

Why God Had to Have an Immaculate Mother

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Abstract

Anselm's argument for the salvific necessity of the Incarnation in his *Cur Deus Homo* is justly famous and elegantly simple: only man ought; only God can; therefore, only a God-man both ought and can (atone for sin). Unfortunately it is a paralogism, trading on an equivocal use of 'ought'. It is not difficult, however, to reconceive the meaning of the terms 'ought' and 'can' in a way that both renders the argument formally valid and deepens our christology. Sin may be conceived, per Anselm's own insistence, as a condition of the human soul in its relation to God, a failure of the human will to establish itself in harmonious union with the divine will. If the integrity of created human nature requires that its psychological conditions are propagated together with it, then one who has both the duty and ability to atone for sin must be descended from Adam but must enjoy the original justice of the soul that Adam rejected and deformed in himself. Thus, systematically reconstructing Anselm's argument has the surprising consequence of enabling us to posit an argument for the salvific necessity of the Immaculate Conception as a preparatory stage in the hypostatic union of the Incarnation.

Keywords

Immaculate Conception, Anselm, original sin, atonement, Incarnation

*For Christ died for sins . . . that he might bring us to God.*¹

In the first part of this paper I will show that Anselm's argument for the salvific necessity of the Incarnation can be made sound, and its apparent dependence on a feudal conception of honor and a medieval conception of punishment can be eliminated. In the course of demonstrating this, I will reconceive of the "ought" component of the argument. Sin can be reconceived from a debt of honor to a marring or disfigurement of human nature as it relates to the divine economy,

¹ 1 Pet 3:10.

and ultimately to a disintegration of the purposed relationship between God the creator and man his creature, as well as between men and the rest of creation (including fellow men). This “ought” can only be repaid by a son of Adam who shares his nature by natural descent. I will reconceive of the “can” component of the argument in showing that only one who shares the divine nature from and by which Adam himself is made in image and likeness has the ability to change the relation between the divine will and the whole line of Adamic descent. Following this, I aim at a deeper understanding of the salvific significance of the Incarnation and show that this requires a broader array of dogmatic and Biblical theology. Other core doctrines of the Christian faith are needed to make sense of the “where from” of the economy of salvation, to show that Christ’s dispensation in the life of the historical Jesus is consistent with the life of self-less love that is the activity of the triune Godhead. In the next part of the paper, with this theological background in place, I show how it is possible to provide an argument for the necessity of the Immaculate Conception of Mary in accordance with the salvific plan of the Incarnation. The argument is distinct in certain respects from that of Duns Scotus.²

I An Elaboration of Anselm’s Argument for the Necessity of the Incarnation

Anselm’s argument is important because its structure provides a very elegant articulation of the primacy of the Incarnation in understanding the atonement. This elegant structure can be preserved while reconceiving the content of the premises and conclusion so as to eliminate any equivocation and to make the argument formally valid. Indeed, with its content thus reconceived, we can offer stronger support for the argument’s premises from other traditional doctrines of theology, yielding a sound argument for the necessity of the Incarnation in a manner that opens up deeper insights into the nature of sin and the systematic indispensability of the wholeness of Church teaching.

Anselm’s “satisfaction” theory of the atonement is famously premised on the conception of an infinite debt of honor owed to God on the part of offending mankind. On the face of it the argument seems narrow and antiquated, but a careful reading suggests otherwise. For Anselm is careful to point to the “spiritual conditions” that characterize this offense, how they are primarily a detriment to

² ‘De Immaculata Conceptione Beatae Virginis’, *Ordinatio* III, dist. 3, q.1. For an English translation, see the second of the eponymous questions in Allan B. Wolter, O.F.M., *John Duns Scotus, Four Questions on Mary* (Saint Bonaventure, New York: The Franciscan Institute, 2000).

man in his relation to God and a result of the freely chosen plan of glory for which God created the world and man in particular as its centerpiece. This glory is to be understood as a lived interior condition exercised in love. It is from this plan that religious duty or “debt of honor” originates and in which it is to be discharged. As he says, “. . . uprightness in heart, that is, in will; and this is the *sole and complete* debt of honor which he [man] owed to God”.³

According to Jasper Hopkins,⁴ the Anselmian argument for the necessity of the incarnation and death of Christ of, viz.,

- (1) Only man ought [to atone for sin—because it is he who has sinned].
- (2) Only God can [atone for sin—because sin’s burden of debt is infinite].

- (3) Only a God-man both ought and can [atone for sin].

is invalid because the ‘ought’ is equivocal across premise(s) and conclusion. The ‘ought’, he suggests, shifts from meaning ‘owes’, in the sense of debt, to mean ‘should’, in the deontic or imperative sense, to indicate something one ‘must’ or ‘needs’ to do. Only this shift in meaning preserves the joint truth of (1) and (3). These two senses of ‘ought’ are, however, incompatible. The ‘ought’ in (1) cannot mean ‘should’ or ‘must’, at least not given the widely held assumption of deontic logic that ‘ought’ implies ‘can’; for if man can, then (2) is false, in which case the argument may be formally valid, but trivially so and uninteresting.

Further, according to Hopkins, the force of the argument depends (*sic*) upon

- (a) a feudal conception of honor
- (b) an ecclesiastical conception of penitence
- and
- (c) an orthodox christology and trinitarianism.

However, I contend that the argument can be made valid in a way that is theologically illuminating and ultimately in the spirit of Anselm’s essay. The concerns of (a) and (b) can be addressed at the same time, and the fact that the argument depends on (c) is very much part of what can make it illuminating. In order to render the use of terms univocal, one must take sin to be a relational condition of existential estrangement between God and human nature, the ontic consequences of which are borne collectively by all who share in human nature. It is human nature that is disturbed and distorted by

³ Anselm, *Cur Deus Homo* I.xi.i; emphasis is mine.

⁴ ‘Anselm on Christ’s Atoning Sacrifice in Human Sacrifice’ in Finsterbusch, Lange, and Roemheld, editors, *Jewish and Christian Tradition* (Leiden: Boston, 2007).

sin; it is we who suffer. And it is our very disfigurement that keeps us from being able to effect our reconciliation with God, for to do so would require that we know and execute our Lord's will, precisely what we cannot do while estranged from him.

God can be said to suffer, but only in a very different sense. In his external relation to contingent creation he "suffers" or is "dishonored" in that the beauty of creation as a whole is tarnished by man's abasement. But God does not need creation in the first place. Creation is a free result of his super-abundant and self-less love, the ecstatic interpersonal love of the immanent Trinity. But if sin is a condition that debases human nature by estranging man from his creator God, then this explains why God both would want and would have to become man in order to atone for sin. He must change human nature "in the flesh", by living a perfect life as a human being in a fallen world, under the conditions of collectively shared abasement, remaking human nature in dignity and glory by a voluntary reconciliation with the creator God. To heal a free relationship among persons, one must identify with both sides of the relationship, subjugating the will of the offending and hence estranged creature in penitential humility to the just and merciful will of the Creator. For how can one sharing the will of an estranged creature know the will of the Creator, unless he at once shares the will of both?

The corrected argument, which I think well preserves the spirit of the original, would run thus:

- (1') Only a possessor of human nature suffers from its self-disfigurement.
- (2') Only the creator of human nature has the power to reshape its form.

- (3') Only one who is the creator and possessor of human nature both has the need and the power to transfigure human nature.

This 'transfigurational' version of the argument for the Incarnation is valid. It corrects the equivocation of Anselm's version and avoids the other objections (namely (a) and (b) above) by focusing on the object of human nature in its essential relationality to God, something that is the crowning point or high achievement of the hexaemeral cosmogony made good in the image of God, something destined from all time to be elevated by grace into the full likeness of God through man's free cooperation. In the wake of the Fall, this elevation of man in glory, the key component of the economic plan for the work of creation, predestined in the mind of God to be executed in the structure of time,⁵ expressed in the co-hortatory injunction "Let us make . . .",⁶

⁵ Eph 1:10.

⁶ Gen 1:26.

takes on a salvific dimension. The plan for the hypostatic union of man with God (through Mary) in the Incarnation became not merely the perfection or completion of the work of creating man and elevating him to the experience of the mutual indwelling of divine life, but a correction, a reformation, an elevation of man not merely from the spatio-temporal limits of his original condition but also from the abysmal depths of corruption to which he had plunged. This conception avoids any problem of the so-called “fortunate fall”.

We gain a deeper understanding of the salvific work of the Incarnation if we press beyond the analogy of sensory concepts of shape and figure and ponder their moral significance. We talk of sin as a marring or disfigurement of human nature, and this it is, but this is already a metonymy of antecedent for consequent. In the first place, sin is relational; it consists in the disobedience of man to the will of God. It is a “turning away” from God, seeking after an end, be it knowledge, power, authority, pleasure, or some good, from a source other than God. And the stakes are high. So high is the standard of glory to which man is called⁷ that even one disobedient act of will can be decisive, quickly accumulating effects that ferry him on course to the darkness and dumbness, the mindlessness of the dust from which his flesh was made. So powerful was man’s will created that, once chained, its thrashing about produces a terrible violence. One sin encompasses a multitude. This is easier to understand in view of the original society in which he was created. Man alone was not good, but man created male and female was; and with a female, moreover, who took her whole nature directly from him, so that all of their descendants would share a common human nature in virtue of being a family, a race in the proper sense of the word, a *gens* or nation. The cumulative effects of sin are borne by the collective family not only because they share a common nature and inhabit a common world, but because the original plan for their deification, the gift of reaching the full likeness of their creator, depended on a free response of adoration, of loving reverence toward the creator that expresses itself in communal charity.

Following this line of thought, we have:

- (1’’) Justice requires that man and only man, i.e. a descendent of Adam, he who at the origin had willingly disobeyed God and made himself a slave to sin and its consequences, ought willingly to free himself from these and reinstitute himself under the rule of God.
- (2’’) Only God the lawgiver to human nature has the power to change the relationship between His authority (and its law, or the revelation of his rule and authority to man) and human action; and

⁷ 2 Pet 1:3.

only God in His justice (and infinite mercy) has the motivation to change the relationship between His authority and human action.

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- (3'') Only a God-man both ought willingly to free himself from sin and its consequences and has the power to do so by changing the relationship between His authority and human action.

As one who is both God and man, only the God-man can both act as a human being in accordance with the will of God and suffer the consequences of sin at the same time, (super-)positioning these in a new relationship whereby voluntary passion of the consequences of sin becomes the way to act in accordance with the law, the will of God; and thus establishing a new cosmic order in which each man, as a man, can do what no man since Adam's fall otherwise could do, freely place himself under the rule of God. It would not be enough for a sinless man to voluntarily suffer the consequences of sin, since this would not please God. Only one substantially united to the will of God, one who fully shares in the divine authority that defines justice and to which man either obeys or does not, only such a one acting as a sinless man who voluntarily suffers the consequences of sin can, by so acting, make them into the means of pleasing God by obeying his rule.

Only because Jesus acts freely as a man and *is God* is it the case that his actions please God because they, in their efficacious compassion, free all men from slavery to sin. Only because Jesus is God is it the case that God is not a sadist. He does not desire the suffering and death of any man, sinful or sinless. But because Jesus is God, what Jesus wills God wills, and so whatever Jesus accomplishes is pleasing to God as something done in accordance with His will. And yet His will had already been established and could not change, lest it be that the application of His will was unjust. God does not change. What he wills he wills eternally. So if Jesus had acted against the law, he would not have sinned but he would have changed the law and so he would not have brought about the redemption of those who had died under the old law. The hope of the Old Testament righteous would have been in vain. God would have shown himself to be limited in power, wisdom, or compassion and a deceiver, all of which is impossible. Does this mean that after all Jesus could not have acted otherwise than he did? If so, how are we do credit him with overcoming and hence experiencing temptation? Temptation is an external suggestion to disobey God and in so doing to obey someone else, an event that originates not from our own will but attempts to arouse the interest of our own will. And so Jesus, as a man, was perfectly capable of experiencing temptation. But Jesus, as God, was perfectly capable of resisting it, and not only by grace but by nature, since the will of God is immutable.

II *The Salvific Role of the Immaculate Conception in God's Incarnation*

The first stage of the salvific work of this Incarnation was to restore an individual man to the prelapsarian-Adamic condition, since it is only by a man suffering the consequences of sin in a sinless state that the consequences of sin can be changed from being what displease the Father and distances us from Him in a downward fall, to what please him as freely suffered righteous acts of love, and so as steps of ascent to full knowledge and life with Him. We know that the human nature that the Son took from Mary at the Incarnation of Christ is and must have been an Adamic nature; Christ is a descendant of Adam. Yet was the Virgin Mother from whom he received his human nature, however sinless in her actions, still one who suffered from original sin, as a daughter of Adam?

It is true she was not herself conceived by the Holy Spirit as Christ was. But conception by the power of the Holy Spirit is not really conception in the usual sense, the form of generation that is characteristic of Adamic nature. It is not like natural human conception with the Holy Spirit simply taking the place of human seed. Rather, the virginal conception of Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit is the Incarnation itself, the hypostatic union of divine with human nature. Therefore, since Christ's human nature is not the product of a sexual union, yet still required to be Adamic for the execution of reconciliation, the only possibility is that his whole human nature was taken directly from Mary. But this means that whether or not Mary suffered from original sin determines whether or not Christ suffers from original sin. Yet we know that Christ did not suffer from original sin. If he had, his death would not have been a free substitutionary sacrifice of an innocent, it would simply have been one more human death, however tragic, under the law.

Now it is tempting to think that Christ already would have been free from original sin in virtue of his virginal conception, being free from conception through a concupiscent sexual union inasmuch as he was free from conception through any sexual union whatsoever.⁸ But this *prima facie* plausible suggestion rests on a mistake, essentially

⁸ Here it should be pointed out that I am assuming with Anselm (see *De Conceptu Virginali et de Originali Peccato*, 2 and 7) that original sin consists in the privation of original justice in the rational soul of human nature. The condition is inherited from Adam through sexual transmission simply because such is the original created means for the propagation of human nature that is proper to that nature. The elaboration of Anselm's argument that I provided in Section II, was intended to make it especially clear why, in view of the ontic relationality of human nature, justice and sin are conditions of the soul in its relation to God that characterize it essentially unto life or death. I am staying neutral on the question of how concupiscence of the sexual act bears on the transmission of original justice/sin.

that of Eutychianism. The conception of Christ did *not* result in the creation of a new human nature. If God purposed to create an entirely new human nature, he would not have become the son of an existing woman, being incarnated in her womb, and such a newly created nature would not really have been human as we always understand the term; his nature would have been that of a *sui generis* creature perhaps resembling us but not like us, sharing no common ancestor, however distant, with us.⁹ Therefore, since Christ is the hypostatic union of a Marian human nature (and thus an Adamic one) with the divine nature, his human nature is obviously passed to him from her and can contain nothing more or less than was in her nature, including original sin or sinlessness.¹⁰

Christ saved us from our sins, original as well as personal. As with all sins, he saves us from original sin by effecting its status in relation to the authority of the divine will. So in the particular case of original sin, he saves us from it by changing the status of Adamic natural generation in its relation to the authority of the divine will. In accordance with the mercy and justice of God's will, natural generation must be remade from a mechanism that propagates sin by extending the range of fallen Adamic nature into a cooperative act that pleases God and prepares men to be made into His own sons and daughters in the regeneration of baptism. Remaking natural generation in this way, from an instrument of corruption into an instrument of divine adoption is something that Jesus does as the risen Christ, invested as a man with all divine authority,¹¹ clothing his apostles with power on high¹² at Pentecost to effect the regeneration of divine adoption through the sacrament of water and the Spirit¹³ as he himself was baptized. But while Christ instituted this sacrament for us, he did not baptize himself, wash away his own original sin or effect his own regeneration. As a man not suffering from original sin, he was never in need of this. And yet because he was not naturally generated and yet was still as much a man as one who is, it would have to be that the human nature he assumed from Mary was itself already free from original sin. It must have been that, as a preliminary stage in the Incarnation of His Christ, God caused the natural generation of Mary to be remade in its relationship to the

⁹ While being at odds with Scripture in many ways, including the messianic prophecies of the Davidic covenant, perhaps none is more striking than the way it mocks the title "the Son of Man", apparently Jesus' own preferred style for himself in the Gospels.

¹⁰ In order to avoid being misled by the metaphor of containment, this could just as well be phrased to say "his human nature must be characterized by all and only those conditions that characterize hers, including the condition of original sin or sinlessness". In this way we are careful to keep in mind the ontic relationality of sin.

¹¹ Mt 28:18-20.

¹² Lk 24:49.

¹³ Jn 3:5.

divine will, into an instrument of perfect grace and beauty, so that her sons might take the place of her fathers and that she might make them princes throughout the land.¹⁴ In accordance with the Mystery of Christ, the predestined divine plan from all eternity to reconcile in him all things in heaven and earth and make peace by the blood of his cross,¹⁵ God also predestines that all who would be conformed to the image of the son,¹⁶ adopted brethren of Christ through baptism,¹⁷ thereby be made holy and immaculate¹⁸ in virtue of being sons of Mary, just as is Christ her first-born.

Hence the necessity of the incarnation for the atonement leads us on to the necessity of the immaculate conception of Mary. On pain of Eutychianism, Christ's human nature is identical with Mary's. The satisfaction of God's mercy required that human nature be set free from slavery to sin; the satisfaction of God's justice required that the same Adamic human nature that had willingly enslaved itself to sin willingly free itself of such bondage.¹⁹ But this freedom, this victory, could only satisfy to an infinite degree, for all people at all times, and for every particular sin (except blasphemy that freely rejects it) if the one attaining the victory through the voluntary substitutionary sacrifice was himself infinite. And his passion and death would only have the power to change the relationship between these and the will of the Father if his will were identical to that of the Father. Only in such a case would the one who chose such a substitutionary sacrifice rise from death and ascend into heaven.

We know that the human nature that needed to be remade, whose beauty needed to be restored, was the human nature descended from Adam, a nature that through Adam's sin was subject to death. What we must now recognize is that the work of remaking human nature in Christ, as directly received from Mary in the virginal conception, was a "two stage" process. It began with Mary's immaculate conception, an act of grace consisting in the direct intervention of the Holy Spirit in the lives of Mary's parents, Joachim and Anna (according to tradition), blessing their conjugal union with the gift of supernatural purity.²⁰ God's work of freeing Mary from original sin is itself a preparatory stage in the greater salvific Christ-event, so that the human nature that the Word takes from Mary at the conception

¹⁴ Ps 45:16.

¹⁵ Col 1:20.

¹⁶ Rom 8:29.

¹⁷ Eph 1:5, Gal 3:27.

¹⁸ Eph 1:4.

¹⁹ God's wisdom requires this also, lest it be that God created man in vain.

²⁰ For an exposition of this point see Gregory Palamas' 'Sermon on the Entry of the Mother of God into the Temple' in *Mary the Mother of God: Sermons* (Mount Thabor Publishing, 2005).

of Christ is already free from sin, original and personal. In this way there is never a moment, however brief, in which the human nature of Jesus—which can be nothing other than the human nature of Mary in virtue of Jesus’ virginal conception—was stained or corrupted by sin.

III *Not the Woman Alone, but the Woman and Her Seed*

The virginal conception of Jesus does not distance or alter his human nature over and above Mary’s. Now one might think, in that case, that Mary herself could have acted alone for salvation, as a sinless, innocent human voluntarily undergoing the consequences of sin (and certainly we should imagine that her humble and unreserved acceptance of the divine will manifested in the Annunciation entailed a sacrifice, not least of which was the social shunning that must have followed, and this was indeed characteristic of her whole life, marked as it was from the beginning by chastity, leading to virginity, culminating in fullness of sanctity and only then reaching those high pitches of suffering and sorrow in which heaven and earth rejoice). But her own solitary sacrifice unto death—however beautiful an act of love-caused obedience by one all-pure and guiltless—would not have atoned for all. She could not have harrowed hell and led the captive souls with her in ascent to heaven,²¹ nor could she have sent to earth the Holy Ghost or instituted the sacraments; she could not have illumined the world with the “Unwavering Light”,²² proclaimed the year of the LORD’s favor as his prophesied Anointed One,²³ or become a life-giving spirit,²⁴ even if eternal life had been given to her; even though she is Full of Grace, without her Son she would not have had the singular grace of her immaculate conception nor the means to dispense her graces to others. Underlying all of this is the fundamental issue of the relationship between passion and death on the one hand and God’s will and its revelation in law on the other. Mary, acting alone as a creature, could not have permanently changed the relationship between the law and human nature once and for all.²⁵ Only God, whose being and power wholly transcend human nature and who alone is its Creator and lawgiver, could do this. Only God Himself in his divine economy could so fundamentally establish in the structure of reality that the angle subtending man and God should vanish.

²¹ Ps 68:18, Eph 4:8-10.

²² From the Canon of Pascha.

²³ Is 61:2, Lk 4:18-21.

²⁴ 1 Cor 15:45.

²⁵ In accordance with premise (2’), p.6.

The law was just, just as man was good. Sin is disobedience, contravening the will of God. Mary, as a sinless creature, always obeyed the will of God. But such perfect obedience on the part of a creature on its own, considered in and of itself, would not have changed the fact—the metaphysical fact built into the relational essence of human nature—that death was a consequence of transgressing the law, the result of displeasing God, a state of corruption, the loss of life resulting from the ontological separation of man from the Source of Life.²⁶ Even if Mary's death were not the result of any original sin but instead a free sacrifice under some circumstances or other; and even if God, in response, had resurrected Mary and assumed her bodily into heaven, as he had done with Enoch and Elijah, still without her conception and bearing of the Immortal Word, such events on their own would not bring about a change in the underlying relation between man and his creator. Men would continue to be trapped in cycles of self-gratification, naturally propagated in original sin, and continue in their slavery to sin bound to the grave. Of course God could intervene again in individual cases of human conception and others might have been spared from the penalty of death in so many one-off instances. But in that case there would be no hope of a general resurrection, the supposed righteous of the Old Testament would have been disappointed and anyone conceived in sin would be as despairing, anguish-ridden, and hell-bound as were Job and David in their darkest moments.

Only the hypostatic union of the Incarnation, the act that completes the course of unblemished love and total obedience of Mary to God, only this perfects the relationship between man and God that begins with Mary's immaculate consecration, her total devotion. In the Incarnation of the Word, the inseparable union of God with Mary's human nature elevates her devotion into something infinite, supernal, transcendental, something that "overshadows"²⁷ those bounds of space and time in which human life first comes into being and grows, that overcomes the limited will and intellect, however pure, of even prelapsarian Adam. Through Mary's life of total consecration and perfect obedience to God, she became one who found favor with God, and indeed to a supreme degree, as she was "full of grace" and one whom the "Lord is with".²⁸ She had led the life that Adam and Eve were called to lead; she had grown up into full spiritual maturity, a spotless reflection of the divine splendor. But until she became the bride of God, the spouse of the Spirit, her perfection did not yet have any implication for others. Until God united his nature with hers, heaven and earth still existed apart; until the shoot

²⁶ Prv 4:23, Jn 1:24, 5:26, Acts 3:15.

²⁷ Lk 1:35.

²⁸ Lk 1:28.

of Jesse²⁹ flowered into fire, the visible world still lay in darkness. But with the virginal conception of God in Mary, the perfection that she attained is available to all, because God decreed that this perfect human being *would become His Mother*, so that He would become what she was, that the spotless reflection of God in Mary would be reflected back, ramified within the depth of creation to infinity. And this double reflection of God in Mary back to Mary and the whole visible world is the immortal Incarnate Word, Jesus Christ. When we look at Jesus we see what Mary saw when she looked at him, her own love for God reflected back to her as love for all, both from her and from God, a perfect union of what she is with what God is, so that the two need never again be separated. In Mary, the attributes of God were projected onto the visible manifold, the finite plane of existence. In the Incarnation, this clear, finite, changing image of God was inversely projected back onto the eternal and the infinite, so that the Incarnate Word became the “double reflection” between God and Mary, God’s love for man personified in a man that loves God, a simultaneous composition of the double outward movement of paternal and filial love, not an expansion of finite man into the infinite Godhead nor a finite cross-section of the infinite but a living saturation of a finite man *in the finite* by the infinite as infinite, “Him in Whom the fullness of God was pleased to dwell bodily”.³⁰ He is the personification of the bi-infinite love between God and all men through Mary that God alone makes possible.

Even as a perfect Christian, Mary does not herself have the power to make us one with God. God alone as our creator has the power to do this, just as he alone could chasten her conception and so prepare her as his holy temple, the gracious chastity that by the development of her own free will grew in virginity and flowered into divinity. Only through the power of the same Spirit can we become what she is, full of grace, and this is what is accomplished in the Incarnation. Mary cannot accomplish this union by herself; and it is only this most mystical union, the Incarnate Word, that has the power to make us one body with her. Only He can unite us as one body as a perfect living sacrifice for all time. It is by the Spirit that we are created and the earth renewed.³¹ The Spirit of God united with her, and by His power the Word of God took on her likeness in the Incarnation. He took *her* likeness, that of the most humble servant, so that *we* might attain to His divine likeness in proportion as we approach hers. He is the eternal Word through Whom all things are made; and He willed to be incarnate and born of a human mother, so that she might become the mother of the Word through Whom all things are made,

²⁹ Is 11:1.

³⁰ Col 2:9.

³¹ Ps 103:30.

so that the first things are made through His eternity but all things are finished in the marriage of His Spirit with the child of time, the God-man from the daughter-Mother.

Mary was free of original sin, so that she would not be under the sentence of death. Yet this does not mean that she already had the gift of eternal life before God united himself with her in the Incarnation of Christ. She would have been an earthly immortal through his first work of salvation, like Adam and Even before the Fall, on course, “destined” perhaps on account of His loving purpose, for the gift of eternal life, but not already in possession of it. Only the Incarnate Word, God and Creator in the flesh, can be the full revelation of God to all in the flesh, the full glorification of God on earth. Only in the Incarnate Word, the Son of God and Mary, can the gift of eternal life be given to all, including Mary but not limited to her. Her Son is this gift of eternal life, the height of human knowledge of God.³² All are saved by being united as the body of the Son of Mary, “one body in Christ”.³³ This means that we, the Church, the holy nation, the royal priesthood, the living temple, are the body in which God is glorified and the perfect sacrifice to Him, because he took the form of his handmaid and in her form presented himself as a sacrifice to the Father, true God to true God. So he presents us, his body, as a sacrifice to the Father, to Whom nothing is more pleasing, when we take the form of this same handmaid. When we become her son³⁴ we are gifted the strength of God and atonement with his will, because we become the sacrifice of God to God in her form.

IV Conclusion: The Atonement of the Incarnation Requires the Immaculate Conception

All together then what we have is a valid argument for the salvific necessity of the Incarnation, understood as including the original sinlessness of Mary, while only minimally modifying Anselm’s original argument. His original argument can be interpreted correctly but is potentially misleading as stated. “Only man ought” does not mean that the Son must take a human nature that owes or deserves death in order to please the Father. It must be *human*, but precisely *not* subject to corruption. It must be “Adamic”, but prelapsarian-Adamic, not postlapsarian: man as he was intended to be in the predestinate³⁵ plan of glory.

³² Cf. Jn 17:3.

³³ Rom 12:6.

³⁴ Ps 85:16.

³⁵ Rom 8:29.

The hypostatic union of the Incarnation requires that the assumed human nature already be all-pure. God can only be present in what is holy, ritually pure, set apart from anything corrupting, from any defilement or impurity. The perfection of God's holiness requires this,³⁶ and he took great effort to reveal this to us in the rites of the Levitical cult and Holiness Code. In the virginal conception of Jesus, he takes all of his human nature from his mother, his conception being nothing other than a union of God with the Virgin's being and nature. Such a union must be *at least as faithfully complete* a transmission of human nature as that of a sexual union, including aboriginal psychological conditions, of justice or sin, given the purposed relationship of the human creature to God, or what I have called the 'ontic relationality' of human nature. If she had been subject to original sin and so to death, then so too would he have been, and so he could not have been our savior, for in that case it would have been just that he should die. But as God and the Author of Life,³⁷ this would have been impossible. So, viewed one way we have an argument by *reductio ad absurdum* for the Immaculate Conception of Mary from the necessity of the Incarnation for the Atonement. But viewed another way, we learn something important for soteriology. Christ, God the Son incarnate, achieves victory over death by his free atoning sacrifice. In his Passion he suffers the collective consequences of social sin and in his death he passes into Hades, there to ransom for all time those who were imprisoned.³⁸ But if he is subject to death through his mother, then, in Anselmian language, the payment he makes is not sufficient to redeem all, to atone for all dishonor—it only satisfies for his own debt. It would not be a death he "freely accepts"³⁹ or chooses; it would be required of him individually. It would not change the relation between death and the will of the Father, and so would not fundamentally change human nature.

The Incarnation transfigured Adamic human nature so that the man, Jesus Christ, was set free from the bodily corruption and death that Adam suffered. Or rather, by freely suffering death, he used death to set us free, changing the relation between death and the will of the Father from a just consequence of sin to a stage in sinlessly uniting with him in the fullness of love. While this is true, and while it is also true that Christ accomplished this for Mary as he did for all, he accomplished this by means of her own prior sinlessness, through the supernatural intervention of the Holy Spirit in her conception through the sexual union of her parents and through her own free individual

³⁶ Lest it be thought that this is somehow a limitation or weakness on God's part.

³⁷ Acts 3:15.

³⁸ Mt 20:28, 27:52-52, 1 Tim 2:6, 1 Pet 3:19.

³⁹ Cf. Jn 10:28 and the anaphora prayer preceding the epiclesis in St. John Chrysostom's Divine Liturgy.

participation in the total consecration of her life to God, climactically expressed in her own fiat at the Annunciation.

We must logically separate the condition of original justice, enjoyed by Mary and prelapsarian Adam, from the final perfection of life in beatific union with God. Mary was freed by God from bondage to original sin before the accomplishment of the Incarnation and Cross *so that* through them she and all descendants of Adam might enjoy the way of the Cross to eternal life, afforded by the changed relationship between suffering and intimacy with the Father in Christ. So while it is tempting to think that it is the act of the Incarnation that frees Mary from the bondage to original sin, as a daughter of Adam, in fact the full salvific significance of that Incarnation is only possible because Mary was already free from original sin, through the activity of the Holy Spirit. The same power of the Holy Spirit by which Christ was conceived, acted first to prepare a human nature to which God would unite.⁴⁰ The full salvific significance of the Incarnation has to be seen as including Mary's original sinlessness as its first and preparatory stage. So she, like her son, was not subject to natural death. For her son it was still different. He who knew no sin was made *to be sin* for our sake.⁴¹ Given the condition of social evil in the world and its implicative effects, it was inevitable that he would incur the human punishment of death by leading the life of the sinless Messiah, calling sinners to repentance and proclaiming the kingdom in word, sign, and miracle. This was a death imposed by the sins of others. It was foreknown and accepted by the Son of God in decreeing his Incarnation. The Passion on the Cross became the inevitable consequence of fidelity to his mission. And by the omnipotent will of God it became an opportunity to save all men from death, by changing the relationship between the law and death, which as God and the author of the law he was in a unique position to do.

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⁴⁰ Perhaps by blessing the natural conjugal union of Mary's parents with a supernatural purity, but in any case directly intervening in a supernatural way in the event of her natural generation so that she might enjoy original justice. Whatever its manner, this is the same possibility offered to us in the baptismal sacrament instituted by Christ.

⁴¹ 2 Cor 5:21.