

***Quomodo Deus Homo:* Anselm in the New Millennium**

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Abstract. Saint Anselm clarified the need for the Incarnation in Cur Deus Homo, and in De conceptu virginali he affirmed that the Incarnation also preserved created reproductive nature. Now, using advances in scientific knowledge of that nature, one can elaborate Anselm's thought, showing that the Incarnation not only preserved but also resanctified humanity, male and female equally, and accomplished this through reproductive nature. Christ, by personally becoming incarnate as male, resanctified all that is male, and in two ways He likewise resanctified female humanity. First, through the divinely designed encoding of DNA He assumed the female Y chromosome. Second, through His conception, gestation, birth and nursing He resanctified through Mary all that is female. This comprehensive renewal of humanity happened naturally, once the supernatural event of the conception had occurred.

That God became Man is Christian doctrine.¹ Why God became Man has been the subject of theological investigation through the ages, memorably in the treatise *Cur Deus Homo* by Saint Anselm. He clarifies that only a perfect man, God incarnate, could effect complete and fitting satisfaction for human sin (Bk. 1).² Moreover, he affirms that the full goodness of the original creation was restored by the Lord's Incarnation. Now, using modern scientific advances in our knowledge of human reproduction, faith can bring reason to bear more completely on this subject.³ How God became man—that is, in what manner (*quomodo*) He effected the Incarnation—proves to be dynamically expressive of why God became incarnate, in ways that elucidate what Anselm affirmed. This does not concern the mystery of how the Holy Spirit effected the conception of Christ; for, as Anselm rightly asked, “Who . . . will dare to think that the human mind can discover how wisely, how wonderfully, so incomprehensible a work has been accomplished?”⁴ Rather, the present investigation concerns what transpired from the

¹ This paper was first presented at the Conference on Saint Anselm, Saint Anselm College, 2009. The line of thought was taken further in my research seminar on “The Theotokos and the Incarnation” for The Aquinas Institute of Oxford University in July, 2011.

² Latin from Anselm, *Opera Omnia*, 6 vols., ed. Franciscus Salesius Schmitt, O.S.B. (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson & Sons, Ltd., 1938-1961), vol. 2 (1940); reprinted in 2 vols. (Stuttgart-Bad: Cannstatt, 1968). In the following notes *Cur deus homo* will be abbreviated *Cur* and page numbers will refer to the page in volume 2 of Schmitt. English cited from *St. Anselm, Basic Writings: Proslogium, Monologium, Cur Deus Homo & Gaunilon's In Behalf of the Fool*, introduction by Charles Hartshorne, trans. by S. N. Deane, 2nd ed. (La Salle, Ill.: Open Court, 1974).

³ It can also provide a biological argument, from DNA, to replace Anselm's outmoded argument in *Monologium* 42 for the identity of the First and Second Persons of God as Father and Son, not Mother and Daughter: see Catherine Brown Tkacz, “Reproductive Science and the Incarnation,” *Fellowship of Catholic Scholars Quarterly* 25.4 (Fall, 2002): 11-25 at 17-19.

⁴ Quis ergo praesumat vel cogitare quod humanus intellectus valeat penetrare, quam sapienter, quam mirabiliter tam inscrutabile opus factum sit? *Cur* 2.16.

historical instant of that unique and ineluctably mysterious conception.⁵ Importantly, the manner in which God became Man can be seen in itself to constitute a re-sanctification of the human person, both male and female, in a way which could not have been accomplished had He become incarnate in a different way. This analysis can be understood in the context of the theology of the body articulated by blessed Pope John Paul II.⁶ It has a particular pertinence to the thought of Saint Anselm, for Katherin A. Rogers has shown that “he is very clear that the whole human person consists in soul and body, and his insistence upon the importance of biological family and human procreative abilities is striking.”⁷

Book Two of *Cur Deus Homo* opens with emphasis upon the human capacity for holiness. Anselm states, “It ought not to be disputed that rational nature was made holy by God, in order to be happy in enjoying Him.”⁸ He argues further that the restoration of mankind to holiness and happiness is more wondrous than the original creation.⁹ Anselm expresses this with word play, using predicates that are cognates: *restauravit / instauravit* and *restituit / instituit*, which emphasizes the close relationship ontologically between creation and restoration. Twice he discusses the role of a female virgin as the source of the humanity for the Incarnation.¹⁰ The wonder of God’s restoration of humanity and the fittingness of a female virgin as human parent can be shown more fully by considering the Incarnation with reference to scientific analysis of female physiology.

The Wondrous Restoration of Humanity

Modern scientific knowledge that was unavailable to Saint Anselm supports new analysis that supplements his reasoning and affirms with strength his assertion that mankind’s restoration was “more wondrous” (*mirabilius*) than our creation. Anselm’s focus was on the logical necessity of the Incarnation and Passion for restoring mankind to life from the death of sin. Logic’s role is not to persuade the believer of the truth, but to gladden him by understanding and meditation on the truths of the faith (Book One, Ch. 1). Anselm’s references in *Cur Deus Homo* to Mary’s role in the Incarnation underline the power of God the Father and what is fitting for

⁵ The implications of the pre-born life of Jesus Christ have to some extent been considered in light of modern science, e.g., Oliver D. Crisp, “The ‘Fittingness’ of the Virgin Birth,” *The Heythrop Journal* 49 (2008) 197-221; Tkacz, “Reproductive Science and the Incarnation”; Arthur Peacocke, “DNA of our DNA,” in *The Birth of Jesus: Biblical and Theological Reflections*, ed. George J. Brooke (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 2000), 59-67; and Alister McGrath, “Old Theology and New Biology,” *Science and Christian Belief* 1 (1989) 167-71. For earlier discussions, see especially Albert Mitterer, *Dogma und Biologie* (Vienna: Herder, 1952); and Hilda Graef, *Mary: A History of Doctrine and Devotion*, 2 vols. (London / New York: Sheed and Ward, 1963).

⁶ John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, translation, introduction and index by Michael Waldstein (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 2006).

⁷ Katherin A. Rogers, “Christ Our Brother: Family Unity in Anselm’s Theory of the Atonement,” *ACPQ* 86.2 (2012) 223-36, at p. 223.

⁸ *Cur* 1.1, Latin edition, p. 97, lines 4-5: Rationalem nature a deo factam esse iustam, ut illo fruendo beata esset, dubitari non debet.

⁹ Quippe mirabilius deus restauravit humanam naturam quam instauravit: *Cur* 2.16, p. 117, lines 6-7. See also lines 12-13: Tanto ergo mirabilius deus illum restituit quam instituit.

¹⁰ *Cur* 2.8 + 16.

God the Son. New arguments offered here treat further what is fitting for the Son and in addition help to explicate the resanctification of both male and female through the manner of the Incarnation. That is, they also extend Saint Anselm's discussion of what is fitting, given the full purpose of the Incarnation.

Anselm in Book Two, Chapter 8, directly addresses the question of how God became man. He begins by establishing that for proper atonement of human sin a human savior is needed, descended from Adam.¹¹ Then he treats the various ways of bringing about such a savior:

In four ways can God create man, viz., either of man and woman, in the common way; or neither of man nor woman, as he created Adam; or of man without woman, as he created Eve; or of woman without man, which thus far he had never done. Wherefore, in order to show that this last mode is also under his power, and was reserved for this very purpose, what more fitting than that he should take that man whose origin we are seeking from a woman without a man?¹²

An elegant and just completeness is accomplished by the savior's mode of coming into being, for God Incarnate does so by a unique means, a means which completes the set of variations hitherto used by God. Anselm's discussion here points to the power and creativity of God. He left to us the consideration of the Virgin Birth's implications for Christian anthropology.

Within the whole of creation God designed a variety of modes of generation, including asexual and egg-laying. As a result, by His creating human beings as sexual, specifically as viviparous mammals, He showed that this was the best possible way for him to create humankind.¹³ This seems implicit in Anselm, who uses the varying roles of the two sexes to categorize the four methods God used to create human beings: Adam with neither sex producing him, Eve taken from the male Adam, normal human generation coming from the action of both sexes, and Christ uniquely coming forth from woman alone. Consider for a moment two notable differences between the two sets here: Adam and Eve were created directly by God, with Genesis narrating that He fashioned them, and in the metaphor of Genesis we would visualize this

¹¹ Moreover, to fulfill the covenant with Abraham, so that through his seed all nations might be blessed (Gen. 17:7-9, 12:3, 28:13-14), the savior must descend from Abraham specifically. Jesus does so, through His mother Mary. See also *Catechism* §§59-60 and Mary's Magnificat, Luke 1:55. Jesus is specifically identified as being the seed of Abraham (Gal. 3:16, 19). For a full discussion of this see Tkacz, "Reproductive Science," section on "Seed of Abraham, Fruit of Mary" on pp. 16-17.

¹² Quatuor modis potest deus hominem facere. Videlicet aut de viro et femina, sicut assiduus monstrat usus; aut nec de viro nec de femina, sicut creavit ADAM; aut de viro sine femina, sicut fecit EVAM; aut de femina sine viro, quod nondum fecit. Ut igitur hunc quoque modum probet suae subiacere potestati et ad hoc ipsum opus dilatatum esse, nil convenientius, quam ut de femina sine viro assumat illum hominem quam quaerimus: Anselm, *Cur* 2.8, p. 104, lines 3-8 (pp. 248-49 of English). Anselm also holds that the manner of the savior's coming into existence will be "nobler" and "purer" (*mundus et honestius*) if it is by one sex alone and not by sexual generation (p. 103, lines 28-29; English, p. 248), and that it will be "more worthy" (*dignius*) for the God-man to be born of a virgin (p. 104, line 9; English, p. 249).

¹³ The only oviparous mammals, including the duck-billed platypus, exist in Australia and New Guinea.

fashioning as done with His hands, showing the immediacy of Creator with creation here, with male and female equally. Also the protoplasts were created as adults. In contrast, every other human person is generated by the means God created in Adam and Eve, and every other human person begins life not as an adult but as a single cell, a zygote. These details prove useful in contemplating the “how” of God becoming Man. And in *De conceptu virginali* 17 Anselm himself holds that “natural reproduction” (*propagatione naturali*) is, in the words of Katherin Rogers, “so intrinsically valuable that . . . it is the value of preserving Adam’s reproductive nature which ultimately necessitates the Incarnation.”¹⁴

The Incarnation itself initiated the restoration of mankind to holiness and happiness in the persons of Mary and Jesus, a theme reiterated in Eastern Catholic hymnody.¹⁵ Jesus was sinless. By divine gift, Mary was granted the saving effect of the Passion in advance of the historical fact of it, so that she, too, was sinless. Jesus and Mary are, wondrously, new Adam and new Eve, mankind’s restoration in a sinless woman and a sinless man who both, by free will, sustained their heavenly sinlessness. Unlike Adam and Eve, Mary’s and Jesus’ human natures came into being through conception. It will be argued here that how God became man, the biological mode of Our Lord’s unique birth, was essential to the full resanctification of women through the person of Mary, complementing the full resanctification of men through the person of Jesus. Although each of them is a model of holiness for each of us, God in His thorough generosity wanted every human person, male and female, to have a perfect example of the same sex, of sinless, sanctified humanity.

Jesus, being fully human, shares humanity itself with every human person. And He does so by free will and deliberately. Indeed, as the Trinity always acts in consort, all Three Persons of God willed that Jesus should share full humanity with us. He took on His human nature, spiritual and physical, at His conception, and He retains it, for He ascended bodily and is at the right hand of the Father, still lovingly incarnate. Jesus has the human capacities to understand, to know, to choose the good, to love. He has complete human physiology: body, brains, heart with circulatory system, lungs, teeth, skeleton, muscles, fingers and toes, eyes, ears, nose, mouth, and skin, just as we do. Every human person is blessed to know that when we stretch or see or breathe or move a hand to do a good act or restrain our tongue from an unkind word, we are using human capacities and bodily features that are just like our Lord’s. Sobering, shaming, heartening, gladsome thought. His features were Semitic, and He was undoubtedly a different height from many of us, but fundamental human sameness we share.

A focal element of this fundamental human sameness is that Jesus shares with every human person the fact of having biological sexuality, marked from the instant of conception by a pair of sex chromosomes within the DNA and thereafter growing to have primary and secondary sexual characteristics and a comprehensive hormonal system that develops and maintains the

¹⁴ Rogers, “Christ our brother,” 231. For *naturali propagatione*, see *De conceptu virginali* 17, in Schmitt ed., vol. 2, p. 158, line 17.

¹⁵ For instance, see *Byzantine Book of Prayer*, compiled by the Inter-Diocesan Liturgy Commission of the Ruthenian Metropolitan Province, 2nd ed. (Pittsburgh: Byzantine Seminary Press, 1995), p. 53.

sexual organs and capacities. As Fr. Vivian Boland noted in his Ash Wednesday sermon in 2009, the sole kind of human difference specified in Genesis 1:27, 31, is “male or female”: no other difference was important enough to creation to be mentioned.¹⁶ Jesus, too, has biological sexuality and in this He is just like every human being ever created or yet to be created. When anyone, male or female, lives chastely, whether virgin or married, that person can know that the Lord, too, took on sexuality when He took on our human nature, and He shares it with us yet.

Jesus is also specifically male. Biologically, He has maleness just as every male child and male adult does. Every man is blessed to know that his male organs and capacities are features he shares with God incarnate. Every man called to holy celibacy knows that he shares with the Lord the dedication of his sexual capacities to spiritual and not bodily fruitfulness and, if a priest, is intended through his vocation to exemplify and partake of the mystery of Christ’s role as loving and strong and faithful husband to the Church. Every man called to holy matrimony knows that he shares with the Lord the possession of the same capacities but is called to bodily fruitfulness as well as spiritual and is intended with his wife to exemplify in the mystery of marriage the union of Christ with His Church. This resanctification every male human being has.

New Questions

Do women have equal resanctification through the Incarnation? Does the maleness of Jesus imply for women a deficit in what the Incarnation imparted to them? Would it have been necessary for God to have become incarnate as a woman, if that were possible, in order to resanctify female human persons as completely as Jesus’ Incarnation resanctified male human persons? Saint Gregory Nazianzenos taught that what Christ did not assume, He did not heal.¹⁷ Is woman’s sexuality, then, unhealed? In the Culture Wars of the new millennium it is crucial to address these questions with philosophical rigor. Such study demonstrates that women’s resanctification by the Incarnation is not second-class, not only by analogy with men’s, but rather is perfect. This demonstration has two parts, an argument from DNA and an analysis based on the events occurring from Christ’s conception to His infancy.

Analysis from DNA

First consider DNA. This sophisticated genetic encoding was created by God so that, in any given pair of chromosomes, if even one dominant gene (such as the indicator for brown eyes) is in a person, then that person has the dominant trait (such as brown eyes), while two recessive genes (e.g., for blue eyes) are necessary for the person to have that recessive trait. Of the sex chromosomes, the male gene is dominant. What does this mean in terms of what Jesus assumed in His Incarnation? Jesus had an X and a Y chromosome. This is not remarkable. Every male human being’s DNA includes one X chromosome. While in every other man, however, this

¹⁶ Preached at Blackfriars Priory, Oxford, on February 9, 2009.

¹⁷ Gregory Nazianzenos, Epistle 101, to Cledonius the Priest against Apollinaris (NPNF vol. 7, p. 440). For the affinities of Anselm’s thought to Gregory’s here, see Giles E. M. Gasper, *Anselm of Canterbury and His Theological Inheritance* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), p. 172.

fact is irrelevant, the Incarnation is unique, and it matters that Jesus assumed in His Incarnation the chromosome which, when doubled in an individual, defines her biologically as female. Our Creator designed it this way, with pairs of genes and with the female gene being recessive. For, had maleness been recessive, then Jesus could not have had an X chromosome. Thus before the beginning of time did God prepare the means by which, when the Son became incarnate, He would assume in His DNA a female sex chromosome. So even the female chromosome was healed by our Lord's Incarnation.

This is an elegant detail, valuable to point out. Yet, is it satisfying? Literally? Does this detail by itself "do enough"? In fact, Our Lord and God and Savior Jesus Christ, in His body, had every anatomical male feature which every man has. If you, the reader, are male, then you know that you and your father share with the Lord biological maleness. But your mother and the Lord's mother do not share with Christ their biological sexual nature.

Analysis from the first year of the Lord's Incarnation

It seems reasonable to elaborate Saint Gregory's insight beyond what Jesus personally assumed in His Incarnation by setting forth what He sanctified in His pre-birth life and infancy. This is reasonable precisely because of the unique being Who is God incarnate. Through the Theotokos, women received a resanctification of their female natures as complete as the resanctification of the male sex, accomplished dynamically through Jesus by His personally becoming human. The equal resanctification of women was possible only because of the divinely designed process of human reproduction. The "how," the *quomodo* of female fertility and of the first year of human life provided the manner of female resanctification.

We honor the Mother of God, and respect for her modesty and maidenliness is surely not at odds with respect for her unique role in salvation history. It is well to invoke her now, in the words of a Byzantine hymn for Mary, sung on the day after Christmas:

O Virgin, it would be better for us to keep an awesome and reverent loving silence than to try singing songs composed with such depth of feeling, but, O Mother, grant us the power to accomplish whatever is your desire.

Synaxis of the Theotokos (December 26), irmos¹⁸

New Arguments from Fittingness

Mary's role is entirely human. She is truly the Mother of God, and this and her normal, nine-month pregnancy imply that her own naturally produced ovum contributed toward the

¹⁸ *Byzantine Liturgical Chant*, comp. John Vernoski (Annandale, Virginia: Epiphany Byzantine Catholic Church, n.d.).

making of Our Lord's body.¹⁹ It is now known that a human ovum is viable for only twelve hours.²⁰ This fact suggests a new argument of fitness, of what was fitting for God incarnate. If an ovum is not viable after twelve hours, this is because it decays in some way, and apparently it does so swiftly. Reason suggests, then, that the ideal ovum for the Lord's conception would be the freshest and most perfect one, one that had not suffered from any degree of aging or, to use a term from Aristotelian science, corruption. Thus it is reasonable to assume that the Annunciation occurred precisely when Mary was on the verge of ovulating. Then her *Fiat mihi* could coincide naturally with, or be immediately followed by, ovulation and the instant of conception.²¹

A second argument from fitness will suggest that ovulation and conception might most fittingly have occurred simultaneously. This point requires some preparation.

While Mary's role is entirely and exclusively human, Jesus' is both human and divine. Although every zygote, the initial single-celled body of a human person, lacks the physical development to allow cognition, and thus to allow volition, Jesus Christ is uniquely both human and God. For no other human can the events of pre-born life be deemed acts, but for Jesus every event of His Incarnation from the instant of conception must surely be recognized as divine act. Even when He dwelt in a single cell, He was perfectly and completely God almighty. For two thousand years Christians have marveled that the Creator of the universe became incarnate and dwelt in His mother's womb. Now science clarifies pre-born human life in much more detail and as a result we may marvel that, evidently, He entered His hypostatic union and brought His full transcendent divinity into a body which consisted at first merely of a single cell.

What was, historically, Our Lord's first incarnate act?

If God the Father by means of the Holy Spirit completed Mary's ovum at the instant in which it emerged from her ovary, then Jesus became incarnate while that ovum was still in contact with her ovary.²² If this is the case, then His first incarnate act was to touch a woman's ovary. The innermost anatomical feature of female sexuality, and arguably its most basic feature, is the source of female fertility: the ovaries. The instant the Lord became incarnate as male (i.e., with a Y chromosome) and began the resanctification of men, He also by His holy touch resanctified what is profoundly female and began the resanctification of women. A kind of metonymy seems evident here, with those few cells of the ovary which could have been touched

¹⁹ As noted by several scholars, including Crisp, "'Fittingness' of the Virgin Birth," 199, 201-02. By "Virgin Birth" he means divinely caused generation within a virgin, in distinction from a conception that could have occurred from a married Joseph and Mary by natural human intercourse.

²⁰ The length of time during which coitus can result in pregnancy is longer, because sperm can live for some days within the vagina and uterus. Thus intercourse during the days preceding ovulation can produce a child. For the conception of Jesus, of course, only the duration of the ovum's viability is relevant.

²¹ Human ovulation is not voluntary or even conscious, so it is likely that God arranged that Gabriel would make his Annunciation to Mary when God knew she was about to ovulate, so that her freely given assent could coincide naturally with the moment of ovulation.

²² For simplicity's sake, in this essay the word "ovum" will be used for the primary oocyte, the secondary oocyte and the ovum proper.

by the Lord when His body was a zygote constituting the part by which the whole organ, and indeed pair of organs, was resanctified.

Genesis describes God as creating mankind personally—by hand, metaphorically. That metaphor of a touch which wrought the first humans prepares us to see that the actual touch which may well have occurred at the first moment of the Incarnation is likewise creative. It may well have been that God incarnate, entering life as a male human, as His first act touched a woman’s ovary.²³ Thus begins the wondrous restoration of mankind, male and female. Our Lord was causing to exist once more the full created potential of mankind, male and female, for holiness and happiness.

In that instant, the Son became the unique One who has two natures, both Divine and Human, with each nature perfectly present and neither nature diminished or partial. Anselm observes what a great wonder it is, that God incarnate would preserve the integrity of each nature (*servata integritate utriusque naturae*).²⁴ Also, at that same instant, Mary became the unique one who has two states, virgin and mother, with each state perfectly present and neither state diminished or partial. The twofold natures of Christ and the twofold states of Mary began at the same instant. This much is necessary to believe. It follows inevitably from Church doctrine.

In addition, as just outlined, it is reasonable to think that at that same instant, the zygote which was Our Lord’s body, and which already had His maleness encoded in His DNA, touched the ovary, the female source of life, within His Virgin Mother. The first mili-second of the Incarnation already commenced the resanctification of male and female in the New Adam and the New Eve, decades before they would be recognized as the New Adam and New Eve, and nearly two millennia before we could see that Eve’s name as “source of life” resonates not only with Mary’s role as sinless mother of The Source of Life, but also indicates anew, as blessed, the created female capacity for fertility, basically embodied in her ovaries, the biological source of life.

All of this in the first instant. The Big Bang is nothing to it. Indeed, the imaged and awesome explosive display which is posited to be the start of the Universe may now be seen as cosmic foil to the exquisitely tiny, silent, hidden, omnipotent wonder of the first instant of the Incarnation when (it may be) the single-celled body of the Son of God touched a few cells of an ovary of the Theotokos. Rightly did Anselm deem the restoration of mankind more wondrous than its creation. Moreover, what follows the first instant of the Incarnation, if human pre-born life provides the true model here, continues the resanctification of women, with a fitting completeness for the female which matches the completeness for the male literally embodied by our Incarnate Lord.

²³ Let us be quite clear that it would be ludicrous to think of this as a sexual act, for we are speaking of the single-celled body of the Lord, male only in its DNA and capable of touching only a cell or two of His mother.

²⁴ *Cur* 2.16, p. 117, lines 14-15.

This is what seems likely: At once upon conception, the new zygote was impelled (by the force of the ovum's emerging from the corpus luteum in the ovary) into the opening of the nearby fallopian tube.²⁵ The Lord slowly journeyed through that channel for six to nine days.²⁶ It is now known that a woman's response to conception is not biologically passive: for instance, her fallopian tube secretes nourishment for the new life and moves it toward the uterus by the movement of cilia lining the tubes. Thus the presence of the Lord hallowed the fallopian tubes also by His progress.²⁷ Then He arrived at her womb. In order for him to survive and grow for nine months in normal human fashion, He would have had to touch the lining of her womb, enriched and ready to receive him, and His then-several-celled body would have had to become implanted. This process, too, is not biologically passive: the new life secretes a hormone dissolving the cell walls of the uterus so that the new life can implant, and reciprocally the blood-enriched lining of the womb is biologically receptive to the new life.²⁸ The Lamb of God, soon enclosed in the amnion, the "lamb-sack," dwelt within her womb for nine months, His presence sanctifying His mother's already sinless body.²⁹

Then, if Isaiah's prophecy was accurate, if Luke's Gospel is true, if the Apostles' Creed is correct, the Lord was born. Jesus, we are taught, is like us in all things but sin. Although Saint Paul may well have been thinking of Jesus' adult life primarily, Our Lord's generosity in sharing with us our human nature is so lovingly comprehensive that it is reasonable to think that from the instant of conception He has been like us in physical humanity. In any case, it is problematic to think that God would have suspended His Incarnation after nine months, to have dis-corporated in the Virgin's womb and then at once re-corporated outside her body. That sounds suspiciously like the Monophysite idea that it would have been beneath God's dignity to become incarnate and that therefore He did so only in appearance and not in reality.³⁰

²⁵ Although I have used the term "emerging" here, the usual word for the ovum's emergence is "eruption." In some women at least some of the time it is accompanied by a twinge and by "break-through bleeding." The natural enlarging and ripening of an ovum in a cyst on the outside of the ovary produces pressure within the cyst, causing it to burst open when the ovum is ripe. Thus the ovum naturally comes forth with the energy needed to project it through the peritoneal fluid into the fallopian tube. When speaking of the unique experience of the pre-birth life of Christ, however, it seems best to prescind from language (such as "eruption") connoting breakage or damage of any sort.

²⁶ Thomas W. Hilgers, M.D., *The Ovulation Method of Natural Family Planning with an Introduction to NaPro Technology, the Contemporary Approach to Women's Health Care: An Introductory Booklet for the New User* (Omaha: Pope Paul VI Institute Press, 1992), p. 12.

²⁷ Again, as with the ovaries, so the pair of tubes was evidently resanctified by the Lord's presence within one of them.

²⁸ On blood in this context, see Tkacz, "Reproductive Science," pp. 20-21. Note that implantation requires a minor lesion in the mother's body, which, had Saint Thomas known of it, would evidently have seemed to him "corruption" (see note 35 below). But without implantation, the Lord could not have experienced normal gestation. Either the Lord's life progressed naturally after conception, or a continuous series of miraculous interventions occurred to prevent His developing naturally within His mother's body. The latter alternative seems unavoidably dualist.

²⁹ On the etymology of "amnion" and its suggestion of sacrifice, see Tkacz, "Reproductive Science," p. 21.

³⁰ The Manicheans and Docetists "held – to use the terminology handed down by Irenaeus and Tertullian – that Christ was only a *putativus homo* and that His body was only *putativa corpulentia*": Joseph C. Plumpe, "Some Little-Known Early Witnesses to Mary's *Virginitas in Partu*," *Theological Studies* 9 (1948) 567-77 at p. 568. For

Taking as true God's affirmation through Genesis that the creation of man, male and female, is good, we may review how it seems reasonable to think that God continued His resanctification of the human female body through His own birth. The divinely created female capacity to give birth is essential for this. For nine month's Mary's cervix had held securely closed so that the Lord might wax in her womb. Now, through the well-orchestrated, natural arrangement of hormones and physiological preparations, that cervix would open, and the Lord would then pass through it. He would pass through her vagina, blessing by His presence the organ by which every wife knows her husband, the female organ which is essential for consummating the sacrament of marriage. The Lord would then arrive at her maidenhead, and we cannot know what happened. Again an argument from fittingness suggests that however He emerged, He would also have touched her hymen so that the resanctification of the female body might be complete.

In brief: The natural variation in the extent and structure of the hymen is great. Given the hypothesis that it was fitting that Mary receive bodily the resanctification of female humanity, it is best that she should have had every anatomical element naturally possible to a woman, including a hymen. And, if the hypothesis offered here is correct, namely that through the Incarnation women received a bodily blessing in their female nature as complete as men received in their male nature, and that this was accomplished for women by the pre-born and infant life of our Lord, then it is also fitting, perhaps even necessary, that Our Lord in His birth would touch His mother's hymen. From the Gospels and abiding Church doctrine we hold that the Lord was born; and this very strongly suggests that the Lord came forth from her body in birth, chastely touching what is externally female and private. Indeed His touch was more than chaste: The touch of God incarnate was sanctifying.³¹

In the next several months, Mary would continue to nourish her son. She had nourished him for nine months through the placenta, and now she would give the nourishment natural and proper to babies, the milk of her breasts. That would complete the resanctification of the female body, in the womanly capacity to lactate. The wholesome physiological changes that nursing provides for mother and child – such as the mother's womb contracting to pre-pregnancy smallness under the stimulus of the child's suckling, and the infant's mouth muscles developing through nursing – were resanctified by Our Lord himself when He was being suckled at His mother's breasts.³²

analysis of the Proto-Evangelium of James and other pertinent apocryphal texts, see Tkacz, "Theotokos and the Incarnation."

³¹ For the importance of Jesus' touch, see Tkacz, "Reproductive Science and the Incarnation," pp. 20, 21, and note 78.

³² Tertullian was perhaps the first to observe that a normal human birth would have been necessary for Mary to have been naturally able to nurse her son with her natural milk: Tertullian, *De carne Christi* 20 (PL 2:785), cited by Jean Galot, S.J., "La virginité de Marie et la naissance de Jésus," *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* 82 (1960) 449-69 at p. 458. Others to make this physiological point included Saint Athanasius of Alexandria, *Letter to Epictetus* 5 (PG 26:1058): Galot, pp. 459-60.

Objections

Some Christians, however, do not believe that the Lord came forth from His mother's body by a real human birth, and they suggest that such a birth for Jesus would have entailed up to three unacceptable features: 1) pain for mother and child, 2) experiences unworthy of the Lord and / or of His mother, and 3) violation both of Isaiah's prophecy of a virgin birth and also of the perpetual virginity of Mary. First, we may reply that the unique human birth from a sinless human woman to a sinless and moreover divine infant could have been without pain, for it would occur with full cooperation with grace.³³ Second, there is no Christian basis for considering birth to be unworthy or dishonorable. Jesus accepted His Passion. He endured the spit and the buffets and the flogging and the thorns and the nails and the agony and the spear during His Passion, injuries inflicted upon him deliberately and with malice and mockery, and we praise and love him for His endurance for our sakes. How then, could there be unworthiness or dishonor in His accepting the gift of birth³⁴ from His loving mother?³⁵ Anselm in *Cur Deus Homo* 1.3 places himself in the tradition of Christians who cite the Lord's pre-birth, birth and Passion together in affirming the reality of the Incarnation.³⁶ Moreover, as Katherin Rogers has noted, Anselm does so in order to "answer those who found the idea of the Incarnation just too off-putting."³⁷ Moreover, human birth occurs in the manner designed by our loving and holy Creator. It is private; but it is not dishonorable or unworthy. Finally, if the present hypothesis is correct, that the manner of the Incarnation constituted a resanctification of male and female, then one would have to explain why God would have specifically excluded many of the female sexual organs from His sanctifying touch, and only them.

Third, would a human birth violate Church doctrine? Mary was a virgin when she conceived, and, taught by the Church and reason, we firmly believe that she remained celibate all

³³ Hilda Graef has made the same point to me, in a private communication.

³⁴ Sarah Smith Bartel describes the "gift of birth" in her essay on "Welcoming the Child at Birth," *The National Catholic Bioethics Quarterly* 6.2 (2006) 273-94.

³⁵ Although Saint Thomas Aquinas argues that the Lord would act more honorably by not injuring His mother's hymen, he bases this in part on an argument that the loss of a hymen is a form of corruption (presumably in the strict scientific sense, without moral overtone): See Thomas, *Summa* 3a, 1. 28, art. 2, Respondeo, citing a sermon of uncertain attribution, *serm.* 121 (PL 39:1988). It is not clear that this argument would be acceptable in the light of modern science, for it would seem that the emergence of the ovum from the ovary, an event unknown to Aquinas, causes "corruption" in the same technical sense, i.e., corruption (breaking) of the corpus luteum. Would we say that a woman, called to holy matrimony, who consummated her marriage with her husband, is thereby corrupted? Surely we would say that the term has only the technical physical meaning of "underwent change" and has no moral overtone. Otherwise, we would end up concluding that the sacrament of marriage corrupts a woman (but not a man), and for a sacrament inevitably to corrupt a person called to it would be heinous to believe.

³⁶ In the patristic era, Tertullian was among those who detailed the details of physical birth in tandem with the details of the Passion: *Adv. Marc.* IV 21; *De carne Christi* 4.20, 23, cited by Hans von Campenhausen, *The Virgin Birth in the Theology of the Ancient Church*, Studies in Historical Theology 2 (Naperville, Ill.: Alec R. Allenson, 1964), p. 48.

³⁷ Rogers, "Christ Our Brother," 236. Her note clarifies: "Some scholars frame the issue as centering on Christ's humiliation and suffering (Hopkins, *Companion* 187; Southern, *Portrait*, 200). As Anselm explains it, though, the core problem is God becoming embodied at all." The full citations in Rogers' references are to Jasper Hopkins, *A Companion to the Study of St. Anselm* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1972); and R. W. Southern, *Saint Anselm: A Portrait in a Landscape* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

her life, equally in her bodily actions as in her thoughts and feelings.³⁸ Certainly Isaiah's prophecy and the doctrine of Mary's perpetual virginity are essential considerations here. But sometimes verbal ambiguity and, to be blunt, dualism affect how that prophecy and doctrine are discussed.³⁹

For a virgin to give birth in itself constitutes a virgin birth, as Ratramnus and others have argued through the centuries.⁴⁰ To affirm the virgin birth affirms first and foremost the virginal character of Mary's actions and spirit. The language does not, of itself, imply the perpetual possession of a hymen.⁴¹ Indeed, Saint Athanasius (d. 373), countering Arianism, affirmed the real humanity of Christ and His real birth, in which the Lord "opened the womb."⁴² Likewise, Epiphanius of Salamis (d. 403), the one credited with including the word "evervirgin" in the Creed, argued that to think that Mary did not give birth normally was heretical.⁴³ Many texts, several of great beauty, including venerable liturgical hymns, rightly express love and wonder at the mystery of the birth of our Lord, and do so with metaphors and modest metonymy.⁴⁴ To

³⁸ In the early Church the doctrine of the perpetual virginity had not been defined, and several noted preachers and theologians such as Tertullian and Irenaeus thought that Mary and Joseph had consummated their marriage after the birth of Mary's divine son: von Campenhausen, *Virgin Birth in the Ancient Church*, p. 48. Today many non-Catholics think Mary had children with Joseph, a view also found in the early Church.

³⁹ This difficulty arises from the ambiguity of language, specifically the words "virgin / virginity" and terms such as "door," "gate," "seal" and "integrity" which can have a physical or spiritual meaning or both. Similarly prophecies and laws when considered with reference to Mary are ambiguous, such as Ezekiel's gate which was opened and not opened (Ezekiel 44:2) and the Mosaic Law about sanctifying to the Lord each male child which opened His mother's womb (*omne adaperiens vulvam*). For an example of a hymn with such ambiguity see Romanos the Melode, First Kontakion on the Nativity, in *Hymnes*, 5 vols., ed. José Grosdidier de Matons (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1964-81), vol. 2. An important modern Conciliar document here is *Lumen Gentium* §57, which affirmed that Christ's birth "did not diminish his mother's virginal integrity, but sanctified it." Supplementary note 10* of chapter II on *Lumen Gentium* (1964) on this sentence adds the following citations "Cfr. S. Irenaeus, Adv. Haer. III, 16 6; III, 22, 1-3; PG 7, 925 C-926 A et 955 C – 958 A; Harvey 2, 87 s. et 120-123; Sagnard, Ed. Sources Chrét., pp. 290-292 et 372 ss."

⁴⁰ José-Maria Canal, C.M.F., "La Virginitad di Maria según Ratramno y Radberto, Monjes de Corbie. Nueva Edición de los Textos," *Marianum: Ephemerides Mariologiae* 30 (1968) 53-160, esp. 54-60 for introduction on Ratramnus. The edition of Ratramnus is on pp. 84-112. Also published separately by Rome: Libreria Mariana, 1968. The older edition is *De eo quod Christus ex virgine natus est* 1 (PL 121:81-102).

⁴¹ For Origen and others, Mary's perpetual virginity subsisted in her character and in lifelong sexual abstinence and did not require a perpetually intact hymen. Hunter concurs that Origen "did not believe" that her perpetual virginity "extended to her physical integrity in the process of giving birth to Jesus": David G. Hunter, "Helvidius, Jovinian, and the Virginity of Mary in Late Fourth-Century Rome," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 1 (1993) 47-71 at p. 69. As Neumann states, Origen "defined virginity in opposition only to sexual intercourse, not to birth": Charles William Neumann, S. M., *The Virgin Mary in the Works of Saint Ambrose*, Paradosis 17 (Fribourg: The University Press, 1962), p. 131, see also p. 132.

⁴² Athanasius of Alexandria, *Letter to Epictetus* 5 (PG 26:1058): see Graef, *Mary: Doctrine and Devotion* 1:52.

⁴³ He affirmed that Jesus "truly opened the womb of His mother": *Haer.* III. 2, 19 (PG 42:729). See Galot, "Virginité et naissance," 459, noting that the Latin translation in Migne is defective. He rejects the view of a supernatural birth as dualist in *Panarion (Medicine Box)* 78.1, 78.6, and 77.8: Graef, *Mary: Doctrine and Devotion* 1:70-71. Epiphanius asserts that "only the Only-Begotten opened the virginal womb."

⁴⁴ As a Greek hymn at Divine Liturgy for the Encounter of Our Lord with Simeon and Anna exclaims, "O Christ God, through Your birth You sanctified the Virgin's womb; and blessed, as it was proper, the hands of Simeon! Today you have come to bring us deliverance!" Kontakion of the Encounter of Our Lord with Simeon, *Byzantine Book of Prayer*, p. 520. This Greek hymn is one instance of many which appear to name the womb in modest metonymy for full female sexuality, including womb and birth canal. See also p. 529.

construe these texts as if every metaphor were unambiguous and literal is, perhaps, to reason like Nicodemus. Certain it is that Mary is both Virgin and Mother, and perfectly each, and that this is a mystery.

It is essential to affirm that the act of giving birth is not a sin. In particular it is not a sexual sin. To say it is would be to deny the goodness of God. (God created men, male and female, and declared that they were good. If giving birth is a sin, then at least the female body—and perhaps the biological sexuality of both male and female—is bad, so it was false for God to proclaim man good. If that statement was false, then God was wrong or He was lying, which would mean either that He was not all-knowing or that He was not good.) Within Christianity is a recurring tendency by some to hold that the Nativity of Christ must be fastidious, distinctively atypical, and even spectacular to some degree. This is not evident in Eastern icons of the Nativity which show the Theotokos reclining and resting in a mandorla, a full-body halo, and the newborn Lord being bathed by midwives. Indeed, the venerable conciliar title for Mary, Theotokos, literally means “Birth of God.”⁴⁵ But the notion of an extraordinary birth is seen in the Protoevangelion of James,⁴⁶ the writings of Saint Hildegard of Bingen,⁴⁷ and Saint Brigid of Sweden,⁴⁸ while many others assert, e.g., a “miraculous exit out of the womb.”⁴⁹ But this notion seems to veil the dualist idea that a normal human birth would be low, that sexuality per se—that is, existing with a body that includes sexual organs—is bad, especially if the sexuality is female.⁵⁰ In some cases this dualist thought seems even to imply that Our Lady could not have remained without sin had she experienced giving birth.⁵¹

⁴⁵ Discussed in detail in Catherine Brown Tkacz, *The Ruthenian Liturgy: An Historical-Theological Explication*, foreword by Jeffrey Burton Russell (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 2011), esp. 14-24.

⁴⁶ The Protoevangelion of James departs from Luke’s Gospel in having Mary forget about the Annunciation and in narrating a startlingly brief pregnancy, a sudden non-birth appearance of the infant at home (not at Bethlehem), and the pyrotechnic event with the midwife.

⁴⁷ When Hildegard of Bingen (d. 1179) rejects the idea of human birth for the Lord, it seems to imply that the female sexual organs are bad and cannot be redeemed, a view which is a symptom of dualism. She holds the emergence of the Lord to have occurred while the Virgin was asleep and unaware, and that the child came forth from her side “et non in ore vulve.” Otherwise, there would have been *corruptio*, she writes, and it appears that she means both physical and spiritual corruption: “Quo instante beata virgine viribus aliquantum debilitate et quasi in somno sopita, infans ipsa nesciente de latere eius sine dolore, sine corruptione et sine sorde velut eva de latere ada exivit et non in ore vulve, quia ibi non intravit, quoniam si ibi exisset, corruptio ibi fuisset, sed quia mater ibi integra fuit, infans ibi non exivit. Et pellicula eundem infantem in utero matris virginis natura aliorum infancium non circumdedit, quoniam de virile semine conceptus non est”: Hildegard, *Fragment IV.7*, lines 682-9, ed. Heinrich Schipperges, “Ein unveröffentlichtes Hildegard-Fragment,” *Sudhoffs Archiv für Geschichte der Medizin* 40 (1956) 41-77, at p. 68. The passage continues of Jesus: “Qui vagitus more aliorum infancium non emisit, se quietus et tacitus fuit” (lines 689-91).

⁴⁸ Saint Brigid (d. 1373) in her *Revelations* “envisioned Mary’s childbirth as painless and instantaneous: the erect Madonna adoring the miraculously born infant ‘lying on the ground naked and shining.’” See Vida J. Hull, “The Sex of the Savior in Renaissance Art: The *Revelations* of Saint Bridget and the Nude Christ Child in Renaissance Art,” *Studies in Iconography* 15 (1993) 77-112 at p. 78. One notes that the word for “shining,” *nitidissimum*, appears to be a reference to the language of the Transfiguration.

⁴⁹ The words are those of Stanley J. Jaki, “The Virgin Birth and the Birth of Science,” *Downside Review* (Oct. 1989) 255-73 at p. 267.

⁵⁰ Nearly two decades ago John Galvin called salutary attention to the “[h]idden monophysitism of much theology and piety – orthodox in its verbal affirmation of Chalcedonian dogma of Christ’s two complete natures, yet nonetheless inclined to abbreviate the full reality of his humanity”: John P. Galvin, “From the Humanity of Christ to

But if Jesus was not born, that is, if He did not enter post-gestational life through the natural birth canal, then He is not like us in all things but sin: He is like us in all things but birth and sin. If He evaded birth by discorporating inside the womb and reincorporating outside His mother's body, then it appears that there was a hiatus in His having a human nature, a "time out" from the Incarnation. The Church has rejected that hypothesis regarding His Passion; surely it must be rejected regarding the Lord's birth.

If Mary did not give birth to Jesus through the natural birth canal, then her virginal state is still perfect and she also certainly retains an unaltered hymen.⁵² But if Mary did not give birth to Jesus through the natural birth canal, her maternal state would appear to be incomplete. For if she conceived and gestated but did not give birth to her child, then her motherhood would seem to be imperfect. And it must be explained why it was proper for Jesus to be incarnate as male, with no omission from His male anatomy, and yet it was not proper for Jesus' sinless mother to give him birth. The present analysis demonstrates how the likely manner of the Lord's earliest year of life, from conception onwards, accomplished the resanctification of women through Mary. If the Theotokos did not give birth to her Son in a way recognizable as human birth, then part of her body, and through her, part of every human female's body, would seem to remain unsanctified and, because unsanctified, inferior to men's bodies, which have been resanctified through Christ's maleness. It would have to be clarified why the Lord found it fitting to be incarnate in a biologically male body but chose not to be born through the birth canal which is an essential part of a biologically female body.

Conclusion

What is fitting for the God-man, it appears, in perfect complementarity is also fitting for women in the person of Mary. God deserved the best possible ovum to begin His corporeal life, and this implies the real possibility that His first incarnate act was to touch the source of life within woman, the ovary. The Lord deserved lovingly given pre-birth life within, and birth itself from, His holy mother. Had our species been created oviparous, the incarnate Lord would have been physically separated from His mother by an egg shell and His direct divine touch could not have been bestowed upon her internally. Indeed, had our species been created to reproduce by external fertilization, as frogs do, the Lord would have become incarnate outside His mother's body, within an egg which she would have brought forth unfertilized. God prepared from the beginning for the comprehensive resanctification of women, for this resanctification was

the Jesus of History: A Paradigm Shift in Catholic Christology," *Theological Studies* 55 (1994) 252-73 at p. 253, quoted by Randy L. Stice, "Jesus the Christ: The Christology of Walter Kasper," *The Heythrop Journal* 49 (2008) 240-53 at p. 241.

⁵¹ As I argued in "Theotokos and the Incarnation," the affirmation of the goodness of birth may underlie the conciliar affirmation that Mary is virgin *ante partum*, *in partu*, *post partum*.

⁵² A wondrous birth through the entire birth canal could also, if God so willed, have allowed for the persistence of Mary's maidenhead: The halves of that female membrane might have been eased aside by the Lord in His birth and then eased back into original alignment, for instance.

bestowed precisely through the divinely created human “natural generation” which Anselm deemed so valuable that it deserved redemption.

The answers to the new questions posed earlier are important. By the arguments suggested here, the answers are entirely positive. Yes, through the Incarnation women do have resanctification equal to men’s. Because Jesus’ incarnate touch resanctified femaleness in the person of His mother during His conception, gestation, birth, and nursing, the maleness of Jesus implies no deficit in what the Incarnation imparted to female human beings. Men’s sexuality was healed and resanctified when the Lord assumed it in His Incarnation; arguably women’s was healed and resanctified when the Lord received human life from and within Mary, grew in her womb, and then received birth and nursing from her.

Advances in scientific understanding have, in effect, entrusted to us the responsibility to provide a fuller exposition than was possible for Saint Anselm. In the new millennium as the mystery of *quomodo Deus homo* is considered, if these new arguments “have any power to explain” the wonder and effectiveness of the Incarnation, let us follow the advice of the Archbishop of Canterbury and “thank God for it.”⁵³

⁵³ Sed si aliquatenus potero quod postulas ostendere, gratias agamus deo: *Cur* 2.16, p. 117, lines 23-24. English, p. 266.