, Hartshorne, Russell!) Here I will mention two things.

i. *Unique existence.* If one of God's names is 'something than which nothing greater can be conceived', that implies God's being is unique and unsurpassable. If I think I know what I am talking about when I use the name 'God', but you show me that something greater, more inclusive, more lively is conceivable, you have shown me that what I *thought* was God is nothing of the kind. I am using the name of God in vain. This leads Anselm to the conviction that any idea of God that presumes, not just as a matter of *fact*, but even as a matter of *thought*, that God might not exist, is in itself the demonstration that that particular idea of God is false. 'Something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought exists so truly then, that it cannot even be thought not to exist. And You, Lord our God, are this being.' The assertion of God's non-existence is literally unthinkable; which seems to imply that God exists necessarily.

Whether this stands up is the heart of ensuing debates. Great minds have come down on different sides. Perhaps this much can be said. Anselm's name for God puts a big question mark against what has been called *contingent theism*. If there are some conditions we can think of that are incompatible with the being of God – if, for example, the level of suffering in the world utterly rules out the idea of a loving God, or if the laws of physics absolutely preclude the possibility of a creator God, or if time is so irresistible that God, if God exists, must eventually be borne away by it – if any of these conditions (or any others) rule out my idea of God then, according to Anselm's name, I have not thought who God truly is. As he says, 'everything else there is, except You alone, can be thought of as not existing'. But 'You cannot even be *thought* not to exist'.

ii. *A theological destabiliser.* Anselm's name for God is a kind of idol detector. 'Something than which nothing greater can be thought' relentlessly questions my thinking about God. As I look back across my theological journey one thing stands out, my ideas of God have *always* proven to be something than which a greater certainly can be thought. I was brought up in the Plymouth Brethren. There I learned that God was the God of *our* little community. The rest of the churches, to say nothing of other faiths and philosophies, were lost in eternal darkness. Well, there's an idea of God that needed the blow torch of Anselm's 'that than which nothing greater can be conceived'.

Again, I learned in my early years that males were somehow more central in church and ministry than females, and that language about God was best cast in male-weighted signs. The brilliant critique of women's theology over the past decades has made me face the fact that *my* 'something than which nothing greater can be thought' was in fact nothing of the sort. And I wonder if the recent bruising encounters within our world Anglican Communion over God and sexuality are not again a fight with the angel who brings us the name. Such conflicts are hard and wounding. They have always been. But the hope is they wound to heal. They break down in order to build up a better, more loving understanding of God as revealed in Jesus Christ, and of the practice of life and politics that flow from that.

One of the mysteries of the reception of Anselm's tract through history is the silence that surrounds it. The long sophisticated debate often concentrates its brilliant efforts on a few sentences taken from chapters 2 and 3 – the bits where Anselm reports his discovery. But the whole lead-up to these famous sentences is almost entirely ignored. As is clear from the citations I have used, much of the text of the *Proslogion* is not theological, still less philosophical, language. It is prayer, addressed not to us, but to God.

Anselm's theology does not talk *about* God, or not primarily, as most of his commentators do. Anselm talks *to* God. And his prayer brings God's being vividly to our awareness. Were God *not* to be, Anselm's prayer would be without meaning. Prayer implies *that* God is (we are not speaking into emptiness), that God is *personal* (we are not addressing some absolute principle), and that God is *active* (we ask something of God in the hope of a response). This prayer-theology and theological-prayer *speaks God...* not words about God. Just so. Anselm closes his celebrated tract on the proof of God in prayer:

God of truth, I ask that I may receive so that my 'joy may be complete' (John 16:24). Until then let my mind meditate on it, let my tongue speak of it, let my heart love it, let my mouth preach it. Let my soul hunger for it, let my flesh thirst for it, my whole being desire it, until I enter the 'joy of the Lord' (Matthew 25:21), who is God, Three in One, 'blessed forever. Amen' (Romans 1:25).

I wonder what my classmates would make of that.