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## Our Lady of Eden

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## OUR LADY OF EDEN?

It has always seemed a hard saying to me that "at the moment of (Our Lady's) conception, nature (her's) was sanctified not from any guilt which, at that time, lay therein, because there was none such; but from a guilt which there would have been, had not grace been infused into her soul then and there."<sup>1</sup> Even when that "would have been" may be changed to "might have been" one still remains unsatisfied.

At a time when, generally, in the West science and philosophy assumed that the advent of the soul, the "animation," did not take place until weeks after the parental act of procreation, Duns Scotus opined that, in any event, the special intervention of grace at Our Lady's generation could and did make itself felt at the instant when soul and tissue were joined. If this act of divine power had been lacking, in uniting with the matter deployed by the parents, the intellectual soul would have been tainted with that ungodly handicap and blameworthiness, original sin. But, in point of fact, radically changing the whole picture, a beforehand prevention of that guilt cut in, pouring in grace, cancelling grounds for accusation and doing away with any need of a following-up, repairing justification.

However, for our part, we repeat, whether we say "would have" or "might have," one cannot be happy with either: if the faith permits! Cajetan's way of putting it, namely, that, before her pre-emption, there was in Mary and inborn leaning towards the sorry birth-lot of the rest of mankind, jars even more.

As a help towards avoiding it we might hint that that way of thinking suggests a like, but quite outlandish, view about

<sup>1</sup> Duns Scotus, *In 3 Sent.*, Dist. 3, 2, scholium; ed Lyons, 1639. Here the friar was answering St. Bernard.

the Redeemer Himself which, with apologies, one might, as a hypothesis, match with Scotus' which, of course, for long has been thought befitting enough to wit: Had not God seen to it otherwise, by making His Mother holy beforehand, Jesus might have been born of a flesh subject to sin! By these present we beg to suggest that the same concern for Our Lady's holiness and the honor of God which gave grounds for the reverent theory of the great Franciscan theologian be given rein to see whether or not some truth might be spotted which, like the facts (His total, potential and actual), absolute sanctity, which put out of court that unworthy hypothesis about Our Lord likewise would not leave room even for the thought that, if things had gone another way, the mother of God to-be might have been conceived in a state of original sin. We are seeking a way of understanding and putting into words the essence of Mary's first-being which would not even need (as Pius IX's definition did need) to make reference to original sin. We believe we find a solution in an authenticated denial of an axiom so basic to the thinking of Scotus, St. Bernard and others, namely, that the "first" *active* conception of Our Lady was, necessarily, marred by sin. We now know, of course, that, in any event, that 'first' is first and last, in any one procreation.

If, for comparison, we examine the causes, the agencies divinely put into motion to give the result willed by God at the Incarnation of the Divine Child, one being a mother-habitat and holy person fit to nurture Him, we see that both springs of action were, through and through, good: on the one hand the Holy Spirit, the Immaculate Virgin on the other.<sup>2</sup>

Looking now again at the causes at work at the immaculate conception of Our Lady, in the theory of Scotus it is taken as understood that, of itself, one of the factors, the bodily union of Mary's parents, was bound to pass on the spoiled legacy of

<sup>2</sup> Bellarmine notes this combination of totally holy causes as explaining why Christ was utterly holy "ex vi generationis," "in His very conception." (*De amissione gratiae et statu peccati*, Lib. 4, Cap. 16; Rome, 1958).

Adam. Now, of course, an effect cannot have being on a higher level than its cause. Given, therefore, the wished-for result which, indeed, came forth, a spotless and perfect human being, the most holy Virgin Mary, from Scotus we understand that what was wanting of goodness in the active conception was made good by the bringing in of a third influence, a fore-running, instantaneous grace. As we have said, not feeling at ease with this approach, we have assumed that any system in which the, if only threatening, sin-inducing, crippling impact of the human agent could be done away with not as *forestalled* (and, at that, from outside the generative act of Joachim and Anna) but as being entirely *absent* from it, even as a menace, from the start, a Providence thus freeing us at once from any need to think up a third, a corrective ingredient, as well as with the harsh (as we regard it) above-mentioned language: such an opinion (in itself not entirely new<sup>3</sup>) we think, might be worth looking at from what may be a new angle.

Church historians find that the honoring of the conception of the Mother of God in the liturgy of the West was copied from the custom of the East. Indeed, drawing on Byzantine (ineptly, we think, called "eastern") practice and Syrian, we find that, from very early centuries, a feast-day referred to as the conception of *Anna*, recurred on 9th December. It is honored under the name as much as ever today in the Orthodox and, in part, of the Catholic Byzantine world. We cite some typical texts from the Greek *Menia* and the Ukrainian Catholic and Russian Synodal service books.<sup>4</sup> In my written text these are identified by the capitals, G, U and R.

1. (G, R) (At great vespers, stanzas for Psalm 140) St. Anne is speaking: "The tribes of Israel shall rejoice over me for, behold, I am with child; I have thrown off the

<sup>3</sup> See Cardinal Nicholas de Cusa, quoted in *Verdad y vida*, 1954, Vol. 12, p. 113.

<sup>4</sup> Greek *Menaia* (Rome, 1888), volume for Dec. 1889, and the *Slavonic Minia* (Kiev, 1894) Vol. 12.

shame of childlessness."

2. (G, R) (Stanzas after the great supplication): "Praying for offspring Anna cried out: O Lord of Sabbaoth, Thou knowest my shame as childless; put an end to the anguish of my soul, open the gates of my womb, making me, the barren one, fruitful."
3. (G, R) (From the same stanzas): "The worthy spouse (Joachim) procreates the godly girl-child..."
4. (G, R) (From the first troparion of the first ode of the Kanon): "Today, O Godly-minded Anna, we celebrate thy conceiving of the one who was to find place for the Immense..."
5. (G, R) (The third troparion of the above): "The estimable Anna now conceives the pure one who is to conceive the Most Blessed Lord... Christ."
6. (R) (From the alternative kanon, first ode, third troparion): "In its mother's womb the divinely saving temple is set up... the ladder which shall lead all mankind upwards. Let us loyally make festivity over her conception."
7. (R) (At matins, from the third ode of the kanon): "This day, O faithful, from the saintly ones begins to take being the spotless lamb, the most pure tabernacle, Mary, gloriously adorned by God."
8. (R) (First troparion of the alternative third ode and kanon): "From an angel in the heights, in prayer, St. Joachim hears the news he has longed for: Go, good man, God has accorded thee all thy desires."
9. (G, R) (From the fourth ode, the "Mother-of God" prayer<sup>5</sup>): "O Virgin Mother of God, thou treasury immaculate<sup>6</sup>... this day cleanse me defiled by sin... O, pure

<sup>5</sup> This is the *Theotokion* "Bogorodichen."

<sup>6</sup> In the Slavonic "neskvernaya," while faithfully upholding the Byzantine tradition about the parents of Our Lady, as for herself, the Czarist Orthodox Russian Church taught that: "The Most Holy Virgin God-

one, glory to thee whom God hath glorified."

10. (G, P) (The kontakion)<sup>7</sup> "To-day the whole world celebrates Anna's conceiving by God's will: for she brought forth her who, in a manner beyond the power of words to tell, bore the Word of God."

In the Ukrainian service books this kontakion comes after the third ode of the kanon of matins for 8th December, treated as a pre-solemnity in the feast-day of Joachim and Anna on 9th. Their kondak for 9th., itself, concludes with a most exact wording of the opinion preferred in the West, thus: "Not cleansed from original sin, but pre-shielded from it." However, its opening sentence reads more positively: "In the womb of the exceptional Anna the Finger of the Holy Ghost designs the most pure image of the glory of God."<sup>8</sup> The dismissal prayer after greater vespers speaks of "her (Mary's) most immaculate conception, the feast of which we are solemnly observing."

11. (R) (From the oikos of the sixth ode of the kanon):  
"The holy childless ones, Joachim and Anna, called upon God to have pity on them in their misery: Give us issue of the womb!"
- 12 (G) In the oikos after the sixth ode of this Kanon for 9th December, St. Andrew of Crete proclaims that: "Anna conceived Mary in joy," repeating the thought in his brief hymn:

"Not as Eve dost thou bear, O Anna, in pains  
For in thy womb does thou hold joy;  
On the ninth day Anna conceives the Godbearer."<sup>9</sup>

bearer was conceived... not outside the rule of normal human birth." It was "far from the thought that (her conception) was immaculate ("neporóchnym") in the sense of complete freedom from original sin." *Nastól'naya kniga* (Khar'kov, 1900), p. 451, footnote. At the same time they readily use the word "vsesviashchénaya," "all holy."

<sup>7</sup> This is St. Andrew of Crete's text. See *P.G.*, 97, 1312.

<sup>8</sup> *Vechernya i Utrenya*, Vidavnitsvo O. O. Vasilyan (Mondare, Canada, 1945).

<sup>9</sup> *P.G.*, 97, 1312. St. Andrew of Crete.

One feels safe in taking these lines of St. Andrew to imply that, together with the pains of childbirth, the other consequences of the fall, including the inheritance of original sin, were also annulled.

Still on the subject of liturgy, it is noteworthy that in the order of the Holy Sacrifice of the Altar of both St. Basil and St. John Chrysostom, at the rite of preparation of the offerings of bread and wine, taking their turn in a series with other great saints, Saints Joachim and Anna are honored by a particle of bread being put on the discos in their name also. Further, in some uses of the Byzantine rite (the Russian, for instance) along with other major patrons, Saints Joachim and Anna also are invoked in the final blessing after each celebration of the Holy Eucharist, whether of St. John (the form of the Holy Sacrifice used most of the year) or of St. Basil. The saintly couple are invoked also by the Ukrainians after matins in some contexts, as well as by all Byzantines in a litany chanted at vespers and matins on certain greater feasts.

Looking now into the area of homiletics, the priest-monk, John of Euboea, commenting on the subject of this feast reports that: "On 9th December we celebrate the announcing to Joachim and Anna of their coming procreation of Mary." He retails the story of the holy pair's grief over their barrenness, their prayer and, finally, their joy at the news of the miracle-to-be: of "the conception to come about through him" and makes that fruit, Our Lady, "all-undefiled." Her parents are blest, he declares "but still holier is she by you (them) begotten."<sup>10</sup>

When treating of the *birth* of Our Lady, St. Andrew of Crete does not fail to bring in thoughts also about her conception: God replies to the complaining and pleading elderly couple that, at last, He will give them the fecundity they crave: to Joachim "to generate offspring" and to Anna the state of body

<sup>10</sup> St. John of Euboea, *P.G.*, 96, 1473-1476.

to nourish it. Thus "out of, as it were, dried-up trees, the rich fruit, the Virgin Most Immaculate was generated."<sup>11</sup>

St. John Damascene speaks even more biologically. He, too, brings the subject into a discourse of the *birth* of the God-Bearer: "It was only natural that the path to the peak of wonders (Christ) should be marked by prodigies" here the marvel of a birth from the sterile, thus: "O blessed pair, Joachim and Anna . . . O most enviable loins of Joachim, from which most pure seed was let to flow! O much sung womb of Anna, in which, in silence took shape the most holy fetus! O womb, in which a living heaven, wider than the skies was conceived!"<sup>12</sup> And, further: "O blessed couple, Joachim and Anna, transparently most immaculate! By their fruits ye shall know them! (Matt. 7, 16)."<sup>13</sup> To add three more examples from the Doctor of Damascus: "In their holiness Joachim and Anna fertilized themselves and harvested the fruits of life."<sup>14</sup> they are "a pair most self-controlled."<sup>15</sup>; and, finally, in his treatise on the Orthodox (that is, the Catholic) Faith St. John writes: "Joachim took the august and honorable Anna to wife and so, from grace (for that is what Anna means) brought forth the Lady."<sup>16</sup>

In a sermon on this holy couple Cosmas Vestitor exclaims: "Hail, Joachim . . . grace be to thy loins; Anna, praise to thy womb; Hail, O father, sower of a living paradise."<sup>17</sup>

In his kanon of the conception of the "Most Holy God-bearer," in the eighth ode, Cosmas speaks of Joachim and Anna as a ripe couple fruitful of the Godly daughter.<sup>18</sup>

Although bodily prolific, nevertheless, because of original sin after the fall, the human race has been spiritually sterile.

<sup>11</sup> St. Andrew of Crete, *P.G.*, 97, 816.

<sup>12</sup> St. John of Damascus, *P.G.*, 96, 664.

<sup>13</sup> St. John of Damascus, *P.G.*, 96, 668.

<sup>14</sup> St. John of Damascus, *P.G.*, 96, 673.

<sup>15</sup> St. John of Damascus, *P.G.*, 96, 669, No. 6.

<sup>16</sup> St. John of Damascus, *P.G.*, 94, 1157.

<sup>17</sup> Cosmas Vestitor, *P.G.*, 106, 1009.

<sup>18</sup> Cosmas Vestitor, *P.G.*, 106, 1017.



St. Tarasius, Patriarch of Constantinople, speaks of Our Lady as of one "who took away the curse of sterility,"<sup>19</sup> meaning, of course, spiritual barrenness. Now, it is not of the child that we say he is fruitful, but the parents. Is St. Tarasius, then, saying that, so that the child Mary might be purely holy, their conceiving her was at the same high spiritual level? He does not make any mention of any intervention of the Holy Ghost but, precisely, this child Mary "is from the will of the flesh"! (A flesh, surely, prepared in grace, if the outgrowth was to be all-holy!); "from the will of man."<sup>20</sup> Of man, undoubtedly, not carried away by concupiscence!

In his *Carmen* No. 27, 8, our last witness, St. Ephraem the Syrian seems, indeed, to be saying what we are so ready to hear: "For, indeed, Thou (Christ) and Thy Mother are wholly beautiful in every respect, for, in Thee, O Lord, there is not any imperfection, nor is there any stain in Thy Mother."<sup>21</sup> Not, then, *in any respect*: not even in the realm of might-have-been, the projection of her conception? And could the eulogist mean that was in the nature of things?

We have been reviewing these many expressions of joy over a conception and birth, but over still more, the special nature of this epic event: everything about it is full of grace! The parents are spoken of as blessed and holy; far from there being any hint of its being a vehicle of sin, their act of procreation is described as sacred, worthy, indeed, to be preached about. In proclaiming the total sanctity of the fruit of this unique pair the liturgical prayers and the sermons do not raise the question of whether or not the blight of Adam *might* have stood in the way, although it did not. All along this chorus of veneration is sometimes saying and, at times, taking it for granted that, of course, Mary, the passive outcome of that active propagation, was not even in the way to be considered as

<sup>19</sup> St. Tarasius, *P.G.*, 98, 1481.

<sup>20</sup> St. Tarasius, *P.G.*, 98, 1485.

<sup>21</sup> St. Ephraem, *Carmina Nisibena* (Lipsiae, 1866), pp. 122-123.

having anything to do with original sin. Whereas in the West reflection led men to feel that some reason warranting the belief that this girl-child was beyond the reach of that disgrace had to be found, among the Byzantines and for St. Ephraem, in calling her immaculate from conception, everything had been said. And that was professed, it would seem, in part at least, because she was the product of an active intercourse that was essentially sinless.

The question which came under discussion between, on the one hand, St. Bernard, and the canons of Lyons on the other was, precisely, about this active conception. Possibly there may be many today for whom also the thought that Our Lady's privilege lay in her being sanctified at that point is as abhorrent as it was to St. Bernard. Typical of them may be Fr. Ailbe J. Luddy, O.Cist., whom we find expressing himself thus: "It may seem incredible that educated Christians, such as the canons of Lyons, could have thought of keeping a feast in honor of the active conception, or that St. Bernard could have supposed them capable of such a superstition. Nevertheless, there were many . . . even some with a reputation for learning . . . such as St. Peter Comester . . . ; St. John Damascene is believed to have held the same view . . . some churches in the East . . . called it the feast of the conception of Anna."<sup>22</sup>

In piously adopting the feast, of course, the Latin Church concentrated on the passive aspect of the conception, that is, upon what it implied in Our Lady. As for the active participants, Joachim and Anna, the Roman Missal of 1920, for example, recalls them separately on two different days: 26th June for Anna and, for St. Joachim, 16th August, in each instance the plain fact that their parenthood was a miraculous answer to prayer providing the grounds for their veneration.

The problem of squaring the Immaculate Conception with the Scriptural declaration that all men are born in need of re-

<sup>22</sup> Ailbe J. Luddy, O.Cist., *The Life and Teaching of St. Bernard* (Dublin, 1950), p. 703, footnote.

demption having been raised, we repeat we, personally, find our jealousy for the Ever Immaculate quite unsoothed by Scotus' ingenuity, for we think he did not go far enough. Thus, without hinting in the least that, as some have feared, that invention involves thoughts of change in the divine decrees answering to our human processes of reasoning, we do not like, even in thought, to assess Our Lady as, in some first instance (to use human terms) "by nature" having been even neutral to original sin and grace (for those are the two alternatives) for one then to proceed at once to think of her as, by a positive influx of a grace of pre-redemption, in a flash, rescued from that benighted state. On the other hand, when thinking of the Virgin's record in the use of her full will after birth, one cannot take exception to a statement that, except for the grace of the Savior, she might have committed sin. What one cannot abide to hear said (if the feeling, that is, befits a Roman Orthodox) is that, if God had not put forth His will in this unwonted way at her conception Mary *would have* been conceived into the bandit kingdom of Satan. We would like to make our own in its broadest spread wider, perhaps, than he, himself, intended that sentiment of St. Augustine: "For the honor of the Lord, when sin is being discussed, categorically, I do not want the Virgin Mary even to be mentioned."<sup>23</sup>

In this mood one may incline to examine again the notion of redemption to see whether or not, without heresy, it might also bear some meaning other than that of being snatched from the power of the Devil, of being freed from undergoing punishment for a built-in ungodliness.

Although the direct purpose of Pius IX's *Ineffabilis Deus*<sup>24</sup> was, expressly, to define the Immaculate Conception, not to show how that fact and dogma might be dovetailed theological-ly with the witness of Holy Writ above-mentioned, it may be significant that, although bringing in the word "redemption"

<sup>23</sup> St. Augustine, *P.L.*, 44, 276.

<sup>24</sup> Pius IX *Acta* (Rome, 1854), Vol. 1, p. 597.

more than once in leading up to it, when it comes to the precise definition, in his apostolic letter Pope Pius' word is "salvation": "Intuitu meritorum Christi Jesu Salvatoris humani generis."<sup>25</sup> Expressions other than those two which also occur in the pontiff's proclamation (either his own, or phrases taken from Pope Alexander VII) are: preserved from sin; immune from sin; ever free from; redeemed "sublimiori modo." One might enquire whether or not these phrases might also be taken to carry the meaning of lifting up to the heights rather than of salvaging from an abyss.

There is, perhaps, some encouragement for our theory in general to be drawn from the fact that the provision of the needed sinless source of the flesh and blood of the Redeemer was not carried through until, so to speak, the last moment. Our Lady came at the end of a long line of mortals conceived and born in the stock of fallen Adam: a chain of many sinners, of some persons notorious for their evil lives. Yet, as to the one concluding generation, the Incarnation, through the Immaculate Conception the impact of all that perversity was cancelled out. In any chain of causes and effects the first characteristic of the cause at any stage is that it gives *being* to its effect. In the generation of living beings there is the added quality that the offspring is of the same *species* as the generator. The physical condition, whether of health or sickness, of the new progeny, often but not inevitably, may be determined by the condition of the more remote forebears. It can be influenced by that of the immediate progenitors. The story of the generation of Jesus Christ shows that the spiritually ignoble condition of strings of ancestors need not be passed on with the species. It is the resultant of the cluster of immediate, last causes at the end of the line, which fixes the state in which the last scion is born. For Jesus those causes were the divine power and an immaculate mother, adding up, of course, as we remarked earlier, to an utterly blessed work.

<sup>25</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 616.

As for the Blessed Mother's procreation, what we are seeking is some intervention of Providence through which, ontologically and from eternity, there could not be even the possibility of Our Lady's being conceived in original sin, consequently, of her being in need of salvation from *that*. (She would receive such aid later, after birth, in rejecting personal sin). We wish to be spared even the thought that one of the factors entering into the conception, the human generative act, even though overbalanced or outplayed by a unique influx of grace, still, was there in inchoate operation, in condition unclear. If there is a known likelihood or possibility that it may rain, the day cannot boast of being a tourist's dream on the other score that, in fact, it does not rain, for, only what you can be sure of is perfect.

Where there is no evil in the cause there will not be any blemish in the effect.

Supposing that, as a matter of history, both causes of the procreation of Our Lady, the divine (of course) and the human were, beyond all mishap, wholly untarnished and blessed. No one could then assert that, hypothetically, the outcome might have been impure, that, in the nature of things, at her origin, at least, Mary might have been subject to Satan. Any such statement would be simply impossible. Our ambition to find grounds for keeping even the mention of sin out of our discussions about this (after Christ) "our nature's solitary boast" would have been achieved. Scotus' perspicacity ruled out any actual sin; we would have outlawed also the word "there would have been."

Just as for all others, so also for Joachim and Anna, at their espousals it could have recognized that the normal fruit of their union, their progeny, would begin its existence in an unblessed, fallen state, a condition displeasing to God. But we have found the Byzantines, on a level with the holiness of the passive sharer of the event, the little fetus, returning over and over again to the blessedness adorning Joachim's active, fatherly part in the begetting of their God-sent child, and of Anna's to match.

What if that embrace, *in itself, intrinsically*, "intuitu meritorum Jesu Christi Salvatoris" were infused with that perfection which such intercourse had lacked since Adam's fall?

As far as the notion of a chastening of the marital act goes, Venerable Bede invokes it in another context, and rather widely. When commenting on the first chapter of St. Luke regarding St. John Baptist he declares that: "His birth was brought about miraculously, to make it understood that lascivious, carnal concupiscence playing no part, here was a man destined to great virtue; where there was not any voluptuous cause at work (we are reminded of Damascene's "pair most self-controlled") the sole intent was the spiritual grace of the progeny."<sup>26</sup> The Greek and Russian service books speak of this conception of the Baptist, celebrated on 23rd September as holy, "godly, glorious," as, they aver, was also that of Isaac.<sup>27</sup> Bede lists as enjoying this same privilege: Jacob, Joseph, Samuel, all of whom "at the very beginning of their lives, transcended the laws of the human condition."<sup>28</sup>

In one passage of the Russian Orthodox office of 9th December (the kanon, first ode, fourth troparion) the womb of Anna is spoken of as "subject to defilement." Be it so, but could it not, alternatively, be exposed to sanctification? And with it, the flesh of her partner? Such that, *in this instance*, by divine, timely superintendence, the procreative union, itself, of these elderly spouses could be elevated by grace, making it totally foreign to the passing on of the shame of Eve? Indeed, the third ode of that same kanon as well as its kontakion (quoted earlier under No. 10) suggest that this exception was, in fact, made. Indeed, were not the authors of the texts we have called in evidence both saying and implying that that embrace, nay, that the *state and being* of Joachim and Anna, as persons, not just in this one deed, were thus elevated? And we wonder whether,

<sup>26</sup> Venerable Bede, *P.L.*, 94, 205.

<sup>27</sup> See the kanon at matins.

<sup>28</sup> Venerable Bede, *loc. cit.*

once bestowed, such a providential boon would then be withdrawn, though never needed again: "O blessed couple, Joachim and Anna, transparently most immaculate! By their fruits ye shall know them!"

The outcome of a grace-imbued cause like that, allied with the creative co-operation which God provides at all human reproduction, the fruit, we say, would also be unblemished. Any occasion to link in our minds that healthful bud so begotten with even the thought of spiritual blight, sin, would be removed. That "more sublime redemption" through the merits of Jesus Christ "Saviour of the human race" might then find its reality in the gifts of integrity and faultless fidelity lavished on the Mystical Rose at her conception; an unfailing chain of graces with the aid of which, from infancy to assumption, the Godhearer lived a life of unwavering, positive holiness. This acceptance of the word "redemption" would not be any stranger than St. Bernard's including the saving of the good angels from the disaster of Lucifer and his cohorts under that doctrine.<sup>29</sup>

When founding His priesthood for the New Testament Christ by-passed the entire Mosaic succession, the line of Aaron. After St. Paul, we are accustomed to classify His priesthood as "of the order of Melchisedech." Actually, in the long interval of time between that pious king of Salem and Christ, there were not any intermediaries in the system. Was it His mother's privilege, analogically, to belong to an Order of Eden?

Our plan to move back one step the point of entry of the divine will making real the immaculate conception, places her, in one respect, on a par with the first Eve, for she, also, was fashioned by purely holy causes. Eve's spoiled progeny goes on in the Order of the Fall. The order we suggest ranking the Holy Virgin in would be that originally designed by God to stem from a sinless Adam and Eve, an Order of Eden, in which to be conceived and born in grace is the normal thing. Again, there would not be any other members between her first par-

<sup>29</sup> St. Bernard, *P.L.*, 183, 880.

ents and herself, whose infinitely holy offspring was to be the Word Incarnate, holiness itself. In this blessed succession, we repeat, Our Lady's bliss would be owed neither to the abolition of a debt claimed by divine justice, nor to that first system of graces applied by God in Eden at creation, but "in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, Savior of the human race."

Moreover, just as saying of Christ as Man that He was sinless has its place, but the fuller truth is that He is all-holy, so also we suggest of His Mother: whilst honoring that (we think) lesser title "Immaculate," we would here focus the light of that phrase "All-Holy," but on a creature level. Her being is not made up alone of what underlies not-evil but, rather, is it tightly wrought and woven of every natural and supernatural which God can give and woman get.

As we have seen, besides rejecting the opinion which draws on pre-redemption, on other grounds also St. Bernard could not go along with the idea of sanctification at the moment of procreation. He takes it for granted that the Holy Spirit could not possibly be yoked with any human operation which is inescapably marred with the turpitude of concupiscence. That for-so-long generally accepted, but mistaken understanding that God's imparting of the soul came much after the planting of the seed, left him room for that position. As for the co-operation of God, in every begetting of man, of course, the power of the Divinity in giving the soul goes along with the human transmission of cells and sin. And there, moreover, the product is displeasing in His sight; here it is the Immaculate.

In that controversy the great monk-advocate of the Virgin was much exercised by the danger, as he thought, of the feast's being instituted in Lyons and, with it, further holy days multiplied in advance of, or without regard for the authority of Rome. For him, the only way left for Our Lady to be conceived free from original guilt would be for St. Joachim and St. Anne, themselves, to be immaculate (the which, it transpires, would not have been too-shocking news in the East)



and we must have a new liturgical day for them. From that, what was to stop us going back in the line and having Mary's successive forebears also sanctified in the womb before birth, as St. Bernard believed it of Our Lady herself, thus setting up an infinity of saints' feast-days, making this exile on earth the equivalent of Heaven! Thus St. Bernard.<sup>30</sup>

It seems, indeed, that the root of most of the theories and opinions hitherto aired to give strength to the dogma of the Immaculate Conception has been the assumption that, even when the offspring was to be the Virgin Mary, active, carnal generation must always tend to convey original sin. To summarise our treatment of the matter, what we have done is to challenge that belief. We suggest that the persistence of the accounts of the miracle worked in favor of St. Joachim and St. Anne, taken together with the many witnesses from the Church's prayer and homiletics of Byzantium and St. Ephraem, as well as the intrinsic possibility of the thing gives one grounds for this position. Thence we proceed to steal from St. Anselm the reasoning which already enjoys the sanction of centuries, to assert that *potuit*, and to ask: *nonne deuit fecitque?* We are led to the conviction that the only effective "pre-redemption" for the Mother of God which meets the requirements of her exalted vocation lies entirely outside the fallen human condition.

The word "immaculate" is negative, of course: she who bears it as a name is NOT besmirched with sin, was NOT subject to concupiscence. The word is sanctified both by Our Lady's using it of herself at Lourdes and by its enshrinement in Pope Pius' definition, uttered before that heavenly appearance to Bernadette. It is the complement of the "Full of Grace" hallowed by the Holy Ghost and St. Gabriel. It is negative because it is the rebuttal of a tireless heresy; it is a shield of the positive, the faith. In order to make it plain that it was to be dynamically kept out of the reality of the Godbearer's origin,

<sup>30</sup> St. Bernard, *P.L.*, 182, 332-336.

sin had to be mentioned. However, amongst ourselves and in prayer, no doubt, it will not be wrong to prefer Mary's Scriptural title "Full of Grace"; to speak of "The Conception Full of Grace" and to honor the blessed channel through which she came. It would seem, also, that in Heaven, the Lourdes title may take second place: for there there will not be any adversaries.

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