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Title: Tract on the Conception of St Mary (Part 2)

Editors' Introduction:

Eadmer (c. 1060-c. 1130), a monk of Canterbury, is best known as the biographer of his teacher, St Anselm. However, he also wrote the first full defence of the doctrine of Mary's Immaculate Conception. It is known that the feast of Mary's Conception was celebrated in England in the early part of the eleventh century, but, following the Conquest, the Normans suppressed it. The principal theological objection to the feast was that Mary had been conceived in sin, and to celebrate her conception was thus to celebrate a sinful act. Accordingly, Eadmer defends the feast by arguing that Mary was conceived without sin – that she was conceived immaculately. This argument is what is contained in his Tract on the Conception of St Mary.

The present translation was undertaken by Tessa Frank, an independent scholar, who worked from the text in Migne (Patrologia Latina 159.301-318). Sarah Jane Boss then amended her translation by reference to Herbert Thurston's critical edition (De Conceptione Sanctae Mariae, editum ab Eadmero, Freiburg-im-Breisgau: Herder, 1904). *Maria* is publishing the translation in two parts. Sections 21 to 41 appear below, and sections 1 to 20 appeared in Issue 1 of the journal.

Tract on the Conception of St Mary (Part 2)

21. Now, then, what glory, what honour, what rejoicing of heart, what joy of mind, what eternal certainty of happiness there will be for human nature when it sees Him Himself, bodily, whom all the heavenly army adores, above itself true God, reigning with the Father and the Holy Spirit, ruling all things, commanding everything, consubstantial and co-omnipotent with His eternal Father! Human nature could never arrive at such glory, at the possession of such great good things, if God Himself had not been born in human flesh to expiate the sin of Adam. Therefore we shall be much happier and worthier in the heavenly kingdom than we would have been if Adam had not sinned.

22. But someone might ask, What will become of the memory of the evil deeds for whose complete pardon all those in that place who have been men give endless thanks to their most loving Redeemer? For it is certain that all the individual consciences of all will lie open, not only of men to men, but of men to angels, and of angels to angels, and of angels to men. The cherubim and seraphim, thrones and dominations and the other powers of heaven will see into the consciences of each one, and see their sins, as also the consciences of those who are wholly guiltless. How could it be that they shall not reckon them viler than if they had never been subject to such errors? There are those whose vileness is made known to the consideration of the angels by their sharing in the sin of Adam; how will such people exist more happily and worthily in the company of the angels? To sin is unhappy and unworthy; not to sin is indeed accompanied by happiness and true worth.

23. If anyone says this, it is seen to arise from reason, but reason that is human; heavenly consideration considers the matter in other ways. Certain just men, after this life, attain, by God's promise, to the likeness of the angelic spirits. In them, they will not consider who they will have been [i.e., who they once were], but who they might [now] be—allowing that they will keep in mind who they once were. This is to the praise and the glory of their Saviour,



and, moreover, to the glorification of his power, by which, through the help of God, they are strengthened and made victors over the devil and his allies.

Imagine that someone in this mortal flesh was struck with a serious illness, by leprosy, for example. He might abound with worms on his whole body and breed frightful horror in all who looked at him. Imagine that, by some chance, such as the help of doctors, or by the wonderful working of God's mercy, he were to be restored to full health and the thing became known to those who were previously acquainted with him. Soon, those who before had shunned him, if a solid charity lived in them, would by the grace of God desire to see him, speak to him, gaze on him, wonder, venerate and hold him in double regard of honour. He is not forgetful of his illness, even if others are ignorant of it. When he refers to it, it is with a certain exaggeration, although, first and foremost, the credit belongs to God's grace, which is publicly proclaimed, whether it comes through the skilled knowledge of doctors, or their patience, or through the long attentive offering of devout prayers with good works, or the striking harshness of the cure from which the patient, desiring to be healed, did not turn aside. If this is the way things are in human affairs, do you not think that divine matters will be similar? Truly, sins by which the face of God is offended—the wounds and rottenness of the human mind—these things are not unknown. What things proceed from thence unless they be from the inborn corruption of the human condition? When this corruption passes over into incorruption, it will bewail nothing more, nothing that is any way soiled, nothing that offends the all-seeing eyes of God. Peace therefore will exist between God and humanity, a peace which has no end, which no chance rends and no offence clouds over. He who is will be seen as He is, and there will be rejoicing for all, in Him, with Him and to Him who, by that which is, cannot be anything else.

24. My God, my God, teach my heart to understand what may be the future there for all those who love You here—those who have embraced your death, which is their life, to direct their ways: those who cleave to You, in following your will through keeping your commandments. Truly, good Lord, according to the words of your apostle, You, the summit of all goodness, will be most pre-eminent in all things eternally. And what good thing

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could be wanting to any one of them since they possess You, the source and perfection of all goodness?

And so, I ask, how will those whom I call angelic spirits—those whom You love and who love You, and who rejoice with gladness to behold your everlasting glory—how can they not judge as especially worthy and honourable—how can they not love as themselves—those who are of one body with You: those who, in human form, will see, even as they are consubstantial with You? Surely people whose wonderful strength of soul while they lived in mortal flesh availed so much in taming their pleasures for love of You, surely they will be embraced with immense sweetness? In them every creature may see that not for nothing were You made man and born, not for nothing did You suffer and die for them. They offered You this praise, You who became man on earth and sought them when they were lost, namely that they should listen to You, love You, obey your commands and come to You rejoicing. And thus, You were not deceived in your purpose, nor would those things You suffered for them be seen as endured uselessly. It is not, therefore, wholly irrational to say that people are, Lord, as I think, worthier and happier in your kingdom which is to come than if Adam had not sinned.

25. To my way of thinking, there would be a different worth and happiness, to which human nature would be in no way alien, if the first man had not lost paradise on account of the demerit of his sin.

Above all women blissful and blessed, the Virgin Mary is honoured and proclaimed today. The most high and omnipotent God raised her up to be his mother and established her to rule with Him all those who came after her. The multitude of united humanity shall see her stand at the right hand of the same unique and blessed Son in the realm of beatitude. Surely, in her presence and contemplating her, humanity cannot but consider her state happy, joyful and honourable, beyond what anyone can imagine? All, I say, have before their eyes the Virgin, risen from their race and like them in that she shares the same nature—she who presides over angels and archangels as queen, disposing all things with her Son, embracing Him with a sweet affection, and rejoicing



with Him from the glory of her position at his side. How could it be that everyone should not exult at this immeasurably, or not rejoice together, with ineffable delight, in those who are glorified? And who would ever have ascended to this dignity—neither the most blessed of maidens, nor the great number of the elect of humanity—if the Son of God had not descended from the bosom of his Father, to assume humanity for the destruction of Adam's sin. Therefore it is because of sinners that Mary has been made Mother of God.

It is not possible to find anyone chaster, holier or humbler than Mary in the whole human race. She owed such excellence to the merit of Him than whom no one more chaste, no one holier, no one more sublime could be received. And with what greater excellence would He be worthily received than that she should bring forth God made flesh, from her own flesh, whilst she remained perpetually a virgin?

God made use of this excellence of the Virgin Mary, for He saw that purity of heart and body inhered in her above every other creature. Oh happy inhering! Oh inhering in happiness! To adhere to Him who alone is true, who alone is highest, who never fails anyone or deceives anyone whose heart adheres to Him.

Since, loving Lady, as I have said, **you cleaved to Him and He to you**, in such a way that there could be neither sweeter nor worthier a cleaving. What is a sweeter cleaving between two, or what could be more worthy than the cleaving of the Mother to the Son or of the Son to His mother? And this closeness is yours in both respects, as may be apparent to all.

26. So these honours, these dignities, this joy by which the union of men, joined to the union of angels, is brought to fruition, are on account of the breach committed by the first man and woman. But ought these things to be ascribed to those people thanks to whom they exist? I think not. Human beings disobeyed the command of God not with the intention that good things should result, but because, despising God, they were excessively proud. They listened in this to the devil who said that they would be gods;

they did not heed the Godhead, driving it away even as they hoped to be exalted, not understanding that the Son of God would one day become human from their own stem.

27. All the more strongly Eve believed that she would be as God and that Adam himself would consent to be the future consort of [her] divinity. Oh intolerable pride! Oh unfathomable stupidity! Oh incomparable vanity of all vanities!

O Eve, how much nearer you would have been to the true and highest Godhead if you had remained in your humble status, obedient to God.

Adam, truly, as the Apostle says, you were not deceived in your breach of duty,¹ because what the serpent promised you knew to be a lie.

You, however, Eve, were most wretchedly seduced and, in the wake of this, imbued with the desire for many perverse things. You enticed Adam to consent to you by your alluring eloquence. You thus foreshadowed in your deed the future judgement of the man of God, namely, that women cause apostasy even in the wise.²

Yet the judgement of God set you, Adam, in charge, and so you brought perdition on yourself, on her and on the whole of your posterity on account of that feminine enticement.

For he obeyed your voice, Eve, putting it before obedience to the voice of God.

28. Woe to obey. Woe not to obey. Woe to obey the voice of the woman against the voice of God. Woe not to obey the voice of God for the sake of the voice of the woman. This is evil, this is evil. For from this arose all the tribulations and miseries which the world has suffered, which it suffers and which it will suffer. They all flow down from this. From this, the tribulations and miseries will maintain their resolve and perseverance;

¹ 1 Tim. 2.14

² Eccl. 19.2



from this comes ignorance of all that is good, and from this comes the knowledge and execution of all that is evil. From this comes contempt of God; from this, the most nefarious cult of demons under the species of images; from this, the death of this present life; from this, the much more wretched death causing the loss of the life to come.

Therefore, human nature owes you, Adam and Eve, no thanks in that nature which is exalted and honoured in God the Son, but to you it certainly owes the fact it was cast down and thrown into innumerable ills, into the twofold death of body and soul. Nor would there have been the slightest hope of avoiding such evils if that most splendid flower had not taken the start of his birth, through the most glorious branch, nobly sprung from the root of Jesse.³ Yet He was born into the world in the way He wished, by the Holy Spirit resting on [his birth] in the fulness of his graces. He distributed gifts to those who heard Him, and powerfully led the world forth from its ignorance of true good, and the other ills which stem from that, all of which it had incurred through Adam; and He mercifully led humanity back to the lost way of life of the Kingdom of Heaven, some in actuality and others in the hope thereof.

29. So it is clear what the human race owes to Him: to Him before whom it was prostrate and humiliated to the lowest degree; to Him by whom it is exalted on high and glorified. You, therefore, Adam and Eve, you: the human race accuses you. Your progeny imputes to you the evils which they undergo. With pitiable lamentation, and not without good reason, they deplore their exclusion from Paradise and their entry into continual miseries, all of which you brought about. The cause is clear and cannot be gainsaid.

What then, God of all, could the work of your hands have done which was not liable to the punishment of ceaseless suffering and eternal death, because of the breach incurred by these, its parents, if You had not come—if You had not come to its aid? Whither could it flee? Where could it hide? Where escape? Surely there was no counsel, no remedy, no possible protection. But You came, and efficaciously showed how we might strive to

³ Isa. 11.1

attain all these things. So, Lord, if those who come after your coming are not saved, then, in all fairness, they do not have anyone to complain against other than themselves.

30. What can they do? Lord, as it seems to me, the ultimate and only advice for all those who want to be saved is that first they repay solemn thanks from the depths of their heart for all your good gifts, that they love You and obey your commandments precisely; and in this way they may hope to come to You with secure confidence. But, loving Father, who is fit to do this? Surely no one, unless supported by your strength. For You are the height of all that is good, You who are yourself the highest good; nor can anything be good, either potentially or in fact, unless it is from You, or for You, or of You. Nothing can be counted good or can avail apart from You. You have redeemed us, Lord, God of Truth. You do not exercise your strict judgement against us on account of our sins. You willed to become man for us: hear our prayer that we could become that for which, in order that we might be so, You became one of us. What we seek is that your honour is as it may be. For if it is not, You will be seen, in this respect at least, to have failed in some way. True, we cannot argue with You, for You are the Lord, and one word of yours outweighs a thousand of ours.

If, in your sight, all our justice is like a menstrual rag,⁴ how will our injustices and those of our enemies appear when laid open before your face? Woe, woe: who can disquiet the mind with the confusion which arises hence; who can explain the enormity of such a tremendous horror? And if confusion of horror and the enormity of the horrendous confusion is in a way inexplicable to us, who will be able to bear the rigorous examination of evils in the future judgement? Alas, sinful humanity, who look back to all those ills which come from the stem of Adam—what can we do about this? Shall we despair? Not at all! What then? O fountain of David,⁵ open for menstrual cleansing, flow to us, and counsel us what is best for us.

⁴ Isa. 64.6

⁵ Zech. 13.1



31. O loving-kindness! God truly good, I see. Living, I rejoice. Rejoicing, I embrace the counsel that, through your singular mercy, You have provided for our well-being. And what is this? Undoubtedly, that with mind, face and voice, we should turn to her, whom we commemorated above, your sweetest Mother, who is also our most loving mistress. From the contemplation of her chastity, from the contemplation of her purity, from the consideration of her dignity, from gazing at her sublimity, we arrive in these straits—while the soul does not cease to remember her—to call with pure devotion upon her who towers over us, that she will give counsel, and that the grace for which she is preeminent before You might come to our aid.

There is no doubt, in fact. We know she is so much in your hands that none of those things that she wishes to do, could in any way fail to be carried through. Our salvation, therefore, depends upon her will, for all that she wishes is powerfully accomplished. So what beneficial advice would her Son, who is the end of all things, give to us, who are caught up in the end of the age, other than to run to her who brought forth from her own flesh, Him without whom there would be no remission of sins? He is truly good, truly loving, truly merciful in his will.

32. And you, Lady, to whose protection your sweetest Son sends us, what do you say to us? For He Himself is our mercy, and you are the mother of that same mercy. What, I repeat, do you say to us? Perhaps, Lady, that we should fly under the protection of his wings. Good; but can it be allowable that we be embraced by his mercy, as is fitting, but not equally fear his justice? Lest He spread His justice over us when we seek his mercy, we ask you to be near us and present our cause for us. He, the Highest Angel of great counsel, counsels us to come to you, lest you drive us away from you, so we should be stripped of your help.

Certainly we know that we are sinners and deserve damnation—and justly so—we cannot deny that. But we shall equally acknowledge His justice; and that He may do what He wishes, He who does not refuse to be in union with all who do his will.

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Whoever stood out more greatly as being in union with his will than you, whose whole being was taken up with fulfilling his will? May you alone cast your veil over us, Lady, that He, the most just judge, may have pity on us. Truly, let it be just and according to right reason, that your will may be brought to its fulfilment.

Do not, therefore, oh do not, for the sake of that Mercy, whose mother you clearly are, be absent from us, so that He might not disregard your will concerning our salvation; for through you He became our brother, that we might be saved.

33. Oh wonderful working of the Creator! Oh immense consolation for the sinner! Lady, if through you your Son became our brother, surely you, by the same token, became our mother? For even when He was dying for us on the cross, He said to John, that is, to humanity—none other than us who by nature share his condition—‘Behold,’ He said, ‘thy mother.’⁶

O sinner man, rejoice and exult! For there is nothing for you to despair at, nothing you need fear; whatever is decided concerning you, all hangs on the decision of your brother and your mother. Do not turn the ear of your heart away from their counsel. Your judge, that is your brother, teaches you to fly to the protection of his mother, and that same mother of yours advises you to cleave faithfully to the protection of her Son's wings, and Him to you. So that you might not be weighed down by his justice, she did not refuse to be present.

34. Mary, what shall we say? With what voice or with what jubilation of heart shall we express how much we owe to you? Certainly, Lady, whatever we have understood, whatever our minds have grasped, whatever things we have spoken out about, all are tiny and as nothing in comparison with what, in justice, we owe to you. You, of all women the most chaste, were preordained in the mind of God before all creatures, so

⁶ Jn 19.27



that from your flesh you should bring forth God Himself made man: so that—after your Son—you might reign over all things as the glorious queen of heaven and so that you might prepare for a lost world the way to restoration and the gift of eternal life. The human race was bereft of eternal glory; you, through the blessed fruitfulness of your virginal childbearing, led it back to its original condition. You overthrew the laws of hell, because, through the death of your Son, the prince of death was overcome.

To all of who were unaware of Him, you revealed our God and Lord, the propitiator, now visible. Through you, Lady, in your only Son, we regained the life we had lost. If we have the power of doing any good, if we are any good, it is through you. Through you we shall attain eternal glory, whoever we are. After God Himself, you are our highest and most excellent consolation. You are our happy and blessed boast: you both lead and carry us to the heavenly kingdom. We beseech you to receive us into the beatitude of that kingdom and be our perpetual and exultant joy. So according to the blessed and merciful counsel of our particular, sweetest mercy, that is, your child, we fly to you: grant that we do not do this in vain. It is certain that, if you were to fail us, our safety would cease. O you who were foretold before all, do not delay your mercy because you see only our injustices. You cleave eternally to Him who is above all and who cannot change in any way: by that cleaving we plead lest the yoke of mercy, which you have thus far shown towards us, should [ever] be any different from what we most certainly know you to have been.

35. Certainly, Lady, it is not fitting for your will to differ from that of your Son, who never ceases to demonstrate his desire to have mercy on the human race and to sharing its nature before the face of his Father. That demonstration that He shares our nature is aimed at nothing else than to call down upon us his mercy, which stirs up ineffable loving kindness. For the Father Himself testifies to his good pleasure in his Son; so it cannot be that He will not have mercy on those on whom He desires to have mercy: the most high Father wishes to have mercy on those who participate in his Son, and the Son Himself carries them within sight of the Father's mercy. And you, the unique mother of the same unique Son of God, will you repel from the breasts of your mercy those who, as I have said, both the Father of the

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Son and the Son Himself, call and recall into the bosom of your favour? Will you be exasperated with us because of our iniquities, when your Son, whom we have most greatly offended, gave Himself up to death to cancel out our sins? You would thus be more severe to us than He is, when you are of the same condition as our own. Lady, you would exceed your nature!

36. Perhaps, however, you so love the justice of God against those who sin against Him, so as to exert punishment rather than showing mercy. If it be so, why, Lady, to someone of old, urgently needing your help, and not knowing who you were, did you respond with a sweet voice, Mother more of Mercy than of justice, when your Son is no less true and immutable justice than true and desirable mercy? Could this be the reason? If you say you are the great Mother of Justice—not only to him who finds himself in narrow straits without mercy (which is placed aside by the severity of justice), you will know what to do. You will take away any hope of grace and you will close the gate of the only refuge of the human race—your enemies, in a certain sense—as they flee their cruel persecutor. For who could undergo the judgement of God with justice, if not like a garment that is worn away, or worse than one devoured by a moth?

37. On this account, loving Lady, sweet and most merciful mother of the Lord, heed the serious necessity our fragility places us in, and show us in practice that you are what you recognised yourself to be in delightful utterances. If you do this, in order to save us, you will, without any doubt, be in harmony with your Son and his Father. Certainly your most kind Son desires our salvation and, so that He may make that salvation unchangeable and eternal, He will mingle His eternity with our transient mutability. His true and most just Father is pleased with Him in everything and wishes all those things which He understands his Son to want. You want them only in the way that the Son wants them; nothing will remain that could stand in the way of our salvation. It is a wicked opinion to say that you do not want what God wants.



Rejoice, therefore, human nature, and exult: for Christ, the Son of Saint Mary, has prepared everything that prospers you. In truth, He created these things on your account, from her, in your own substance.

38. Lady, lady, since I am but a poor manikin, and truly a great sinner, meditating with impure heart upon things concerning you, speaking of them with putrid mouth, and having dared to write of them with polluted fingers, spare and have mercy! You know, loving Lady, that I have presumed to take this on myself, although I confess I am such that neither in heaven nor earth am I a worthy judge. And therefore all the more anxiously do I wish, if I may in any way, struggle to some extent towards the beholding of that mercy with which God reaches out to me. By his ineffable grace may He kindle in me the temperate affection of holy love through the sweetness of your kindness. Indeed, I trust firmly that if He will do this, his mercy and your assistance will have the strength to redeem me from these pains of hell which I have deserved. On this account, Lady, do not be indignant at one so audacious and presumptuous, because, if I seem to be so in these things, it is my grave necessity which compels me, and your great and proven age-long goodness which persuades me.

39. Therefore, the last and greatest object of my prayers is that, in the last examination made by your most just Son, if, with mercy laid aside, He hands me over by a cruel sentence to be damned to cruel torture, then you will come to my aid and rush to seize me away from hell, and that you will pluck me away, so that, sheltered by the sleeve of your most merciful protection, I may escape being damned eternally. And indeed, Lady, if I am not mistaken, I recall that little boys, including myself, were protected in this way by matrons, when the boys were taken off to receive an excessive flogging by the pedagogue; and many of them were extremely grateful for this, and made known, with great flourish, the tenderness of heart that had liberated them. If, therefore, those women merit great publicity for so small a favour, I ask with what praises of the citizens of Heaven, who rejoice over the salvation of sinners, will you proclaim—as I have said—that you will take pity upon me, since I am a great sinner?

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At any rate, your good and blessed Son, the Lord Jesus, said that there would be more joy in Heaven, among the angels of God, over one sinner who repents than over ninety- nine righteous people who need no repentance.⁷ Since, therefore, there may be joy in Heaven for the penitent, because, in repenting of his evils, he strives towards salvation, what joy will there be, Lady, when someone freed from all evil comes to that same salvation? If, therefore, I am set free from the pains I deserve, and you make me a sharer in eternal salvation, you will exceedingly gladden the whole court of the heavenly kingdom.

40. On this account, most loving Lady and Mother, do not weigh lightly the enormous magnitude of my crimes, so that you may not proportionally lessen the greatness of the joys of the angels who rejoice at their remission.

Lady, Lady, I do not know thoroughly what I might be or what I might become; and therefore, whatever may befall me, do not cast into oblivion my present entreaty, I earnestly implore you. By that sweetest delectation with which you love your only Son, may you pluck me from the author of death and transfer me to the destiny of eternal life.

And you, true and sole Son of this most chaste virgin, my Lady; unique and only defence of all who fly to You, I entreat You through the love with which You love her, your sweetest mother, that I may feel in due season the effect that I desire through that same most devoted mother of yours. Lukewarm I may be, but with what force!

Yet perhaps the multitude of my sins will stir up your justice to condemn me more than the piety of your mother inclines your mercy to pardon me. You, who are everywhere present and equally powerful in every place: It is by means of your protection that I hide from my enemies; this is the obstacle in the way of my becoming the prey of demons and being cast down into the depths of infernal evils. And if, indeed, I do not deserve to be heard in this matter, at least, when I am fixed in Hell, do not suffer me to be deprived of the knowledge and memory of your Holy Name, lest, like Satan and his coheirs, I should blame

⁷ Lk. 15.7,10



your justice and endure all the more heavily, and with perverse mutterings, the scrutiny of your unbiased judgment.

41 O good, good Lord, if in all these matters You close the ears of your mercy to me, really I do not see what more I may ask from what the abundance of your mercies lays out before me; and this ignorance undoubtedly arises from the multitude of my wickednesses. For if I were not wrapped in the dense darkness of my sins, You, who are unfailing light, would not fail me, but would drive away the darkness of my ignorance with the radiance of your clarity, so that, fixed in its light, I might see that You are not a God who desires evil⁸ and that You have the knowledge and the power to come with loving kindness, in unfathomable ways, to the aid of those fallen and oppressed by misery and wickedness.

All this, Lord, I most firmly believe to be the case, and on this account I hold in my innermost heart and confess with my mouth that whatever You do with me, if it were to oppress me—that is, with the burden of evils—You would carry out these actions troubled by no malicious injustice. Therefore, may your action towards us be such that our sins will be washed away and destroyed, on account of the sweet love of your sweetest mother, so that we might find out that You are truly that mercy, the true human being, to whom—as the pious mouth will confess—she gave birth from the substance of her flesh, for the salvation of the human race. Amen.

⁸ Ps. 5.5