

Anselm of Aosta: The challenge of knowledge and education throughout intellect

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Abstract

In this contribution, we aim to analyse the figure of Anselm of Aosta through a critical historical approach to bring to light how the concept of *intellectus*, which Anselm investigates, plays a key role from an educational point of view also. To this end, we will explore not only the theme of *intellectus* as an essential tool for self-discovery and openness to the transcendent but also its repercussions and its connection with the theme of *rectitudo*. We will show how these elements that characterize Anselm’s speculative thought are linked with his anthropological and educational conception and constitute an essential element for understanding the uniqueness and innovativeness of his thought.

In questo contributo ci proponiamo di studiare la figura di Anselmo d’Aosta attraverso un approccio storico critico per portare alla luce come il concetto di *intellectus* che Anselmo indaga giochi un ruolo chiave anche dal punto di vista educativo. Per questo esploreremo il tema dell’*intellectus* come uno strumento essenziale non solo per la scoperta di sé stessi e della propria apertura al trascendente, ma anche per le sue ripercussioni e il suo legame con il tema della *rectitudo*. Mostriamo come questi elementi che caratterizzano il pensiero speculativo di Anselmo siano legati con la sua concezione antropologica ed educativa e costituiscano un elemento essenziale per comprendere l’unicità l’unitarietà e l’innovatività del suo pensiero.

Keywords: history of education; Anselm of Aosta; intellectus; rectitude; history of medieval education

Parole chiave: storia dell’educazione; Anselmo d’Aosta; intellectus; rectitudo; storia dell’educazione nel Medioevo

1. Introduction

Anselm of Aosta was undoubtedly one of the greatest philosophers at the turn of the 12th century. If his greatness as a thinker is known to all and remains the focus of exciting studies and debates, it is at the same time true that the figure of Anselm as an educator has remained somewhat in the background. Eadmerus, his biographer, speaks of him as a great pedagogue and educator. A true master who combined his teaching with intellectual insight and a theoretical approach, but also with the example of actions and life.

In the contribution we are proposing, we wish to explore the figure of Anselm of Aosta through a critical historical approach, trying to bring out a fundamental aspect that is that of the *intellectus*, to try to show how this constitutes a fundamental passage for the human possibility of understanding and, to establish a cognitive process that leads to the discovery not only of the transcendent, but also of man himself through a true educational process. These are the fundamental aspects that we will attempt to highlight and which, in our opinion, characterise the distinctiveness of the Anselmian anthropological vision. This, of course, has repercussions that characterise Anselm's educational vision.

Anselm took up the challenge of knowledge by basing his research and teaching on rational criteria and principles, taking a theoretical paradigm to its highest peak. Anselm was searching for dialectic demonstrations of the rationality of faith that refocused every contingency of life under that light, because of this, Anselm, as an educator, attracted disciples and future masters. The significance of his works preceded him as he travelled around Europe, and for this reason, monks, students, abbots and educators turned to him for advice. This is precisely why his figure as an educator is exemplary: because in his school, he was always able to read the vicissitudes of life with surprising naturalness in the light of the highest and most profound philosophical and theological concepts. This is why he ceaselessly sought out channels of communication that changed according to the sensibilities and needs of his interlocutors, and through these relationships, he always succeeded in advancing in the search for truth guided by the power of intellect.

2. An educational focus

From a philosophical and theological point of view, attention on the monk of Aosta has never faded, so much so that the bibliography is endless. Among the latest works, we cannot fail to mention Leftow (2022), Slotemaker, J. T., & Sweeney, E. (2022), Healy-Varley, M., Gasper, G., & Younge, G. (2021), Enders, M. (2021), Holopainen, J. T. (2020), Catalani, L., & De Filippis, R. (2018). However, it was since the Saint-Vincent conference in 2002 (Biffi et al., 2003) that attention was also focused on an aspect that had been only tangentially or partially addressed, namely that of education. In our opinion, Xodo (2023, p. 199) emphasises a fundamental aspect that we believe to be crucial: that of a direct link between educational rationality and theological ratio. We agree and hope to emphasise the significance of this aspect. We have already pointed out (Odini, 2020) how God, man and the world are characterised by being the foundational places in which education takes place, and Anselm orders them, in this sense, in both the *Monologion* and the *Proslogion*. We had, however, left the so-called proofs of God's existence as a background in order to highlight the global vision that Anselm used from a methodological point of view.

Now, in this contribution we consider it necessary to take up this aspect again, which we had overlooked, in order to show how it constitutes a key element, also in educational terms. From the very first words of the *Monologion* we have confirmation of what we mentioned earlier, that is, of how attentive and caring Anselm was towards his brothers: "Quidam fratres saepe me studioseque precati sunt, ut quaedam, quae illis de meditanda divinitatis essentia et quibusdam aliis huiusmodi meditationi cohaerentibus usitato sermone colloquendo protuleram, sub quodam eis meditationis exemplo describerem" (SACA, M, *Prologus*, 2-5)¹. The *Monologion*

came into being not so much through the will of the author himself but through the insistence of some of his brothers who encouraged the master to write down the discourses he gave them on the divine essence. The birth of this work, therefore, must be sought in an educational concern of the author towards his confreres. Let us also bear in mind a second aspect, as Sciuto (1991, p.18) reminds us, this work should be read not so much alongside the other works, but as the origin and anticipated *summa* of the works that will follow.

Shortly afterwards, again in the work's prologue, we see how Anselm returns to show us how he did not follow, in his exposition, what was most congenial to him, but endeavoured to follow the requests of his brothers who asked him to set out his reasoning in simple language and without using the authority of the Bible as an argument in support, but simply to make explicit the clarity of the truth he reached through logical passages. "Cuius scilicet scribendae meditationis magis secundum suam voluntatem quam secundum rei facilitatem aut meam possibilitatem hanc mihi formam praestituerunt: quatenus auctoritate scripturae penitus nihil in ea persuaderetur, sed quidquid per singulas investigationes finis assereret, id ita esse plano stilo et vulgaribus argumentis simplici disputatione et rationi necessitas breviter cogeret et veritatis claritas patenter ostenderet. Volebant etiam, ut nec simplicibus paeneque fatuis obiectionibus mihi occurrentibus obviare contemnerem" (SACA, M, *Prologus*, 5-12).

There are therefore two aspects that can be grasped in these terms, and we emphasise them again. The first, Anselm's willingness to concede to a request from his confreres, which underlines all the human and educational attention of which he was capable towards his disciples. The second, of a more theoretical and methodological nature: a setting aside of biblical *auctoritas* to make room for *necessitas rationis* and *veritatis claritas*. This is what he is enacting, as Ghisalberti (2010, p. 4) also emphasises; a procedure that is entirely internal to reason, which finds itself forced to admit an intrinsic necessity that leads it to progress in discourse and investigation. Moreover, this aspect is the consequence of what Novikoff emphasises: "A younger contemporary of Lanfranc, Sigebert of Gembloux, admiringly describes the manner in which Lanfranc explicated the apostle Paul 'according to the laws of dialectic (secundum leges dialecticae)'. It was precisely this combined study of arts and theology that gave Lanfranc and the monastery of Bec its reputation (*fama*) across Europe in the late eleventh century. And it was precisely this endeavour, with even greater attention to the power of dialogue and disputation in a classroom setting, that allowed Anselm to achieve his theological, philosophical, and pedagogical success" (2013, p. 40). This again emphasises how the monastery played a key role in education in the Middle Ages, and for Bec in particular (Pohl & Gathagan, 2018).

For Bec in particular because Lanfranc had contributed to making the monastery known not only for the intellectual acumen of his works, but for the very school he had helped to build there. Anselm fits precisely into these terms and context and learns from what Lanfranc had built. Again, Novikoff points out how: "Anselm's method of instruction, as far as it can be reconstructed from his writings and those of the monks who knew him, was to hold a Socratic form of debate with his pupils in which the participants in the dispute argue out the issues" (2013, p. 42). This, we have said, is taken as his own method, although Anselm himself tells us, as we have seen, that in many cases, he would have preferred to proceed in a method more in his own likeness. Campbell writes: "What I find striking about Anselm's arguments, whether in the more philosophical works or in the more theological, is the way they always proceed within the context of what someone says [...] In the dialogue form adopted in many of the later works all of the statements are, of course, owned by one or other of the participants [...] Anselm is not indulging in idle speculation or intellectual games; he will only consider propositions which are 'owned' by one speaker. [...] Even in the *Monologion*, where the protagonist is most shadowy, and which Anselm tells us was written in the manner of one arguing with himself, it is clear that the questions raised are designed to clarify what is inherent in the domain of discourse within which Anselm was speaking"

(Campbell, 1984, pp. 553-554). Are these not aspects that denote great educational pedagogical attention and that connote not only the character but also the sensitivity of the author?

3. Through reason only

What we are interested in gaining at this point is a method and sensibility that we find as foundational in the *Monologion* and that return systematically in Anselm's works. However, we can now proceed to one aspect, the particular one that we are keen to investigate, which is what Anselm is actually famous for: the *Proslogion* proof. In this case, Anselm wonders whether it is not possible to find an argument that avoids the concatenation of arguments in the *Monologion* to prove the existence of the greatest nature and comes to use only one, necessary and sufficient, that proves not only that God really exists, but that he has a series of characteristics that are generally attributed to the divine substance. One of the mistakes one must avoid making is to extrapolate individual chapters of Anselm's work in order to absolutize them. Such an investigation would not only lead to misinterpretations of the author's thought, but would also contravene a historical-critical reading that requires us to follow what the author himself indicates. If the *Monologion* is an *exemplum meditandi de ratione fidei*, the *Proslogion* is a *Fides quaerens intellectum*. In this case, it is no longer a direct dialogue with his disciples. The *Proslogion* is the fruit of an *alloquium*, an entirely internal conversation that, in some respects, shows continuity with a kind of maieutic model that we mentioned earlier. Holopainen (2020, p. 11-12) emphasises how important these clarifications are "The preface to the *Proslogion* is designed to make the readers curious about Anselm's single argument—unless it happens they think they already know what the argument is. Unfortunately, this is the case with most modern readers: they already have strong ideas about the *Proslogion* and about Anselm's argument before they read any of Anselm's text".

At this point, one cannot fail to quote the words of Anselm, who emphasises certain aspects in the *Proemium* of the *Proslogion*. He says that he wrote the *Monologion* as an example of meditation on the rationality of faith at the pressing request of some of his brethren: "Postquam opusculum quoddam velut exemplum meditandi de ratione fidei cogentibus me precibus quorundam fratrum in persona alicuius tacite secum ratiocinando quae nesciat investigantis edidi" (SACA, P, *Proemium* 1,5), and this shows how the concern for his brethren was an aspect that was present in his mind. But another aspect cannot be overlooked: the fact that one cannot extrapolate from the entire *Proslogion* chapters II-IV, those of the famous proof, but must take into consideration, as Holopainen also suggests, the work in its entirety. Staglianò writes: "L'unicità logica e di pensiero dei cc. II-IV appare dunque irrecuperabile se non è colta nell'unità del fare narrativo di tutto il *Proslogion*, che, a sua volta, è l'espressione letteraria dell'unità profonda di quella porzione di esperienza credente e intellettuale da essa ridescritta, ri-significata. La stessa struttura letteraria della composizione esige di essere apprezzata in questa profonda armonia interiore" and shortly afterwards: "il suo pensiero, anzi, costringe allo svelamento della capacità infinita della mente, la quale deve essere incontraddittoriamente riconosciuta nel suo strutturale dinamismo, pena l'autocontraddizione, la stoltezza. Dentro queste premesse fondative di un approccio unitario al *Proslogion* che tenga conto dell'insieme globale teologico e dei sottoinsiemi che possono avere anche un carattere filosofico, non si può non dar ragione a M. Corbin che vede nel c. XV il 'centro geometrico' di una struttura circolare e simmetrica: è il tema della *sovracomprensibilità di Dio*. Rispetto a questo centro focale, vertice del movimento speculativo, le argomentazioni volte a determinare una conoscenza positiva di Dio sono distribuite in direzione crescente, mentre quelle che esprimono l'ineffabilità della sua natura in senso decrescente" (1996, p. 184).

Man finds himself at the centre of this twofold movement and, in order to be able to utilise all the potential that is inherent in his nature, he needs, as it were, to return to himself and concentrate. For this he needs a prayer: the *excitatio mentis ad contemplandum deum*. Anselm, in this beautiful prayer, first of all traces a theme already

known and famous from Augustine, man is always only a man “Eia nunc, homuncio” (SACA, P, I, 4, p. 98) and in order to understand himself better, he needs to withdraw from everyday thoughts to make himself available to God. Anselm invites man to enter the room of the mind and leave everything outside that is not useful to seek and find the revelation of the face of God: “Abice nunc onerosas curas, et postpone laboriosas distentiones tuas. Vaca aliquantulum deo, et requiesce aliquantulum in eo. ‘Intra in cubiculum’ mentis tuae, exclude omnia praeter deum et quae te iuvent ad quaerendum eum, et ‘clauso ostio’ quaere eum. Dic nunc, totum ‘cor meum’, dic nunc deo: ‘Quaero vultum tuum; vultum tuum, domine, require’” (SACA, P, I, 4-10 p. 98).

Anselm specified in the work’s proem how, in his search for this unique argument for this demonstration, he not only proved the existence of God, but also that he is the supreme good, who needs nothing else, whereas all other things need him in order to be and to be well: “coepi mecum quaerere, si forte posset inveniri unum argumentum, quod nullo alio ad se probandum quam se solo indigeret, et solum ad astruendum quia deus vere est, et quia est summum bonum nullo alio indigens, et quo omnia indigent ut sint et ut bene sint, et quaecumque de divina credimus substantia, sufficeret” (SACA, P, *Proemium* 5-10, p. 93).

In the *Proslogion*, it is faith that seeks the intellect to find its own internal coherence through the effort of reason. The subject is forced to enter into itself and to compare itself to the self as a subject that is expressed in its activity of being a thinking self, and the product of this activity. The main subject of the work is thought itself, with its capacity for abstraction and enquiry, a synthesis of thinking a thought and thinking of the thought, which is constituted as the premise and condition of the thought of God himself as thought and as existing. This, in essence, we believe to be that conflict of thoughts that Anselm himself tells us he was occupied with trying to grasp the *unum argumentum*: “Cum igitur quadam die vehementer eius importunitati resistendo fatigarer, in ipso cogitationum conflictu sic se obtulit quod desperaveram, ut studiose cogitationem amplecterer, quam sollicitus repellebam” (SACA, P, *Proemium* 16-19, p. 93). In his *Vita Anselmi* (Eadmero 1986, p. 58), Eadmero tells us how his attempt to grasp that thought in a single moment had taken away his desire to eat and sleep, thus disturbing him not only in his prayer and intellectual activities, but also in his body and his everyday life. So it was that Eadmerus tells us how, during a prayer vigil one night, he had that intuition of which the work is the fruit.

We definitely find Logan’s writing interesting: “The outcome of Anselm’s argument in the *Proslogion* is not simply that the God of Catholic belief exists, but that this God cannot be eradicated by or from human reason. [...] It’s this trinitarian image of God in man that allows Anselm to achieve his objective in the *Monologion* of establishing ‘by reason alone’ (M1) the necessity of the Catholic doctrine of God as Trinity. Thus, even prior to the *Proslogion*, Anselm is involved in a ‘turn to the subject’ to understanding itself as the basis on which God is to be understood” (Logan, 2009, p. 197). We agree with Logan’s analysis, and in particular we consider the idea he emphasises of the “turn to the subject” to be a fundamental juncture, and here it is worth examining another aspect that is decidedly interesting and is taken up again at the end of the first chapter. Anselm prays to God to teach him how to seek Him, and emphasises that this is impossible unless God somehow shows and reveals Himself. He almost seems to take the term revelation literally. Anselm writes: “Doce me quaerere te, et ostende te quaerenti; quia nec quaerere te possum nisi tu doceas, nec invenire nisi te ostendas. Quaeram te desiderando, desiderem quaerendo. Inveniam amando, amem inveniando” (SACA, P, I 11-19, p. 100).

4. Seeking God, seeking man

The theme of desire and the search for God, for his face, is a theme dear to all medieval monastic literature, but in this case Anselm, apart from his unparalleled affective and stylistic mark, really seems to indicate something deeper that also has, inevitably, educational implications. The theme of the *intellectus* through which God is

sought does not seem to be a mere intellectual quirk, but points to something decidedly more important and foundational: ontological!

The issue is that of the foundation of man as the image of God. In the power of desire and *intellectus*, all this germinal tension of the essence of man himself is rediscovered. Ghisalberti writes: “L’uomo-immagine è in una condizione di potenzialità da tradurre in atto; l’inizio di una concreta riappropriazione dell’immagine divina avviene con l’atto di fede, con l’accettazione della rivelazione: aderendo al credo, l’uomo realizza la propria *capacitas Dei*, si realizza cioè quella natura che si ricorda di Dio, conosce Dio e ama Dio [...] L’intelligenza della fede diventa il compito per eccellenza dato all’uomo, senza che per questo sia violata la trascendenza di Dio; si mira piuttosto ad assaporare fino in fondo il carattere umano assunto da Dio nel testo della Scrittura e ad ammirare il grande privilegio accaduto alle parole del linguaggio umano, assunte da Dio come veicolo della sua eterna Parola” (1990, p. 546).

At this point, from a theoretical point of view, a decidedly interesting issue arises, explained by Parodi (1988 pp. 111-112). The issue is, essentially, whether the starting point for interpreting Anselm’s proof is based exclusively on faith, or can be argued that the proof was based on a refined and self-sufficient use of man’s rational instruments? We share with Parodi a possible solution: “scoperte nella memoria le basi di una conoscenza che la trascende, l’intelletto si propone di comprendere, ma la volontà non è in grado di sorreggerne adeguatamente lo sforzo. Il contrasto, che si viene così a creare, illumina le facoltà della conoscenza umana nelle loro diverse funzioni e il processo dialettico che le collega, e talvolta le contrappone. Nella ragione e nella conoscenza, quali sono descritte da Anselmo, è veramente la scoperta, in termini agostiniani della somiglianza tra anima e Dio, tra articolazione delle facoltà conoscitive e processo trinitario interno alla realtà di Dio, a mettere l’uomo sulla strada della dimostrazione dell’esistenza dell’essere cui si scopre simile”.

It does not seem possible, if one wishes to remain on a strictly historical/philosophical level, to deny that the starting point of Anselm’s discussion and proof is decidedly theological. A level that then necessarily has both ontological and theoretical implications, but the ontological foundation of the human can only be sought in the divine and within the dialectic of God’s word. D’Onofrio says: “L’intero argomento si risolve nella semplicità dell’atto di pensiero con cui si comprende la sua premessa, l’identità tra *Deus* e *aliquid quo maius cogitari nequit*: il che equivale a comprendere con l’intelletto, con un atto unico e diretto, il significato stesso della parola “Deus”, ossia la sua *rectitudo*. Tale affermazione della coincidenza della pensabilità di *Deus* con quella del *quo maius* è una perfetta espressione di teologia negativa, che impone di escludere che in Dio possa non essere presente una qualsiasi perfezione, oppure che una qualsiasi perfezione sia posseduta da Dio in grado inferiore rispetto ad altri esseri che la possiedono. Come tale, è suggerita ad Anselmo dalla fede, ma il riconoscimento della sua verità è possibile, anzi è inevitabile per chiunque, perché è un’operazione primordiale dell’intelligenza, intuitiva e diretta, talmente semplice da essere autoevidente” (2011 pp. 216-217).

God, then, appears to man’s intellect, but his appearance is so resplendent that man can hardly grasp it, so much so that to approach what he is, man can only use the apophatic path of negation: *quo maius cogitari nequit*. God gives Himself to man’s thought in a momentum whereby, by showing Himself in the subject’s consciousness, He hides Himself in the ineffability of His eminence. Through this name of God, which is inscribed in the human intellect, not only is a new noetic plane founded to which man can potentially educate himself, but also the real existence of what is transcendent. The ontological leap is significant: the mind, the human intellect, which received its being from something else, is constituted as a creature, but it is in the intellect itself that the *unum argumentum* that identified and founded the being is imposed on the mind. The *intellectus* is thus that faculty which enables man not only to recognise himself as a creature, but also to recognise the God who created him and who enables him to be sought. In the *intellectus*, God opens himself to the cognitive instance placed in

man at the moment of his creation. The *intellectus* thus becomes the foundational place through which man can not only recognise his nature as a creature, but through the act of *intelligere* itself recognise his Creator and say something about him.

The interesting thing, from an educational point of view, is that this is not a foundation that is given once and for all. Rather, it remains a fragile possibility coexisting with the possibility of man's distortion. The *insipiens* who says in his heart *Deus non est* demonstrates this. Theologically and ontologically, then, this foundation of the human being continues to be constituted day after day within a relationship that, on the one hand, leaves man free to distort himself and no longer be or make use of the possibilities he has been given, but on the other hand somehow binds God to safeguard this possibility.

5. Education between *intellectus* and *rectitudo*

These elements constitute what we might call the Anselmian anthropological vision or, if we want, the Anselmian hermeneutic circle itself, in which education plays a fundamental role. Once this foundational possibility of man and the possibility of recognising oneself and recognising the creator given in the *intellectus* has been founded and discovered, it is a matter of keeping this tension alive and active within a *rectitudo* that is built within a dual relationship: between brothers, men, and with God. And it is precisely this typicality of Anselm's anthropology that is revealed in this hermeneutic circle and within these two movements. The first, which unveils the possibility of discovering the deeper nature of one's own being and which occurs through the *intellectus* that springs from the ontology of man/creature/image. The second, which through the cognitive act of *intellectus* somehow manages to transcend itself and discover, within itself, the idea of the Absolute. The possibility of finding God and knowing one's own nature is bound, in man, to the practice of rational activity, of what, in essence, makes him a man. In these terms, God offers himself to be tested, but it is a test that requires constant effort: that of educating oneself to reason in community experience.

Through this education in reason, man can be led to grasp, through the exercise of the mind's acumen, traces of the image of God in man. This is possible through the work of continuous education that enables man to train his gaze and grasp, through his conscious and rational activity, the *rectitudo* of creation. And the concept of *rectitudo* is not declined in merely intellectualistic terms as the discovery of traces of this image of being, but in the everydayness of life and relationships, as Anselm always endeavoured to do and live. Man, in these terms, finds his true humanity and the very foundation of his being through the continual discovery of his being in the image of something else. Logan (2009, p. 201) makes this very clear: "Although Anselm does not explicitly identify God's undeniability with our remembrance of Him, the proof of this undeniability is the proof of the *imago Dei* in man, that God is remembered and understood in man's rationality. If man were not made in the image of God, he would not be able to remember and understand Him". What we have highlighted so far can lead us to emphasise once again the theme of the importance of discovering oneself in the image of something else. The theme of the image is of fundamental importance, and Anselm always refers to certain images to exemplify the educational theme. However, it would be reductive to read those images without the premises we have set out. Another very interesting aspect of this conception is that at a certain point, man, in his existential condition, in the testing of the intellect, discovers and experiences another element of his being, namely that of the limit. In intellect, man discovers on the one hand his foundation, he experiences all his potential, that is, to be able to grasp the vertigo of Being, but he also encounters a threshold, a limit beyond which he cannot go. And this, too, is an aspect that from an educational point of view we consider truly fundamental. Man, in becoming aware of his limited being, can however grasp the existence of another foundation, a different image to which he himself is referred. This place is inaccessible, however, with the forces of reason alone. It is the discovery of the possibility

of the recognition of a relationship constitutive of one's own being, the need, as it were, to come out of oneself and rely on the dialectic of the intellect, on the relationship with the other, who is not only the brother who shares life with us, but is also the transcendent. In these terms, we find it interesting to read the subject of the *Proslogion* and intellect itself from an educational perspective. Evdokimov writes: “L'exemplarisme' de saint Anselme reprend la conception patristique de la conformité entre le terrestre et le celeste, et de la déiformité de l'homme. Ici l'idée de l'Etre réel comme prédicat ontologique de l'Existant, n'est pas déduite d'une nécessité logique mais elle vient de la lecture-vision du Prototyp dans son image. Le début du *Proslogion* parle Justement de la restauration de l'image de Dieu. L'argumentation de saint Anselme est une expérience mystique sur le contenu vivant, religieux du mot «Dieu». Ce n'est point une conquête de la vérité ne relevant que de la raison. Il s'agit de l'intelligence déiforme, la connaissance de Dieu existant lui est co-naturelle dès que cette intelligence est christifiée” (1959, p. 237).

Given these premises, we can see how the metaphors that Anselm uses to talk about education take on considerable depth and meaning. In particular, we can learn some useful aspects from the epistolary to outline, albeit briefly, these traits and show how his educational sensitivity and attentions were inevitably linked to his theoretical framework as well. Let us take the metaphor of wax: “Veruntamen adolescentibus atque juvenibus praecipua cura intendebat, et inquiringibus de hoc rationem sub exemplo reddebat. Comparabat cerae juvenis aetatem, quae ad informandum sigillum apte est temperate. ‘Nam si cera’ Inquit ‘nimis dura vel mollis fuerit, sigillo impressa ejus figuram in se nequamquam ad plenum recipit. Si vero ex utrisque duritia scilicet atque molitiae discrete habens sigillo inprimitur, tunc forma sigilli omnino perspicua et integra redditur. Sic est in aetatibus hominum” (Eadmero, 1986, XI, 1-7). Anselm uses this metaphor to explain why he shows so much educational concern for young people. He uses, again, an image that we have somehow, albeit in different terms, learned to know: the seal and the wax, the image and its model. Here, says Anselm, is how important it is to get the timing right in education. If, in fact, one receives an education that is not correct for the age in which one is, one runs the risk of behaving like the wax when it receives the seal. If the wax is too soft or has hardened too much, it runs the risk of not reproducing the image imprinted by the seal to the best of its ability.

It is essential, from an educational point of view, to be able to seize the right moment to teach something, and one must consequently adapt what we would today call teaching strategies to the different ages. This refers not only to the theme of image and seal that we identified earlier, but also to that of *rectitudo*. The example brought to us by Anselm, in his life, and his behaviour as abbot and bishop, always showed great faith in man's ability to educate himself and learn from his mistakes. However, in this case, applying not only the principle of *rectitudo* but also that of the different ages of life, he realises how difficult it will be for someone who has never been accustomed to doing so throughout life to understand the spiritual depth of contemplation or the spiritual life: “Videas hominem in vanitate hujus seculi ab infantia usque ad profundam senectute conversatum, sola terrena sapientem, et in his penitus obduratum. Cum hoc age de spiritualibus, huic de subtilitate contemplationis divinae loquere, hunc secreta caelestia doce rimari, et perspicies eum nec quid velis quidem posse videre, nec mirum. Indurata cera est, in istis aetatem non trivit, aliena ab istis sequi didicit” (Eadmero, 1986, XI, 7-13).

A similar situation is experienced if one tries to explain to a child something that he will not be able to understand, precisely because of his young age. When you are a child, you are not yet able to understand the distinction between good and evil, and you will not be able to fully comprehend the very words you are saying. “Encontrario consideres puerum, aetate et scientia tenerum, nec bonum nec malum discernere valentem, nec te quidem intelligere de hujusmodi disserentem. Nimirum mollis cera est et quasi liquens, nec imaginem sigilli quoquo modo recipiens” (Eadmero, 1986, XI, 13-16). This is why it is important for Anselm to be able to identify the right time to educate. The issue of the right time is not secondary, indeed, having identified the right

age, it will be possible not only to eradicate all the vices that the educated have acquired, but also to train them to cultivate and behave according to virtue. This is not only functional to a mere exercise of willpower and fortitude in resistance, but it is functional so that the youngest can discover that image they carry within them, which is the image of the spiritual man, the image of the man who lives his tension towards a rectitude that leads him to recognise the supreme good and recognise himself in it. This is possible, in particular, if one seizes the right moment, as with the example of the wax and the seal: “Quod ipse animadvertens, juvenibus majori sollicitudine invigilo, procurans cuncta in eis vitiorum germina extirpare, ut in sanctorum exercitiis virtutum postea competenter edocti, spiritualis in se transforment imaginem viri” (Eadmero, 1986, XI, 18.21).

Everything, then, must be read in these terms, and the game of education seems to be part of these very images, the need to understand the right moment to offer an educational stimulus. For this, Anselm offers us another metaphor, and this one comes from food. One must indeed be able to give the right food at the right time, so that one can give food (even intellectually speaking) that is solid to the robust soul that is capable of understanding it, while one must still give milk to those who are only at the beginning of a journey. One must be able to adapt times and circumstances to the person one wants to educate. Wrong times and moments, as in feeding, can cause harm instead of benefit. “Et panis et quisque solidus cibus utilis et bonus est eo uti valenti. Verum subtracto lacte ciba inde lactantem infantem, et videbis eum ex hoc magis strangulari quam recreari. Cur hoc, dicere nolo, quoniam claret. Attamen hoc tenete, quia sicut fragile et forte corpus pro sua qualitate habet cibum suum, ita fragilis et fortis anima habet pro sui mensura victum suum” (Eadmero, 1986, XXII 40-46).

But Anselm gives us another interesting image of education that is quite common but allows us to better emphasise an aspect that we are interested in remembering. Indeed, he cites the image of the tree. Eadmerus recounts how an abbot had once come to ask his advice on how to educate young people and Anselm had argued: “si plantam arboris in horto tuo plantares, et mox illam omni ex parte ita concluderes ut ramos suos nullatenus extendere posset, cum eam post annos excluderes, qualis arbor inde prodiret? Profecto inutilis, incurvis ramis et perplexis. Et hoc ex cuius culpa procederet nisi tua, qui eam immoderate conclusisti? Certe hoc facitis de pueris vestris” (Eadmero, 1986, XXII, 10-15). The theme, therefore, is that of finding the right balance in the upbringing of the young, so that they are able to best express their characteristics and extend their branches towards the heavens. If these have been tied too tightly with rules or constraints, they will never become strong and will never dare to stretch. One must be able to grasp the right measure and the right space to ensure that even the youngest are able to achieve their full identity. And the full identity of each one corresponds to the *rectitudo* of each one. Here, then, the hermeneutic circle closes. Goebel (2001, p. 264) explains it well: “wenn sein Wille sich darin ausschließlich von seiner Vernunft bestimmen läßt, dann verfügt er über sittliche Ghtheit (iustitia) als die dem Vernunftwesen Mensch eigentümliche Rechtheit und ist wahrhaft frei”. Man, obeying his own reason, understanding through the *intellectus* what his own nature is, freely determines himself and freely disposes himself to follow it.

6. Conclusion

To educate oneself through the *intellectus* to obey reason, means to respond rightly to the nature given by the supreme essence, to recognise the seal that is imprinted in each of us. This, then, is the true task of education, and it cannot be detached from *intellectus* and *rectitudo*. Again Goebel’s words (2001 pp. 234-235.258) are significant: “Doch läßt die enge Korrelation der normativen und der ontologischen Perspektive das imperative Element des Sollens nicht als heteronom oder willkürlich erscheinen, sondern als eine ontologische Dimension des Geschöpfes selbst. Dieses ist einer einzigen Regel unterworfen: Es soll sein spezifisches Sein bewahren. Ausgeschlossen ist folglich eine heteronome Gesetzgebung, auch eine göttliche, die das Geschöpf seiner selbst

entfremden würde [...] Autonomie und Theonomie sind für ihn dasselbe [...] Der Mensch soll sein [...] was er ursprünglich ist”. This is the path of education, to help, through man’s action, to become what one truly is, and one can only become this if one understands it through *intellectus* and puts it into practice in the tension of *rectitudo*.

Through education, man thus discovers this foundational core of the *intellectus* in which not only is the possibility of knowing himself authentically as a subject founded, but also the possibility of tracing a path that also leads to the other. These elements are indeed very different from contemporary thought, but to understand Anselm, one must understand this hiatus: “In today’s world, the world ‘God? Appears as just one word among many. Yet, for Anselm, the word ‘God’ is the undeniable word for that which man encounters within as the ground of his being. When this fact is grasped, man knows that even if he desires to deny it, still he cannot do so, except in a lie, in an act of self-denial ‘even if I should not want to believe it, I would *not* be able *not* to understand that You exist’ (P 4.6). The real meaning of Anselm’s argument is that God cannot be denied by anybody, except in a willful refusal with no basis in reason. Accepting God is part of accepting oneself and one’s own experience” (Logan, 2009, p. 201).

In short, Anselm was a teacher who was able to make the search for truth, through his life, his example and his works, attractive. This is demonstrated by his disciples, it is demonstrated by his school, and it is demonstrated by the fact that we still look at and study his example today, as a philosopher and teacher who was able to translate the heights of his thought into the everyday life of educational relations. He was undoubtedly a teacher who was able to grasp the challenges that the knowledge of the time and the quest for knowledge placed before him, living them as opportunities to translate into practice, from the educational point of view, the high principles that he investigated, believed in, and lived. Perhaps it was precisely this that made him an attractive teacher yesterday, and still today, capable of arousing the desire to imitate him in spending one’s life in research and teaching.

Note

1. We use the abbreviation SACA for the critical edition of Anselm’s texts: Sancti Anselmi Cantuariensis Archiepiscopi (SACA) (1946-1961), *Opera Omnia. Ad fidem codicum recensuit Franciscus Salesius Schmitt*. Th. Nelson; M for Monologion and P for Proslogion.

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