

PENURIA NOMINUM AND LANGUAGE RECTITUDO. LINGUISTIC ECONOMY IN SAINT ANSELM OF CANTERBURY

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The role that language holds in Anselm's thought can hardly be underestimated, for what concerns both his philosophical and logical arguments (as in *De grammatico*, *De veritate* and *Cur Deus Homo*) and his more strictly theological reflections (in the *Monologion* and *Proslogion* above all). Indeed, it may be argued that the crux of Anselm's thought precisely resides in the intimate tie between language analysis and Trinitarian theology, so that it is not possible to elucidate one without elucidating the other, and vice-versa. In the light of Anselm's conception of language, therefore, we shall advance an analysis of the term *paupertas* and all its semantic ramifications, showing how the term and the concept it conveys stand at the core of a theoretical construction that organically and seamlessly connects logical-linguistical terms (e.g. *cogitatio vocum* and *cogitatio rerum*, *significatio per se* and *per aliud*), theological and philosophical principles (such as *Verbum*, *intima locutio* and *veritas*), and monastic values that belong to the ethical, social and political context, such as silence and *rectitudo*.

1. PAUPERTAS AND TACITURNITAS: THE LANGUAGE OF THINGS

If we consider the occurrences of the terms belonging to the semantic area of *paupertas* in Anselm's work (*paupertas*, *pauper*, *paupero*), we see that they constantly oscillate between two extremes. On the one hand, we have *paupertas* in its more commonly understood sense: that expressed in the formula "pauper est anima mea", which indicates a condition of poverty; its opposite is represented by the *dives*, the rich person who owns much. On the other hand, there is the *paupertas* that characterises the monks and, in a different way, the *pauperes spi-*

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ritu, to whom the Kingdom of Heaven belongs. In this sense, the term is equivalent to “necessary”, as the right measure between lack and excess. Thus, in *De Veritate* XI, for example, the right definition is labelled «that which does not contain nothing more and nothing less than what is needed»¹. *Paupertas*, therefore, is linked to a condition of *simplicitas* and *rectitudo*.

In line with Anselm’s overall conception, *simplicitas* is both a logical and a theological principle: it is not only a moral virtue, by analogy with God’s simple nature; it also constitutes the *modus operandi* of human intellect when it does not scatter itself around to follow the *multiplicitas phantasmatum* (*Epistula de Incarnatione Verbi*), the *verba vana* (*Regula* IV)² or *verba otiosa* (*Regula* VI)³. *Paupertas*, therefore, amounts to simplicity in the act of reference: it is a logical rule that operates on both a mental and a social level – like the Benedictine rule, though in a different sense; it shows the proper norms of behaviour to the monk who wants to make a righteous use of his interior and exterior language, both in the dialogue with God and with men.

In order to be true, the *significatio* that connects its linguistic sign to its reference must satisfy two requirements: (1) it must connect on the logical level what is connected on the level of reality, and (2), it must do so correctly (*recte*). The mode in which the linguistic reference happens provides the condition for the cognitive act to grasp its object. In geometry, a straight line is the shortest distance needed to connect two points: similarly, the shorter the distance between a term and its object, the straighter, righter and thus more truthful the cognitive act. When such a distance is equal to zero, the *verbum* coincides with the *res* and is thus eminently true because eminently simple.

Within the realm of language, the *verbum cordis* – as Anselm defines it, following Augustine in the *De Trinitate*⁴ – holds a special place: the formula describes an

1 «*Nempe nec plus nec minus continet ista definitio veritatis quam expediat*» *De veritate*, XI, 121, ll. 21-22. All the latin quotes of Anselmian works are from SANCTI ANSELMI CANTUARIENSIS ARCHIEPISCOPI, *Opera omnia* ad fidem codicum recensuit 6 voll., F.S. Schmitt, Edinburgi 1946-1961.

2 «*Os suum a malo vel pravo eloquio custodire, multum loqui non amare, verba vana aut risui apta non loqui, risum multum aut excussum non amare*» *Regula*, IV, 51-54, in *La regola di san Benedetto e le Regole dei Padri*, ed. S. Pricoco, Milano 1995, 146.

3 «*Nam loqui et docere magistrum condecet, tacere et audire discipulum convenit. [...] Scurritates vero vel verba otiosa et risum moventia aeterna clausura in omnibus locis damnamus et ad talia eloquia discipulum aperire os non permittimus*» *Regula*, VI, 6-8, in *La regola di san Benedetto e le Regole dei Padri*, ed. Pricoco, 152.

4 Cf. *Trin.* X, 17-18: «*Nam etsi verba non sonent, in corde suo dicit utique qui cogitat [...] quaedam ergo cogitationes locutiones sunt cordis*». This *verbum*, *qua interior*, is «*simillim-*

inner kind of word, a different way to talk about things that has to do with “what” and “how” one speaks rather than to whom. The *verbum cordis* avoids “linguistic scattering”, as it were, by establishing a straight and right relationship between terms, meaning and reference. Let us consider Book 10 of the *Monologion*, for example. Here, Anselm distinguishes three different manners of speaking, which correspond to three forms of human words: first, when we speak by employing perceptible signs (for instance, when we use the term “man” to indicate the person in front of us); secondly, when we imperceptibly think to ourselves those same signs (i.e. when we repeat the term “man” in our mind); thirdly, when we «inwardly and mentally speak of the objects themselves» (*Monologion* X)⁵. While all the three modes make use of words, the third one is the only one that employs universal words (*verba naturalia*), which are the same for all peoples.

The *verba naturalia* are the matrix of every historical language with which men have tried to (conventionally) express natural terms. Such a *locutio* says things in their being, for

«no other word seems so similar to the object for which it is a word, and [no other word] so expresses that object, as does that likeness which is expressed in the acute gaze of the mind as it conceives the object itself. Therefore, the natural word is rightly to be called the principal and most proper word for an object (*rei verbum*)»⁶

The *verbum cordis* does not talk *about* things, but *says* them, by producing terms that indicate things rather than representing them by reproducing them as mental images. *Simplicitas* in reference is the rule of such a language: its terms are perfect *similitudines* of things, as they adhere to them without any distortion or mediation. The *verbum cordis* is a sign insofar as it refers to something else and makes it know-

um rei notae» (*Trin.* XV, 12, 22). Cf. also *Trin.*, XV, 12, 21. About *verbum*, see also *De magistro* (particularly *mag.* 1.2); cf. A. BISOGNO, *Il De magistro di Agostino. Introduzione, testo, traduzione e commento*, Roma 2014, 62-92 and, from a different point of view, C. KIRWAN, *Augustine's philosophy of language* in *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, edd. E. Stump-N. Kretzmann, Cambridge 2006, 186-204.

5 «pro rerum ipsarum diversitate intus in nostra mente dicendo» *Monologion*, X, 25, ll. 3-4.

6 «Exceptis namque rebus illis, quibus ipsis utimur pro nominibus suis ad easdem significandas, ut sunt quaedam voces velut, a vocalis, exceptis inquam his nullum aliud verbum sic videtur rei simile cuius est verbum, aut sic eam exprimit, quomodo illa similitudo quae in acie mentis rem ipsam cogitantis exprimitur. Illud igitur iure dicendum est maxime proprium et principale rei verbum» *Monologion*, ll. 17-22.

able, according to the definition provided by Augustine in *De Doctrina Christiana*: «a sign is a thing which, over and above the impression it makes on the senses, causes something else to come into the mind as a consequence of itself»⁷.

Within this semeiotic model, linguistic signs perform a function that is purely reproductive, not productive, of knowledge. They establish a relationship between the *verba cordis* of the interlocutors, so that their value is purely indicative, as a track is indicative of an animal or smoke is indicative of fire. The mental language of the *verbum cordis* thus holds a privileged position, linking as it does the utterances of all historical languages - of which it is matrix - to the level of *res*. Such a privileged position is due to the fact that the *verbum cordis* is eminently analogous to the perfect example of the divine *Verbum* of the *Genesis*, which is an “interior language”, a silent word (*intima locutio*): «it is equally certain, as reason teaches, that whatever the Supreme Substance made, it made through no other than through itself and that whatever it made, it made through its own inmost Expression (whether by uttering different things with different words or else by uttering all things at once with a single word)» (*Monologion*)⁸; lastly, it is simple (*unum verbum*)⁹. Consequently, if unity and simplicity are the features of divine order, if it is through unity and simplicity that the world testifies to the nature of its Creator, then also the human word that aims to approximate God and its order must be unitary and simple¹⁰.

From *Regula VI (De Taciturnitate)* on, the logical-linguistic inquiry meets the Benedictine tradition of silence. *Taciturnitas* describes, in the first instance,

7 «*Signum est enim res, praeter speciem quam ingerit sensibus, aliud aliquid ex se faciens in cogitationem venire*», *Doctr. chr.*, II.1.1.

8 «*Sed cum pariter ratione docente certum sit, quia quidquid summa substantia fecit, non fecit per aliud quam per semetipsam, et quidquid fecit, per suam intimam locutionem fecit, sive singula singulis verbis, sive potius uno verbo simul omnia dicendo*» *Monologion*, XII, 26, ll. 26-29.

9 «*Non igitur constat pluribus verbis, sed est unum verbum per quod facta sunt omnia*», *Monologion*, XXX, 48, ll.11-12.

10 About Word and languages in Anselm's works, cf I. ROSIER CATACH, *The Augustinian Threelfold Word and Angelic Mental Speech* in *The Word in Medieval Logic, Theology and Psychology. Acts of the XIIIth International Colloquium of the Société Internationale pour l'Étude de la Philosophie Médiévale. Kyoto, 27 September-1 October 2005*, edd. T. Shimizu-C. Burnett, Turnhout 2009, 20-21; L. VALENTE, *The Notion of the Mental Word in Twelfth-Century Theology* in *The Word in Medieval Logic, Theology and Psychology. Acts of the XIIIth International Colloquium of the Société Internationale pour l'Étude de la Philosophie Médiévale. Kyoto, 27 September-1 October 2005*, edd. T. Shimizu-C. Burnett, Turnhout 2009, 369-371; E. SWEENEY, *Anselm of Canterbury and the Desire for the Word*, Washington DC 2012.

the condition of possibility for a true language: this is identified with a mental space in which the vain words of human language are silenced and utterances can therefore become true, as intellect can tune in with that wavelength, so to speak, that allows it to grasp the *res* and indicate them. Silence is intellect's mode of acting when it thinks *in veritate*, when it grasps the thing that stands at the other end of the straight line and thus constitutes it as the object of its cognition¹¹.

Secondly, silence is the very nature of the divine *Verbum* itself, insofar as it is language of things: existence and meaning in this case coincide; things have a meaning due to a reference act that is inherent to their nature and not due to a conventional signification (*appellatio*, in Anselm's words): «by the very fact that they are, [things] declare that they ought to be» (*De Veritate IX*)¹². This coincidence of levels reveals *paupertas*, along with *rectitudo* and *simplicitas*, as the essential rule for the logical use of language and the foundation for an ethics of speaking.

2. BETWEEN VOX AND VERBUM

Anselm's philosophy of language is organised around a number of distinctions, which all go back to the seminal one between *vox* and *Verbum*: the former indicating the human word, the latter the divine one. The utterances of human language are, in Anselm's view, propositional *complexa* whose terms and syntactical structures are functional to the *usus loquendi*, that is, to the daily practice of language. Anselm assigns such a mode of speaking to the category of *vox*, thus signalling both its insubstantiality, as the *flatus voci* that is somehow consumed by use in the communicative act, and its semantic vagueness, that is, the inability of language to establish a term that univocally ties its reference to the level of *res*.

In common usage, language moves on the edge between use and abuse of words: words are often an example of *multum loqui* (*Regula Sancti Benedicti IV*),

11 About the role of *taciturnitas* in Anselm's philosophy of language, see M.L. COLISH, «St. Anselm's Philosophy of Language Reconsidered», *Anselm Studies. An Occasional Journal* 1 (1983) 113-123, S. VANNI ROVIGHI, *Introduzione ad Anselmo*, Chapter IV, «Logica e filosofia del linguaggio», Roma-Bari 1987, 63-79, P. KING, *Anselm's Philosophy of Language in The Cambridge Companion to Anselm*, edd. B. Davies-B. Leftow, Cambridge 2004, 84-110, and R. LIMONTA, «Linguaggio e spazio del silenzio in Anselmo d'Aosta» *Dianoia* 18 (2013) 163-190. See also, for a broader sense of *taciturnitas* in medieval monastic tradition, S.G. BRUCE, *Silence and Sign Language in Medieval Monasticism. The Cluniac Tradition c. 900-1200*, Cambridge 2007, particularly 1-27, and A.G. WATHAN, *Silence: The Meaning of Silence in the Rule of Saint Benedict*, Washington DC 1973.

12 «eo ipso quia est, dicit se debere esse», *De Veritate*, IX, 189, l. 25.

and are as redundant as «a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal» (1 Cor 13,1). Although terms are plentiful, they are incapable of securely connecting to things: under the pressure of the practical functions of language, terms become signs whose references are uncertain; thus, linguistic proliferation becomes in fact the mark of a *penuria nominum* and a semantic poverty that are integral to *voces*.

In the case of *usus loquendi*, the appellative function of a term, that is, its reference, is established within a framework of linguistic rules that is determined by the social context. Words belong to the entirely conventional level represented by the historical languages that arose after Babel, and wear out with use, so to speak.

In Anselm's account, linguistic signification has two modes: *per se* and *per aliud*. The distinction is developed in its most complete form in the dialogue *De Grammatico*. Here, Anselm takes into consideration the case of appellative terms, i.e. those concrete terms that derive from an abstract one, like *grammaticus* derives from *grammatica* and *pauper* from *paupertas*, and inquires into their nature, asking whether they designate a substance (a man who is poor), a quality (poverty), or both. In Anselm's view, in utterances like "homo est pauper", the term *pauper* is the object of a double signification: one that is linked to the substance (*per aliud*) and one that is linked to the quality (*per se*)¹³.

However, one signification does not entail the other:

«It is not the case that the name "expert-in-grammar" signifies as a single thing man and expertise-in-grammar; rather, of and by itself (*per se*) it signifies expertise-in-grammar, and on the basis of something else (*per aliud*) it signifies man. Moreover, although the name "expert-in-grammar" is appellative of (a) man, nevertheless it is not proper to say that it signifies man; and although "expert-in-grammar" signifies expertise-in-grammar, nevertheless it is not appellative of expertise-in-grammar» (*De Grammatico*, XII).

Direct (or: *per se*) signification, therefore, indicates the quality of being poor (*paupertas*) in the poor man; it is thus the most proper kind of signification, insofar as it is a semantic property that is inherent to terms and precedes their use.

13 «*Grammaticus vero non significat hominem et grammaticam ut unum, sed grammaticam per se et hominem per aliud significat. Et hoc nomen quamvis sit appellativum hominis, non tamen proprie dicitur eius significativum; et licet sit significativum grammaticae, non tamen est eius appellativum. Appellativum autem nomen cuiuslibet rei nunc dico, quo res ipsa usu loquendi appellatur. Nullo enim usu loquendi dicitur: grammatica est grammaticus, aut: grammaticus est grammatica; sed: homo est grammaticus, et grammaticus homo*», *De grammatico*, XII, 157, 1-8.

Since *per se* signification is the logical frame that underlies grammatical form, it is the object of Anselm's inquiry as he strives to provide a secure foundation, and thus truth, to human language, making it as close as possible to the divine *Verbum*. Indirect (or: *per aliud*) signification, on the other hand, is tied to the *usus loquendi* and indicates (*appellat*) the term's reference, i.e. the man who is an expert in grammar. The term *pauper*, therefore, signifies (*significat*) poverty and is appellative (*appellat*) of the man who is poor.

The divine *Verbum* represents the other form of language, whose simplicity and *summa paupertas* reside in *rectitudo*. This concept is key to Anselm's thought, as it marks the transition from human language to God's *Verbum*. Let us trace this shift. In *De Grammatico*, we observed how the relationship between linguistic signs and their references is defined by the capacity, or lack thereof, to connect to the things' substance (to *paupertas*, therefore, or to the *homo pauper*).

The criterion that determines this capacity is *rectitudo*. Discussing the long tradition of such a complex notion is beyond the scope of this paper; however, some remarks on the role of *rectitudo* in connecting these two dimensions of language are in order¹⁴.

Rectitudo is a multifaceted notion: it is an ethical and theological value, an ontological principle, a logical-linguistic property and a truth-value. The latter two are the most relevant to our argument. *Rectitudo* is the mode of the cognitive act when it connects to the level of *res* thus granting true knowledge: in this case, the linguistic term is not a mental object that reproduces the real one, but an intentional act by way of which intellect correctly (*recte*) aims at its reference.

Linguistic rectitude is thus much more than the mere correctness of reference within the framework of a certain language or a rule of correspondence between the *res* and its concept (in accordance with the model of *adaequatio rei et intellectus*). As rectitude activates the natural capacity of language to direct itself towards things, it is the only factor that allows what Anselm calls *cogitatio rerum*, in contrast with the *cogitatio vocum* that is vainly performed on linguistic functions and not on real objects. The *penuria nominum* thus turns into semantic *paupertas*, which results from the rectitude of the cognitive act and is at the same time guarantee of its truth. In order to approach the divine *Verbum* model, human language must proceed by subtraction rather than by addition. Once

14 Cf. R. POUCHET, *La Rectitudo chez Saint Anselme. Un itinéraire Augustinien de l'Âme à Dieu*, Paris 1964 and B. GOEBEL, *Rectitudo, Wahrheit und Freiheit bei Anselm von Canterbury: Eine philosophische Untersuchung seines Denkansatzes*, Münster 2001.

they are deprived of their multiple meanings, human words are made “poorer”, and, thus, truer.

3. LINGUISTIC ECONOMY: THE MONASTIC COMMUNITY AS A CONVERSATIONAL COMMUNITY

The nature of Anselm’s reflection on language should not lead us to conclude that his aim is to elaborate an exclusively logical model. For the normative force that *taciturnitas* and *rectitudo* exercise on interior language is also projected outwards, to structure the daily linguistic practice of the monastic community. First, we saw how the theological significance of *taciturnitas* supports its function as the norm that regulates the correctness of linguistic reference; now, we get to see that once such rule attains its ultimate form, that is, silence, it becomes the proper linguistic model for the monastic community. Here, language ceases to be a mere communicative practice to become the spiritual exercise *par excellence*.

Indeed, meaning is not only a concept in Anselm’s view, but also an event, a social object. It is determined in the context of a reading practice (or a writing practice, we might add), along the lines reconstructed by Stanley Fish: «The communication takes place within a situation, and [...] finding oneself in a situation means to already possess (or be possessed by) a framework of assumptions and practices that were established as appropriate to certain goals and objectives [...] Such a framework, on the other hand, is not abstract and independent, but social»¹⁵.

For the monastery - and in a broader sense, the whole network of Benedictine communities that include the Bec Abbey¹⁶ -, must be understood as a “conversational community”, in which literary sources are far more mobile than what the Benedictine vow of stability would lead us to suppose. With the phrase “conversational community” we mean a context characterised by the recurrence of certain themes, terms and concepts, which, although allowing for a certain degree of variety in individual positions and modes and manners of discussion, are consistent enough with one another to define a common theoretical field¹⁷. The latter must not be understood as a doctrinal framework aimed at rigidly

15 S. FISH, *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretative Communities*, Cambridge Massachusets 1980, 157-158.

16 Cf. R.W. SOUTHERN, *Saint Anselm: a portrait in a landscape*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1990, particularly Chap. II and Chap. XIII.

17 We refer here to the use and meaning of the term “conversational community” adopted by Hester Gelber in H.G. GELBER, *It Could Have Been Otherwise: Contingency and Necessity in Dominican Theology at Oxford, 1300-1350*, Leiden-Boston 2004.

defining the field of orthodoxy and rule out any deviation from it as a heresy. Rather, through the sharing of texts and cultural practices, this model allows that *conversatio* that Gilson identified as the very condition and rule of monastic life¹⁸. It is this rich network of relationships that emerges from Anselm's letters¹⁹.

Anselm envisages in linguistic *rectitudo* and *paupertas* the rule of the monastic community that is gathered around his authority and his word. Not only must the *verbum cordis* be rooted in the interior language with which man dialogues with God; it must also constitute the fundamental norm that regulates the linguistic exchange between monks and monastic communities, functioning as the exterior trace and mark of a deeper, inner rule of life.

Epistolary exchanges are especially revealing of such forms of communication. Anselm's letters, in particular, are packed with references to the need of overcoming verbosity and linguistic proliferation, as they are useless in relation to the truth of the word that is characterised by *rectitudo* and *paupertas*. Letter 41, addressed to the fellow monk Gondulf, reads as follows:

«Both my inner Gondulf and your inner Anselm are witnesses of the fact that neither you or I need to explicitly declare our mutual affection in our letters. [...] Why should I describe on paper my affection for you, when its true image is safely guarded within the casket of your heart? [...] Thus your desire, which I know very well, suggests me to write you something, to overcome the distance that physically separates us; but as we are no strangers to one another and, furthermore, we are fully present to one another in spirit, I will limit myself to wish you that God may grant you what he knows to be pleasing to Him and useful to you» (*Letters*, 41)²⁰.

18 Cf. E. GILSON, *Héloïse et Abélard*, Paris 1938.

19 About the cultural relationships between Bec's Abbey and other Benedictine monasteries, see also G.H. BECKER, «Catalogi Bibliotecarum Antiqui», Bonnae 1885, J. HAMESSE, «Les florilèges à l'époque de saint Anselme», *Rivista di storia della filosofia* 3 (1993) 477-495 and R. FEDRIGA-R. LIMONTA, «La debolezza di volontà in Anselmo e le sue fonti», *Rivista di storia della filosofia* 3 (2016) 357-386, particularly 372-383.

20 «*Et meus Gondulfus et tuus Anselmus est testis quia ego et tu nequaquam indigemus, ut mutuos nostros affectus per epistolas nobis invicem indicemus. [...] Cur autem tibi dilectionem meam describam in carta, cum eius veram imaginem assidue serves in cordis tui arca? [...] Invitat igitur me nota mihi tua voluntas, ut propter corporalem nostram absentiam aliquid tibi scribam; sed quia nobis noti sumus per animarum praesentiam, nescio quid tibi dicam, nisi deus tibi faciat quod ipse scit sibi placere et tibi expedire*», *Epistola* 41, 52-53, ll. 4-15.

When the communication takes place in the terms of the *verbum cordis*, its guiding rule is linguistic economy: it employs a word that says *all* that needs to be said because it says *only* what needs to be said; a word that *says* only what *is*, and nothing more. Letter 4 is again addressed to Gondulf, who lives in England and would like to receive as many letters from Bec as possible:

«Why are you so distressed, and why do you complain so much about not seeing my letters, and why do you lovingly ask to receive more of them, when my conscience is always with you? Certainly, if you stay silent, I understand that I am in your heart; so when I keep quiet, “You know that I love you” [Gv 21, 16]» (*Letters*, 4)²¹.

Anselm writes to Gondulf again in Letter 28: «It is not necessary for my mouth to speak much to him whom I know to be another heart of mine, thanks to the love that binds us to one another»²². Silence speaks, and only says what is essential.

The transition from the simplicity of language to the *verbum cordis*, and finally to silence as the sublimation of words, is explicit. The rule of linguistic *paupertas* thus reaches through to the core of Anselm’s theology. In Letter 77, Anselm defends his *Monologion*, which got a rather cold reception from his master Lanfranc, by claiming that his work has at least the virtue of presenting a “shorter argument” (*breviori ratiocinatione*)²³.

Even in official letters, which require specific formulas of address to respect the institutional etiquette, Anselm lingers on an apology of linguistic simplicity - a paradoxically verbose one, it must be said -, complaining about the archbishop Lanfranc’s use of phrases such as «lord and father» or «yours *qua* yours» (Letter 57). Such circumlocutions appear to Anselm as deprived of an objectual reference, and thus unable to reach through to his *verbum cordis*, which, he suggests, contains far truer words.

In writing to his beloved monks of the Bec Abbey from Canterbury, where he is now archbishop, Anselm restates the idea that two modes of language ex-

21 «*Praeterea cur - sicut audio - tanto maerore quereris quod numquam litteras meas videas, et tanto amore quaeris ut eas saepe accipias, cum meam conscientiam tecum semper habeas? Te quippe silente ego novi quia diligis me; et me tacente “tu scis quia amo te”*», *Epistola* 4, 104, ll. 16-19. See also *Epistola* 16.

22 «*Non est opus ut multa de incolumitate pristinae amicitiae loquatur os meum illi, quem in mutua dilectione scio esse alterum cor meum*», *Epistola* 28, 135, ll. 3-4.

23 Cf. *Epistola* 77, 199, ll. 25-26.

ist: «Each written or uttered word, which you individually or collectively send to me, your most beloved and cherished friend, with the liveliest affection of your heart, and which no tongue or pen might ever express, is clearly impressed within my heart (*in corde meo*)» (Letter 148)²⁴.

The same concept returns in a letter to Matilde, countess of Tuscany: «Lips and pen are unable to express what my heart feels»²⁵ (Letter 325). The word that Anselm reads and turns over in his mind, again and again, in the solitude of his inner dialogue with God, is the *verbum cordis*. In comparison with it, the language of the *usus loquendi* reveals all its inadequacy: «When confronted with such an intimate spiritual union, souls reach such a high degree of mutual knowledge that no tongue or pen could ever manage to express» (Letter 178)²⁶.

When speaking to Aimon and Rainal, two relatives of his that have come from afar to visit him in Bec, Anselm cannot but encourage them to embrace the monastic life. But as the two are still outside of the *monachica conversatio*, Anselm's words sound hollow, insufficient (*nulla verba sufficiunt*) and ineffective, laden as they are with Anselm's excitement and impatience at the thought of the happiness his relatives would have access to. Anselm thus turns to the power of interior language, which is true and effective: «Talk to their heart, dear Jesus – without you no word (*vox*) can affect their ears; tell them to leave everything behind to follow you» (Letter 120)²⁷.

The value of linguistic simplicity recurs in a number of letters, with minus-cule variations: in Anselm's view, terms are signs that are functional to rousing the *verba cordis* in the interlocutors' souls; thus, when the distance separating them is equal to zero, words become useless, as they lie directly on the thing itself, so to speak. When this happens, language reaches a level of syntactic parsimony that amounts to semantic fullness. The conversational community in which Anselm acts, thinks and writes is founded on a word of this kind and a corresponding reading and discussion practice. The *paupertas* that grounds and supports such linguistic economy is thus set against the world's spiritual poverty,

24 «*Quaecumque scripta vel dicta communiter vel singuli de affectu cordis vestri mittitis dilectissimo et desideratissimo vestro, et quae nec lingua potest exprimere nec calamus: omnia expresse et aperte scripta sunt in corde meo*», *Epistola* 148, 3, ll. 4-6.

25 «*os et stilus ad proferendum quod cor sentit non sufficit*», *Epistola* 325, 256, ll. 17-18.

26 «*Ubi enim tanta cordis est et animarum unitas, plus ipsae sibi invicem sunt notae conscientiae, quam lingua aut stilus possit exprimere*», *Epistola* 178, 61, ll. 11-12.

27 «*Dic tu, o bone Iesu, cordibus eorum, sine quo nulla vox valet auribus eorum, dic illis ut relinquant omnia et sequantur te*», *Epistola* 120, 259, 45-46.

in the framework of an economy of Salvation to which all other forms of political, social and economic order must, in Anselm's view, submit.

Abstract

The topics of language and dialectic argumentation have a pivotal role in Anselm's thought. They constitute the theoretical context in which we proceeded with a semantic analysis of the term *paupertas*; it should be understood under a thought where logical-linguistic terms (*appellatio, cogitatio vocum e rerum, significatio*) are related to ethical and social principles as monastic silence and *recitudo*, in particular. Indeed, Anselmian idea of poverty moves on the ridge between the *paupertas* as *penuria nominum*, typical of the human language merely capable of producing *voces* for the *usus loquendi*, and the Divine Word (*Verbum*), a "poor" word, where "poor" means unique, simple, pure and real. The *Verbum* will be, at the same time, a linguistic and ethical model for the human language to avoid the *multiloquium* and to properly connect words and things. Reduced to a line that directly moves from the word to his corresponding thing, the linguistic signification thins all his redundant references and becomes right, that is simple. This kind of language aims at the monastic silence of chapter six of the *Regula Sancti Benedicti* as his higher and very true form. So, the *paupertas* has to be intended, in the Anselmian philosophy of language, as a value against the mundane poverty of spirit, in the broader context of the Salvation of the soul's economy.