

The vindication of teaching and theology in a monastic community: Lanfranc of Le Bec and his students Anselm and Ralph

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*Monastic schools such as Le Bec played a major role in the making of systematic and even philosophical theology in the middle ages. While the monastic life is regarded as a continued experience in learning in the Benedictine tradition, institutional schools are not essential to it and monks often had to justify their engaging in teaching and theology over and above the study of the Bible. After sketching the problem with a special focus on Anselm, I take a look at the genesis and rise of the school of Le Bec following the arrival of Lanfranc, and give a short outline of what we can gather about him as a teacher. I then turn to Ralph of Battle, one of Lanfranc's closest associates and a notable theologian in his own right, and explore his relation to Anselm. His recently edited *De inquirente et respondente* provides us with a vivid image of what teaching on an advanced level could have been like at a monastic school in the Lanfrancian tradition. In this dialogue, Ralph endeavours to adjust the discussion of theological topics to the spiritual commitments of master and disciple alike, in what may be termed a thoroughly "altruistic" model of teaching and learning, and aims to demonstrate how speculative theology and the monastic life are not only compatible with each other, but complement each other in important ways.*

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1. *Learning and the monastic life*

The "regular" life of a Benedictine monk has a primarily eschatological goal. It is a form of existence designed to cultivate a desire for perfect happiness through communion with the divine. And it is meant to ensure that this desire will come true after one's physical death¹. At its core is a "devotion to heaven"² with the monastic community regarded as an anticipation of the heavenly life. Like

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¹ Cfr. *Benedicti Regula*, in particular Prologue, 17-21; 42-44; ed. R. Hanslik, CSEL 75, Vienna, Hoelder-Pichler-Tempsky, 1960, p. 4; 8.

² J. Leclercq, *L'amour des lettres et le désir de Dieu. Initiation aux auteurs monastiques du moyen âge*, Paris, Cerf, troisième édition corrigée, 1990, pp. 55; 67.