

## Durham E-Theses

---

*Humanity and Sanctity: Anselm of Canterbury's  
Letters to Women and Marian Writings as distinct  
expressions of a common theological vision*

MATTHEW JAMES MILLS

### How to cite:

---

MILLS, MATTHEW JAMES (2012) *Humanity and Sanctity: Anselm of Canterbury's Letters to Women and Marian Writings as distinct expressions of a common theological vision*. Masters thesis, Durham University.

### Use policy

---

The full-text may be used and/or reproduced, and given to third parties in any format or medium, without prior permission or charge, for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes provided that:

- a full bibliographic reference is made to the original source
- a <https://etheses.durham.ac.uk/id/eprint/3649/> is made to the metadata record in Durham E-Theses
- the full-text is not changed in any way

The full-text must not be sold in any format or medium without the formal permission of the copyright holders.

Please consult the [full Durham E-Theses policy](#) for further details.

# **HUMANITY AND SANCTITY**

**ANSELM OF CANTERBURY'S  
LETTERS TO WOMEN AND MARIAN WRITINGS  
AS DISTINCT EXPRESSIONS OF  
A COMMON THEOLOGICAL VISION**

**MATTHEW J. MILLS**

A thesis submitted for the degree of  
**MASTER OF ARTS**  
by research

Department of Theology and Religion  
University of Durham  
2012

# CONTENTS

<b>PRELIMINARIES</b>	4
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	7
<b>A. Primary Literature: Anselm's <i>Letters to Women</i> and <i>Marian Writings</i></b>	9
i. <i>Anselm's Letters to Women</i>	
ii. <i>Anselm's Marian Writings</i>	
<b>B. Secondary Literature: An Introduction to the Present Situation</b>	18
<b>I. ANSELM'S CHRISTOCENTRIC VISION</b>	21
<b>A. Christ in Anselm's Letters to Women</b>	21
i. <i>Caritas, dilectio</i> and <i>amor</i> : divine love and love for Christ	
ii. Spousal Union with Christ: the <i>telos</i> of female religious life	
<b>B. Anselm's Christocentric doctrine of Mary's divine maternity</b>	31
i. Mary's <i>fiat</i> : the precursor to her divine maternity	
ii. '...flesh of your flesh': Mary's maternity and Christ's humanity	
iii. '...mother of my Lord and God': Mary's maternity and Christ's divinity	
<b>II. VIRTUE</b>	48
<b>A. Virtue in Anselm's Letters to Women</b>	48
i. Virtue in Friendship: John Cassian's presence in Anselm's thought	
ii. Anselm's call to Holy Obedience	
<b>B. Anselm's understanding of Mary's perfect obedience</b>	60
i. 'Made clean by faith': the vexed question of Mary's purification	
ii. '...by you the elements are renewed': Mary as the New Eve	
<b>III. VIRGINITY</b>	74
<b>A. Justice: the moral foundation of Anselm's letters and Marian writings</b>	74
i. What is the relationship between justice and rectitude?	
ii. What is the role of the will in respect of justice?	
iii. What does it mean to preserve justice?	
<b>B. Virginity in Anselm's Letters to Women</b>	82
<b>C. The Perpetual Virginity of Mary</b>	87
i. Mary's virginity <i>ante partum</i>	
ii. Mary's virginity <i>in partu</i>	
iii. Mary's virginity <i>post partum</i>	
<b>D. Moral restoration in Anselm's letters to women and Marian writings</b>	95
i. ' <i>In cubiculum meum</i> '	
ii. ' <i>Excita mentem</i> '	

- iii. *'Compunctio cordis'*
- iv. *'In Caelis'*

<b>IV. SALVATION AND INTERCESSION</b>	101
<b>A. Salvation</b>	101
i. Anselm's preoccupation with salvation in his letters to women	
ii. Salvation not Romance: the overriding concern of Anselm's Marian writings	
<b>B. Intercession</b>	113
i. Queenship and Intercession in Anselm's letters to women	
ii. The Nobility and Intercession of Mary	
<b>CONCLUSION</b>	125
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>	129

## **ABBREVIATIONS**

### **Anselm**

*Mon.*            *Monologion*

*Pros.*           *Proslogion*

*DV*              *De Veritate*

*DLA*            *De Libertate Arbitrii*

*DIV*            *De Incarnatione Verbi*

*CDH*           *Cur Deus Homo*

*DCV*           *De Conceptu Virginali et Originali Peccato*

*DC*              *De Concordia praescientiae et praedestinationis et gratiae dei cum libero arbitrio*

### **Other**

*ODCC*          *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*

*DCC*            *Documents of the Christian Church*

*RSB*            *The Rule of St Benedict*

## **DECLARATION AND STATEMENT OF COPYRIGHT**

The material contained in this thesis has not been submitted for a degree in this or any other university; the copyright rests with the author and no quotation from it should be published without the author's prior written consent and information derived from it should be acknowledged.

TO MY WIFE

## INTRODUCTION

Anselm of Canterbury (c.1033-1109) is a familiar figure to students of medieval history and theology. His immense contribution to the development of Christian philosophical theology has been widely acknowledged and he has dominated the research of many modern scholars, notably Sir Richard Southern (1959, 1990). Yet, several important dimensions of his life and thought are still to be analysed. This thesis identifies two such understudied areas and critically explores their relationship. It concerns the forty-one letters which comprise his correspondence with women and his writings that refer to the Virgin Mary. Its central contention is that these groups of texts are distinct expressions of a common theological vision. They both reveal a theological schema with four discernable dimensions: Christocentricity, virtue, virginity and salvation. The study has two overriding aims: (1) to contribute to a growing body of scholarship relating to Anselm's friendships with women and his Mariology; (2) to demonstrate the ways in which their fourfold theological vision draws from and exemplifies the theology of his other treatises, prayers and meditations. Its short title, *Humanity and Sanctity*, illustrates the sense in which these texts are distinct. His letters to women reflect the maelstrom of human experience, blighted and suffering from the consequences of the Fall. They speak of imperfect relationships with Christ, inconstant virtue and virginity, and the uncertainty of salvation. His Marian writings, by contrast, meditate upon the serenity of holiness; Mary personifies perfect union with Christ, superlative virtue and virginity, and she is portrayed as an essential intercessor for salvation. Both groups of texts are similar, however, in being relational and demonstrating that Anselm explored earthly and heavenly relationships with the same emotional intensity and theological subtlety. Benedicta Ward (2009) acknowledges the interrelatedness of heaven and earth in Anselm's worldview: 'He was 'at home' with all men, but he was equally at home in the courts of heaven... People, living and dead, formed together the body of Christ, and Anselm understood communion with both.'<sup>1</sup>

Each chapter of this thesis illustrates the main hypothesis, that Anselm's letters to women and his Marian writings are distinct expressions of a common theological vision. They also advance internal arguments, relating directly to the

---

<sup>1</sup> Ward, B. (2009) p.35

subjects under consideration. Chapter I demonstrates that both sets of texts reflect on the nature of a right relationship between God and humanity, and define it in terms of union with Christ. It suggests that Anselm understood his female friends to enjoy only a partial and imperfect relationship with the divine, whilst Mary exemplifies full and perfect union. In respect of his letters to women, it advances two arguments. Firstly, that Anselm used three words meaning ‘love’ – *caritas*, *dilectio* and *amor* – to distinguish between love for Christ and the love shown by Christ through his sacrificial death. Secondly, that he believed spousal union with Christ to be the purpose (*telos*) of female religious life. Turning to his Marian writings, it advances two further points: (1) Mary’s *fiat* exemplified free and active cooperation with the divine will; (2) Anselm believed her divine maternity to safeguard the Christian doctrine of Christ’s two natures.

Chapter II argues that virtue, especially the virtue of obedience, is a central tenet of the theological vision of Anselm’s letters to women and his Marian writings. His female friends demonstrate only imperfect obedience, whilst Mary’s perfect obedience is the predicate of her exalted place in the mystery of redemption. Like Chapter I it advances two arguments in respect of Anselm’s letters. They reveal Anselm’s dependence on the monastic teacher John Cassian (c.360-435). They also call his female friends to a life of holy obedience to God and the Church. The analysis proceeds to explore Anselm’s understanding of Mary’s virtue. It begins with a consideration of what he meant by saying that she was, ‘made clean by faith’.<sup>2</sup> It concludes with an exploration of his portrayal of Mary as the New Eve.

In Chapter III the focus shifts to the virtue of virginity, which is preeminent in the moral-theological vision of Anselm’s letters to women and his Marian writings. This chapter is structured slightly differently to the preceding two; it begins with a conceptual discussion of Anselm’s definition of ‘justice’ (*iustitia*), which is the cornerstone of his moral theology. It then turns to his letters to women, exploring Anselm’s distinction between ‘virginity’ (*virginitas*) and ‘chastity’ (*castitas*). It also critically considers whether or not Anselm believed in Mary’s perpetual virginity: *ante partum*, *in partu* and *post partum*. The chapter concludes by expositing the schema for the moral restoration of those who lose their virginity which is common to both his letters to women and his Marian writings.

---

<sup>2</sup> DCV 19; cf. DCV 18

Finally, Chapter IV looks at the soteriological dimension of Anselm's theological vision. Its central argument is that the uncertainty of salvation and the necessity of intercession are prominent themes in both sets of texts. In respect of salvation it makes two arguments: (1) his letters to women make an explicit connection between moral rectitude and the likelihood of eternal beatitude; (2) his Marian writings propose a synergetic relationship between God and Mary in the accomplishment of objective redemption. Turning to intercession, it demonstrates that his letters express an earthly paradigm in which the queen or noblewoman intercedes for the archbishop. Thus they reflect the *realpolitik* of Anselm's feudal world. It challenges the view that Anselm's writings reflected or contributed to an emergent romantic courtly love movement. It also shows that Anselm's Marian writings present a heavenly paradigm, in which Mary is the archetypal intercessor with God. In preparation for the main analysis here follows an introduction to the primary and secondary literature under consideration.

#### **A. Primary Literature: Anselm's *Letters to Women* and *Marian Writings***

##### **i. Anselm's *Letters to Women***

The phrase 'letters to women' is used throughout this thesis as shorthand meaning the forty-one letters that Anselm exchanged with his female contemporaries, six of which were written to him by Queen Matilda of England (c.1080-1118). His correspondence with women dates from between c.1071 and c.1107/9, spanning the period from before his election as prior of Bec (c.1078) to his death (c.1109). Citations are taken from Walter Fröhlich's (1990, 1993, 1994) translations of the authoritative collection of F.S. Schmitt (1984), consisting of four hundred and seventy five letters. This was Anselm's considerable contribution to a tradition of letter writing that became prominent in the Carolingian age, with contributors like Alcuin of York (d.c.804). According to Brian Patrick McGuire (1988), letter collections became especially common after c.1050 as western literary culture became interested in the inter-relatedness of humanity.<sup>3</sup> The conception that all human beings share a common

---

<sup>3</sup> Cf. McGuire, B.P. (1988) p.180ff.

nature underpinned Anselm's thought; Southern calls it his belief in the 'homogeneity of humanity'.<sup>4</sup>

The advent of cathedral schools was the other impetus behind the rise of letter writing, which became the medium in which students practised their Latin prose in preparation for careers in law and theology.<sup>5</sup> This suggests that Anselm's letters arose from and contributed to a wider movement concerned with education. His letters were always intended for the education of their recipient but many of them were also supposed to be disseminated to a wider audience. For example, his letters to certain Bec monks who had moved to Canterbury, perhaps with Lanfranc (c.1005-1089), were intended '...to be read aloud to all the Bec monks at Canterbury, even though he addressed his letters to individuals among them'.<sup>6</sup> Anselm's letters to women are good examples of his educational intent. This study demonstrates that they instructed his friends in love, virginity and obedience, among other things.

It also seeks to show that they were as passionate as his letters to fellow monks. Hitherto, scholars have suggested that whilst Anselm had a plethora of friends, his intimates were all male and in the habit. For example, Adele Fiske (1961) concludes: 'St. Anselm's friends are from all ranks of society, but his intimates are all fellow monks'.<sup>7</sup> Richard Southern, too, is circumspect about crediting Anselm's letters to women with the same emotional intensity as his correspondence with male monastic contemporaries. Whilst he suggests that they stand out among Anselm's later correspondence (post-1093) for their emotional intensity, he cautions that '...their expressions are more subdued, and their message is about the need to persevere, rather than rejoicing in an assured triumph'.<sup>8</sup> This thesis holds that Anselm's letters to women are highly emotionally charged, which is especially evident when they contemplate the absence of friends. Anselm often speaks of his pain at the bodily absence of his friends but consoles himself with thoughts of their spiritual presence. In *Ep.* 288 to Queen Matilda, for example, he says: '...however much I feel your bodily absence, the presence of your faithful love can never be taken from my mind'.<sup>9</sup> Anselm's correspondence with Matilda is particularly valuable because it includes letters from her too. *Ep.* 317 reveals that Anselm's affection for

---

<sup>4</sup> Southern, R.W. (1959) p.75

<sup>5</sup> Cf. McGuire, B.P. (1988) pp.184-5

<sup>6</sup> McGuire, B.P. (1988) p.212

<sup>7</sup> Fiske, A. (1961) p.260

<sup>8</sup> Southern, R.W. (1990) p.159

<sup>9</sup> *Ep.* 288 (c.1103)

Matilda was more than reciprocated by the pain she experiences in his absence: ‘Come, I beg, father, appease my groans, dry my tears, lessen my pains, put an end to my sorrow... My soul [thirsts] for you like a dry weary land without water [Ps 63.1; Vul. Ps. 62]’.<sup>10</sup>

In the course of this study it will become clear that his letters to women vary tremendously in quality. Perhaps surprisingly, his most theologically subtle letters were written to women about whom little is known, for example, Frodelina and Ermengard. Many of them are also notable for the vibrancy of their prose, casting some doubt over Southern’s analysis that the quality of Anselm’s letter writing deteriorated after his accession to Canterbury because he became preoccupied with politics: ‘It is very noticeable that though the letters of the twenty years after 1070 sparkle with ardent and unconventional expressions of friendship, there is nothing similar after 1093. The break was decisive.’<sup>11</sup> Only seven letters to women survive from before 1093 whilst the rest belong to the later period and they are intensely emotional and theologically subtle. Anselm’s letters to women also reflect a combination of secular and religious interests. They often refer to contemporary political issues and generally suggest that he respected his female friends greatly as political figures. He frequently thanks them for services they have rendered to the church and makes no attempt to cosset them from political reality.

Anselm’s eighteen female correspondents are a mixture of female aristocrats and religious. The little biographical information we have demonstrates that many of them were extraordinary. As a point of reference for the rest of the study it will be useful to briefly introduce each of his female friends. The following demonstrates how inextricably linked the royal and noble families of medieval Europe were. It also shows that he communicated with a range of women including queens, countesses, abbesses and ordinary nuns:

**Adelaide** or **Adeliza** (c.1055-1113) was the daughter of William the Conqueror (c.1028-87) whom Fröhlich suggests took the veil,<sup>12</sup> though Ward thinks not: ‘...she

---

<sup>10</sup> *Ep.* 317 (c.1104)

<sup>11</sup> Southern, R.W. (1959) p.76; this point of view was expressed earlier by Fiske: ‘Anselm saw his friendships swept away in the tumultuous conflicts of his last years as archbishop of Canterbury and opponent of William Rufus and Henry I’ (Fiske, A. (1961) p.260).

<sup>12</sup> Fröhlich, W. *trns.* (1990) p.93-4n1

seems to have lived a secluded life without in fact being a nun'.<sup>13</sup> She received one letter from Anselm: *Ep.* 10 (c.1071).

**Frodelina**, about whom little is known, was an aristocratic woman from Normandy with a reputation for virtue. Anselm wrote one letter to her: *Ep.* 45 (c.1074/5).

**Ida, Countess of Boulogne** (c.1040-1113) was one of Anselm's closest female friends; their relationship lasted throughout his time at Bec and Canterbury.<sup>14</sup> She was the daughter of Godfrey III, Duke of Lorraine (c.997-1069) and the sister of future Pope Stephen IX (r.1057-8). She married Eustace II, Count of Boulogne (c.1015/20-87) and had three male children. Her second and third sons, Godfrey of Bouillon (c.1060-1100) and Baldwin (c.1058-1118), became the first and second rulers of Jerusalem respectively. Anselm wrote six letters to Ida: *Ep.* 82 (c.1077/78), 114 (pre-c.1093), 131 (post-c.1086), 167 (c.1093), 244 (c.1101/2), 247 (c.1102).

**Adela, Countess of Flanders** (c.1009-79) was the daughter of Robert II, King of France (c.972-1031) and wife of Baldwin V, Count of Flanders (c.1035-1067). She had two sons and one daughter, Matilda (c.1031-83), who became queen of England. Adela received one letter from Anselm shortly before her death: *Ep.* 86 (c.1077/8).

**Ermengard**, like Frodelina, is a mysterious character. Little is known about her but her letter from Anselm – *Ep.* 134 (c.1079/92) – will emerge in the course of this study as one of his most theologically significant.

**Gunhilda** (c.1055-97) was the daughter of Harold II (c.1022-66), the last Anglo-Saxon King of England, and Edith the Fair (c.1026-86). She sheltered from the Normans who invaded England at the Abbey of Wilton, Wiltshire, but was later abducted by Alan Rufus (c.1040-93) who intended to marry her. She received two highly charged letters from Anselm concerning her relationships with Alan Rufus and his brother, Alan Niger (d.c.1098): *Ep.* 167 (c.1093/4), 168 (c.1094). The purpose of these letters was to encourage Gunhilda to return to Wilton.

---

<sup>13</sup> Ward, B. *trns.* (1973) p.275

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Canatella, H.M. (2007) pp.361-7

**Eulalia** was a long-serving abbess of St Mary and St Edward, Shaftesbury (r.c.1074-1106) whom Anselm admired. He wrote three letters to the Abbess and her nuns: *Ep.* 183 (c.1094/5), 337 (c.1104), 403 (c.1106).

**The unknown nun** or ‘Nun M.’ is conjectured to have been the daughter of Richard de Clare (c.1035-1090) and Rohais Giffard (d.c.1113),<sup>15</sup> though she is often missed from lists of their issue. She received one letter from Anselm: *Ep.* 184 (c.1094/5).

**Matilda**, whose dates are unknown, was abbess of Wilton, the convent from which Gunhilda was absent. She and her nuns received one letter: *Ep.* 185 (c.1094).

**Athelits**, whose dates are unknown, was the first abbess of St Mary, Romsey, which Fröhlich describes as ‘...a community of Anglo-Saxon ladies who had fled Norman violence into the safety of the cloister’.<sup>16</sup> She was later abbess of Winchester. Anselm wrote to her in both places: *Ep.* 237 (c.1102) and *Ep.* 276 (c.1103).

**Matilda, Queen of England** was the daughter of Malcolm III, King of Scotland (d.c.1093) and Margaret of Scotland (c.1045-93). She became the wife of Henry I of England (c.1068/69-1135) whose dispute with Anselm over the right of lay rulers to invest ecclesiastics with the symbols of their office is discussed below. Matilda was an important intercessor between Anselm and Henry, and a powerful queen (see, Chapter IV). She received nine letters: *Ep.* 243 (c.1102/3), 246 (c.1102), 288 (c.1103), 296 (c.1103), 321 (c.1104), 329 (c.1104), 346 (c.1104/5), 385 (c.1106), 406 (c.1106/7). She also sent six letters to Anselm, which are the only examples of a response from his female friends: *Ep.* 242 (c.1102/3), 317 (c.1104), 320 (c.1104), 384 (c.1106), 395 (c.1106), 400 (c.1106).

**Clementia, Countess of Flanders** (c.1078-1133) was the daughter of William I, Count of Burgundy (c.1020-87) and the wife of Robert II, Count of Flanders (c.1065-1111). Many of her estimated thirteen siblings rose to prominent royal and ecclesiastical positions in Europe, including her brother, Guido (d.c.1124) who

---

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Fröhlich, W. *trns.* (1993) p.104n1

<sup>16</sup> Fröhlich, W. *trns.* (1993) p.214

became archbishop of Vienne in 1088 and Pope Callistus II in 1119. Anselm wrote one letter to Clementia: *Ep.* 249 (c.1102).

**Richeza**, whose dates are unknown, was Anselm's only sibling (at least the only one to have survived beyond childhood).<sup>17</sup> She received one letter from Anselm in her own right – *Ep.* 268 (c.1102/3) – although others were written to her and her husband. Richeza's son, also called Anselm (d.c.1148), became abbot of Bury St Edmunds.

**Matilda** was the first and very long serving abbess of Holy Trinity, Caen (r.c.1059-1113). Anselm's deep respect for her is suggested by the fact that he addresses her as 'mother', a title used for only one other female correspondent. She received one letter: *Ep.* 298 (c.1103).

**Matilda, Countess of Tuscany** (c.1046-1115) is the other correspondent Anselm calls 'mother'. She was the daughter of Boniface III, Count of Tuscany (c.985-1052) and Beatrice of Bar (c.1017-1076). Her mother married Godfrey III of Lorraine in c.1053, so she became half-sister to Countess Ida. Fröhlich records that she was an indomitable political leader and advocate of church reform.<sup>18</sup> She received one letter from Anselm: *Ep.* 325 (c.1104).

**Mabilia** was a nun about whom little is known. Anselm wrote one letter to her: *Ep.* 405 (c.1106/7).

**Basilia** was the widow of Hugh de Gournay (c.998-1074), who had been a counsellor to William the Conqueror. After Hugh's death, Basilia lived at or close to Bec Abbey. She received one letter from Anselm: *Ep.* 420 (c.1107).

**Atla (Adela or Adala), Countess of Blois and Chartres** (c.1062/7-1137) was the sister of Henry I of England and wife of Stephen II, Count of Blois (c.1045-1102). She was also the mother of Stephen, King of England (c.1092/6-1154). Her only letter from Anselm is deeply affectionate: *Ep.* 448 (1107/9).

---

<sup>17</sup> Southern acknowledges the possibility of other children who died (Southern, R.W. (1990) p.7n7).

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Fröhlich, W. *trns.* (1994) pp.39-40n1

## ii. Anselm's *Marian Writings*

Until the early twentieth century Anselm was believed to have authored over thirty Marian texts and to have contributed decisively to the explication of the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception. In 1910 a congress was convened to celebrate his contribution to Marian thought, which had not been explored since the time of Gabriel Gerberon (c.1628-1711).<sup>19</sup> Later, in the 1920s and 30s, the authenticity of many texts was called into question by André Wilmart, who distinguished pseudo-Anselmian texts from genuine texts in the corpus. Anselm's Mariology suffered most, as Joseph Bruder explains: 'The results of this painstaking examination were not only startling, they were all but annihilating in the field of Mariological literature. Of more than thirty Marian compositions...only three prayers were proven to be authentic!'<sup>20</sup> As a result of this 'annihilation' scholars have overlooked Mary's significance to Anselm's theology. Certainly in English there has not been a systematic analysis of his Marian thought since Bruder. This thesis builds on Bruder but also seeks to move beyond him, critically analysing Anselm's Marian writings anew in light of recent scholarship. Anselm refers to the Virgin Mary many times in the course of his treatises and prayers. The most significant texts for understanding his beliefs about and relationship with her are: *De Incarnatione Verbi* (c.1094), *Cur Deus Homo* (c.1098), *De Conceptu Virginali* (c.1099/1100), his three prayers to St Mary and his *Prayer to Christ*. This analysis contends that even though it is diminished the body of Anselm's Marian writings remains worthy of study.

*De Incarnatione Verbi* is Anselm's defence of divine triunity against Roscelin of Compiègne (c.1050-1125). Mary is first mentioned in his response to the question: why was it necessary for the Son to become incarnate rather than the Father or the Holy Spirit? He offers a fourfold explanation of this necessity, in the context of which he asserts that: (1) confusion would have arisen from two sons co-existing in the Godhead if the Word had not become incarnate: the Son of God and the son of the Virgin; (2) if the Father had become incarnate the Son would be the Virgin's grandson without deriving any part of Himself from her.<sup>21</sup> *Cur Deus Homo* is Anselm's two

---

<sup>19</sup> Cf. *Actes du Congrès Marial tenu à Aoste à l'occasion du VIIIe Centenaire de la Mort de Saint Anselme 1109-1909* (Aoste, 1910); Gerberon, G.: *Sancti Anselmi ex Beccensi Abbate Cantuariensis Archiepiscopi Opera* (Lutentiae Parisiorum, 1675; Secunda Editio, 1721); cf. Bruder, J.S. (1939) p.iii

<sup>20</sup> Bruder, J.S. (1939) p.iv; cf. Gasper, G. (2004) p.147

<sup>21</sup> *DIV* 10

volume explanation of the necessity of the Incarnation for the accomplishment of human redemption. He defines ‘The question on which the whole work hangs’ as: ‘By what logic or necessity did God become man, and by his death, as we believe and profess, restore life to the world, when he could have done this through the agency of some other person, angelic or human, or simply by willing it?’<sup>22</sup> In the course of the treatise, Anselm explores Mary’s divine maternity and unequivocally affirms that she is the New Eve: Christ’s counterpart in redemption. *De Conceptu Virginali* addresses the question of Christ’s freedom from original sin, which Anselm understood as injustice: a privation of rectitude in the rational will. It is concerned to explain how Christ derived his humanity from Adam without contracting original sin. Mary is first mentioned in passing when Anselm implies that Christ was ‘...alone among men sinless in the womb and at his birth’.<sup>23</sup> Later, she is the subject of the discussion in her own right when Anselm describes her as ‘just’.<sup>24</sup> He proceeds to extol her sinlessness, saying: ‘Indeed, it was fitting that the Virgin should shine with a purity which was only exceeded by God’s own...’<sup>25</sup>

This conviction regarding Mary’s purity runs throughout Anselm’s Marian writings, taking an especially impassioned form in his three Marian prayers. They are part of a much larger corpus consisting of nineteen *orationes*, which include prayers to God, Christ, the Holy Cross, St John the Baptist and St Benedict. Most scholars agree that Anselm’s prayers were composed while he was a monk at Bec (pre-1093) and that they were written for his fellow monks and certain lay people to encourage them in the spiritual life. According to Ward, Anselm was greatly admired for his piety: ‘His own prayer made him a spiritual guide to others from the beginning of his life as a monk, and it was in this capacity that he was most esteemed by his contemporaries.’<sup>26</sup> The length, literary accomplishment and theological subtlety of his prayers also make them a landmark in devotional writing. Laura Swan (2007) says:

[Anselm’s] prayers...express a shift away from stately and detached prayer forms of the first millennia to more emotional prayer forms. More than a collection of prayers...this volume was meant to engage

---

<sup>22</sup> I *CDH* 1

<sup>23</sup> *DCV* 3

<sup>24</sup> *DCV* 18

<sup>25</sup> *DCV* 18

<sup>26</sup> Ward, B. *trns.* (1973) p.17

readers' hearts and minds with instruction that was heartfelt and not legalistic.<sup>27</sup>

Although they are not liturgical texts, his prayers were probably influenced by the liturgical routine of monastic life, particularly the Divine Office, the Kalendar and the Mass. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the Marian prayers, which Southern calls, 'the most important and original' of the entire corpus.<sup>28</sup> Two important features of the medieval liturgy are reflected in these prayers: the use of epithets (titles such as, 'O glory of purity'/'o tu decus puritatis')<sup>29</sup> and the use of scripture. Anselm's use of titles and appellations to denote Mary's importance in the economy of salvation is self-evident but his use of scripture is more subtle. Although his prayers do not consist of explicit scriptural citations they are permeated by the 'language of scripture'. Anselm was a Benedictine monk and his prayers echo the use of scripture in the *Rule of St Benedict*. They both use biblical material extensively without providing citations or references. Benedict's (c.480-547) seventh chapter, 'De Humilitate', is a particularly good example. Timothy Fry (1981) identifies forty-four clear uses of scriptural phraseology in Benedict's exposition of the twelve steps of humility as well as numerous implied references. The Psalter is a particularly dominant source, providing approximately twenty-eight phrases. For example, Benedict's seventh step of humility uses a phrase from Psalm 22.7 (21.7 in the Vulgate) to illustrate the feeling of contrition which should overwhelm the heart of a humble man:

The seventh step of humility is that a man not only admits with his tongue but is also convinced in his heart that he is inferior to all and of less value, humbling himself and saying with the Prophet: *I am truly a worm, not a man, scorned by men and despised by the people* (Ps 21[22]:7).<sup>30</sup>

This citation is reminiscent of the self-loathing which Anselm places in the mouth of the sinner praying to Mary: 'I am so filthy and stinking that I am afraid you will turn your merciful face from me'.<sup>31</sup> The awareness of the sinner to the object of his devotion and to his own sinfulness characterises his prayers. Their personalistic and

---

<sup>27</sup> Swan, L. (2007) p.27

<sup>28</sup> Southern, R.W. (1973) p.12

<sup>29</sup> *Prayer to St Mary* 3, Ward, B. *trns.* (1973) p.122

<sup>30</sup> *RSB* 7.51-52 (The words of the Psalmist are: 'Ego autem sum vermis et non homo, obprobrium hominum et abiectio plebis' Ps 21[22].7)

<sup>31</sup> *Prayer to St Mary* 1, Ward, B. *trns.* (1973) p.107

dialogical nature was characteristic of emergent personal and private prayers (*preces privatae*) used alongside liturgical prayers in the high Middle Ages. The origin of private prayer forms is, once again, to be found in the *Rule*:

The oratory ought to be what it is called, and nothing else is to be done or stored there. [...] ...if at other times someone chooses to pray privately, he may simply go in and pray, not in a loud voice, but with tears and heartfelt devotion.<sup>32</sup>

Ward explains that emotionally charged private prayers emerged as a dominant form of medieval piety and a complement to explicitly liturgical devotions.

Anselm's Marian prayers also stand out for being three drafts of a single prayer; the composition of a *Prayer to Mary* clearly caused Anselm some difficulty. The drafts represent stages in Anselm's personal journey to the heart of the Marian mystery. Southern and Ward acknowledge that each of the prayers has a slightly different nuance, which suggests that Anselm was writing about the mystery from different angles. The *first prayer* emphasises Mary's holiness, calling her: 'the most holy after God'.<sup>33</sup> It also begins to locate her in the context of the mystery of Christ and human redemption; there is no sense of some 'mystery of Mary' running parallel to the mystery of her Son, they are one. The *second prayer* develops these themes, affirming the latter more emphatically and emphasising her virginity: 'By your blessed virginity you have made all integrity sacred, and by your glorious child-bearing you have brought salvation to all fruitfulness'.<sup>34</sup> Anselm's *third prayer* is his most devotionally extravagant, focussing on Mary's place in the mystery of redemption and her ongoing intercession for imperilled souls: '...by you the elements are renewed, hell is redeemed, demons are trampled down and men are saved, even the fallen angels are restored to their place'.<sup>35</sup>

## **B. Secondary Literature: An Introduction to the Present Situation**

From its outset one of the most challenging aspects of this study has been working with a very small body of secondary literature – and consequently academic debate – about Anselm's letters to women and his Marian writings. In respect of his letters, we

---

<sup>32</sup> *RSB* 52.1-5

<sup>33</sup> *Prayer to St Mary* 1, Ward, B. *trans.* (1973) p.107

<sup>34</sup> *Prayer to St Mary* 2, Ward, B. *trans.* (1973) p.110

<sup>35</sup> *Prayer to St Mary* 3, Ward, B. *trans.* (1973) pp.119-20

have acknowledged the important work of Adele Fiske (1961) and Richard Southern (1959, 1990) but they almost exclusively concentrate on his letters to men. Southern suggests that, aside from his two letters to Gunhilda (*Ep.* 167, 168), Anselm's correspondence with women is barely noteworthy for reasons of emotional intensity or theological daring.<sup>36</sup> Only recently have Sally N. Vaughn (2002, 2010) and her doctoral student Holle Canatella (2007) begun to analyse the letters he wrote to women. Vaughn, in particular, raised the profile of his female correspondence arguing that he sought to inculcate in his friends the qualities of perfect mother and good queen. She also asserted that he held them in high esteem as political allies and loved them as friends. Even though she claims not to set Anselm in the context of gender history, Vaughn's analysis is self-evidently feminist, asserting that Anselm loved his female friends 'the more so because [they] functioned in a man's world'.<sup>37</sup> Canatella's recent article on friendship begins by acknowledging her debt to Vaughn as: '...one of the few historians to investigate Anselm's correspondence with women...'.<sup>38</sup> She accepts Southern's view that Anselm's early letters are more emotionally charged than his later writings but her thesis is that a model of specific individual friendship based on virtue underpinned Anselm's friendships with his fellow monk Gundulf and Countess Ida. Her detailed analysis of Anselm's letters to Ida asserts that their relationship was '...mutually beneficial, with each friend learning from the other'.<sup>39</sup> These are the only efforts which have been made to engage with Anselm's letters to women and recognise their value.

Analysis of Anselm's Marian writings has been similarly patchy and unsystematic. Joseph Bruder's (1939) study represents the last lengthy analysis, focussing on Anselm's contribution to the development of Marian dogma in Roman Catholicism.<sup>40</sup> His work was a timely response to the researches of André Wilmart, mentioned above, and it has been foundational to this study. Recent engagement with Anselm's Marian writings remains sporadic but some effort has been made to analyse them by Luigi Gambero (2000), Dániel Deme (2003) and Giles Gasper (2004). In his two volume study of the development of Mariology in Patristic times and the middle ages, Gambero argues that Anselm was fundamentally concerned with Mary as '...a

---

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Southern, R.W. (1990) p.159

<sup>37</sup> Vaughn, S.N. (2002) p.250

<sup>38</sup> Canatella, H.M. (2007) p.352

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. p.353

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Bruder, J.S. (1939) p.vi

real, authentic person, close to his heart...'<sup>41</sup> He also observes that Anselm locates his Marian thought in the context of his Christology: '...the mystery of Christ and the mystery of Mary always shed light on each other'.<sup>42</sup> This is also the central assertion of Gasper and Deme whose analyses consider Mary in the context of discussions about Christology. They are both of the view that, as Gasper says: 'Mariology...was not of central importance to Anselm...'<sup>43</sup> He suggests that Anselm reflects the tendency of eastern theologians to emphasise Mary's role as *Theotokos* rather than identifying her as a type of the church like Augustine (c.354-430) and Ambrose (c.337/40-397). Deme argues that Anselm understood Mary primarily as a woman of faith and he is reluctant to draw firm conclusions on the basis of data taken from devotional texts which comprise the majority of Anselm's Marian corpus.<sup>44</sup>

There has been virtually no acknowledgement among scholars of a possible relationship between these two sets of texts. The present work was inspired by a close reading of the texts as well as two scholarly arguments. First, Southern's assertion that Anselm's letters, prayers and meditations concentrate upon ideals of humanity and sanctity:

We see in these expressions of friendship a familiar characteristic of Anselm's thought. He bends his mind to the contemplation of an ideal image, he attaches it to himself with passionate intensity, he defines its nature, and he gives it a name. [In his letters] the name is that of a friend. In his prayers and meditations, the name is that of a saint or God.<sup>45</sup>

A central idea underlying my hypothesis is that Anselm understood Mary to be the perfect personification of the four dimensions of his theological vision: an ideal that he had in mind in his letters to women and which his female friends were called upon to realise. Second, Vaughn's argument that Anselm developed his understanding of male-female friendship '...around his meditations on the Virgin Mary and her womanly nature as it is related to the universe'.<sup>46</sup>

---

<sup>41</sup> Gambero, L. (2000) p.109

<sup>42</sup> Ibid. p.109

<sup>43</sup> Gasper, G. (2004) p.144

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Deme, D. (2003) p.167

<sup>45</sup> Southern, R.W. (1959) p.73

<sup>46</sup> Vaughn, S.N. (2010) p.55

## I

### ANSELM'S CHRISTOCENTRIC THEOLOGICAL VISION

This chapter critically explores the Christocentricity of the theological vision of Anselm's letters to women and his Marian writings. Fundamentally, it seeks to show that both sets of texts are reflections on the interaction of human beings with the divine, especially Christ. Anselm regarded his female friends as enjoying only a partial and imperfect relationship with God whilst he considered Mary to be fully and perfectly united with him. It begins by exploring the implications of his use of three words meaning love – *caritas*, *dilectio* and *amor* – in his correspondence with women. It then argues that he believed spousal union with Christ to be the *telos* of female religious life. In two important letters he exhorted the nun, Gunhilda, to be faithful to her religious profession by forsaking earthly love in favour of her heavenly spouse, Christ.<sup>47</sup> The focus then shifts to Anselm's Marian writings, analysing his understanding of Mary's intimacy with God, which she achieved by actively cooperating in the accomplishment of her conception of Christ. For Anselm, Mary's divine maternity was the central mystery of her life and an example of perfect synergy between God and a human being. The chapter concludes by demonstrating how Anselm believed the divine maternity to safeguard Christian orthodoxy regarding the two natures – divine and human – of Christ.

#### A. Christ in Anselm's Letters to Women

##### i. *Caritas, Dilectio* and *Amor*: divine love and love for Christ

In his letters to women Anselm uses three Latin terms meaning 'love': *caritas*, *dilectio* and *amor*. Each of them conveys a subtly different dimension of his thought and together they mirror the language of his reflections on Christ's Passion and death. The first term, *caritas*, refers to the highest form of Christian love, which is synonymous with divine love. It entails a deep emotional empathy which Anselm regarded as the basis for Christian friendship because it is selflessly concerned with the good of the other. The second and third terms, *dilectio* and *amor*, refer to the

---

<sup>47</sup> *Ep.* 168 (c.1093/4), 169 (c.1094)

personal love between friends and their mutual love for Christ. Although Anselm's use of these terms was singular it also reflected a tendency in the western theological tradition to delineate them. In early Latin editions of the Bible they were all used as translations of the Greek word *agape* (*ἀγάπη*), meaning 'love', but *caritas* quickly assumed a special significance in western theology. Elizabeth Carmichael (2004) notes: '*Caritas, dilectio* and *amor* would all be used by theologians down the centuries as close or exact synonyms, with *caritas* alone gaining the honour of use in an exclusively 'good' sense and becoming the primary term for Christian love.'<sup>48</sup>

Carmichael traces the rise to prominence of *caritas* in the writings of Ambrose and Augustine. She notes that *caritas* was favoured by Ambrose because he liked to quote scriptural verses in which it featured: 'God is love' (*Deus caritas est*, I Jn 4.8); 'the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace...' (*fructus autem Spiritus est caritas, gaudium, pax...*, Gal 5.22); etc. However, she observes that it was Augustine who first developed a theological definition of *caritas*, which he integrated within his doctrine of friendship. For him, *caritas* meant divine love poured out by the Holy Spirit and it was thought to be 'the foundation and essence of Christian friendship'.<sup>49</sup> In his *Confessions*, Augustine relates the story of his friendship with a boy from school, which lasted until adulthood. Although they were the same age and shared similar interests, he concludes that they did not share 'true friendship' because they were not bound together with the love (*caritas*) that comes from the Holy Spirit.<sup>50</sup> Carmichael summarises Augustine's distinction thus: 'Just as friendship unites many souls in one, so *caritas* mingles all Christian hearts and souls in the one soul of Christ... All Christians should share the experience of the Apostles at Pentecost when, like gold melting into a single mass in fire, the Holy Spirit fused their hearts into one by the flame of spiritual love.'<sup>51</sup>

The limitation of Augustine's use of *caritas*, Carmichael argues, was that it 'did not...have the shape of dynamic mutuality'.<sup>52</sup> In short, it pertained only to what might be called the vertical paradigm of friendship – participation in divine love – rather than placing an equal emphasis on the horizontal paradigm: love of neighbour. James McEvoy (1999) implied this, too, when he explained that Augustine

---

<sup>48</sup> Carmichael, E.D.H. (2004) p.45

<sup>49</sup> Ibid. p.60

<sup>50</sup> *Confessions* IV.iv (7)

<sup>51</sup> Carmichael, E.D.H. (2004) p.60

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. p.63

‘...referred all love and friendship to the person of the resurrected Christ, through whom the depth of friendship and love was uniquely revealed’.<sup>53</sup> Yet, unlike Carmichael, McEvoy pointed out that for Augustine ‘...the presence of Christ within friends who love each other in Him, and Him in each other, does not make them less the friends of each other on a personal level. On the contrary, it opens up a depth of purely spiritual response within each of them, a depth which would remain unsuspected in any other context than that of the divine love.’<sup>54</sup>

The ‘dynamic mutuality’ to which Carmichael referred is clearly exhibited by Anselm’s letters but scholars have expressed confusion regarding the object(s) of some emotionally intense passages they contain. They cannot discern whether these passages express Anselm’s participation in the outpouring of divine love or his personal love for a particular friend. Richard Southern (1959) noted: ‘It cannot be doubted that they express a personal and passionate longing; but the nature of this longing, and the extent to which it was associated with its ostensible object in the person directly addressed are not easily distinguished.’<sup>55</sup> Mary-Rose Barral (1988) expressed confusion over the following excerpt from Anselm’s letter to Haimo and Rainald, two of his relations who contemplated entering monastic life:

Already my eyes desire, most dearly beloved, desire to see your faces, already my arms stretch out to take you in their embrace. My mouth yearns for your kisses; whatever remains of my life longs for your company, that my soul may rejoice with you in the complete joy of the life to come.<sup>56</sup>

Barral concluded: ‘Southern is right in saying that such expressions are undoubtedly an outburst of personal desire or emotions but it must be admitted that it is not easy to determine whether the passion is actually addressed to the person in question or to the more general love of the religious life, or even to zeal for the glory of God.’<sup>57</sup>

Understanding the subtly different purposes to which Anselm puts *caritas*, *dilectio* and *amor* in his letters to women hints at a solution to this problem. Like Augustine, Anselm understood *caritas* and its derivatives to refer to the divine love, poured out by the Holy Spirit, which he regarded as the basis of true Christian friendship. This is the sense in which he used it in his letter to Frodelina. Little is

---

<sup>53</sup> McEvoy, J. (1999) p.33

<sup>54</sup> Ibid. pp.33-4

<sup>55</sup> Southern, R.W. (1959) p.73

<sup>56</sup> *Ep.* 120 (c.1086)

<sup>57</sup> Barral, M. (1988) p.172

know about Frodelina but Anselm's letter to her is unique among his correspondence with women in that it solicits her friendship. He had become aware of her virtue and wrote to her in the hope of cultivating a relationship with her: 'Ever since I became aware of the odour of your good reputation which has spread far and wide like a sweet perfume, I have longed to make myself known to you.'<sup>58</sup> It is likely that Anselm was motivated to contact her by his belief that friendship between good Christian souls was mutually beneficial in their shared pursuit of the good (the ultimate virtue) and union with God (salvation). In his letter, Anselm adopts a disposition of humility; he subjects himself to her as a pupil in virtue, just as he does to Mary in his prayers (more below):

But since I see myself totally lacking in merit perhaps I might somehow share yours by a communion of charity [*caritatis communionem*].<sup>59</sup>

Here *caritatis* is used in connection with *communionem* to posit a relational experience of love as the basis of friendship because it wills the best for one's neighbour. This meaning is brought out more clearly in one of Anselm's letters to Countess Ida, which juxtaposes *caritatis* with *dilectioni* (from, *dilectio*):

I know and am sure...that your holy love [*sancta tua dilectio*]...ceaselessly desires to know everything about me and all that concerns me, and also to hear or to read something from me, in order that you may rejoice or suffer with me according to the rule of true charity [*verae caritatis regulam*]. Indeed, to this love [*dilectioni*] of yours my heart replies with like affection.<sup>60</sup>

Here Anselm uses *dilectio* and its derivative to refer to a personal connection, a kind of love which could also be called affection. By contrast, he uses *caritatis* to speak of a kind of love involving empathy at a deep emotional level: 'rejoice or suffer with me according to the rule of true charity'. For Anselm, in order for personal friendship to be morally good it had to be rooted in *caritas*, which he considered to be a profound theological reality. He believed *caritas* to entail a connection between friends at a deeper level than that implied by either *dilectio* or *amor*, engendering what Southern calls the 'fusion of souls'.<sup>61</sup> As it is used in Anselm's letters to women *caritas*

---

<sup>58</sup> *Ep.* 45 (c.1074/5)

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> *Ep.* 167 (c.1093)

<sup>61</sup> Southern, R.W. (1959) p.74

reflects the language of passages in Anselm's prayers which contemplate the Passion and death of Christ.

For Anselm, *caritas* did not mean love *for* Christ, although he regarded this as an essential precondition for friendship and expressed it using *dilectio* or *amor*. In his letter to Frodelina, he rejoiced because he had discovered that she shared his desire for friendship. Employing a derivative of *dilectio* he attributes their mutual desire for friendship to their mutual love for Christ: 'Now I have discovered this and, having discovered it, I rejoice in Christ over our desire, which he knows to be borne out of love [*dilectione*] for him...'<sup>62</sup> Anselm's letters to women reveal that *dilectio* and *amor* could mean anything from the spiritual love between friends to the spousal love between husbands and wives. In his letter to Ermengard, Anselm employs *dilectio* and *amor* to express the relationship she shares with her husband. Like Frodelina, little is known about Ermengard except that Anselm wrote a letter to her, praising her chastity and encouraging her to allow her pious husband to become a monk:

Thus in such a great and true mutual affection as yours [*vera mutua vestra dilectione*], it can well be believed that you love [*diligere*] not so much each other's bodies as each other's souls. By no care or mutual love [*amore*] can you snatch your bodies from temporal death; whereas, if you know how to rule your love [*amorem*], you can acquire eternal life for your souls.<sup>63</sup>

In summary, then, Anselm's letters to women exhibit a linguistic distinction between *caritas*, *dilectio* and *amor*. Anselm's use of *caritas* reflects the western theological tradition based on Augustine for whom it meant divine love, poured out by the Holy Spirit. In McEvoy's words, *caritas* is regarded as '...the presence of Christ within friends who love each other in Him, and Him in each other...'<sup>64</sup> By contrast, Anselm uses *dilectio* and *amor* to refer to the personal love between friends, including their love for Christ. This linguistic distinction is characteristic of passages from Anselm's prayers which reflect on Christ's Passion, suggesting that the theology of his letters is Christocentric.

Anselm's *Prayer for Friends* is ostensibly an intercessory prayer, in which he asks God to look with mercy upon his friends: 'So I pray you, good and gracious God,

---

<sup>62</sup> *Ep.* 45 (c.1074/5)

<sup>63</sup> *Ep.* 134 (c.1079/92)

<sup>64</sup> McEvoy, J. (1999) pp.33-4

for those who love me [*me diligunt*] for your sake and whom I love [*diligo*] in you. And I pray more earnestly for those whom you know love me [*me dilectionem*] and whom I do most truly [love].'<sup>65</sup> In his letter to Ermengard (above), Anselm used a derivative of *diligo*, which Ward translates as 'love'. Even though it also occurs here, *diligo* does not concern this study because it means something akin to 'respect', rather than 'love', and it was not one of the three words – *caritas*, *dilectio* and *amor* – used for *agape* in Latin translations of the Bible. In this citation, Anselm's use of a derivative of *dilectio* is consistent with our hypothesis that it refers to the personal love of friends and love for God. This definition is further supported by Anselm's *Prayer to Christ* which uses derivatives of *amor* to refer to the shortcomings of the suppliant's love for Christ and his desire of amendment:

My life, the end to which I strive,  
 although I have not yet attained to love [*amare*] you as I ought,  
 still let my desire for you  
 be as great as my love [*amare*] ought to be. [...]  
 Most merciful Lord,  
 Turn my lukewarmness into a fervent love [*amorem*] of you.<sup>66</sup>

Anselm's *Prayer for Friends* also evinces the view that his definition of *caritas* is Christocentric.<sup>67</sup> Whilst it is ostensibly an intercessory prayer the *Prayer for Friends* is really a profound meditation on the example of Christ's self-sacrificial death for spiritual friendship. For Anselm, Christ's Passion and death radically altered the paradigm of friendship, making it an ethical obligation to all people. Anselm used *caritas* to refer to the love which Christ showed when he suffered and died to redeem the human race:

Jesus Christ, my dear and gracious Lord,  
 you have shown a love [*caritatem*] greater than that of any man  
 and which no one can equal,  
 for you in no way deserved to die,  
 yet you laid down your dear life  
 for those who served you and sinned against you. [...]  
 Lord, who showed such love [*caritatem*] to your enemies,  
 you have also enjoined the same love [*caritatem*] upon your friends.<sup>68</sup>

---

<sup>65</sup> *Prayer for Friends*, Ward, B. *trns.* (1973) p.214

<sup>66</sup> *Prayer to Christ*, Ward, B. *trns.* (1973) pp.93, 94

<sup>67</sup> Anselm's *Prayer to Christ* only mentions the impetus behind the Passion once, using the word *pietate* which, like *diligo*, means love but is not among the three translations of *agape*: 'Alas I did not deserve to be amazed in the presence of a love [*pietate*] marvellous and beyond our grasp.' *Prayer to Christ*, Ward, B. *trns.* (1973) p.95

<sup>68</sup> *Prayer for Friends*, Ward, B. *trns.* (1973) p.212

If this interpretation of Anselm's use of language is accurate, it demonstrates that the theology of his letters to women is profoundly Christocentric, stemming from the language of his prayers. It means that Anselm's friendships with women were based on their mutual love – taking full account of them as individual souls – and on their shared love of Christ. It also implies that his friendships with women were defined by mutual participation in the divine love of Christ, poured out by the Holy Spirit.

This Christocentric interpretation of Anselm's letters to women locates him within a tradition of chaste spiritual friendships between medieval men and women. Brian Patrick McGuire (1988) uses the example of Anselm's older Benedictine contemporary, Goscelin of Saint-Bertin (c.1020[-35]-1107) to suggest that '...in the later eleventh century male bonds with women in the religious life could be just as important as men's friendships with each other'.<sup>69</sup> Goscelin settled at the monastery of St Augustine in Canterbury sometime after 1078. Between 1082-3 he penned a *Liber Confortatorius* ('Book of Consolation') to Eve/Edith, a former nun at the abbey of Wilton, whom McGuire describes as 'the great love of [Goscelin's] life'.<sup>70</sup> His *Liber Confortatorius* was an expression of his pain at Eve's departure from Wilton for France, as well as a pledge that they would always be together in spirit and eventually in heaven. McGuire observes: 'Without providing a detailed description of Christian friendship, Goscelin manages to link firmly his own love for Eve with their unity in Christ.'<sup>71</sup> On account of their Christocentric character Anselm's letters to women participate in a tradition of male-female friendship epitomised by figures like Goscelin.

## ii. Spousal Union with Christ: the *telos* of female religious life

Anselm's letters to women reveal that he was preoccupied, especially as archbishop of Canterbury (post-1093), with the spirituality of the religious life. He wrote at least eleven letters to female religious and they number seven of his eighteen correspondents.<sup>72</sup> Several of his letters were intended to be read aloud to entire

---

<sup>69</sup> McGuire, B.P. (1988) p.203; Goscelin's final work, an account of the translation of St Augustine's relics in 1091, was dedicated to Anselm.

<sup>70</sup> McGuire, B.P. (1988) p.202

<sup>71</sup> Ibid. p.202

<sup>72</sup> *Ep.* 168 (c.1093/4), 169 (c.1094), 183 (c.1094/5), 184 (c.1094/5), 185 (c.1094), 237 (c.1102), 276 (c.1103), 298 (c.1103), 337 (c.1104), 403 (c.1106), 405 (c.1106/07)

communities for the purpose of instructing the nuns on various matters, including virtuous living, obedience and salvation.<sup>73</sup> This observation is consonant with the argument of Adele Fiske (1961) that the purpose of Anselmian friendship, which his letters express, ‘...[was] to form one’s friend in nobility of character and to love of God’.<sup>74</sup> The themes of virtuous living, obedience and salvation are articulated within a Christocentric vision of the religious life in Anselm’s letters to nuns. They are presented as the means to and fruits of spousal union with Christ, which Anselm regarded as the *telos* of religious life. His belief that a nun’s spousal love for Christ should take priority over her worldly passions and desires is emphasised with particular force and clarity in his letters to Gunhilda (c.1055-97), more below.<sup>75</sup>

At the heart of Anselm’s theology of the religious life is his conception of life as a journey, which he elucidated for Basilia (*Ep.* 420). She was the widow of Hugh II de Gournay (c.998-1074) and lived at Bec. Anselm wrote to her in response to her entreaty for advice regarding virtuous living. In his letters, he characterises life as a ‘journey’ which must come to an end. He explains that throughout life human beings are always ‘ascending towards heaven or descending to hell’ on account of their deeds. He advises Basilia to be vigilant and guard against descent, pursuing only those desires that are holy and will lead her to heaven:

You should be aware that it is much quicker and easier to descend than to ascend. For this reason a Christian man and a Christian woman should consider carefully in each of their desires or actions whether they are ascending or descending; and they should embrace with their whole heart those things in which they see themselves ascending. Those things, however, in which they perceive descent they should flee and abhor just as they would hell.<sup>76</sup>

This citation demonstrates Anselm’s dichotomised worldview, in which moral behaviour has profound soteriological consequences. His letters to women, especially female religious, show that he perceived human beings to be moral agents whose particular, everyday, choices epitomise their response to the fundamental choice between good and evil; heaven and hell; salvation and damnation. Anselm’s language

---

<sup>73</sup> Cf. Southern, R.W. (1990) pp.259-60: ‘...sixteen of Anselm’s forty-eight surviving letters of the period 1093-7 were about the problems of monks or nuns – a far higher proportion than any other subject... As we have seen, ardent friendship and commitment to the monastic life were the most frequently intertwining subjects of his years at Bec. This combination is still to be found in his letters as archbishop, especially in his letters to small communities of nuns.’

<sup>74</sup> Fiske, A. (1961) p.264

<sup>75</sup> *Ep.* 168 (c.1093/4), 169 (c.1094)

<sup>76</sup> *Ep.* 420 (c.1107)

of ascending and descending is also to be found in his letter to the nuns of Shaftesbury Abbey (*Ep.* 183), in which it is located within a Christological frame of reference. *Ep.* 183 is addressed to Eulalia, who was abbess of St Mary and St Edward, Shaftesbury, but it was intended for the whole community. Anselm compliments the nuns on their ‘holy zeal’ before exhorting them, in similar terms to Basilia, to be vigilant in thought, word and deed. This letter is distinct from *Ep.* 420, however, because it recommends strict observance of the precepts of the *Rule* under which the nuns lived, as the means to ascend. Importantly, it characterises their ascent through good deeds as the correct way of living out their religious vocation. Anselm clearly implies that the *telos* of their religious life is union with Christ who is waiting for them in heaven:

Consider without ceasing, my most beloved daughters and sisters, that you decide to ascend to heaven and have already begun doing this in order that you may reign there; and that while reigning you may rejoice with your Lord and friend Jesus Christ who there awaits you and who, while waiting, incessantly invites you to come.<sup>77</sup>

Anselm’s letters to Gunhilda predate both *Ep.* 420 and *Ep.* 183 and they vividly illustrate his Christocentric understanding of the eschatological progress of the religious life. Gunhilda was the most enigmatic of Anselm’s female correspondents and a few words about the complicated situation in which she was embroiled and which gave rise to Anselm’s letters is necessary. She was the daughter of King Harold Godwinson and Edith the Fair. Fröhlich explains how, after her father’s death, Gunhilda ‘...found refuge from Norman violence in the convent of Wilton in Wiltshire’.<sup>78</sup> From there she was abducted by Count Alan Rufus who intended to marry her. His plans were thwarted by his premature death in 1093 but his brother, Count Alan Niger, decided to take Gunhilda for himself instead. Anselm’s letters to Gunhilda attempt to release her from Niger’s power and return her to the religious life. They demonstrate that, in Anselm’s mind, Gunhilda had no choice but to return to her convent. Gunhilda’s mind on the matter is unknown but the letters suggest that she was perhaps not inclined to return to the convent and might have preferred to take a husband: ‘I have heard, my sister, that you wore the habit of holy monastic life for a long time. How you threw it off, how you suffered and what you did is not secret but

---

<sup>77</sup> *Ep.* 183 (c.1094/5)

<sup>78</sup> Fröhlich, W. *trns.* (1993) p.68n1

a well-known fact.<sup>79</sup> Anselm was so emphatic that Gunhilda should be faithful to her vocation that Southern suggests: '[He] never felt as strongly on any political issue as he did on this'.<sup>80</sup>

Anselm's letters to Gunhilda stand out among his correspondence with women for the emotional intensity and passion of their language. They are even cited by Southern as possible exceptions to the rule that he enjoyed his most intimate friendships with other men. He observes that they are '...full of his early mannerisms of style, and the eloquent fervour of personal attachment'.<sup>81</sup> Anselm wrote to Gunhilda as both her friend and her archbishop, and his letters encourage, cajole and threaten her in almost equal measure. They intend to provoke a reaction in her: to encourage her return to Wilton but also, more fundamentally, to reorient her mind from Alan Niger to Jesus Christ. Thus, they support Marilyn McCord Adam's (1999) conclusion that 'St Anselm is...a consummate rhetorician whose own deliberately participatory works attempt to remodel the reader'.<sup>82</sup>

Like his letters to Basilia and Abbess Eulalia, Anselm's letters to Gunhilda bear witness to his belief that people ascend to heaven by good deeds and descend to hell by wicked ones. However, they locate his language of ascent and descent within a Christological frame of reference much more clearly. He believed that as a nun Gunhilda should have been focussed entirely on achieving union with Christ. Anselm characterised Gunhilda's choice as one between the temporal world of carnal pleasure and the spiritual world of 'hope', 'promise' and 'delightful expectation'.<sup>83</sup> Even though his first letter to her betrays some ambiguity about whether or not she had been formally professed as a nun before being abducted, Anselm was clear that by wearing the habit she had signalled her intention to the world: '...these vows were evident and cannot be denied since you wore the habit of your holy intention both in public and in private'.<sup>84</sup> For him, Gunhilda was undeniably the spouse of Christ and her disloyalty to him, by remaining with Niger, could only lead to damnation. In a clever wordplay on Niger's name Anselm wrote:

---

<sup>79</sup> *Ep.* 168 (c.1093/4); Fröhlich notes that Gunhilda seems to have eventually returned to Wilton where she was remembered 'with honour' (Fröhlich, *W. trms.* (1993) pp.68-9n5).

<sup>80</sup> Southern, R.W. (1990) p.264

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.* p.263

<sup>82</sup> Adams, M.M. (1999) p.91

<sup>83</sup> *Ep.* 168 (c.1093/4)

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

Oh, would that he be black to you and you black to him in love so that he may not be black to you nor you black to him in condemnation!<sup>85</sup>

The letters demonstrate his belief that union with Christ, in spiritual matrimony, was the *raison d'être* of female religious life. The nun is chosen by Christ as a child and singled out to be his bride: '...he chose you from infancy to be his spouse...'<sup>86</sup> He awaits her at the heavenly altar, to which she approaches wearing a special garment: '...[he] chose you for such honour and...called you, [and] by calling you gave you the bride's habit and...is still waiting for you'.<sup>87</sup> After they are married, they confirm their union: '...[he] recalls you...in order to lead you to his royal bedchamber, not an earthly but a heavenly one'.<sup>88</sup> Finally, she reigns with Christ in glory in accordance with his promise: 'Render to me, handmaid of mine, whom I created and redeemed, render what you have promised me... I am prepared to lead you as my chosen and beloved spouse into the bridal chamber of my glory and set you over all my possessions'.<sup>89</sup> These citations express in vivid terms Anselm's Christocentric vision of female religious life. Together *Ep.* 168 and 169 firmly locate in a Christological frame his belief that the choices human beings make implicate them in their ultimate ascent to paradise or descent to hell. In his own powerful prose, Anselm expressed this thought thus:

My sister, you have been ensnared. By this snare Christ is drawing your soul from one side, but from the other the devil. By this snare either Christ will draw you to the heights of paradise if you hold on to the life of a nun, or – God forbid! – the devil [will draw you] into the depths of hell if you abandon it.<sup>90</sup>

## **B. Anselm's Christocentric doctrine of Mary's divine maternity**

Like the theology of his letters to women, Anselm's Mariology is resolutely Christocentric. His entire Mariological edifice is founded upon his doctrine of Mary's maternity of Christ. Anselm believed the divine maternity to be the basis of Mary's

---

<sup>85</sup> *Ep.* 169 (c.1094)

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>87</sup> *Ep.* 168 (c.1093/4)

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*; in hideous contrast Anselm refers to the earthly bed of the deceased Alan Rufus: 'Your loved one who loved you, Count Alan Rufus. Where is he now? Where has that beloved lover of yours gone? Go now, sister, lie down with him on the bed in which he now lies; gather his worms to your bosom; embrace his corpse; press your lips to his naked teeth, for his lips have already been consumed by putrifaction.' *Ep.* 169 (c.1093/4)

<sup>89</sup> *Ep.* 169 (c.1093/4)

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

many privileges and a safeguard against heresy for the central tenets of Christology. He believed Mary's free and active cooperation with God at the annunciation (her *fiat*) to be the precursor to her maternity and, consequently, her virginal purity and intercessory power as well. He also believed that the doctrine of Mary's maternity safeguarded the doctrine of the two natures of Christ. Anselm taught that Christ derived his human nature from Mary whilst remaining fully divine, the second person of the Trinity. In his letters, he encouraged his female friends to pursue union with Christ through love, which he expressed using a linguistic distinction between *caritas*, *dilectio* and *amor*. His Marian writings demonstrate that he believed Mary's maternity to exemplify a perfect relationship with Christ at its deepest and most intimate level. He hints at the depth of Mary's union with her Son in his *Prayer to Christ* when meditating upon her trauma during Christ's Passion:

Most merciful Lady,  
 what can I say about the fountains  
 that flowed from your most pure eyes  
 when you saw your only Son before you,  
 bound, beaten and hurt?<sup>91</sup>

In his letters, Anselm also taught that union with Christ is the goal (*telos*) of the religious life. His prayers reveal that he believed friendship with Mary to offer a uniquely effective route to Christ because of her divine maternity. He expressed this in a series of powerful appellations: 'gateway of life, door of salvation, way of reconciliation, approach to recovery...'<sup>92</sup> These titles rightly suggest that Anselm's desire for friendship with Mary on account of her purity and power stemmed from his understanding of her maternity of Christ. Benedicta Ward (2009) observes: 'After Christ, and only because of him, Anselm claimed the Mother of Jesus, Mary, as his heavenly friend and patron.'<sup>93</sup>

**i. Mary's *fiat*: the precursor to her divine maternity**

Anselm understood Mary's *fiat* to be her free and active cooperation with the divine will in the accomplishment of her divine maternity. Anselm's Marian writings are replete with words and phrases that reflect the account of the annunciation and

---

<sup>91</sup> *Prayer to Christ*, Ward, B. *trns.* (1973) p.95

<sup>92</sup> *Prayer to St Mary 3*, Ward, B. *trns.* (1973) p.117

<sup>93</sup> Ward, B. (2009) p.40

visitation in Luke's Gospel (Lk 1.26-45). Some English translations of Anselm's prayers insinuate that he was heavily influenced by the language of these accounts. For example, Ward's translation of the opening salutation of his third *Prayer to St Mary* – 'greatest among all women'<sup>94</sup> – calls to mind Elizabeth's words: 'Of all women you are the most blessed' (Lk 1.42). Unfortunately, in the Latin original Anselm's use of *feminarum* ('women') rather than its Lucan equivalent, *mulieres*, distinguishes them. The Anselmian text reads, 'tu illa maxima feminarum', whilst in Lk 1.42 Elizabeth cries out, 'benedicta tu inter mulieres'. Nevertheless, on several occasions Anselm did use the exact Lucan words and phrases; the following citation is also taken from his third *Prayer to St Mary*:

Anselm wrote:

'Benedicta in mulieribus' haec omnia mihi dedit 'benedictus fructus ventris tui'...

*'Blessed among women' all these things were given to me by 'the blessed fruit of your womb'...*<sup>95</sup>

Luke's Gospel reads:

...benedicta inter mulieres et benedictus fructus ventris tui...

*...blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb...*<sup>96</sup>

In this citation Anselm adheres closely to the language of Lk 1.42, to which he returns again in a later passage: 'Haec tanta bona per benedictum fructum benedicti ventris benedictae Mariae mundo provenerunt'/'So much good has come into the world through the blessed fruit of Mary's womb.'<sup>97</sup> This use of Lucan phrases associates Anselm with other Church Fathers, including Ambrose, who believed the annunciation to constitute '...the central mystery of Mary's life and mission'.<sup>98</sup> Anselm's implies that Mary's *fiat* was the precursor to her divine maternity when he says that she was '...made clean through faith, so that he [Christ] might be received from her...'<sup>99</sup> However, Anselm is sometimes ambiguous and no consensus has been reached regarding his theological definition of Mary's *fiat*. The following passage from his third *Prayer to St Mary* is notable as the only explicit reference in his Marian writings to Mary's *desire* to receive Christ at the annunciation:

Mary, I beg you, by that grace

<sup>94</sup> *Prayer to St Mary* 3, Ward, B. *tns.* (1973) p.115

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.* p.117

<sup>96</sup> Lk 1.42

<sup>97</sup> *Prayer to St Mary* 3, Ward, B. *tns.* (1973) p.119

<sup>98</sup> Gambero, L. (1999) p.196

<sup>99</sup> II *CDH* 17

through which the Lord is with you  
and you willed to be with him,  
let your mercy be with me.<sup>100</sup>

According to Dániel Deme (2003), these words refer to the one single grace of God through which the divine maternity was accomplished. He asserts that Mary's *fiat* represents her passive acquiescence to the divine will, rather than her active cooperation with God: '...she is an *object* in this process, and her cooperation is that she is willing to be this'.<sup>101</sup> He regards it as '...impossible to place this passage into the context of the later Catholic theology of Mary's *fiat*, as the expression of man's free consent to the plans of God, or as a particular role played by people in salvation-history...'.<sup>102</sup> He adds that 'Mary's free willingness is free exactly on the basis that it is in accordance with the will of God'.<sup>103</sup> In short, he proposes a passive acceptance of the divine will on Mary's part at the annunciation. In respect of her *fiat*, he seeks to avoid an interpretation of Anselm which could imply a denigration of God's prerogative in the accomplishment of Mary's divine maternity. Deme is concerned that imputing active, rather than passive, freedom to Mary could undermine divine omniscience and omnipotence. For him, Mary's response cannot have been actively free because it was foreknown in the mind of God and because the divine maternity was not the result of human volition but divine grace.

The problem with Deme's interpretation of Anselm is that it is too highly conditioned by the Protestant prolegomenal framework he employs. At the outset of his consideration of Anselm's Mariology, he explains: 'As my theological analysis and prolegomenal framework is rooted in the life and thought of the so-called churches of the historical Reformation, Anselm's theology of the Son and his Mother will have to be discussed in a separate excursus, clearly distinguished from the main systematic body of the current work.'<sup>104</sup> Ostensibly, Deme seeks to avoid 'meaningless' battles over Mary with 'popular Catholicism'. In reality his analysis is dangerously compromised by the reductionism imposed upon it by his prolegomena. Intellectually honest recourse to Anselm's treatises strongly commends an alternative and more satisfying interpretation of the above citation and Anselm's other implicit

---

<sup>100</sup> *Prayer to St Mary* 3, Ward, B. *trns.* (1973) p.121

<sup>101</sup> Deme, D. (2003) p.167

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.* p.167

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.* p.167; Deme has in mind Anselm's warning that the power to contravene the divine will is not a component of freedom: '...the power to sin is neither liberty nor a part of liberty' (*DLA* 1)

<sup>104</sup> Deme, D. (2003) p.166

references to the annunciation. Anselm's *De Concordia* provides a theological lens through which his understanding of Mary's *fiat* should be viewed. Its first chapter, 'God's Foreknowledge and Human Freedom', explains how it is possible to impute genuine freedom to human choices without diminishing the omniscience of God. Its second chapter, 'Grace and Free Choice', articulates the view that human free choice and divine grace often cooperate without negating the omnipotence of God. These arguments suggest that he understood Mary's *fiat* as both a free and active cooperation with divine grace in the accomplishment of the divine maternity.

*De Concordia* opens with an attempt to respond to the objection that if future events are already foreknown in the mind of God then human choices are the product of predetermined necessity rather than genuine free will. Anselm seeks to explain that there is 'no conflict between a foreknowledge which entails a necessary occurrence and a free exercise of an uncoerced will'.<sup>105</sup> He clarifies 'foreknowledge' as a declaration of the future existence of a thing and defines 'necessity' as the impossibility for something that is going to be not to be. The crux of Anselm's argument is that it is impossible for something that is going to occur not to occur yet everything that occurs need not do so by necessity (i.e. divine coercion):

...when we say that what God foreknows is going to happen is necessarily going to happen, we are not asserting always that it is going to happen by necessity but simply that it is necessary that what is going to happen is going to happen.<sup>106</sup>

Anselm makes a qualitative distinction between God knowing what is going to happen (divine foreknowledge) and his actively bringing it about (divine coercion). Using the example of personal sin he explains that whilst it does not come from God he foreknows that it will occur and as such it can be said to be the result of necessity. Thus even human volition which enables human beings to sin is said to operate by what Anselm calls 'consequent necessity'. This pertains to past, present or future events which have occurred, are occurring or will occur unless they are prevented. Such necessary occurrences are formulated using the conjunction 'if' because it implies that the events are conditional: 'i.e. 'If it shall happen, it shall happen'.<sup>107</sup>

---

<sup>105</sup> DC 1.1

<sup>106</sup> DC 1.2

<sup>107</sup> DC 1.3

Anselm contrasts events that occur as a result of consequent necessity with those that occur as a result of so-called ‘natural necessity’ which he describes as ‘a way of reporting what happens by necessity in the natural order’.<sup>108</sup> Mary’s *fiat* – by which she ‘willed to be with [Christ]’ – falls into the category of consequent rather than natural necessity.

Anselm further explained that God does not merely refrain from coercing the human will but actually safeguards its freedom by his own volition. God wills that the human will should not be coerced and that what it wills should actually occur, provided it is concordant with the limitations of human nature. In Anselm’s own words:

...God brings what we will about in accordance with our willing or not willing. For since what God wills cannot not happen, when he wills that our will shall not be compelled or prevented by any necessity either to will or not to will, and when he wills that an effect should follow from a human choice, it is necessary that the human choice will be free, and it is necessary that what it wills should actually happen.<sup>109</sup>

These words directly contradict Deme’s interpretation of Anselm because they attest that he believed free human agency to be assured by God. Hence, Anselm’s Mary need not be interpreted as a merely passive participant in the accomplishment of her divine maternity. Anselm would not have stumbled over the impediment encountered by Deme for whom Mary’s active cooperation with God poses a threat to divine omniscience. For Anselm, divine foreknowledge occupies the realm of eternity (‘Gods eternal present’) whilst acts of the human will occur in the realm of time. Underlying Deme’s interpretation seems to be the mistaken assumption that God’s foreknowledge of Mary’s *fiat* and the historical annunciation occupy the same spatio-temporal realm. It leads him to conclude that the necessity of Mary’s response to the annunciation precludes the possibility that it was an expression of ‘free consent to the plans of God’.<sup>110</sup> By contrast, Anselm understood that certain things, such as divine foreknowledge, belong to eternity whilst others, such as the annunciation, belong to temporality. He asserts: ‘...that which cannot be changed in eternity sometimes, before it occurs, proves to be, without involving any incongruity, changeable because

---

<sup>108</sup> DC 1.3

<sup>109</sup> DC 1.3

<sup>110</sup> Deme, D. (2003) p.167

of free will'<sup>111</sup>. In short, then, Anselm proposed a structure in which Mary's *fiat* can be seen as an act of free and active cooperation with the divine will, which does not undermine divine omniscience.

Anselm's theology also suggests that Mary's *fiat* could have been free and active without implying that the divine maternity was the result of human volition rather than the grace of God. Anselm nowhere suggests that freedom consists in passive rather than active acceptance of the divine will. For him, Mary's willingness is free because it actively cooperates with the divine will without undermining the omnipotence of God. In *De Concordia*, he reconciled the seemingly incompatible ideas of free will and grace. Speaking of salvation, he observed that the Scriptures appear to offer contradictory responses to the question of whether free will or grace is its cause; for example:

*On grace:*

Without me you can do nothing... (Jn 15.5)

*On free will:*

If you are willing and listen to me, you shall dine on the good things of the land. (Is 1.19)

The premise of Deme's interpretation of Anselm appears to be that free will and grace are incompatible. He is fixated upon safeguarding the principle of divine omnipotence and consequently suggests that Mary's *fiat* represented little more than her consent to be an 'object' in the accomplishment of the divine maternity. Presumably he is implying that it was all the result of grace alone. On the contrary, however, Anselm did not consider free will and grace to be mutually exclusive; his stated intention was: '...to show that free choice in many instances coexists with grace and co-operates with it...'<sup>112</sup> An interpretation of Mary's *fiat* which adopts this as its starting point seems closest to the mind of Anselm. For him, Mary's *fiat* exemplified the proper response to God's gift of grace: grateful acceptance. It was an example *par excellence* of the cooperation of free will and grace. To illustrate his thought Anselm used an analogy of the fecundity of the earth and the human ability to cultivate vegetation for nourishment. In the following citation, the fertile earth

---

<sup>111</sup> DC 1.5

<sup>112</sup> DC 3.1

represents the human heart, the seedlings represent God's word and the grower represents the human agent striving towards spiritual perfection:

Without any cultivation on our part the soil brings forth countless plants and trees which fail to nourish us and sometimes even kill us. But it is only when associated with great toil and a grower along with seedlings that the earth produces those things which are especially needed to nourish us.<sup>113</sup>

Anselm's point is that the soil of the human heart cannot bear fruit without the seed of divine wisdom – which is the gift of grace – and human toil. He is suggesting that grace and human volition must coexist and cooperate in order to bring about the good. This paradigm is the basis for an authentic interpretation of Anselm's belief about Mary's *fiat* which was the precursor to her divine maternity. For Anselm, Mary's free and active response to God at the annunciation represented an unparalleled degree of human cooperation with divine grace.

## ii. '...flesh of your flesh': Mary's maternity and Christ's humanity

Anselm's Marian writings are Christologically significant because they reassert the doctrine of Christ's two natures, which was authoritatively defined by the Council of Chalcedon (451AD). Principally, the Chalcedonian Definition proclaims that Christ was, at the same time, fully divine (of one substance [*ὁμοουσιος*] with the Father) and fully human (of one substance with humanity), and that Mary was his Mother (God-bearer [*Θεοτοκος*]). It emphasises that Christ must be 'recognised in two natures' but that they are 'without confusion, without change, without division, without separation; the distinction of natures being in no way annulled by the union'.<sup>114</sup> J.S. Bruder (1939) defines Anselm's doctrine of Mary's divine maternity in respect of this ancient Christology. He observes that, for Anselm, there were 'two conditions in default of which her motherhood could not be divine: first, that she is really the mother of a genuine human being, secondly, that this human being born of her is God...'<sup>115</sup> In so far as Anselm's Marian writings reiterate this doctrine they are significant for the Christology of the church, as well as the Christology of his treatises. For example, they reinforce his central assertion in *Cur Deus Homo* (book

---

<sup>113</sup> DC 3.6

<sup>114</sup> *The Definition of Chalcedon, 451 in, DCC p.73*

<sup>115</sup> Bruder, J.S. (1939) p.5

II), that it was ‘necessary for [humanity’s redeemer] to be perfect God and perfect man’.<sup>116</sup> The following pages consider Anselm’s understanding of Christ’s humanity; as well as reiterating Chalcedonian theology, he used the divine maternity to demonstrate that the eternal Word, the Son of God, alone became incarnate and that he derived his humanity from Mary.

In his treatises, Anselm refers to the divine maternity at least three times in arguments relating to Christ’s human birth. In *De Conceptu Virginali*, he explains that Christ elected Mary to the divine maternity: ‘...the Son himself substantially chose her for himself to be his mother...’<sup>117</sup> In *Cur Deus Homo*, he argues that it was appropriate for Christ to become incarnate from a human woman in order to correct the wrongdoing of Eve: ‘...just as the sin of mankind and the cause of our damnation originated from a woman, correspondingly, the medicine of sin and the cause of salvation should be born of a woman.’<sup>118</sup> Thirdly, in *De Incarnatione Verbi* he uses the divine maternity in the course of his defence of the orthodox Christian definition of divine triunity against Roscelin of Compiègne (c.1050-1125). It seems that Roscelin questioned the doctrine of the Trinity, asserting that if the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are not three separate ‘things’, then the Father and the Holy Spirit became incarnate with the Son.<sup>119</sup> Anselm’s response makes a twofold distinction between the metaphysical categories of *nature/substance* and *person*.

Firstly, Anselm implies that there are more ways to be a human being than simply to be a person.<sup>120</sup> He seems to suggest that Roscelin’s error stemmed from his inability to understand that at the Incarnation, God’s eternal Word assumed a human *nature* not a human *person*. Secondly, he explains that whilst the Holy Trinity is united in its common *substance* it consists of three distinct *persons*, which are

---

<sup>116</sup> II *CDH* 7

<sup>117</sup> *DCV* 18

<sup>118</sup> II *CDH* 8

<sup>119</sup> Anselm explains that he had begun to draft a refutation of this error some years earlier but that it had not been completed because Roscelin ‘abjured his error in the council convoked by the venerable Archbishop of Rheims [Council of Soissons, c.1092/3]’. He published *De Incarnatione Verbi* (c.1094) because Roscelin retracted his abjuration. (Cf. *DIV* 1; also, Anselm’s letters concerning Roscelin, *Ep.* 129, 136)

<sup>120</sup> ‘...those who cannot understand anything to be a human being unless an individual will in no way understand a human being other than a human person. For every individual human being is a human person. Therefore, how will they understand that the human being assumed by the Word is not a person, that is, that another nature, not another person, has been assumed?’ *DIV* 1

understood only by reference to their relationship to one another as opposites.<sup>121</sup> The crux of Anselm's argument in *De Incarnatione Verbi* is that 'the Son assumed a human being into the unity of his person and not into the unity of his substance'.<sup>122</sup> He regarded Roscelin's argument to rest upon an erroneous premise that the Son assumed human nature into the divine substance, which he shares with the Father and the Holy Spirit. This premise is based upon a misapprehension of the difference between *nature/substance* and *person* in respect of God. Its corollary is the assertion that when Christ became incarnate so did the Father and the Son.

Anselm did not merely argue that it was fitting for the Son, rather than the Father or the Holy Spirit, to become incarnate but that it was necessary. He gave four reasons to justify this assertion, two of which explicitly referred to the divine maternity. He argued that it was necessary to avoid the confusion that would arise if there were two sons co-existing in the godhead: '...some mixture of doubt would be generated when we were speaking of God the 'son'. For both [the Son and the Father/Holy Spirit] would be God and son, although one would be the Son of God, the other the son of a human being.'<sup>123</sup> He also observed that it would be ludicrous for the Father to become incarnate because the Son would then be Mary's grandson, without deriving any part of himself from her.<sup>124</sup> In short, Anselm used the divine maternity in *De Incarnatione Verbi* in the context of his refutation of Roscelin, which consisted in asserting that the eternal Word, the Son of God, alone became incarnate.

In his *orationes*, Anselm proceeded to reinforce the doctrine of Christ's true humanity by illustrating, in vivid language, the ways in which it was assumed from Mary. References to the divine maternity in Anselm's first *Prayer to St Mary* emphasise Christ's soteriological power and, by implication, his divine nature. For example, Mary is referred to by a series of appellations, including: 'life-bearer, mother of salvation' (*o genitrix vitae, o mater salutis*).<sup>125</sup> Anselm's second prayer exhibits a

---

<sup>121</sup> Anselm affirmed divine simplicity, which is the belief that in order for the divine essence to be supreme it must not owe its being to its components. It was imperative for him that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit each possessed the fullness of divinity because the alternative was to posit that God is the sum of his parts. He was eager to reject the idea that 'things not intrinsically God or gods produce God' (*DIV 5*), which he regarded as the corollary of the failure to ascribe the fullness of divinity to the divine Persons (cf. *Mon. 17*, 'The supreme nature is simple').

<sup>122</sup> *DIV 9*

<sup>123</sup> *DIV 10*

<sup>124</sup> *DIV 10*

<sup>125</sup> *Prayer to St Mary 1*, Ward, B. *trns.* (1973) p.107

noticeable shift towards a multidimensional focus, juxtaposing references to Christ's divine nature alongside allusions to Mary's physical maternity:

Most gentle Lady,  
whose intercession should I implore  
when I am troubled with horror, and shake with fear,  
but hers, *whose womb embraced*  
the reconciliation of the world? [...]  
Who can more easily gain pardon for the accused  
by her intercession,  
than she *who gave milk* to him  
who justly punishes or mercifully pardons all and each one?<sup>126</sup>

This citation demonstrates that Anselm's increasing preoccupation with the physical aspects of Mary's maternity was concomitant with an increasing focus on her intercessory role. It is clear that Anselm believed the divine maternity to be the basis of all Mary's privileges, including her exalted place in the economy of salvation. This corresponding increase in references to Mary's soteriological role also coincides with consideration of the emotional bond between Mary and her Son: 'Lady, mother of my hope, surely you will not forget in hatred of me what you so mercifully brought into the world, so *happily* revealed and *lovingly* embraced?'<sup>127</sup>

In another passage, Anselm asserts the coalescence of humanity and divinity in Mary's Son, giving priority to the humanity Christ shares with his mother. In turn, he identifies himself with their common humanity before beseeching them both for help:

O human virgin,  
of you was born a human God, to save human sinners,  
and see, before both son and mother  
is a human sinner, penitent and confessing...<sup>128</sup>

Anselm's belief in the 'homogeneity of the human race', implied here, is observed by Southern. He suggests that a common principle undergirding Anselm's letters and his Christology is that one life can be entirely substituted for another because all human beings share a common nature. Although Southern does not acknowledge it, this principle is also at work in Anselm's Marian writings, which appeal for Mary's intercession on the basis of her humanity.<sup>129</sup>

---

<sup>126</sup> *Prayer to St Mary* 2, Ward, B. *trns.* (1973) p.110 [*Italics added*]

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.* p.111 [*Italics added*]

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.* p.111

<sup>129</sup> Cf. Southern, R.W. (1959) p.75

Anselm's belief in the homogeneity of the human race is brought out more forcibly in his third prayer, which also includes references to the physical dimension of Mary's maternity: '...nurse of the redeemer of my flesh, who gave suck to the Saviour of my whole being...'<sup>130</sup> In particular, it emerges as a prominent theme in the second half of the prayer, in two extraordinary meditations upon Mary's maternity of the entire human race. Anselm thrice refers to Mary as 'our mother', before proceeding to speculate that if she is our mother then we are Christ's brothers. For him, such familial intimacy with Christ is one of the fruits of the divine maternity:

For he was born of a mother to take our nature,  
and to make us, by restoring our life, sons of his mother.  
He invites us to confess ourselves his brethren.<sup>131</sup>

This citation is followed by Anselm's speculations, increasingly extravagant and jubilant, upon its implications: 'So our judge is our brother, the Saviour of the world is our brother, and finally our God through Mary is our brother.'<sup>132</sup> These examples show that Anselm's meditations on the divine maternity in his treatises and, specifically, his *orationes* forcibly demonstrate his orthodox faith in the humanity of Christ.

### iii. '...mother of my Lord and God': Mary's maternity and Christ's divinity

Mary's divine maternity features in *Cur Deus Homo* wherein Anselm advances the view that only a God-man could accomplish human redemption. Only a being at once fully human and fully divine could, he argued, be the saviour of humanity. As the argument of his treatise unfolds, Anselm alludes to the divine maternity as the context in which the divine and human natures of Christ coalesced. Mary's role as the passive receptacle of the divine nature is also explored in the vivid language of his *orationes*.

Anselm conceived the original sin of Adam as an offence against the honour of God. He regarded it as impossible for God to lose honour intrinsically but entirely possible for human beings to fail to pay the debt of honour they owed.<sup>133</sup> In light of this

---

<sup>130</sup> *Prayer to St Mary* 3, Ward, B. *trns.* (1973) p.116

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.* p.123

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.* p.123

<sup>133</sup> Cf. I *CDH* 14

redemption became the repayment of humanity's debt of honour: '...everyone who sins is under an obligation to repay to God the honour which he has violently taken from him, and this is the satisfaction which every sinner is obliged to give God'.<sup>134</sup> The first book of *Cur Deus Homo* advances three basic premises: (1) the debt of honour must be repaid by the kind of being who committed the original act of dishonour, i.e. a human being; (2) humanity cannot repay its debt because it is sinful and '...one sinner cannot make another sinner righteous';<sup>135</sup> (3) the righteousness of a single man is insufficient to repay the debts of many sinners. On the basis of these premises, the second book of *Cur Deus Homo* argues that the saviour of the human race must have been both man and God because only God could make satisfaction on the required scale. He argued that the two natures came together in the one person, Jesus Christ, in the womb of the Virgin Mary:

...God will not do it because it will not be his obligation to do it, and a man will not do it because he will not be able to...it is essential that the same one person who will make the recompense should be perfect God and perfect man... Given, therefore, that it is necessary for a God-Man to be found in whom the wholeness of both natures is kept intact, it is no less necessary for these two natures to combine, as wholes, in one person... For otherwise it cannot come about that the one and the same person may be perfect God and perfect man.<sup>136</sup>

This citation indicates that Anselm believed Christ to have been conceived both fully human and fully divine. He thereby repudiated the heresies of *Arianism* and *Adoptionism*, which precluded the divinity of Christ.<sup>137</sup> This basic account of the argument of *Cur Deus Homo* does not adequately express its subtlety or internal coherence. However, it suggests that the divine maternity was in Anselm's mind when he formulated his major Christological argument. He understood Mary's womb to be the crucible in which the divine and human natures cohered into the one person, Jesus Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

---

<sup>134</sup> I *CDH* 11

<sup>135</sup> I *CDH* 23; Anselm also pointed out that even a sinless human being could not have been the saviour because then humanity would have become its bonds slave, rather than God's (cf. I *CDH* 5).

<sup>136</sup> II *CDH* 7

<sup>137</sup> *Arianism* is described as 'The principal heresy which denied the true Divinity of Jesus Christ, so-called after its author, Arius [c.250-336]'. Its proponents argued that the Son of God was a creature, created by the Father, and that he did not share the divine substance (cf. *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, pp.80-1). *Adoptionism* was an early Christian heresy which helped to lay the foundations for the Christological controversies of the fourth and fifth centuries by asserting that Christ was merely a man with divine powers. It emerged again, in a different form, in 8<sup>th</sup> century Spain as *Adoptianism*. Its proponents denied the divinity of the incarnate Christ by asserting that he was the adoptive, not the real, Son of God (cf. *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, pp.18-9).

Anselm's doctrine of the divine maternity acknowledges both an active and a passive sense of Mary's role as *Theotokos*. He asserts Mary's active role as the source of Christ's humanity and her passive role, as the acquiescent bearer of God, in respect of his divinity. Anselm's first and second Marian *orationes* illustrate his belief that Mary was the passive recipient of the divine nature: '...you bore the Son of the Most High, and brought forth the Saviour of the lost human race'.<sup>138</sup> Such explicit statements are joined by others, which express the same sentiment in more poetic language: '...by your glorious child-bearing you have brought salvation to all fruitfulness'.<sup>139</sup> These citations, among others, demonstrate Anselm's belief that Mary gave birth to Christ's divinity as well as his humanity. To reinforce this point Anselm refers to Mary as the 'mother of God' (*mater dei*) twice in the same passage.<sup>140</sup> Recent scholarship confirms that Anselm understood Mary's divine maternity to have been passive in respect of the divine nature. Giles Gasper (2004), for example, argues that she was merely its vessel: 'Anselm is categorical in his emphasis that God made himself of Mary; she was the bearer only. In other words, Anselm's Mariology is part and parcel of his Christological frame and betrays an essential direction of Anselm's thought. It is in the re-establishment and re-creation in Christ that Anselm finds Mary's place, in the context of the saving work of her son.'<sup>141</sup>

Gasper's interpretation is largely accurate, supported by references to the divine maternity in Anselm's treatises and *orationes*. However, it should be received with some circumspection in light of Anselm's third prayer. Herein Mary remains the passive recipient of Christ's divinity but takes on an active role, inseparable from her role as *Theotokos*, as its revealer. In the following citation, Anselm emphasises Mary's active role in making manifest the divine nature of Christ in a threefold formulation, reflecting the threefold character of the Trinity:

You showed to the sight of all the world  
its Creator whom it had not seen.  
You gave birth to the restorer of the world  
for whom the lost world longed.  
You brought forth the world's reconciliation,

---

<sup>138</sup> *Prayer to St Mary 1*, Ward, B. *trns.* (1973) p.107

<sup>139</sup> *Prayer to St Mary 2*, Ward, B. *trns.* (1973) p.110

<sup>140</sup> Cf. *Prayer to St Mary 2*, Ward, B. *trns.* (1973) p.111

<sup>141</sup> Gasper, G. (2004) p.151

which, in its guilt, it did not have before.<sup>142</sup>

Anselm's third *Prayer to St Mary* is the most theologically daring, subtle and sophisticated. These words attest that he considered the divine maternity to be central to the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. Anselm's meditation grows increasingly impassioned, building towards a crescendo: the categorical affirmation that Mary enjoyed a synergetic relationship with God in the accomplishment of the incarnation through her divine maternity.

Anselm's tenth stanza is an ode to the holy name of Mary. In his first and second prayers combined her name occurs only four times but in these twenty-six lines it is used fourteen times. Undoubtedly, Anselm's frequent use of Mary's name is a device to draw the reader very pointedly back to subject of the meditation. However, it also appears alongside numerous uses of 'God', who had until now been referred to mostly by descriptive appellations (e.g. 'Creator'). Anselm creates a clever juxtaposition between Mary and God, which lends pace and personality to his theology. His use of Mary's name emphasises her personal relationship with God in the unfolding of the mysteries of the Incarnation and redemption; it posits that her intimacy with God is predicated upon her divine maternity. The stanza begins with God giving his only Son to Mary, to whom she gives birth; Anselm takes this opportunity to affirm the truth of the Incarnation: '...and of Mary was then born a Son not another but the same one...'<sup>143</sup> It proceeds to describe how in giving birth, Mary really bore the Son of God, very God, to earth: 'God created all things, and Mary gave birth to God'.<sup>144</sup> It explains how Mary's acquiescence was essential to the success of God's redemptive plan: 'He who was able to make all things out of nothing refused to remake it [creation] by force, but first became the Son of Mary'.<sup>145</sup> Halfway through the stanza there is a change as Anselm moves on from describing how the mysteries of the Incarnation and redemption unfolded, to explain the implications for Mary of the part she played. He achieves this by juxtaposing her maternity with God's paternity:

So God is the Father of all created things,  
and Mary is the mother of all re-created things.

---

<sup>142</sup> *Prayer to St Mary* 3, Ward, B. *trns.* (1973) p.118

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.* p.120

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.* p.120

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.* p.121

God is the Father of all that is established,  
and Mary is the mother of all that is re-established.  
For God gave birth to him by whom all things were made  
and Mary brought forth him by whom all were saved.  
God brought forth him without whom nothing is,  
Mary bore him without whom nothing is good.  
O truly, 'the Lord is with you',  
to whom the Lord gave himself,  
that all nature in you might be in him.<sup>146</sup>

This important passage suggests that even in respect of Christ's divine nature Anselm understood the divine maternity in an active as well as a predominantly passive sense. This study seeks to demonstrate that Anselm's Mariology is multidimensional; it conceives her place in the mysteries of the divine maternity, incarnation and salvation both actively and passively. The evidence suggests that Anselm proposed a synergetic, rather than one-way, relationship between God and Mary in respect of the divine maternity. His purpose was to illustrate and safeguard the central tenets of his Christology by exploring, especially in his prayers, Mary's twofold maternity of man and God.

## CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter has explored the Christocentric vision of Anselm's letters to women and his Marian writings. Fundamentally, it has demonstrated that the relationship between human beings and the divine, especially God the Son, is a dominant theme in both sets of texts. In his letters to women, Anselm gives an account of an imperfect relationship between human beings and God, whilst in his Marian writings he proposes a vision of perfect synergy between the Virgin and God the Father, predicated upon her maternity of God the Son. The first part of the foregoing analysis demonstrated how Anselm's use of three words meaning 'love' – *caritas*, *dilectio* and *amor* – is rooted in his meditations on Christ's Passion and death. I proposed that Anselm distinguished the love between friends and love for God (*dilectio* and *amor*) from the divine love of Christ (*caritas*), poured out by the Holy Spirit. The analysis then proceeded to consider Anselm's letters to nuns, who comprised a significant portion of his female correspondents. I argued that he believed spousal union with

---

<sup>146</sup> *Prayer to St Mary* 3, Ward, B. *trns.* (1973) p.121

Christ to be the *telos* of female religious life. The argument was illustrated with vivid examples from Anselm's letters to Gunhilda, which demonstrate the imperfect nature of human relationships with the divine. The focus of the chapter then shifted to Anselm's Marian writings, seeking to show how Mary enjoyed a perfect relationship with God, by her active cooperation with the Father, in the accomplishment of the maternity of the Son, by the power of the Holy Spirit. I argued that Mary's *fiat* was a free and active expression of acquiescence to the divine will. The chapter concluded with an explanation of the ways in which Anselm used Mary's divine maternity to safeguard key tenets of his Christology: the divine and human natures of Christ.

## II VIRTUE

This chapter considers the priority given to virtue, especially the virtue of obedience, in Anselm's letters to women and his Marian writings. It begins by analysing the influence of the great monastic teacher, John Cassian (c.360-435), in determining the centrality of virtue to Anselmian friendship, which his letters to women express. It then asserts that Anselm called his female friends to be obedient to God and the Church. Anselm's conception of holy obedience enjoyed a mutually dependent relationship with freedom in his theology. The central argument of the chapter is that whilst Anselm's female friends demonstrated only imperfect obedience, Mary's perfect obedience was seminal to her place in unfolding the mystery of redemption. Analysis of Anselm's Marian writings begins with a consideration of the Virgin's purification by faith prior to her conception of Christ. It also explains that Anselm did not affirm the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception. The chapter concludes by exploring Anselm's presentation of Mary as the New Eve.

### A. Virtue in Anselm's Letters to Women

#### i. Virtue in Friendship: John Cassian's presence in Anselm's thought

Anselm's letters to women reflect the two central tenets of the doctrine of friendship formulated by John Cassian. Prior to Augustine, Cassian began to articulate a hierarchy or order of love, which distinguished between participation in divine love and affection. This study has already proposed that Anselm's letters make a similar linguistic distinction between at least two types of love, signified by the terms *caritas* and *dilectio/amor*. Anselm's letters to women also reflect Cassian's thought on virtue as the precondition for true and indissoluble friendship. Firstly, Cassian argued that true friendship is predicated upon a similitude of virtue in friends. Secondly, he explained that true friendship amounts to a deeply intimate personal union which transcends time and space.

It is unsurprising that Anselm was familiar with Cassian given that his writings were among those recommended in the *Rule of St Benedict (RSB)* to monks

seeking to augment its teaching. References to Cassian in commentaries on *RSB* are numerous and scholars agree that he was very influential upon its author.<sup>147</sup> Cassian studied monasticism in Egypt and was instrumental in communicating its ideas to the West. After spending time as a deacon in the Church of Constantinople, he founded two monasteries in Marseilles (c.415). Here he produced studies of the monastic life ‘out of the material collected during his years in the [East]’:<sup>148</sup> his *Institutes* and *Conferences*. The *Institutes* prescribe the basic rules for monastic living and consider eight impediments to monastic perfection. They were foundational to many Western rules, including *RSB*. Cassian’s *Conferences* are records of his encounters with the mothers and fathers of desert monasticism which occurred during his travels around Egypt.<sup>149</sup> Benedict wrote that his *Rule* was ‘only a beginning of perfection’; perhaps it was in pursuit of perfection that Anselm first consulted Cassian’s works; his library at Bec contained all twenty-four of Cassian’s *Conferences* in one volume.<sup>150</sup>

The key text for this analysis is Cassian’s sixteenth *Conference: The First Conference of Abbot Joseph, on Friendship*. According to Elizabeth Carmichael (2004), Joseph was prompted to teach Cassian about friendship when the latter explained that he was united to his travelling companion, Germanus, in a bond of ‘spiritual brotherhood’.<sup>151</sup> Cassian records Joseph’s teaching in his third chapter, which outlines a paradigm for true Christian friendship. Joseph acknowledges that many different forms of friendship exist but asserts that the greatest of these is predicated upon a similitude of virtue in friends. Of this type of friendship, he explains, there can be no end, not even in death. He implies that whilst differences of opinion may arise between friends, they will always be held together by their common virtue. However, he cautions that the maintenance of this type of friendship requires perseverance: ‘...we have known many set on this purpose, who though they had been joined together in companionship out of their burning love for Christ, yet could not maintain it continually and unbrokenly, because...they did not with one and the same zeal maintain the purpose on which they had entered, and so there was between them a sort of love only for a while...’<sup>152</sup> He adds that the goodness and patience of one

---

<sup>147</sup> Cf. Fry, T. *ed.* (1981) p.297n73.5

<sup>148</sup> *ODCC* p.243

<sup>149</sup> Cf. *ODCC* p.243

<sup>150</sup> H.M. Canatella (2007) argues that Cassian was in turn influenced by Cicero (c.106-43BC), who understood both communal and individual relationships to be genuine expressions of friendship.

<sup>151</sup> Carmichael, E.D.H (2004) p.52

<sup>152</sup> *Conference* 16.3

party alone cannot maintain a friendship indefinitely, which requires the cooperation of both.

Anselm's letters to women strongly indicate that he was in accord with Cassian's belief that perfect friendship is predicated upon a similitude of virtue in friends. This tenet of Cassian's thought seems to stem from a teaching of Aristotle (c.384-322BC), paraphrased here by Mary-Rose Barral (1988):

...the only kind of friendship worthy of the name is that which Aristotle describes as motivated by the good and obtaining only between and among good persons. This kind of friendship would undoubtedly be virtuous because concerned with the good without qualifications.<sup>153</sup>

Like Aristotle, Cassian argues that true friendship requires no more or less than the spiritual union of persons on the basis of their common virtue: '...there is one kind of love which is indissoluble, where union is owing not to favour or recommendation...but simply to similarity of virtue'.<sup>154</sup> Cassian's use of 'simply' in this citation is very significant because it points to his conviction that there is no alternative to a similitude of virtue upon which to base friendship. He explains that neither 'kindness' nor 'gift' nor 'bargain' nor 'the necessities of nature' are an adequate foundation for indissoluble friendship. Even 'companionship out of...burning love for Christ', he says, is only sufficient to sustain friendship 'continually and unbrokenly' if the persons involved are equally possessed of the virtues of love (*caritas*) and goodness. Cassian's meaning is reinforced by his admonition that unless friends 'with one and the same zeal' remain committed to their friendship it will disintegrate. He believed that true friendship founded upon virtue enables people to grow together 'seeking the healthy condition of perfection'.<sup>155</sup> Richard Southern (1959) summarises Cassian's definition of friendship as 'the union of the souls of good men in the pursuit of virtue'.<sup>156</sup> His sixteenth *Conference* conceives friendship as a journey, which is predicated upon virtue and, with common effort, leads to perfection.

Agreement between Cassian and Anselm on this point is clearly evident and Anselm's letters to women exhibit a similar appropriation of the Aristotelian precept

---

<sup>153</sup> Barral, M. (1988) p.165

<sup>154</sup> *Conference* 16.3

<sup>155</sup> *Conference* 16.3

<sup>156</sup> Southern, R.W. (1959) p.71

as does Cassian's sixteenth *Conference*. Barral – focussing, like Adele Fiske (1961) and Southern, upon Anselm's letters to men – observes a conceptual similitude between the expressions of friendship found in Anselm's letters and Aristotle's *Nichomachean Ethics*. Anselm's letter to Frodelina solicited her friendship on account of her virtue and his desire to grow in virtue through their association.<sup>157</sup> It also calls to mind Cassian's belief that friendship should facilitate growth in virtue. Anselm praises Frodelina's merits and offers to her, in a tone of humility, his 'good qualities'. It signifies that Anselmian friendship is intrinsically reciprocal and mutually beneficial for those involved: 'I know that you will find in me little or nothing which could be expected to increase your sanctity. Yet since I desire to share in your good qualities...I do not know on what pretext I can refuse to let you share, as you desire, in mine, whatever they may be.'<sup>158</sup> Anselm concludes the letter with a plea that he and Frodelina will be united to one another in love (*amore*) with the express purpose of pleasing Christ and advancing towards eternal life.<sup>159</sup>

Similarly, Anselm's letters from Matilda demonstrate her desire to grow in virtue as a result of friendship with him. In 1102/3 she wrote to him on the subject of fasting, concerned that the severity of his penances might have been damaging his health: '...you are turning your daily fasting against nature...'<sup>160</sup> Aside from expressing general concern for Anselm's wellbeing, Matilda admonishes Anselm not to risk his faculties of mind and voice by fasting because they enable him to bring others to the ultimate good: salvation. This is what Matilda means, in the following citation, when she expresses concern that the demise of Anselm's faculties could prevent his friends from bearing 'fruit'. In a letter of extraordinary erudition, she expresses her admiration of Anselm's virtue but enjoins him to be cautious not to denude himself of the faculties by which he enables her and others to grow in virtue.<sup>161</sup>

---

<sup>157</sup> *Ep.* 45 (c.1074/5)

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>160</sup> *Ep.* 242 (c.1102/3)

<sup>161</sup> In this letter Matilda demonstrates her erudition by citing Cicero and appropriating biblical phrases to make her case: 'Therefore, good and holy father, do not let the strength of your body be so inopportunately undermined by fasting lest you cease to be a preacher, because, as Cicero says in the book he wrote *On Old Age*, 'the orator's gift resides not only in his intellect but also in his lungs and strength'. [...] May your Holiness thrive in the Lord and with your prayers do not give up helping me, your faithful handmaiden, who loves you with all the affection of her heart. Deign to receive, read, listen to and take notice of this letter which I am sending to you with not feigned [cf. 2 Cor 6.6] but with faithful and strong charity.' *Ep.* 242 (c.1102/3)

...it is greatly to be feared by many people as well as by myself that the body of such a father may waste away... Moreover, it is also to be feared that the windows of your sight, your hearing and your other senses may become clouded, and your voice, the creator of things spiritual may grow hoarse...as to deprive those who are removed from you for a while of hearing your voice and even leaving them without fruit.<sup>162</sup>

Together *Ep.* 45 and *Ep.* 242 demonstrate that in his correspondence with women Anselm prioritised virtue. His letter to Frodelina reflects Cassian's belief that friendship must be predicated upon a similitude of virtue in the persons involved. Even though Anselm modestly conceded that Frodelina was more virtuous than him, he intimated that her charity and his zeal could make up for his deficiencies. Anselm's letters to and from Queen Matilda demonstrate Cassian's teaching about the need for friends to be mutually concerned for one another. The citation from *Ep.* 242, above, refers to Matilda's concern for Anselm's health for the sake of her own growth in virtue. In another place, she intimates that Anselm will also benefit from the growth of others in virtue and therefore, from his good health: 'You have entered into the labours of many so that you may carry back the profit of many... I beseech you to imitate Gregory, who alleviated the weariness and weakness of his stomach with the help of food and drink... Therefore, do what he did so that you reach what he reached, that is Jesus Christ...'<sup>163</sup>

Anselm's correspondence with Matilda demonstrates Cassian's second point, too: that friendship founded upon a similitude of virtue is undiminished by distance of space or time. Fiske describes this dimension of the Anselmian schema as 'in-hering', meaning something like mutual possession. Cassian, via Abba Joseph, explained that friendship predicated upon virtue remains intact in spite of temporal separation. The result of the intimacy of friends bound together in this way, however, is immense pain at the absence of the other. In short, whilst the fervour of friendship is unaffected by absence it is a painful thing to be parted from friends. Fiske observes: 'The pain of absence Anselm describes vividly: he is wearied, vexed, worn out, tortured by it; it is

---

<sup>162</sup> *Ep.* 242 (c.1102/3)

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*

anguish to him and he is not ashamed to say that he weeps'.<sup>164</sup> Intense anguish is likewise expressed by Matilda who was deeply aggrieved when Anselm was in exile:

Turn, holy lord and merciful father, my mourning into joy and gird me with happiness. See, lord, your handmaid throws herself on her knees before your mercy and, stretching suppliant hands towards you, begs you for the fervour of your accustomed kindness. Come, lord, come and visit your servant. Come, I beg, father, appease my groans, dry my tears, lessen my pains, put an end to my sorrow. Fulfil my desires, grant my request.<sup>165</sup>

In this letter, Matilda beseeched Anselm to write to her if he could not come. She subsequently rejoiced upon receiving tidings from him:

I embrace the parchment sent by you in place of a father, I press it to my breast, I move it as near to my heart as I can, I reread it with my mouth the words flowing from the sweet fountain of your goodness, I go over them in my mind, I ponder them again in my heart and when I have pondered over them I place them in the sanctuary of my heart.<sup>166</sup>

As these excerpts reveal, Anselm's correspondence with women was passionate, personal and emotional. It was also deeply theological, reflecting the central tenets of Cassian's doctrine of friendship. Firstly, it testified to his belief that true friendship must be based on a similitude of virtue in the persons involved, as well as the desire to grow in virtue in pursuit of the ultimate good. Secondly, it testified that Anselm, too, believed that distance of neither space nor time could diminish true friendship. In short, Anselm accepted and enacted Cassian's vision of friendship as a mutually beneficial union based on virtue. However, he also made a singular contribution to the unfolding tradition of medieval friendship by characterising it as a radical union of persons, which surmounts even distinctions of kin. In *Ep.* 242, Matilda exhorts Anselm to be like John, the beloved disciple, whose friendship with Christ led him to take Mary into his home as if he was her son as well: '...consider yourself like John...whom the Lord wished to survive him so that his virgin friend might take care of his virgin mother'.<sup>167</sup> Anselm's idea that the union of friends, consequent upon a similitude of virtue, is like familial union is given forcible expression in *Ep.* 320 and *Ep.* 321 respectively. The following citations have been included synoptically for the purpose of comparison:

---

<sup>164</sup> Fiske, A. (1961) p.281

<sup>165</sup> *Ep.* 317 (c.1104)

<sup>166</sup> *Ep.* 320 (c.1104)

<sup>167</sup> *Ep.* 242 (c.1102/3)

Matilda wrote:

For myself I do not consider that I make any distinction between what is yours and what is mine; that means of course between what is yours by kinship and mine by adoption and love [*dilectione*].<sup>168</sup>

Anselm replied:

Your dignity raised my spirits much by declaring that what nature denies me your grace bestows, that those who are mine by kinship are yours by adoption and love [*dilectione*].<sup>169</sup>

These elegantly phrased salutations express the Anselmian idea that the virtue of love overcomes even distinctions of kin in uniting friends.

## ii. Anselm's call to Holy Obedience

True obedience is when the will of the subordinate so obeys the will of the superior that, wherever the subordinate may be, she knows what the superior wishes, as long as it is not against the will of God.<sup>170</sup>

This citation, from Anselm's letter to Abbess Eulalia, concerns the nature of holy obedience which is – as Jasper Hopkins (1972) and Richard Southern (1990) attest – a seminal concept in his theology. It comes from a passage in which Anselm exhorts a community of nuns in Shaftesbury to obey their mother superior and to observe diligently the precepts of their rule. The context highlights both Anselm's contempt for sin and his belief that the religious life, focussed upon establishing a pattern of obedience, is the surest way to grow in holiness. This excerpt prefaces his admonition that spiritual progress is the fruit of fastidiously performing good deeds and avoiding every bad deed no matter how small. Anselm warns: 'Do not think that any sin is small, although one may be greater than another. Nothing done by disobedience – and that alone drove man out of paradise – should be called small.'<sup>171</sup> This analysis contests that obedience is a pre-eminent virtue in Anselm's letters to women, outranked only by love (see, Chapter I) and virginity (see, Chapter III). The concept of holy obedience is a dimension of Anselm's thought which is closely connected to his belief that divine and human life are part of an existential continuum encompassing all rational beings. Holy obedience meant conformity to the will of God and was believed to be the sign of a truly liberated will.

---

<sup>168</sup> *Ep.* 320 (c.1104)

<sup>169</sup> *Ep.* 321 (c.1104)

<sup>170</sup> *Ep.* 403 (c.1106)

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*

Although Anselm strongly distinguished in kind between God's being and all other types of being the idea of a continuum connecting rational creatures was central to his theology. In the *Monologion* it took the form of a hierarchy of degrees of excellence in being. He explained that the 'greatness' of creaturely existence is judged in terms of its conformity to the superlative 'excellence' of God's existence. He implied that the closer creaturely behaviour imitated divine perfection the more excellent its state of being would be. In his own words:

Necessarily, for every creature, the degree of greatness of its existence and the degree of comparative excellence of its existence is the degree of its similarity to that which exists supremely, and is supremely great. [... A creature's] comparative excellence is its comparative proximity, through its natural essence, to superlative excellence.<sup>172</sup>

The application of this principle – that the condition of humanity depends upon its imitation of divine being – lay at the heart of Anselm's definition of freedom in, *De Libertate Arbitrii*. It was the reason behind his distaste for his student's libertarian definition of freedom as the power 'to be able to sin and not to sin'.<sup>173</sup> Anselm's reply to his student invoked the connection between divine and human existence that the *Monologion* implied. His argument had two central tenets. First, that even though there is a difference in kind between God and creatures the word 'freedom' means the same in respect of one as the other. Second, that since God and the angels are incapable of sin and yet remain at liberty freedom must consist in something other than the power to sin or not to sin: 'The power to sin', he says, 'is neither liberty nor a part of liberty'.<sup>174</sup> For Anselm, freedom consisted in a capacity to preserve moral uprightness in the will for its own sake.<sup>175</sup> In short, it was the ability to be what one ought (i.e. was intended) to be in terms of moral rectitude. Whilst his argument in the *Monologion* posited a hierarchy of degrees of excellence in being, this definition of freedom could be said to posit a hierarchy of degrees of 'ought-ness' in being. Anselm believed obedience and freedom to be mutually dependent. Freedom was considered to be the precondition for obedience in so far as it was the capacity to retain rectitude in the will: '...to will to obey is to will rightly. In fact no one is able to will rightly without uprightness of will [retained through freedom], which none of

---

<sup>172</sup> *Mon.* 31

<sup>173</sup> *DLA* 1 ('posse peccare et non peccare')

<sup>174</sup> *DLA* 1

<sup>175</sup> *DLA* 1, 3

us has without grace.’<sup>176</sup> In turn, obedience was considered to be the virtue by which human beings cooperate with divine grace to regain rectitude. For Anselm, the interaction of freedom and obedience is morally edifying: a greater degree of freedom led to a greater degree of obedience which in turn led to a greater degree of freedom, and so on.

Holy obedience was understood in feudal terms as the rendering of a service owed to another by living according to precepts they had determined. By contrast, the sin of disobedience was understood as egotism which was the precondition for slavery (the opposite of freedom).<sup>177</sup> Hence, as indicated, Anselm believed that original sin – the sin of Adam and Eve – was the sin of ‘disobedience’, which ‘alone drove man out of paradise’.<sup>178</sup> The following passage from *De Conceptu Virginali* illustrates forcibly the link Anselm makes between the sin of disobedience and servitude (slavish obeisance to sin):

But they [Adam and Eve] committed personal sin, and so whereas originally they had the strength and integrity to remain just without trouble, their whole being was now weakened and corrupted. Their bodies after their sin became like those of brute beasts, subject to corruption and carnal appetites, and their souls, ruled by this bodily corruption and these appetites, and deprived of the gifts they had lost, were themselves infected with carnal appetites. And because the whole of human nature was contained in Adam and Eve, and nothing of it existed outside them, the whole of human nature was weakened and corrupted.<sup>179</sup>

From this is it clear that Anselm believed original sin to be the sin of disobedience. Summarising his teaching on the Falls of both the devil and Adam, Hopkins says: ‘In other words, each sinned by not paying his debt of obedience; and the non-payment of this debt tended to dishonour God’.<sup>180</sup>

Yet Anselm did not believe that the virtue of obedience alone was enough to counter-balance disobedience in humanity’s post-Fall condition. He explained that as

---

<sup>176</sup> *DC* 3.6

<sup>177</sup> It seems that scholars like Katherine Rogers (1996) misconstrue Anselm when they say that he proposed a ‘libertarian’ doctrine of free will. His letters to women and his other writings indicate that he believed freedom to consist in the right to do ‘the best possible thing’, not to do either bad or good. ‘The best possible thing’ he defined as the will of God, its opposite he defined as slavery quoting John’s Gospel: ‘everyone who commits sin is a slave of sin’ (Jn 8.34 in, *DLA* 10; cf. Rogers, K. (1996) p.182).

<sup>178</sup> *Ep.* 403 (c.1106)

<sup>179</sup> *DCV* 2

<sup>180</sup> Hopkins, J. (1972) p.192

a result of the Fall humanity became what it ought not to be, descending further from the condition of rectitude in which it was created. He described this moral depravity in some depth and central to his understanding was a distinction between the human capacities to *regain* rectitude and to *retain* it. He explained that whilst human beings do not have the power to regain rectitude, the capacity to retain it, once regained, persisted after the Fall. Reason and will are the abilities which enable human beings to recognise and hold on to rectitude. Thus, for as long as they remain the power to retain rectitude once it has been regained does so too.<sup>181</sup> The value of obedience lies not in its capacity to regain rectitude independently but to cooperate with grace whereby rectitude returns. In *De Concordia*, Anselm explains that no human will can regain rectitude of its own volition but only by the grace of God, after which uprightness is preserved by free will. Just as Anselm, like Paul (Rm 5.12-21), was pessimistic about the multiplication of sin he was distinctly optimistic about the multiplication of grace once it has been regained:

...if by its free choice the will maintains what it has received and so merits either an increase of justice received or power by way of a good will or some kind of reward, all these are fruits of the first grace and are 'grace upon grace' [*gratia pro gratia*].<sup>182</sup>

Anselm's conviction that obedience cooperates with grace in the restoration of rectitude is the key to understanding its importance in his thought. It is also the reason that obedience was pre-eminent among the virtues (beneath love and virginity) in which he encouraged his female friends to persevere.

In *Cur Deus Homo*, Anselm explains that as a 'matter of obedience' every rational creature owes it to God to imitate Christ who 'maintained righteousness unflinchingly in his way of life and in what he said'.<sup>183</sup> This precept is given practical expression in his letters to women. As Southern explains, Anselm was communicating an essentially monastic experience of obedience: 'Anselm, even in the world, was resolutely monastic. The foundation of monastic life is obedience, and Anselm embraced obedience with passionate intensity, as his reported conversations make clear.'<sup>184</sup> In the cloister Anselm lived under the yoke of obedience; he intellectualised this experience in his treatises in the manner outlined above and he

---

<sup>181</sup> Cf. *DLA* 4

<sup>182</sup> *DC* 3.3

<sup>183</sup> I *CDH* 9

<sup>184</sup> Southern, R.W. (1990) p.216

shared his experience through letter writing.<sup>185</sup> In Chapter I, we saw how Anselm called Gunhilda back to a life of obedience to God; love of God, he insisted, must come before love of any other human being. He also explained that shame and repentance are the prerequisites of forgiveness and reconciliation with God: ‘If you grieve I shall rejoice greatly while grieving with you... If you grieve I shall still hope for your salvation; if you do not grieve what else can I expect but your damnation?’<sup>186</sup> Anselm was disapproving of what he perceived to be Gunhilda’s abandonment of a life of obedience. He reiterated his conviction that the virtue of obedience is the rendering of a service owed to another by living according to precepts they have determined. In a passage which appropriates Mt 24.47 Anselm writes: ‘God therefore says to you: ‘Render to me, handmaid of mine, whom I created and redeemed, render what you have promised me...’<sup>187</sup>

Monastic obedience means obedience to the Church – as well as to God – and this was the second dimension of Anselm’s teaching in his letters to women. Once again, it was conceived in a feudal sense, as the rendering of a service which brings honour to the Church. For Anselm there could be no salvation without the Church; he taught that the Church is the spouse of God and deserves be shown a degree of obedience and honour appropriate to its status. This high ideal had tragic consequences for Anselm during what is known as the investiture controversy. It was at the heart of his rejection of the right of lay rulers to make ecclesiastical appointments, invest abbots and bishops with the ring and staff – the symbols of their spiritual authority – and receive homage from them. The right of emperors to invest their clergy was strongly condemned by both Pope Nicholas II in 1059 and Pope Gregory VII in 1075, yet the practise persisted until the First Lateran Council (1123)<sup>188</sup> causing particular problems in England. Anselm’s overriding belief in the dignity of the Church and its autonomy from temporal authorities led him to refuse to pay homage to King Henry I in 1100,

---

<sup>185</sup> Unfortunately Southern’s analysis does not reflect the full import of Anselm’s letters to women as expressions of his monastic experience; none of the three epistles that he recommends as illustrations of Anselm’s teaching on obedience (*Ep.* 73, 156, 196) were written to women.

<sup>186</sup> *Ep.* 168 (c.1093/4)

<sup>187</sup> *Ep.* 169 (c.1094)

<sup>188</sup> ‘A formal settlement was reached at last by the Concordat of Worms (1122; q.v.), the provisions of which were reasserted by the [First] Lateran Council (1123; cans. 8 and 9), the Emperor relinquishing the right to invest with ring and staff but continuing to bestow the temporalities...’ *ODCC* p.699

the same year he blessed Henry's marriage to Queen Matilda.<sup>189</sup> Like his earlier disagreement with King William Rufus (c.1056-1100) in 1097, this dispute resulted in the archbishop's exile. The pain stemming from his absence from England both to Anselm and his female friends is attested in their letters.<sup>190</sup> Yet, in spite of this, he refused to compromise his obedience as a son of the Church to restore relations with the king. Writing to Matilda in c.1104/5 Anselm shows his preoccupation even in political matters with obedience to God. He did not see how it was possible for him to return from exile without contravening God's will unless Henry relented: 'I do not see that he in whose power my return chiefly rests – as far as it depends on a man – agrees in this matter with the will of God, and it would not be good for my soul to disagree with God's will'.<sup>191</sup> In a related dispute about the crown's appropriation of his revenues Anselm reiterated this point. In *Ep.* 321, he thanked Matilda for soliciting the return of his episcopal revenues but issued ominous words for the king:

Whoever advised him to appropriate any of these revenues advised him to commit a sin which is no slight one, nor one that should ever be tolerated. For whoever despoils a bishop of his goods can in no way be reconciled to God unless he restores to him all his goods intact.<sup>192</sup>

Anselm found Henry's actions deplorable because they did not demonstrate the obedience due to the Church, which he calls the 'mother' of secular princes. He regarded lay investiture and the appropriation of episcopal revenues as sins against God because they insulted the dignity of Mother Church. Thus, whilst he readily criticised Henry, Anselm readily praised Count Robert of Flanders (c.1065-1111) for refusing to invest ecclesiastical hierarchs with the symbols of their spiritual authority. The following citation is taken from Anselm's letter to Robert's wife, Countess Clementia. It includes a wonderful play on Clementia's name (*italics*) and associates obedience and honour in respect of the Church.

I have been told that certain abbots have so been established in Flanders that the Count, your husband, did not give them investiture by his hand. *As this was not done without his prudent clemency so I am certain that it was not done without your clement prudence.* [*Quod*

---

<sup>189</sup> 'In England the matter became especially acute under St. Anselm who tried to enforce a decree of a Council of Rome (1099) excommunicating all who gave or received lay investiture. He himself refused to do homage to Henry I (1100) or to consecrate bishops who had received lay investiture.' *ODCC* p.699

<sup>190</sup> Cf. *Ep.* 288 (c.1103); 317 (c.1104); 320 (c.1104); 321 (c.1104); 329 (c.1104); 384 (c.1106)

<sup>191</sup> *Ep.* 346 (c.1104/5)

<sup>192</sup> *Ep.* 321 (c.1104)

*sicut non sine eius prudenti clementia, ita non esse aestimo factum absque vestra clementi prudentia.*] The more I rejoice about this good deed of yours, the more truly do I love you both in God. When you carry out what pertains to the Christian religion in complete agreement you show yourselves to be true children and faithful advocates of the Church, the spouse of God. For princes, if they are Christians, should not consider that the spouse of God, their mother, was given to them as a hereditary dominion but rather entrusted to them by God so that they may merit to become her coheirs to honour and defend her.<sup>193</sup>

## **B. Anselm's understanding of Mary's perfect obedience**

Anselm regarded many of his female friends as highly virtuous but he warned them never to be complacent about matters pertaining to their salvation: '...never feel confident that you are reckoned among the chosen...[and] when you recognise that you are among the few, go on being fearful, because there will still be doubt as to whether you are among the chosen few until you see yourself among [them]'.<sup>194</sup> His Marian writings demonstrate that he believed Mary to be perfectly holy – first among the saved – because she was perfectly virtuous. In his treatises, Anselm explains that Mary was 'made clean by faith' in order to become the Mother of Christ. It is a central assertion of this study that, for Anselm, Mary's divine maternity was the reason for her many other privileges. Although he was ambiguous about the circumstances surrounding Mary's 'purification' it is clear that Anselm did not teach the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception.

In his letters to women, Anselm taught that the sin of Adam and Eve was disobedience and he admonished his friends to be obedient to God and the Church. His Marian writings reveal that he understood Eve's faults to have been redressed in the person of Mary. In particular, he believed that her obedience made her a causal agent in redemption, just as Eve's disobedience made her a causal agent in the Fall. Hopkins (1972) asserts that Anselm understood obedience to be the precondition for the experience of true joy: '...obedience in itself fosters the experience of joy by being a necessary precondition for its presence'.<sup>195</sup> In his third *Prayer to St Mary*, Anselm used 'joy' and its derivatives to illustrate his portrayal of Mary as the New Eve. He explained that the whole of creation rejoiced at its restoration, which came by the fruit of Mary's obedient acquiescence to God at the annunciation. The

---

<sup>193</sup> *Ep.* 249 (c.1102)

<sup>194</sup> *Ep.* 167 (c.1093)

<sup>195</sup> Hopkins, J. (1972) p.40

following citation is one of several exclamations in his third prayer which use derivatives of 'joy' (rejoice, rejoices) to praise Mary's causal role in the accomplishment of redemption:

For the world rejoices in your love  
and so proclaims what you have done for it.  
[...] Heaven, stars, earth, waters, day and night,  
and whatever was in the power or use of men was guilty,  
they rejoice now, Lady, that they lost that glory,  
for a new and ineffable grace  
has been given them through you.<sup>196</sup>

**i. 'Made clean by faith': the vexed question of Mary's purification**

The search for an authentic Anselmian definition of Mary's purification is vexed because, in the centuries after his death, his words were subsumed within various formulations of Mary's Immaculate Conception.<sup>197</sup> Anselm did not explicitly teach this doctrine but it was supported by his followers, including his nephew, Anselm of Bury St Edmunds and Eadmer (c.1060-1126). Consequently, his writings were often read through the lens of their works. To confuse matters further, Eadmer's treatise, *De Conceptione Sanctae Mariae*, was ascribed to Anselm until André Wilmart (1924) questioned its provenance.<sup>198</sup> Prior to Wilmart it was widely believed that Anselm taught Mary's Immaculate Conception; he was even cited in the papal bull, *Ineffabilis Deus* (1854), by which the doctrine was officially promulgated. In recent times scholars have tried, to different degrees, to dissociate him from the doctrine. Moderate attempts include that of David Hogg (2004) who states simply that Anselm did not affirm it: '...[He] gives no evidence of agreeing with this doctrine'.<sup>199</sup> However, others, like Giles Gasper (2004), have been more unequivocally dismissive. Gasper begins by summarising Eadmer's argument: '...Christ should have been born in the best possible way and no other mode of birth was compatible with God's perfection'.<sup>200</sup> He then concludes: 'This is not a theological vein of argument...which

---

<sup>196</sup> *Prayer to St Mary* 3, Ward, B. *trns.* (1973) p.118

<sup>197</sup> The feast of Mary's Immaculate Conception was celebrated in England from the eleventh century, replacing an older feast of her mother, Anne. The doctrine holds that Mary was preserved from the stain of original sin from the moment of her conception in anticipation of the redemptive death of Christ and to prepare her for the divine maternity. For details of its historical development, cf. *ODCC* pp.680-1.

<sup>198</sup> Cf. Gasper, G. (2004) p.147;

<sup>199</sup> Hogg, D.S. (2004) p.41

<sup>200</sup> Gasper, G. (2004) p.147

Anselm could have countenanced'.<sup>201</sup> Anselm certainly believed Mary to have been in need of redemption like other human beings but he also believed her to have been purified before the conception of Christ. Disagreement centres on the circumstances of her purification. This analysis contests that he believed her to have been cleansed by faith and so become full of grace in preparation for her divine maternity. It also suggests that whilst he did not affirm the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception his Mariology provided several important tools for later theologians to do so.

Anselm undoubtedly believed that Mary was completely pure (free from sin) and, consequently, virtuous and holy. He signalled his conviction by calling her 'Mary, holy Mary, the most holy after God...Lady, shining before all others with such sanctity'.<sup>202</sup> As Bruder observes, he understood her holiness to be the corollary of her sinlessness: 'The degree of her sanctity...corresponds to that of her purity'.<sup>203</sup> In particular, he taught that she was purified in preparation for her maternity of Christ:

Indeed it was fitting that the Virgin should shine with a purity which was only exceeded by God's own, because it was to her that God the Father disposed to give his only Son, whom he loved in his heart as equal to himself..<sup>204</sup>

This citation from *De Conceptu Virginali* is vital to an authentic understanding of Anselm's thought on Mary's purity. Firstly, it builds on his third *Prayer to St Mary* wherein she is described as second to God in the economy of salvation. Anselm believed her to be purer, more virtuous and holier than any other rational creature except God but including the angels: 'A thing to be wondered at – at what height do I behold the place of Mary! Nothing equals Mary, nothing but God is greater than Mary.'<sup>205</sup> Secondly, it refers to an important theological category in Anselm's Marian thought, 'fittingness', which became central to formulations of the doctrine of her Immaculate Conception.

Anselm believed Mary to have been purified in preparation for her divine maternity. Later in *De Conceptu Virginali* he speculated about the means of her purification, saying: '...she could have been *made clean by faith* to purify her for this

---

<sup>201</sup> Gasper, G. (2004) p.147

<sup>202</sup> *Prayer to St Mary* 2, Ward, B. *trns.* (1973) p.107

<sup>203</sup> Bruder, J.S. (1939) p.91

<sup>204</sup> DCV 18

<sup>205</sup> *Prayer to St Mary* 3, Ward, B. *trns.* (1973) p.120; cf. *Prayer to St Mary* 1, p.108

mode of conception'.<sup>206</sup> This belief has a long history in Christian thought and it was expressed with particular eloquence in the writings of Anselm's icons, Ambrose and Augustine. Luigi Gambero (1999) explains that for Augustine in particular Mary was the holiest of creatures: '...an incomparable model of interior dispositions and practical life'.<sup>207</sup> It seems likely that Anselm received the idea that Mary was purified by faith from Augustine, for whom it was of central importance. Gambero observes that Augustine understood Mary's purity in both a 'negative' and a 'positive' sense. Negatively, he taught that by a special grace of God she was 'preserved from every stain of sin'.<sup>208</sup> In the following citation from *De Natura et Gratia* Augustine locates Mary's holiness in the context of Christology – her divine maternity – and undeniably posits that she was either cleansed or preserved from sin:

With the exception of the holy Virgin Mary, in whose case, out of respect for the Lord, I do not wish there to be any further question as far as sin is concerned, since how can we know what great abundance of grace was conferred on her to conquer sin in every way, seeing that she merited to conceive and bear him who certainly had no sin at all?<sup>209</sup>

In a positive sense, Augustine understood Mary's purity as an example for people to follow, believing her to offer a paradigm of perfect discipleship. For him, the crux of the matter was Mary's faithfulness, which he contrasted with the faithlessness of Zechariah.<sup>210</sup> Gambero summarises his argument thus: 'The blessedness of faith is superior to the blessedness of motherhood. Mary's faith...acts as a force than annuls concupiscence and replaces it with action in the mystery of the generation of the incarnate word.'<sup>211</sup>

Anselm was almost certainly aware of Augustine's argument that Mary's purity was predicated upon her faith, as the above citation from *De Conceptu Virginali* suggests. However, Mary's faith was given much less prominence in his Marian *orationes* than her maternity. The following citation demonstrates that Anselm believed Mary's sanctity, dignity, power and honour to be the result of her motherhood; it does not imply that her holiness was predicated upon her faith:

---

<sup>206</sup> DCV 19 [*italics added*]

<sup>207</sup> Gambero, L. (1999) p.227

<sup>208</sup> Ibid. p.225

<sup>209</sup> Augustine, *De Natura et Gratia* 36, 42 in, Gambero, L. (1999) p.226

<sup>210</sup> Cf. Gambero, L. (1999) p.227

<sup>211</sup> Gambero, L. (1999) p.227

Mary, holy Mary,  
among the holy ones the most holy after God.  
Mother with virginity to be wondered at,  
Virgin with fertility to be cherished,  
You bore the Son of the most High,  
and brought forth the saviour of the lost human race.  
Lady, shining before all others with such sanctity,  
pre-eminent with such dignity,  
it is very sure that you are not least in power and honour.<sup>212</sup>

Nevertheless, even though Anselm emphasised Mary's maternity in his *orationes*, his treatises clearly implied that he believed her to have been 'cleansed by faith'. In *De Conceptu Virginali*, he described the conception of Christ in respect of Mary: '...it was to her that God the Father disposed to give his only Son...the Son substantially chose her for himself to be his mother, and the Holy Spirit willed and was to effect the conception and birth...'<sup>213</sup> He then proceeded to assert that '...the Virgin was cleansed by faith before this conception'.<sup>214</sup> Although these words do not explain at what moment prior to the conception of Christ Mary was purified, they suggest that Anselm's thought was influenced by Augustine. For Anselm, the sign that Mary had been purified by faith was her 'fullness of grace' to which his third *Prayer to St Mary* refers. Bruder explains that Anselm believed God to apportion gifts to each of his creatures according to the role they would play in redemption: 'God necessarily proportions His gifts to the providential role of each of His creatures'.<sup>215</sup> Hence, Mary, purified by faith, became 'full of grace' so that she would be able to fulfil her role as Mother of God.<sup>216</sup> Anselm also believed that the reason behind Mary's purification by faith was that it befitted God's dignity to become incarnate from a pure mother. He explained that it was not necessary for Christ to become incarnate from a sinless mother but it was appropriate:

Therefore although it is true that the son of God was born of a spotless Virgin, this was not out of necessity, as if a just offspring could not be generated by this method of propagation from a sinful parent, but because it was *fitting* that the conception of this man should be of a pure mother.<sup>217</sup>

---

<sup>212</sup> *Prayer to St Mary* 1, Ward, B. *trns.* (1973) p.107

<sup>213</sup> DCV 18

<sup>214</sup> DCV 18

<sup>215</sup> Bruder, J.S. (1939) p.81

<sup>216</sup> Cf. *Prayer to St Mary* 3, Ward, B. *trns.* (1973) pp.118, 119, 120, 122

<sup>217</sup> DCV 18 [*italics added*]

The category of ‘fittingness’ is central to Anselm’s theology and it has undergirded formulations of the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception down the centuries. Eadmer used it in his treatise and, in 1854, Pius IX used it three times in his bull. Nevertheless, as indicated at the outset of this discussion, Anselm did not affirm the doctrine. Disagreement centres on the interpretation of these words, already cited, from *De Conceptu Virginali*: ‘...it was fitting that the Virgin should shine with a purity which was only exceeded by God’s own...’<sup>218</sup>

For Anselm, all human beings, except Christ, were implicated in the Fall: ‘...human nature was...entirely defeated in [Adam and Eve] with the consequence that it became sinful – with the exception of that one man alone [Christ]...’<sup>219</sup> To be sure, as demonstrated above, Anselm understood Mary to have been purified sometime before the conception of Christ and in preparation for her maternity. However, there is no evidence to suggest that he believed her purification to have occurred at the moment of her conception. Undeniably, he also saw her as a daughter of Adam and Eve: ‘Down the line of our ancestors, as far as the Virgin his Mother, the will sowed the seed and nature brought it to life, so that the Virgin herself, partly in the natural course and partly in the course of the will, took her being from Adam, like all the others...’<sup>220</sup> In short, then, Bruder’s analysis of *DCV* 18 seems accurate: ‘...the celebrated text which played so important a role in the development of the theological demonstration of the Immaculate Conception...was not meant by him to express an explicit belief in the freedom of the Mother of God from the first instant of her conception from all taint of original sin’.<sup>221</sup>

Nevertheless, Anselm bequeathed to subsequent generations of theologians the tools which enabled them to define and defend the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception. Firstly, he gave them ‘fittingness’ which has been alluded to already. Secondly, he proposed that Christ’s redemptive sacrifice was affective for people born before him as well as after him:

...when Christ brought about the redemption which we have in mind, not all those human beings who were to receive salvation were able to be present, and consequently there was such power in his death that its

---

<sup>218</sup> *DCV* 18

<sup>219</sup> I *CDH* 18; cf. *DCV* 2

<sup>220</sup> *DCV* 23

<sup>221</sup> Bruder, J.S. (1939) p.41

effect extends to those who were absent either geographically or temporally.<sup>222</sup>

The principal established here is that the scope and power of the redemptive sacrifice of Christ transcends temporal limitations. In respect of the Immaculate Conception, this meant that Mary could, as John Duns Scotus (c.1265-1308) asserted, experience the fruits of redemption in the form of preservation from sin before it occurred in time: ‘Just as others needed Christ, so that through his merits they might receive the forgiveness of sin already contracted, so she needed the Mediator to preserve her from sin’.<sup>223</sup> Thirdly and fundamentally, Anselm defined original sin as a lack of justice in the soul – the animating principle of the human person – which infects the body upon their union. He moved theology away from the Augustinian idea of original sin as an inherent and insurmountable characteristic of human flesh. Thus, he believed that justice could be regained by grace and retained by reason and will, especially in someone with an important part in the accomplishment of human redemption, such as Mary.

## ii. ‘...by you the elements are renewed’: Mary as the New Eve

Anselm understood Mary to be Christ’s counterpart in the accomplishment of the Incarnation and human redemption. His Marian writings present Christ as the New Adam and Mary as the New Eve. Mary’s role was to provide a perfect example of the virtue of holy obedience – to which his letters to women referred – compensating for Eve’s disobedience. In his letter to Abbess Eulalia, Anselm described ‘disobedience’ as the sin by which humanity fell and, consequently, its first parents were thrown out of paradise.<sup>224</sup> In *De Conceptu Virginali*, he wrote that disobedience also resulted in original sin, which is a lack of justice (or, righteousness) in the human will. Anselm believed that God ‘made up’ Eve’s disobedience and consequent injustice in the person and will of Mary. The question of Mary’s ‘justness’ or ‘righteousness’ is taken up in Chapter III, whilst this analysis explores Anselm’s presentation of her as the New Eve, signified by her obedience. Characteristically, the impetus behind Anselm’s presentation of Mary as the New Eve was his desire to ensure ‘fittingness’

---

<sup>222</sup> II *CDH* 16

<sup>223</sup> John Duns Scotus in, Gambero, L. (2000) p.250

<sup>224</sup> *Ep.* 403 (c.1106)

or propriety in the circumstances of human redemption. He believed it to be fitting that just as the Fall originated with a man and a woman, redemption should as well.

For Anselm, the human nature of Adam and Eve was prototypical for all succeeding generations of human beings. Thus, the lack of righteousness in their rational wills, caused by disobedience, was transferred to all who shared their humanity. In *Cur Deus Homo*, Anselm explains that Christ was the sole exception to the need for redemption among the children of Adam and Eve:

Now, the whole nature of the human race was inherent in its first parents; human nature was as a result entirely defeated in them with the consequence that it became sinful – with the exception of that one man alone, whom God knew how to set apart from the sin of Adam, just as he knew how to create him of a virgin without the seed of man.<sup>225</sup>

In this passage, Anselm asserts that original sin is a participation in the ‘defeated’ or Fallen nature of Adam and Eve. More interestingly, he juxtaposes Christ and Mary (‘a virgin’) on account of the characteristics which made them uniquely able to perform their respective roles in the accomplishment of redemption. Christ was free from sin, which enabled him to die as a sacrifice on behalf of others: ‘one sinner cannot make another sinner righteous’.<sup>226</sup> Mary conceived by the Holy Spirit, which enabled her to become a causal agent in redemption. Hence, Anselm’s third *Prayer to St Mary* hails her: ‘Palace of universal propitiation, cause of general reconciliation, vase and temple of life and universal salvation’.<sup>227</sup> Although Anselm’s language here is extravagant, like the above citation from *Cur Deus Homo* it points to his conviction that the cooperation of Christ and Mary lay at the heart of redemption. His portrayal of Mary as the New Eve – hence, the counterpart to Christ (the New Adam) – was the corollary of this belief.

Southern (1990) describes *Cur Deus Homo* as ‘a commentary on obedience’.<sup>228</sup> It opens by positing that just as original sin came into the world through Adam and Eve, it was appropriate that it should be extirpated by the cooperation of a man and a

---

<sup>225</sup> I *CDH* 18; cf. *DCV* 2: ‘...because the whole of human nature was contained in Adam and Eve, and nothing of it existed outside them, the whole of human nature was weakened and corrupted’; Bruder suggests that Anselm based himself on the Romans 5.12-21 (cf. Bruder, J.S. (1939) pp.28-9).

<sup>226</sup> I *CDH* 23

<sup>227</sup> *Prayer to St Mary* 3, Ward, B. *trms.* (1973) p.118

<sup>228</sup> Southern, R.W. (1990) p.217n17

woman: Christ and Mary. It then proceeds to argue that just as disobedience was the original sin of Adam and Eve, it was fitting that obedience should characterise the redemptive work of Christ and Mary. In Anselm's own words:

For it was appropriate that, just as death entered the human race through a man's disobedience, so life should be restored through a man's obedience; and that, just as the sin which was the cause of our damnation originated from a woman, similarly the origin of our justification should be born of a woman.<sup>229</sup>

This excerpt demonstrates that, in his presentation of Christ and Mary as the New Adam and Eve, Anselm was characteristically motivated by 'fittingness'. For him, it was appropriate that the work of redemption should reflect the circumstances of the Fall, not least to dispel any doubt about its completeness. In this, he seems to have based himself upon a well established theological tradition, dating back to Justin Martyr (d.c.165). In his *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew*, Justin had already begun to draw parallels between Mary's role in redemption and Eve's role in the Fall: 'Christ became man by the Virgin so that the disobedience which proceeded from the serpent might be destroyed in the same way as it originated. For Eve, being a virgin and undefiled, having conceived the word from the serpent, brought forth disobedience and death. The Virgin Mary, however, having received faith and joy, when the Angel Gabriel announced to her the good tidings...answered: Be it done to me according to thy word.'<sup>230</sup> The following analysis will show that Anselm's depiction of Mary as the New Eve echoes the points made here by Justin: Mary was a causal agent in the Incarnation and Eve's disobedience was overcome by her obedience. Indeed, in all its central tenets Anselm's teaching on this subject was consonant with the Patristic tradition in which he was well versed.

Anselm believed that Christ and Mary cooperated in the accomplishment of human redemption. As the above citations from *Cur Deus Homo* suggest, he understood their cooperation to be a reflection of the inherency of Adam and Eve in the Fall. Often Anselm did not distinguish between Adam and Eve, referring to them collectively as humanity's 'first parents'. In reality, however, he understood them to play complementary yet distinct roles in the original 'defeat' of human nature. His

---

<sup>229</sup> I *CDH* 3

<sup>230</sup> Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew* 100.5 in, Graef, H. (2009 Edn) pp.29-30

distinction between them rested on his belief that whereas Adam was prototypical of human nature, Eve was not. Consequently, the guilt associated with Adam's transgression passed down to his progeny in a way that it would not have done if Eve alone had sinned. He clarified this distinction in *De Conceptu Virginali* under the heading: 'Why the sin by which the human race is condemned is imputed more to Adam than to Eve, when he sinned after and because of her'.<sup>231</sup> He began by defining Adam as the 'principal party' in their relationship since it cannot be argued that his nature was contained in Eve's in the same way as hers was contained in his: '...Adam along with his rib, even though a woman was created from it, can be called 'Adam'...' <sup>232</sup> Thus, he argues, '...if Eve alone and not Adam had sinned, it would not have been the fate of the whole human race to die, but Eve's alone'.<sup>233</sup> The corollary of this assertion for the New Adam and Eve is that Mary could not have accomplished redemption without Christ, even though she herself was obedient. For Anselm, Mary was fundamentally a causal agent in the redemptive process whilst Christ alone was its accomplisher:

The world was wrapped in darkness,  
surrounded and oppressed by demons under which it lay,  
but from you [Mary] alone light was born into it,  
which broke its bonds and trampled underfoot their power.<sup>234</sup>

Nevertheless, he taught that Eve was fully implicated in the Fall and, accordingly, that Mary was worthy to be praised for the accomplishments of redemption. In his *orationes*, Anselm expressed himself using an explosive combination of vivid devotional imagery and theologically daring concepts. In a passage from his third prayer he refers to her as 'woman', recalling the first woman. He then attributes all of the achievements of redemption to her on account of her causal role, indicated by the phrase 'flows from you' (*italics*):

O woman, uniquely to be wondered at,  
and to be wondered at for your uniqueness,  
by you the elements are renewed, hell is redeemed,  
demons are trampled down and men are saved,  
even fallen angels are restored to their place.  
O woman full and overflowing with grace,  
plenty *flows from you*

---

<sup>231</sup> *DCV* 9

<sup>232</sup> *DCV* 9

<sup>233</sup> *DCV* 9

<sup>234</sup> *Prayer to St Mary* 3, Ward, B. *trns.* (1973) p.119

to make all creatures green again.<sup>235</sup>

So far, we have noted that Anselm believed Mary to be the New Eve, the counterpart of Christ, the New Adam, in redemption. This is the central tenet of his thought on this matter and it is, unsurprisingly, resolutely Christocentric. However, Anselm did not simply understand Eve and Mary as the counterparts of Adam and Christ respectively. He also explored the direct parallel between them as important figures in their own right. Firstly, whilst Eve was a causal agent in the Fall because of her disobedience, Mary was a causal agent in redemption by her obedience. At the annunciation, for example, she freely and actively cooperated with the divine will. This facet of Anselm's thought was deeply rooted in both Patristic and medieval scriptural exegesis, as Gambero (1999, 2000) explains. In his analysis of Bede's (c.672/3-735) sermon on the annunciation – *In Annunciatione B.M.* – Gambero writes:

[The Eve-Mary] parallel, already classic within patristic tradition, continues to be an obvious favourite of Christian authors. Indeed, it furnishes the clearest and most biblical foundation for the doctrine of the Virgin's cooperation in the mystery of salvation. This collaboration is realized through the exercise of those virtues that appear directly opposed to Eve's sinful errors: faith, obedience, and humility. For Bede, too, the Gospel episode in which Mary is most evidently portrayed as the second Eve is the Annunciation.<sup>236</sup>

As Gambero indicates, the Eve-Mary parallel persisted through the Patristic period to the middle ages. It was regarded as a biblical doctrine inspired, at least in part, by Paul's reference to Christ as the 'last Adam', whereby the parallelism between the Fall and redemption was established.<sup>237</sup> Mary's unique role in the mystery of redemption was predicated upon her exercise of those virtues which Eve had abandoned.

The second dimension of Anselm's Eve-Mary parallel concentrates on their shared womanhood. He taught that it was fitting for a woman to be the causal agent of redemption because another woman had been the causal agent of the Fall. In *Cur Deus Homo*, Anselm asserted: 'That it is right that God should assume human nature from...a virgin woman'.<sup>238</sup> Drawing heavily on the second creation story in Genesis, he explains that God had already created human beings in three ways: (1) from neither

---

<sup>235</sup> *Prayer to St Mary* 3, Ward, B. (1973) p.120

<sup>236</sup> Gambero, L. (2000) p.39

<sup>237</sup> 1 Cor 15.45; cf. Rom 5.12-21

<sup>238</sup> II *CDH* 8

man nor woman, as with Adam in Genesis 2.7; (2) from man without woman, as with Eve in Genesis 2.21-23; (3) from woman and man together, as in natural procreation. However, he noted that God had not – prior to the Incarnation – created a human being from woman without man. This method was kept in reserve for the inauguration of human redemption: ‘In order, therefore, that he should prove that this method too is within his competence and that it has been kept in reserve for the very undertaking which we have in mind, it is pre-eminently fitting that he should take the man who is the object of our quest from a woman without a man.’<sup>239</sup>

In the first book of *Cur Deus Homo* Anselm asserted that the ‘originator of our justification’ was born of a woman because ‘the cause of our damnation originated with a woman’.<sup>240</sup> Playing devil’s advocate, Boso replied that this and other tenets of Christian doctrine are predicated upon insubstantial foundations, which is evidence against their truth. He says, ‘All these are beautiful notions, and are to be viewed like pictures. But if there is nothing solid underlying them, they do not seem to unbelievers to provide sufficient grounds why we should believe that God wished to suffer the things of which we are speaking [birth from a woman, etc]... Therefore, when we offer to unbeliever’s these notions which you say are ‘appropriate’, like pictorial representations of an actual past event, they think we are, as it were, painting on a cloud.’<sup>241</sup> Anselm did not fully respond to Boso’s critique in the first book of *Cur Deus Homo* but he returned to the notion of ‘pictures’ in seeking to explain and defend the necessity, outlined above, that Christ should be born of a woman without man. His argument hinges on the idea that Mary must be a causal agent because Eve was a causal agent. For him, Mary gave women hope that the redemption included them as well. His argument unfolds thus:

Paint your picture, then, not upon an empty sham but upon solid truth, and say that it is extremely appropriate that, just as the sin of mankind and the cause of our damnation originated from a woman, correspondingly the medicine of sin and the cause of salvation should be born of a woman. Moreover, women might lose hope that they have a part in the destiny of the blessed ones, in view of the fact that such great evil proceeded from a woman: in order to prevent this, it is right that an equivalent great good should proceed from a woman, so as to rebuild their hope. Include this, too, in your picture: on the supposition that it was a virgin woman who has been the cause of all the evil

---

<sup>239</sup> II *CDH* 8

<sup>240</sup> I *CDH* 3

<sup>241</sup> I *CDH* 4

besetting the human race, it is all the more appropriate that the woman who is to be the cause of all good should be a virgin. *Another thing to include in your picture is this. One may presume that the woman whom God created from a man without a woman was created from someone who was a virgin: on this supposition, it is extremely fitting that the man who is to be created from a woman without a man, should be brought forth by a virgin.*<sup>242</sup>

Once Anselm was committed to extrapolating the full implications of an idea, as he does here, he became theologically daring. The final assertion of this citation (in italics) is extraordinary because it almost reverses the Eve-Mary parallel, positing a relationship between Adam and Mary on account of their virginity. For Anselm, just as Adam was a virgin when Eve was created from him, so Mary was a virgin when Christ assumed human nature from her.

Anselm's understanding of Mary as the New Eve reiterated a long tradition in Christian theology. Like Justin Martyr, he believed Mary to be a causal agent in the Incarnation, whose contribution to the accomplishment of human redemption was predicated upon her virtue of holy obedience. Like Bede, he focussed acutely upon Mary's virtues and created a framework in which her obedient response to the annunciation (her *fiat*) represented her victory over Eve *par excellence*. Characteristically, Anselm also contributed to this tradition in three exciting ways. Firstly, by emphasising that it was 'fitting' for Mary's role in the unfolding mystery of redemption to resemble Eve's contribution to the Fall. Secondly, by linking Mary's 'justness' or righteousness with her ability to be obedient (more below). Thirdly, by implying the possibility of an Adam-Mary parallel in respect of their common virginity. Finally, however, Anselm leaves no doubt that Mary was different from Eve in a fundamental way. Whilst Eve was created for Adam in an objective process, Mary was chosen by Christ for himself – '...the Son himself substantially chose her for himself to be his mother...'<sup>243</sup> – and, correspondingly, she 'willed to be with him...'<sup>244</sup>

---

<sup>242</sup> II *CDH* 8 [*italics added*]

<sup>243</sup> *DCV* 18

<sup>244</sup> *Prayer to St Mary* 3, Ward, B. *trns.* (1973) p.121

## CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter has considered the distinct ways in which virtue is central to the theological vision of Anselm's letters to women and Marian writings. Its central assertion has been that the virtue of holy obedience is a theme common to both sets of texts. In his letters, Anselm admonished his female friends to grow in virtue – especially obedience – whilst his Marian writings present the Virgin as a paragon of virtue. I began by suggesting that Anselm's letters to women reveal his indebtedness to John Cassian. They embody the two central tenets of Cassian's understanding of true friendship: (1) it is predicated upon a similitude of virtue in friends; (2) it is diminished by neither distance of space nor time. Anselm believed friendship to be a radical union of persons, on the basis of virtue, in pursuit of the good (salvation). Turning, then, to the virtue of obedience, I argued that it enjoys a mutually dependent relationship with freedom in Anselm's thought. His letters called upon his female friends to be obedient to God and the Church; Anselm demonstrated this twofold obedience by his own conduct during the investiture crisis. The second half of the chapter focussed on Anselm's Marian writings, which depict the Virgin as holy and virtuous. I agreed with Bruder that, for Anselm, Mary's holiness was the corollary of her virtue. I also contested that Anselm did not teach the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception. The chapter concluded with an exploration of Anselm's portrayal of Mary as the New Eve, expositing Anselm's threefold basis for the parallel: (1) Mary was the counterpart to Christ, just as Eve was Adam's partner; (2) Mary exercised the virtues, especially obedience, which Eve had abandoned; (3) Mary was a causal agent in the recreation of the world, just as Eve had been a causal agent in the Fall.

### III VIRGINITY

This chapter analyses Anselm's understanding and presentation of virginity (*virginitas*), the preeminent virtue in the moral-theological vision of his letters to women and his Marian writings. In western theology virginity has been defined in several ways. Anselm differs from some of his predecessors – Jerome (c.347-420), for instance – in taking it to mean the absence of sexual experience, its concomitant urges and resultant impurities. This discussion begins by critically considering the concept of 'justice' (*iustitia*) undergirding his presentation of virginity. Anselm believed virginity to be the exterior manifestation of interior justice. Attention is then given to his letters, which concentrate on both the virginity of female religious and the chastity (*castitas*) of married women. Anselm used 'chastity' rather than 'virginity' to refer to sexual continence after virginity has been lost, including by the consummation of marriage. The subsequent consideration of virginity in Anselm's Marian writings argues that he believed in the perpetual virginity of Mary: *ante partum, in partu* and *post partum*. The chapter concludes with an exploration of the schema for the restoration of those who fall from virginity, which runs through both his correspondence with women and his Marian prayers.

#### **A. Justice: the moral foundation of Anselm's letters and Marian writings**

Justice (*iustitia*) is the moral foundation of the theological vision of Anselm's letters to women and Marian writings. It has already been suggested that Anselm's understanding of freedom posits a hierarchy of degrees of 'ought-ness' in rational being (Chapter II). Freedom is conceived as the ability to be what one ought to be in terms of moral righteousness: conformity to the moral order established by the divine will. It is liberty but not license to dispense with divine order. Anselm developed his thinking on justice and its relationship to freedom – and truth – in his early works: *Monologion* (c.1076), *De Veritate* (c.1080-85) and *De Libertate Arbitrii* (c.1080-85). He proposed that the purpose of freedom is to retain justice, which he defined as 'rectitude of the will preserved for its own sake'.<sup>245</sup> His definition both echoed

---

<sup>245</sup> DLA 3

Augustine and made a unique contribution to western theological development. This analysis critically explores his understanding of justice, which was made manifest in the virtues, including virginity, which is the subject of this chapter.

Anselm did not think that justice was itself a virtue but he followed Augustine in believing it to be the root of virtue. According to John Sheets (1948), Anselm meant the same as Augustine, who said: 'It would be absurd that a man have a true virtue unless he is just'.<sup>246</sup> Anselm believed virginity to be an outward sign of inner purity, which he defined as justice (a righteous will). In his letters, he admonished his female friends to '...keep your heart with all vigilance...' <sup>247</sup> because he thought that sin originates in the heart (also called, 'soul' and 'mind'). These words are taken from his letter to Abbess Matilda, which advises her nuns at Wilton to cultivate beauty of mind, purity of heart and the ornament of virtue by resisting temptation:

We ought to be all the more wary of the slightest excesses as we are aware of how frequently they press upon us, and how cleverly our deceiver strives to persuade us that there is no guilt in them, or if there is, that it is to be made light of.<sup>248</sup>

*Ep.* 185 demonstrates that, for Anselm, the inner disposition of a moral agent manifests itself in sinful or virtuous behaviour. Characteristically, he had a dichotomised view of the interior disposition: it was either just or unjust. The connection between justice and virginity is more explicit in Anselm's Marian writings than his letters to women. The concept of justice is foundational to his Mariology because he describes Mary as a 'just virgin' and a 'just mother'.<sup>249</sup> In the atonement theology of *Cur Deus Homo* (c.1098) and *De Conceptu Virginali* (c.1099/1100) he applied the definition of justice articulated in his earlier works.<sup>250</sup> In the latter, he emphasised the justice of the circumstances of Christ's conception by juxtaposing God and Mary: '...according to his divine nature he was born of a just father, and a just mother according to his human nature, he was born just from his very origin...it would not be out of place to say that he had original justice instead of original sin'.<sup>251</sup> It seems that he believed Mary to be pure and virginal because she was perfectly just,

---

<sup>246</sup> Augustine, *Contra Julianum Pelagianum* IV, 3.17 in, Sheets, J.R. (1948) p.136

<sup>247</sup> *Ep.* 185 (c.1094)

<sup>248</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>249</sup> Cf. *DCV* 18, 20

<sup>250</sup> Cf. McGrath, A.E. (1981) p.209ff.

<sup>251</sup> *DCV* 20

i.e. her will was morally righteous, as God intended it to be. It was fitting for Mary to be just because it was from her that Christ derived his own sinless human nature.

The foundational premise of Anselm's definition of justice is that it is possessed differently by God and human beings. Earlier we observed that he believed the comparative excellence of a particular human being to depend upon its conformity to the superlative excellence of God.<sup>252</sup> He advanced this argument in the *Monologion* and illustrated it using the example of 'goodness'. He explained that whilst all good things are good through their participation in 'goodness' God is good in and of himself. In Chapter 16, he applies this line of argument to 'justice'. He explains that words like 'justice' do not express what the supreme nature is but only serve to illustrate what it is like. He concludes: 'It would seem, then, that the supremely good substance is called 'just' by its participation in a quality ['justice']...rather than through itself.'<sup>253</sup> He does not reject this position *per se* but interprets it differently in respect of God and human beings. He claims that God is justice itself, whilst human beings are just because they participate in justice, which is external to them. Thus, God can be said to be 'just through justice' without compromising his perfect self-sufficiency. He proceeds to explain that the same argument applies to other divine 'qualities' as well: life, reason, health, wisdom, truth, goodness, greatness, etc.<sup>254</sup> In light of this schema, Mary's perfect justice can be understood as perfect imitation – as far as her nature allowed – of the divine being, who is justice.

In *De Libertate Arbitrii*, Anselm defined justice as 'rectitude of the will preserved for its own sake'.<sup>255</sup> Three questions arise from a consideration of this statement: (1) what is the relationship between justice and rectitude; (2) what role does the will have in relation to justice; (3) what does it mean to preserve justice? The remainder of this discussion is framed around these questions.

### **i. What is the relationship between justice and rectitude?**

The concept of 'rectitude' (*rectitudo*) is central to Anselm's understanding of justice and truth. He defined *justice* as 'rectitude of the will' and *truth* as 'rectitude

---

<sup>252</sup> Cf. *Mon.* 31

<sup>253</sup> *Mon.* 16

<sup>254</sup> Cf. *Mon.* 16

<sup>255</sup> *DLA* 3

perceptible to the mind alone'.<sup>256</sup> This close connection between rectitude, justice and truth runs throughout his thought, making it impossible sometimes to distinguish between them. Anselm signals their close connection when, in *De Veritate*, he says: '...truth and rectitude and justice mutually define one another'.<sup>257</sup> Accordingly, Alister McGrath (1981) explains that truth and justice represented '...aspects of the basic concept of *rectitudo*'.<sup>258</sup> Anselm followed Augustine in believing that God ordered the world according to his eternal law. McGrath suggests that he used *rectitudo* to refer to '...this basic God-given order of creation'.<sup>259</sup> He believed that justice and truth each described an aspect of the conformity of rational creatures to this original order. Justice, in particular, designates conformity to the moral order established by God. It means total submission of the rational will to the moral order, or rectitude, of God.

Robert Crouse (1958) articulates the Augustinian worldview upon which Anselm's definition of justice – as moral rectitude – was based. His definition suggests that Augustine conflated what would later become the Anselmian concepts of rectitude and justice, into the one, 'justice'. Hence, he asserts that justice, rather than rectitude, was the central concept in Augustine's thought: 'The concept of *justitia*...runs like a thread through St. Augustine's pages, not only in discussion of political theory but also with reference to the central theological questions of the Nature of God, man, sin, and the Atonement.'<sup>260</sup> For Augustine, God was *justissimus ordinator*: the source of justice and supreme justice itself. He believed that God ordered the world according to justice and that the moral worth of creatures is signified by their conformity to the God-given order. In Anselm's thought, this God-given order is called 'rectitude'.

The close correspondence of Anselm and Augustine is clear from their ideas about the origins of humanity and the Fall. Crouse explains that Augustine believed humanity to have been created 'just' and to have lost justice by sin (the Fall). Anselm, too, held that rational creatures were created just: 'It ought not to be doubted that the nature of rational beings was created by God righteous [*iustam*]...'<sup>261</sup> He articulated his understanding of the 'original justice' of humanity's first parents in *De*

---

<sup>256</sup> Cf. *DV* 11

<sup>257</sup> *DV* 12

<sup>258</sup> McGrath, A.E. (1981) p.206

<sup>259</sup> *Ibid.* p.206

<sup>260</sup> Crouse, R.D. (1958) p.117

<sup>261</sup> II *CDH* 1

*Conceptu Virginali*: ‘...so Adam and Eve were ‘originally’ just, that is, they were just as soon as they began to exist as human beings’.<sup>262</sup> Diverging from Augustine, he defined original sin as the privation of original justice in the rational will. The principal purpose of redemption was thought to be the restoration of a just relationship between God and humanity.

Thus, by referring to Mary as ‘just’, Anselm was positing her conformity to the rectitude or original order established by God. Consequently, as far as her nature allowed, she achieved knowledge of the supernatural: ‘He who knows one of them [rectitude, justice, truth] knows the others and can from the known go on to knowledge of the unknown.’<sup>263</sup> In *De Veritate*, Anselm explained to his student what it means for a rational creature to be ‘just’ compared with a non-rational creature, for example, a stone. He was responding to his student’s question: ‘Should we call a stone just, because it seeks to be below when it is above and thus does what it ought in the same way that we say a man is just when he does what he should?’<sup>264</sup> For Anselm, justice entailed an act of the will; the stone could not be called ‘just’ because it acted naturally rather than willingly. He regarded just action as proceeding from knowledge but motivated, ultimately, by the preservation of rectitude itself. Thus, in so far as she was ‘just’, Mary knew rectitude and willed it for its own sake.

## ii. What is the role of the will in respect of justice?

Chapter I asserted that, for Anselm, Mary’s *fiat* was the act of a free and uncoerced will. It used *De Concordia* to demonstrate that Anselm believed in the compatibility of divine foreknowledge and grace with human volition. Central to that discussion was the Anselmian concept of free will as the impetus behind an action. In the same treatise, Anselm explores the type of freedom that human beings can be said always to possess, even in spite of the Fall. He defines it as the freedom to will what God wants them to will and, so, to be able to will justice: ‘...an uprightness which is present in people when they, for their part, will what God wants them will’.<sup>265</sup> Using an analogy

---

<sup>262</sup> *DCV* 1

<sup>263</sup> *DV* 12

<sup>264</sup> *DV* 12

<sup>265</sup> *DLA* 1.6

with the members and senses of the body Anselm describes reason and the will as the tools by which the soul reasons and wills.<sup>266</sup>

He holds that the word ‘will’ has three distinct but interrelated meanings: it is the tool of the will’s action, the affectivity of the tool and the use of the tool. Firstly, as the tool of the will’s action, it refers to the ‘power’ by which human beings will anything. Secondly, as the affectivity of the tool, it means the impetus behind the will’s use. Anselm explains that this can be subconscious:

The affectivity of the tool is that by which the tool itself is so swayed toward willing some object, even when one is not thinking about what one is willing, that it comes to mind either immediately or when the time is right. For example, the will’s tool is so disposed towards willing health, even when one is not thinking about it, that when it comes to mind, one immediately wills it.<sup>267</sup>

Among the objects that the tool is swayed to will Anselm included justice. By describing Mary as ‘just’ he was identifying her with the generic ‘just person’ described here: ‘...in the case of the just person, the will’s tool is disposed towards justice, even when the person is asleep. The person wills it as soon as thinking of it.’<sup>268</sup> Thirdly, as the use of the tool, it refers to the act of ‘willing’ this or that activity: to walk, to sit, etc. For Anselm, the tool is possessed in the same way by all human beings – good and bad – but it is employed in two different ways. It is disposed to either of two ‘affectivities’: ‘one is for willing what is advantageous, the second for willing what is right’.<sup>269</sup> Sheets explains that, in Anselm’s theory of the will, the former affectivity remained after the Fall whereas the latter did not: ‘These two affections also differ in this, that the affection of justice can be separated from the will...the affection of *commoda* [to will what is advantageous] cannot be taken away from the will because it...belongs to the will naturally’.<sup>270</sup> Furthermore, Anselm explained that the disposition towards justice – to will uprightness for its own sake – is called ‘uprightness’. Therefore, ‘uprightness’ or ‘rectitude’ can be regarded as the source of all good: ‘It was precisely due to their uprightness that the apostles were ‘a fragrant aroma rising to God [2 Cor 2.15]’.<sup>271</sup> He was not, however, unrealistic about the difficulty of living for righteousness rather than self-advantage. Nevertheless, in

---

<sup>266</sup> DC 3.11

<sup>267</sup> DC 3.11

<sup>268</sup> DC 3.11

<sup>269</sup> DC 3.11

<sup>270</sup> Sheets, J.R. (1948) p.133; cf. p.134

<sup>271</sup> DC 3.12

*De Libertate Arbitrii*, he explains to his student that even in a post-Fall condition it is not impossible for human beings to live according to righteousness and resist temptation. The freedom to do so remains intact: 'We often say that we cannot do something, not because it is impossible for us, but because we can do it only with difficulty. This difficulty does not destroy freedom of will. Temptation can fight against a will that does not give in but cannot conquer it against its will.'<sup>272</sup> These words indicate that Anselm believed human beings to be accountable for failing to live righteously because it is in the power of the will to persevere.

### iii. What does it mean to preserve justice?

Following Augustine, Anselm did not believe that original justice could be regained by human effort alone. Augustine's teaching was formulated in response to the Pelagians, who held that '...a man took the initial and fundamental steps towards salvation by his own efforts apart from the assistance of Divine Grace'.<sup>273</sup> Crouse summarises Augustine's teaching thus: 'Man, having lost, by his defection in Adam, the justice originally granted by God in creation, cannot offer to God *justitia*, his primary obligation to the deity.'<sup>274</sup> The foundational premise of Anselm's atonement theology is that human effort alone could not restore right relations between man and God. In *Cur Deus Homo*, he explained that redemption could only be achieved if humanity repaid the debt of honour it owed to God. However, this was impossible because of the scale of the debt and the seriousness with which sin must be treated to satisfy the demands of divine justice.<sup>275</sup> Correspondingly, he thought that the magnitude of the Fall made it impossible for human beings to regain lost justice without grace. He proposed that a synergy of divine grace and human effort (epitomised by a faithful response) is required to enable human beings to live justly.

However, Anselm's unique contribution – setting him apart from Augustine – was to propose that once it has been regained, justice can be retained by an act of the will. Admittedly, the will requires constant assistance, as Sheets explains: '...the preservation is not so much to be imputed to free choice as to grace; for free choice does not have and preserve justice except through prevenient and subsequent

---

<sup>272</sup> *DLA* 6

<sup>273</sup> *ODCC* p.1040

<sup>274</sup> Crouse, R.D. (1958) p.118

<sup>275</sup> Cf. I *CDH* 24

grace'.<sup>276</sup> Anselm believed that, at the Fall: '...human nature was stripped of the justice it had, and continues to lack it *unless it is aided*'.<sup>277</sup> Yet, as indicated above, he did not believe that it was impossible – only difficult – to persevere in righteousness for its own sake. He thought that it was necessary even for those whose wills are disposed towards righteousness to undergo trials in order to make room for their personal merit in achieving salvation:

If then, the converted to Christ were quickly to pass into the state of incorruptibility, there would not be people from whom that destined number could be gathered, since no one could help rushing to happiness seen. I imagine that this is what St Paul means when he says of those 'who have worked at justice through faith' that 'they all, though approved because of their witness of their faith, did not receive the promise...' [...] That is to say, if the happiness promised to the just were not delayed for those who have won approval, there would be no role for merit in those who would know of it [happiness] not by faith but by actual experience.<sup>278</sup>

Anselm believed that justice must be preserved for righteousness' sake and for the love of God in the reality of 'actual experience'. He explains that rational creatures are distinguished by their ability to tell justice from injustice. However, without 'love and loathing', he says, the ability to tell the difference '...is quite pointless and superfluous'.<sup>279</sup> For him, the purpose of rational existence is to distinguish between justice and injustice, and to love and reject them respectively. Anselm's letters to women show that his friends possessed justice to different degrees, which he explained was a part of human life: 'For there are people who are just in one respect and unjust in another, for example both chaste and envious. The beatitude of the just is not promised to such people... It is not my present purpose to show how people become free of all injustice. However, we do know that this is possible for a Christian by holy pursuits and the grace of God.'<sup>280</sup> The purpose of his letters was to encourage and exhort his friends to grow in justice. The remainder of this analysis demonstrates how he took virginity to be a sign and symbol of their justness. His Marian writings portray their object as perfectly just, symbolised by her perfect and fruitful virginity.

---

<sup>276</sup> Sheets, J.R. (1948) p.135

<sup>277</sup> DCV 23 [*italics added*]

<sup>278</sup> DC 3.9

<sup>279</sup> Mon. 68

<sup>280</sup> DC 3.4

## B. Virginité in Anselm's Letters to Women

Anselm's letters to women demonstrate that he understood virginity (*virginitas*) to be the absence of sexual experience, its associated urges (e.g. *concupiscentia carnali*) and its consequent impurities. In particular, it was the virtue most associated with the religious life, as the hallmark of spousal union with Christ. As archbishop, Anselm wrote to an unknown nun, whom Walter Fröhlich (1993) speculates might have been the sister of Dom Richard of Bec, Abbot of Ely from 1100.<sup>281</sup> His letter emphasised the bond between virtue and the religious life: 'May the almighty Lord so fill you with his grace that he lifts you up to the firmest peak of virtue and leads you into the bridal chamber of his glory.'<sup>282</sup> This sentence alone demonstrates Anselm's belief in the causal relationship between grace and virtue. More significantly it posits a causal link between virtue in the religious life and spousal union with Christ. It is probable that the phrase 'the firmest peak of virtue' meant perfect virginity because it suggests unadulterated purity; it undoubtedly meant justice: rectitude of the will. For Anselm, perfect virginity manifested a just will *par excellence*. Hence, in his second meditation virginity is associated with the restoration of justice by grace at baptism: 'Once I was washed in the whiteness of heaven, given the Holy Spirit, pledged to the profession of Christianity; I was a virgin, I was the spouse of Christ.'<sup>283</sup> From this citation, the parallel between baptism and entry into religious life is also obvious: both were based on a profession and bore fruit as virginity and spousal union with Christ.<sup>284</sup>

Anselm explored virginity more extensively in his letters to Gunhilda (*Ep.* 168, 169) than anywhere else in his correspondence with women. Chapter I has already analysed these letters for their commitment to spousal union as the *telos* of religious life. In Chapter II, they provided examples of Anselm's call to holy obedience. Once again, in respect of virginity, they are the most theologically rich source among his letters to women. As described above, Anselm wrote to Gunhilda to encourage her to return to the Abbey of Wilton rather than marry Count Alan Niger. *Ep.* 168 exemplifies the first tenet of his teaching about virginity: that it is the opposite of

---

<sup>281</sup> Cf. Fröhlich, W. *trns.* (1993) p.104n1

<sup>282</sup> *Ep.* 184 (c.1094/5)

<sup>283</sup> *Meditation 2: A lament for virginity unhappily lost*, Ward, B. *trns.* (1973) p.225

<sup>284</sup> Cf. *Ep.* 168 (c.1093/4), 169 (c.1094)

carnal, worldly lust. He admonished Gunhilda to consider how divergent was the path of religious purity from that of lust. He was quick to distinguish her relationship with Niger from 'lawful marriage' of which he had a high opinion (more below). Anselm believed that the physical embraces of human beings were a poor substitute for the spiritual embraces of Christ. He equated the latter with sexual continence and moral purity: 'Consider, now, dearest daughter, how far apart are the embraces of men and the pleasure of the flesh from the embraces of Christ and from the pleasure of chastity and purity of heart.'<sup>285</sup>

The previous discussion concerning justice explained that Anselm identified the heart with the soul and mind. In turn, he believed justice to be rectitude of the will, which he defined as the tool by which the soul acts. By equating 'the pleasure of chastity' with 'purity of heart', this citation suggests that Anselm believed sexual purity and justice to be interconnected. 'Purity of heart' (*cordis munditia*) was a phrase he used on several occasions to signify moral uprightness.<sup>286</sup> Akin to the soul and mind, the heart was regarded as the place in which moral impulses – to do good or evil – originated. Hence, in his letter to Basilia (*Ep.* 420) he says:

I learned from your messenger that you eagerly long for a letter from us... I do not see any reason why you should desire it except that you wish to receive from it some sound advice for your soul. [...] Let me tell you something, dearest daughter, which, if you frequently consider it with the complete attention of your mind, will enable you to inflame your heart greatly to the fear of God and the love of a good life.<sup>287</sup>

Anselm tells Basilia that life is a journey in which human beings ascend to heaven by good deeds or descend to hell by evil ones. In this excerpt the close association of the soul, mind and heart as roughly equivalent concepts in Anselmian theology is emphasised by their proximity. He explains that morality – here described as 'love of a good life' – requires the knowledge and action of the mind and heart. To be precise, he probably meant the knowledge and action of the will which he regarded as the soul's capacity for willing rectitude. In short, Anselm associated moral uprightness with purity of heart. The central tenet of his teaching on virginity is that it is the fruit of inner purity (justice) and the opposite of carnal lust.

---

<sup>285</sup> *Ep.* 168 (c.1094/5)

<sup>286</sup> Cf. *Ep.* 168 (c.1094/5), 185 (c.1094)

<sup>287</sup> *Ep.* 420 (c.1107)

Anselm's letters to Gunhilda repeatedly juxtapose spiritual good, represented by the virginal religious life, against worldly evil, represented by her carnal relationship with Alan Niger. Recalling the Fall of Adam and Eve, on one occasion he describes how she has fallen from virginal purity into disgrace: 'You, a virgin, were chosen to be the spouse of God and marked out for him by your habit and way of life. What shall I say you are now? [...] See, dearest daughter, if you face these facts, how great must be the grief in your heart about your grave and serious fall?'<sup>288</sup> For Anselm, the possibility of eternal beatitude was closed to Gunhilda if she abandoned the religious life, signified by virginity. His letters to her reflect the tone of his second meditation and its underlying ideas. Herein, he describes how fornication has 'cast me down' from 'brightness and joy'.<sup>289</sup> In startlingly powerful language, expressing the speaker's interior torment, he meditates on the loss of virginity. It has already been observed that Anselm believed baptism to be constitutive of spousal union with Christ. He also understood the religious life to be a special expression of that union. These words from his meditation reveal his true mind regarding the gravity of Gunhilda's offence:

For, O my soul, you are unfaithful to God, false to God, an adulterer from Christ; it is of your own free will that you are miserably cast down into the lowest pit of fornication. You were once the spouse of the king of heaven and with alacrity you have made yourself the whore of the tormentor of hell.<sup>290</sup>

Characteristically, Anselm uses 'soul' to refer to the origin of sin, though he means the soul's rational principle: the will. This meditation is subject to further analysis later, for present purposes it highlights Anselm's belief that the loss of virginity constituted a grave moral act. There is no sign that he was referring to the virginity of an avowed religious in this meditation rather than any baptised Christian. It can only be imagined how much more seriously he regarded Gunhilda's loss of virginity, in her abandonment of Christ for Alan Niger. Yet, Anselm did not consider Gunhilda to be irredeemable. His letters to women and his Marian writings both reflect his belief that lost virtue could be regained. Although virginity itself could not be restored, it could be imitated in the form of chastity (*castitas*). Anselm's first letter to Gunhilda acknowledges that his intervention might have come too late to prevent the loss of her

---

<sup>288</sup> *Ep.* 168 (c.1094/5)

<sup>289</sup> Meditation 2: *A lament for virginity unhappily lost*, Ward, B. *trns.* (1973) p.225

<sup>290</sup> *Ibid.* p.226

virginity. However, it assures her that Christ will accept her in chastity instead: ‘...your Lord and Creator and Redeemer...is still waiting for you and calling you back so that you may be his lawful bride, and *if not a virgin at least chaste*’.<sup>291</sup> Likewise, his second letter assured Gunhilda that God could purify her from ‘carnal lust’ (*concupiscentia carnali*) so that she may ascend to eternal life.<sup>292</sup>

Anselm’s understanding of chastity is clarified in his letter to Ermengard (*Ep.* 134). As well as the designation for restored sexual continence, he believed it to be the virtue most akin to virginity that a married woman could demonstrate. Little is known about Ermengard except that her husband wanted to become a monk. Anselm praised her chastity and encouraged her to support her husband for the sake of salvation. He did not think that she should stand in the way of her husband’s pious ambition. He believed that true love manifests itself in service of the other and that she should support her husband because of their ‘true mutual affection’. This alone, he wrote, would bring them both to salvation: ‘By no care or mutual love can you snatch your bodies away from temporal death; whereas, if you know how to rule your love, you can acquire eternal life for your souls.’<sup>293</sup> Fröhlich suggests that this letter expresses Anselm’s belief that the religious life is the surest route to salvation. He argues that for Anselm: ‘...there is no question of the love that Ermengard might have for her husband; his desire to become a monk is all important and she is obliged to grant it to him’.<sup>294</sup>

Fröhlich points out that this pillar of Anselm’s thought on the religious life is expressed forcibly in his letter to his friend, Henry (*Ep.* 121). Anselm encouraged Henry to proceed quickly to his monastic profession, warning of the dangers of trying to live in the world and win salvation: ‘If you say, ‘not only monks reach salvation’, it is true. But who are more certain [to do so], who higher?’<sup>295</sup> He reinforces his argument by posing a rhetorical question, which juxtaposes worldly life against religious life: ‘Ponder, therefore, dear friend: how much of the world’s glory you may acquire, what would be the end, and in the end what would be the fruit, what would be the reward? And on the other hand, [ponder] what awaits those who trample the glory

---

<sup>291</sup> *Ep.* 168 (c.1094/5) [*italics added*]

<sup>292</sup> *Ep.* 169 (c.1095)

<sup>293</sup> *Ep.* 134 (c.1079/92)

<sup>294</sup> Fröhlich, W. *trns.* (1990) p.312n1

<sup>295</sup> *Ep.* 121 (c.1086)

of the world underfoot.’<sup>296</sup> Similarly, Anselm cautions Ermengard not to prevent her husband from becoming a monk for the sake of temporal goods. He contrasts the ‘transitory’ advantages of the world with the ‘certain and eternal privileges’ of heaven.<sup>297</sup> Also, just as he exhorted Henry to hasten into monastic life in case death should take him, he encouraged Ermengard to let her husband go before it was too late.<sup>298</sup> Anselm compares her to a widow, saying: ‘For if God takes care of widows who are not widows for his sake, how much more richly will he cherish her whom he knows to be freely a widow for the sake of his love.’<sup>299</sup> The belief undergirding Anselm’s letter to Ermengard is that wives should support their husbands for the sake of the kingdom.

Anselm was confident that Ermengard would act in her husband’s best interests because she was virtuous herself. In *Ep.* 134 he concentrates on her chastity as the outward sign of her interior purity. He begins by praising God for allowing her ‘...to bear so bravely numerous tribulations for the sake of preserving chastity’.<sup>300</sup> The kind of ‘tribulations’ Anselm was referring to is unknown, but Ermengard’s moral constancy had clearly impressed him; he later addresses her, ‘lady of proven chastity’. In short, Anselm’s letter suggests that he believed Ermengard’s chastity to signify that she was disposed towards moral rectitude (justice). In the *Monologion*, he expressed his belief that correctly ordered love and desire is foundational to the attainment of eternal happiness.<sup>301</sup> He was confident that Ermengard would will the best for her husband and herself out of love for him and for God. He admonishes her:

Mark this, therefore, dearest lady, mark this, strong, wise woman, mark this: if you [prevent your husband] you will not be governing your love well, nor will you be loving properly the husband who loves you. [...] ...if, loving his good, you make it your own...the more closely and securely you commit yourself to divine protection.<sup>302</sup>

In the next section of this chapter it is suggested that Anselm’s presentation of Mary’s perfect virginity reveals his similarity to Alcuin of York (d.c.804). Here, too,

---

<sup>296</sup> *Ep.* 121 (c.1086)

<sup>297</sup> *Ep.* 134 (c.1079/92)

<sup>298</sup> To Henry, he wrote: ‘Hurry therefore, towards so great a good because you will not reach the supreme good more successfully by any other means. I have seen many who promised this and then delayed it, whom death carried off so they were able neither to complete the affairs holding them back nor begin what they had promised.’ *Ep.* 121 (c.1086)

<sup>299</sup> *Ep.* 134 (c.1079/92)

<sup>300</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>301</sup> *Mon.* 74

<sup>302</sup> *Ep.* 134 (c.1079/92)

Anselm's readiness to praise women for preserving chastity, in spite of living in the world, associates him with Alcuin. Rolph Barlow Page (1909) notes that Alcuin found some of his lay contemporaries praiseworthy: 'There are some honorable, upright men among them, some virtuous women; first and foremost among the latter is the 'noblest of the noble,' the fair Gundrada. She it was who, amid the license of the court, had attained to the enviable reputation of being chaste as no other lady of the day.'<sup>303</sup> Like Anselm, Alcuin wrote to Gundrada on account of her chastity, encouraging her '...to be an example to the other ladies of the court, to the end that they may keep themselves from falling, and so remain noble in morals as in birth'.<sup>304</sup>

### C. The Perpetual Virginité of Mary

In his Marian writings Anselm presents Mary as a perfect virgin throughout her life. By referring to her as 'just virgin' he emphasises the connection between her virginity and the rectitude of her will. In this he echoed Ambrose who taught that Mary was a virgin in her mind as well as her body. In a letter to his sister, Marcellina, a consecrated virgin, Ambrose described Mary as her teacher in the school of virginity. He asked, 'Who [was] more chaste than she, who gave birth to a body without bodily contact?'<sup>305</sup> He proceeded to explain that her virginity extended beyond bodily integrity to include the uprightness of her mind: '...[she] never mixed the sincerity of her affections with duplicity'.<sup>306</sup> For Anselm, Mary's virginity is the exterior sign of her interior purity. He juxtaposes references to her virginity with others to her freedom from sin which he believed to affect the will. The following citation emphasises Mary's cooperation with Christ in the work of redemption; her virginity has a causal role in the ascent of the soul to spousal union with God through Christ:

How can I speak worthily  
of the mother of the Creator and Saviour,  
by whose sanctity my sins are purged,  
by whose integrity incorruptibility is given me,  
by whose virginity my soul falls in love with its Lord  
and is married to God.<sup>307</sup>

---

<sup>303</sup> Page, R.B. (1909) p.59

<sup>304</sup> Ibid. p.58; cf. Alcuin, *Ep.* 241

<sup>305</sup> Ambrose, *De virginibus* 2, 7 in, Gambero, L. (1999) p.191

<sup>306</sup> Ibid. p.191

<sup>307</sup> *Prayer to St Mary* 3, Ward, B. *trns.* (1973) p.116

J.S. Bruder (1939) only briefly explores Anselm's understanding of Mary's virginity, which he interprets as an affirmation of traditional Catholic teaching regarding the perpetual virginity. This is the doctrine that her virginity remained intact before, during and after the birth of Christ: *ante partum*, *in partu* and *post partum*. Mary's perfect virginity was consistently advocated in the early church (using the word, ἀειπαρθενος), with only limited opposition from Origen (c.185-254) and Tertullian (c.160-225).<sup>308</sup> Scholars agree that it was first systematically expounded by Jerome, although doubts have been raised regarding the strength of his support for Mary's virginity *in partu* (more below). Bruder argues that Anselm unequivocally acceded to the belief that Mary was a virgin before the birth of Christ. He also finds 'incidental' support that Anselm believed in her virginity *in partu* and *post partum*. This analysis builds on Bruder's researches but also seeks to move beyond them. It asserts that his Marian writings positively endorse all three dimensions of the doctrine of Mary's perpetual virginity. His emphasis on Mary's justness and his use of words like 'integrity' to describe her moral and physical condition suggests that he believed her to be – and have been throughout her life – a perfect virgin. This is what he meant by praising her purity as 'surpassing the angels'<sup>309</sup> of whom she is 'marvel'<sup>310</sup> and 'Queen'.<sup>311</sup> These citations come from each of his three Marian prayers indicating that a belief in Mary's unadulterated purity runs throughout his Mariology. His Marian writings demonstrate that he believed Mary's virginity to be the expression of her purity *par excellence*. The following discussion explores Anselm's position on each of the three tenets of the doctrine of her perpetual virginity.

#### **i. Mary's virginity *ante partum***

Anselm believed Mary to have been a virgin prior to the birth of Christ: *ante partum*. The atonement theology of *Cur Deus Homo* affirms this by explaining that it was appropriate for Christ to be born of a virgin: '...it is extremely fitting that the man who is to be created from a woman without a man, should be brought forth by a virgin'.<sup>312</sup> Notwithstanding his ambiguity about precisely *when* she was purified,

<sup>308</sup> Cf. Bruder, J.S. (1939) p.23; *ODCC* p.867

<sup>309</sup> *Prayer to St Mary 1*, Ward, B. *trns.* (1973) p.108

<sup>310</sup> *Prayer to St Mary 2*, Ward, B. *trns.* (1973) p.110

<sup>311</sup> *Prayer to St Mary 3*, Ward, B. *trns.* (1973) p.115

<sup>312</sup> II *CDH* 8

Anselm believed her to have been a virgin in anticipation of Christ's conception.<sup>313</sup> His explanation of how the Incarnation was accomplished by the threefold operation of the Trinity describes her four times as 'the Virgin'.<sup>314</sup>

Whilst he regarded her just virginity as integral to the 'fittingness' of the circumstances of Christ's conception it was not regarded as constitutive of his righteousness. Central to Anselm's atonement theology is the idea that it was essential for Christ to belong to the race of Adam according to his human nature. Only then would he share humanity's 'obligation' to repay its debt of honour to God: 'For, just as it is right that it should be a human being who should pay recompense for the guilt of humanity, it is likewise necessary that the person paying recompense should be identical with the sinner, or a member of the same race.'<sup>315</sup> So, Anselm believed that the saviour required a common origin with the race he came to redeem. He also believed that Christ had to be free from sin in order to be able to die voluntarily rather than obligatorily. He explains that 'mortality' is not 'a property of pure human nature, rather of human nature which is corrupt'.<sup>316</sup> Christ's death was to be a voluntary self-sacrifice, rather than a necessity, so he had to be without sin. His divine nature, rather than his mother's humanity, was the origin of his righteousness: '...between his natures whatever he had of the human he accepted from the divine'.<sup>317</sup>

Anselm's faith in the virginity of Mary *ante partum* is affirmed several times in his three Marian *orationes*. He regarded her divine maternity as the central mystery of her life and mission. The miracle of her virginity was that it fitted her to become the Mother of God. His first *Prayer to St Mary* begins by affirming that she is second only to God in the economy of salvation. He offers her virginal maternity as the explanation for this great privilege:

Mary, holy Mary,  
among the holy ones the most holy after God.  
Mother with virginity to be wondered at,  
Virgin with virginity to be cherished,  
you bore the Son of the most High,  
and brought forth the Saviour of the lost human race.<sup>318</sup>

---

<sup>313</sup> Cf. *DCV* 18, 19

<sup>314</sup> Cf. *DCV* 18

<sup>315</sup> II *CDH* 8

<sup>316</sup> II *CDH* 11

<sup>317</sup> *DCV* 21

<sup>318</sup> *Prayer to St Mary* 1, Ward, B. *trns.* (1973) p.107

In these opening words of the prayer, priority is given to Mary's virginal motherhood. Her soteriological power, which Anselm proceeds to praise, was consequent upon her virginity, remarkable because of its fecundity. This is the only explicit reference to Mary's virginity in the first prayer. In the opening lines of his second prayer it appears again as the first stage in a threefold Marian mystery. In the unfolding story of salvation Mary was first and foremost a virgin, then a mother and finally Christ's counterpart in the accomplishment of human redemption:

By your blessed virginity you have made all integrity sacred,  
and by your glorious child-bearing  
you have brought salvation to all fruitfulness.<sup>319</sup>

In his third prayer, Anselm refers to Mary as having 'conceived in chastity' (*tu casta concepisti*). We have observed that Anselm used *castitas* and its derivatives in his letters to women to refer to: (1) the highest form of sexual continence that a normal married woman could enjoy; (2) restored sexual continence after virginity has been lost. It could be seen as surprising that *casta* occurs here since neither of these definitions apply to Mary. However, his desire to emphasise the role of women in salvation history in his other works, makes it reasonable to suggest that he meant here to be inclusive. The paradigm for this is offered in *Cur Deus Homo*, which explains why a woman should have been a causal agent in redemption:

...women might lose hope that they have a part in the destiny of the blessed ones, in view of the fact that such great evil proceeded from a woman: in order to prevent this, it is right that an equivalent good should proceed from a woman, so as to rebuild their hope.<sup>320</sup>

Perhaps Anselm meant to show that Mary's virginity was a model for married women and those who had lost virginity as well as consecrated virgins without any sexual experience at all. This position finds precedent in the writings of Ambrose. His letter to Marcellina has already been mentioned but he also wrote a treatise explaining: 'This woman is the model of virginity. For such was Mary, that the life of this one woman may be an example for all.'<sup>321</sup> Be this as it may, his use of *casta* here is only

---

<sup>319</sup> *Prayer to St Mary* 2, Ward, B. *trns.* (1973) p.110

<sup>320</sup> II *CDH* 8

<sup>321</sup> Ambrose, *De virginibus* 2, 7 in, Gambero, L. (1999) p.191

a temporary deviation from his usual consistent style, which returns in the following line: ‘...there is no salvation except what you brought forth as a virgin’.<sup>322</sup>

## ii. Mary’s virginity *in partu*

Citations from Anselm supporting Mary’s virginity *ante partum* are generally also applicable as support for his belief in her virginity *in partu*. Aside from those referring to her moral condition at the nativity the excerpts already given could be used here. One difficulty arising from an attempt to discern Anselm’s mind on whether Mary was a virgin *in partu* is that by his time it was no longer in contention. Jerome had penned *The Perpetual Virginity of Blessed Mary* against Helvidius but Anselm was not reacting against heresy. As a result, he did not systematically define his understanding of Mary’s perpetual virginity and his writings tend to conflate its three dimensions. For Bruder, this means that Anselm’s works treat Mary’s virginity *in partu* (and *post partum*) only incidentally: ‘By the time Saint Anselm came upon the scene the question was completely settled and, as no one was openly denying the fact, he does not touch upon the subject other than in passing.’<sup>323</sup> For Bruder, Anselm’s relative silence suggests that he accepted the general view.

It was similarly characteristic of Alcuin of York – with whom Anselm has already been linked – to refer to Mary’s virginity without making it clear which dimension he meant at any one time. Yet, his ambiguity did not negate his complete acceptance of her perpetual virginity: ‘She was a virgin before the birth, during it and after it’.<sup>324</sup> Among Alcuin’s Marian writings is an analogy to explain how Mary completely absorbed the divine power by which she became Christ’s Mother. It is provided here in full because it illustrates the ambiguity among medieval authors to which we are referring:

The Blessed Virgin Mary, preserving the integrity of her body, brought Christ forth as both God and man. By this act she was like the purest wool, resplendent in her virginity, and surpassing all other virgins under heaven. Such she was and so great, that it was her dignity alone to receive the divine nature of the Son of God within herself. For just as wool takes up purple dye, and so becomes purple wool worthy of the imperial dignity, which non may wear unless they be nobly born,

---

<sup>322</sup> *Prayer to St Mary* 3, Ward, B. *trns.* (1973) p.122

<sup>323</sup> Bruder, J.S. (1939) p.23

<sup>324</sup> Alcuin, *The Virgin Mary* in, Dales, D. *ed.* (2004) p.84

so the Holy Spirit approached the blessed Virgin, and the power of the Most High overshadowed her, that she might become as wool dyed purple with divinity, and thereby become alone most worthy of an eternal Kingdom. Thus the Blessed Virgin Mary was made both *Theotokos* and ‘Christ-bearer’.<sup>325</sup>

Alcuin’s analogy of dying wool would have been readily comprehensible but his passage conflates at least two dimensions of the doctrine of Mary’s perpetual virginity. He refers to her virginity *in partu*, when he says that she did not lose her ‘resplendent’ virginity in the ‘act’ of giving birth to Christ. He also refers to her virginity *ante partum*, when he describes her as ‘the blessed Virgin’ at the moment of the annunciation. There are a plethora of medieval texts like this, demonstrating that Anselm worked within a tradition where Mary’s perpetual virginity was unquestioned and theologians spoke of it without delineating its three dimensions.

We are compelled to interpret Anselm’s sometimes ambiguous references to Mary’s virginity in light of his overarching concern for ‘fittingness’ in the circumstances of Christ’s conception and birth: ‘Indeed it was fitting that the Virgin should shine with a purity which was only exceeded by God’s own, because it was to her that God the Father disposed to give his only Son, whom he loved in his heart as equal to himself...’<sup>326</sup> This citation from *De Conceptu Virginali* shares its sentiment with his third *Prayer to St Mary*, which includes the words: ‘...at what height do I behold the place of Mary! Nothing equals Mary, nothing but God is greater than Mary’.<sup>327</sup> Anselm maintained a belief in Mary’s superlative virginity throughout his life and we must interpret positively phrases from his Marian writings which seem to suggest that he believed in her virginity *in partu*. For example, in the following citation he implies that without any loss of virginity, she brought the God-Man into the world:

O Lady, to be wondered at for your unparalleled virginity;  
to be venerated for a holiness beyond all reckoning –  
you showed to the world its Lord and its God  
whom it had not known. [...]  
You gave birth to the restorer of the world  
for whom the lost world longed.  
You brought forth the world’s reconciliation,  
which, in its guilt, it did not have before.<sup>328</sup>

---

<sup>325</sup> Alcuin, *The Virgin Mary* in, Dales, D. ed. (2004) p.83

<sup>326</sup> DCV 18

<sup>327</sup> *Prayer to St Mary* 3, Ward, B. trms. (1973) p.120

<sup>328</sup> Ibid. p.118

### iii. Mary's virginity *post partum*

It seems likely that Anselm believed Mary to have remained a virgin *post partum* even though she was married. Joseph is rarely mentioned by Anselm and he does not pursue Jerome's line of argument that he was a virgin too: 'Would he [Joseph], who knew such great wonders, have dared touch the temple of God, the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit, the Mother of his Lord?'<sup>329</sup> Anselm's *Prayer to Christ* testifies that Jesus was Mary's only son. He contemplates Mary looking up at her son upon the cross and her anguish when, in the knowledge of his impending death, he gave her into the care of his disciple:

My most merciful Lady,  
what can I say about the fountains  
that flowed from your most pure eyes  
when you saw your only Son before you,  
bound, beaten and hurt? [...]  
How can I judge what sobs troubled your most pure breast  
when you heard, 'Woman, behold you son,'  
and the disciple, 'Behold, your mother,'  
when you received as a son  
the disciple in place of the master,  
the servant for the lord?<sup>330</sup>

Anselm believed that upon her son's death Mary adopted his disciple as his substitute, albeit of inferior status. Twice here Mary is described as 'pure', in the full text she is also called 'matchless'. Perhaps it is suggestive that Anselm juxtaposed these references to her moral rectitude alongside a passage emphasising her bond with her only son and the fact that provision had to be made for her after his death.

If Anselm did believe in Mary's virginity *post partum*, as he appears to, his writings show that he did not wish it to overshadow the reality of her motherhood. He balances references to Mary's superlative virginity with statements about the physical dimensions of motherhood, such as breast feeding. His allusions to Mary's womb, which describe Christ as its 'fruit', reiterate a long exegetical tradition of Lk 1.42.<sup>331</sup> His more graphic statements, emphasising her physical maternity, also have a long tradition. He describes her as the '...nurse of the redeemer of my flesh, who gave

---

<sup>329</sup> Jerome, *De virginitate perpetua* 7 in, Gambero, L. (1999) p.207; cf. *De virginitate perpetua* 19

<sup>330</sup> *Prayer to Christ*, Ward, B. *trns.* (1973) p.96

<sup>331</sup> Cf. *Prayer to St Mary* 1, 2, 3, Ward, B. *trns.* (1973) p.109, 110, 117, 119, 126

suck to the Saviour of my whole being...'<sup>332</sup> Likewise, she '...was willing to give him milk at her breast...'<sup>333</sup> These citations emphasise Christ's true humanity; like any child of Adam he relied upon his mother for life and food. They balance exclamations of her virginal purity by providing an insight into the realities of motherhood. In this, Anselm's writings are similar to those of Jerome who grounded her virginity – and the birth of Christ – in the realities of normal childbirth. The following citation is included in the analysis of Luigi Gambero (1999) but his conclusion, concerning Jerome's intention, differs. He interprets Jerome's description of Jesus' birth as exhibiting '...some scepticism regarding the theme of *virginitas in partu*, possibly because this truth, which is not explicitly affirmed in Scripture, was handed down by the apocrypha'.<sup>334</sup>

If every day the hands of God form babies in their mothers' wombs, why blush to think that Mary, after the birth of Jesus, became a real wife? If they find this disgraceful, then they should not believe that God was born by passing through the genital organs of a Virgin. [...] Now add, if you will, the other humiliations of nature: the womb growing larger for nine months, the nausea, the birth, the blood, the swaddling-clothes. Picture to yourself the baby wrapped in the usual protective membranes... We do not blush; we are not silent about these matters.<sup>335</sup>

The fact that Jerome refers to Mary as a 'Virgin' in the course of his description suggests that he did accede to the belief that she was a virgin *in partu* in the context of normal maternal experience. Even though Anselm was fairly silent, he did not blush either; nowhere in his writings does he contradict Jerome or any of the Fathers regarding the virginity of Mary *in partu*. As before three factors serve to suggest that he probably acceded to the belief: (1) there was general agreement by his time; (2) he desired 'fittingness' in respect of Mary's role in the incarnation; (3) he believed that Mary should be second only to God in terms of moral purity. These considerations lie behind his entire approach to Mary and the exalted terms in which he describes her 'unparalleled virginity',<sup>336</sup> suggests that he believed it to be absolute.

---

<sup>332</sup> *Prayer to St Mary* 3, Ward, B. *trns.* (1973) p.116

<sup>333</sup> *Ibid.* p.126

<sup>334</sup> Gambero, L. (1999) p.208

<sup>335</sup> Jerome, *De virginitate perpetua* 19 in, Gambero, L. (1999) p.208

<sup>336</sup> *Prayer to St Mary* 3, Ward, B. *trns.* (1973) p.118

#### D. Moral restoration in Anselm's letters to women and Marian writings

The foregoing analysis suggested that the virtue of 'virginity' (*virginitas*) is central to the moral-theological vision of Anselm's letters to women and his Marian writings. He believed it to be an outward sign of inner justice. Therefore, he praised his female friends for demonstrating it and reproved those who did not. He also understood Mary to have been a perfect virgin before, during and after the birth of Christ: *ante partum*, *in partu* and *post partum*. He held that the particular miracle of her virginity was its fecundity because it resulted in her maternity. This analysis contests that these texts also facilitate a schema for the moral restoration of human beings who have fallen from purity into sin. Anselm's second meditation vividly describes the parlous condition of one whose virginity has been lost. He regarded the loss of virginity by fornication as a grave moral evil, symbolising the loss of justice. It has already been observed that this meditation attributes to fornication the descent of the soul from 'brightness and joy' to moral depravity.

There is some debate about whether Anselm meant 'fornication' in a spiritual or a natural sense. Benedicta Ward (1973) explains that Edward Pusey (1800-82) preferred a spiritual interpretation, arguing that 'Sin is continually in Holy Scripture spoken of as adultery against God'.<sup>337</sup> By contrast, Ward sees '...no reason for not taking it in its natural sense' but she does not exclude the possible legitimacy of both interpretations.<sup>338</sup> Neither Pusey nor Ward, however, thinks that the meditation is a lament for the loss of virginity on Anselm's part. Rather, it was written to engender remorse and initiate restoration in others. Its vivid – sometimes 'hysterical'<sup>339</sup> – language signifies the seriousness with which Anselm regarded the loss of virginity:

Cast off from God, you are cast forth to the devil. Even more, you have cast off God and embraced the devil. Wretched and obstinate harlot...<sup>340</sup>

Ward, Richard Southern (1973) and Thomas Bestul (1988) agree that the purpose of Anselm's devotional works was to transform their readers. Ward observes that they are all undergirded by a common 'pattern' comprising four stages: (1) *in cubiculum*

---

<sup>337</sup> Pusey (1856), *Meditations and Prayers to the Holy Trinity and Our Lord Jesus Christ by St Anselm of Canterbury* p.31n(a); cf. Ward, B. *trns.* (1973) p.74, 85n2

<sup>338</sup> Ward, B. *trns.* (1973) pp.74-5

<sup>339</sup> *Ibid.* p.74

<sup>340</sup> Meditation 2: *A lament for virginity unhappily lost*, Ward, B. *trns.* (1973) p.226

*meum*; (2) *excita mentem*; (3) *compunctio cordis*; (4) *in caelis*. The penitent is supposed to pass through the first three stages in order to reach the fourth. Both Anselm's letters to women and his three Marian prayers facilitate this fourfold schema for the restoration of inner purity, which he regarded as the impetus behind virtues like virginity. His letters encouraged his female friends to begin their personal journeys of repentance and reconciliation. Together with his Marian prayers, they also led their recipients through the first three stages of the restorative process.

**i. 'In cubiculum meum'**

Anselm did not intend his devotional works to be read in public but to provide material for private meditation. They were designed to facilitate the kind of prayerful encounter with God described in the *Proslogion*: 'Come now, insignificant man, fly for a moment from your affairs... Enter into the inner chamber of your soul, shut out everything save God and what can be of help in your quest for Him and having locked the door seek Him out'.<sup>341</sup> Likewise, the schema of moral restoration in his letters to women and his Marian writings requires the reader to abandon worldly distractions and reorientate the mind to God. For example, his letter to the nun Mabilia demands her complete estrangement from 'worldly things'. Anselm recommends that even her family life should be abandoned for the benefit of her spiritual life as a nun. He concludes his letter with this exhortation:

Do not be anxious to be known in the world, for so much more will God say to you, *I do not know you* [cf. Mt 25.12]. Desire to please God alone; long to know God alone and those things which help you towards this. Commend yourself to him daily...<sup>342</sup>

**ii. 'Excita mentem'**

Once it has abandoned worldly distractions to focus on God, the mind can begin the task of introspection by shaking off the 'torpor' of sin by which it is weighed down.<sup>343</sup> Ward notes that Anselm uses various synonyms for 'torpor', including 'dullness',

---

<sup>341</sup> *Pros.* 1

<sup>342</sup> *Ep.* 405 (c.1106/7)

<sup>343</sup> Whilst Ward describes this stage as 'preparation for prayer and for theological speculation', it is perhaps more accurately called the *beginning* of prayer (cf. Ward, B. *trns.* (1973) p.53).

‘weight’ and ‘sloth’.<sup>344</sup> In the following passage from his first Marian prayer he accuses sin of impeding prayer and dulling the senses:

If your weight is so great that I have no hope of being heard,  
why by your shame do you block the voice of my prayer?  
If you have made me mad with love for you,  
why have you made my senses unfeeling with your torpor?<sup>345</sup>

The second stage of Anselm’s schema involves liberating the mind from this oppression. Southern calls it: ‘mental and spiritual awakening’<sup>346</sup> and Ward explains that it means more than just setting aside distractions: ‘...it is a complete emptying by purgation, a knowledge of sin in the light of God, and an understanding of man’s situation with regard to his Creator and Redeemer’.<sup>347</sup>

The concept of ‘memory’ is central to the expression given to *excita mentem* in Anselm’s letters and his Marian prayers. In his second meditation, Anselm writes: ‘...I am tormented by a good conscience, and the memory of its rewards which I know I have lost and cannot freely regain’.<sup>348</sup> These words refer to his belief that the human will cannot regain justice of its own accord but only retain it once it has been regained. They also highlight his understanding of memory as an impetus for guilt. Recalling the rewards of a ‘good conscience’ stirs the mind to contemplate ‘the misery of loss, the grief of loss’.<sup>349</sup> Hence, Anselm attempted to draw Gunhilda back to the religious life by forcing her to remember ‘...the habit and vowed life which you rejected’.<sup>350</sup> He hoped that calling to mind the honourable estate of religious life would compel her to abandon her worldly lover. Bestul suggests that Anselm’s use of memory as an impetus behind moral restoration has its roots in ‘Book X’ of Augustine’s *Confessiones*.<sup>351</sup> Using Platonic language, Augustine described the memory as a ‘storehouse’ for the ‘images’ of ‘perceived objects’, ‘to be recalled when

---

<sup>344</sup> Ward, B. *trns.* (1973) p.53

<sup>345</sup> *Prayer to St Mary 1*, Ward, B. *trns.* (1973) p.108

<sup>346</sup> Southern, R.W. (1973) p.14

<sup>347</sup> Ward, B. *trns.* (1973) p.53

<sup>348</sup> *Meditation 2: A lament for virginity unhappily lost*, Ward, B. *trns.* (1973) p.225

<sup>349</sup> *Ibid.* p.225; God’s memory also plays an important role in the process of moral restoration articulated by Anselm. For example, he writes: ‘Lord, in remembering my wickedness, do not forget your goodness...’ (*Meditation 2: A lament for virginity unhappily lost*, Ward, B. *trns.* (1973) p.228).

<sup>350</sup> *Ep.* 168 (c.1093/4)

<sup>351</sup> See also, Marta Nussbaum (1999) p.68

needed and reconsidered'.<sup>352</sup> Like Anselm, he believed that meditating on memories from the past could influence the future:

Out of the same abundance in store, I combine with past events images of various things, whether experienced directly or believed on the basis of what I have experienced; and on this basis I reason about future actions and events and hopes...<sup>353</sup>

### iii. '*Compunctio cordis*'

The third stage in Anselm's schema for moral restoration is the most important. Ward's phrase, *compunctio cordis*, describes the anguish experienced by one who sees the reality of sin in the light of divine encounter. It also refers to the beginning of restoration by a resultant longing for union with God. She describes these dimensions of *compunctio cordis* as two 'kinds' of compunction: '...the first kind of compunction, a piercing sorrow and dread, which leads, through a realization of its resolution in the love of God, to that other compunction of longing desire for God'.<sup>354</sup> She also locates this understanding of compunction within an historical tradition, encompassing Augustine, Cassian and Benedict.<sup>355</sup>

Achieving *compunctio cordis* requires deep introspection, emotional vulnerability and longing for God; these things characterised Christian meditation after Augustine. Martha Nussbaum (1999) suggests that central to the practice of meditation in post-Augustine Christianity was the tension between 'descent' within oneself and 'ascent' to God.<sup>356</sup> The Anselmian schema of moral restoration is characterised by this tension. It begins with a turning inward: the acknowledgement of one's faults and the need for assistance. This is painful and takes the form of 'grief'; it is also the prerequisite to the 'ascent' to restoration. Hence, Anselm wrote to Gunhilda: 'See, dearest daughter, if you face these facts, how great must be the grief in your heart... If you grieve deeply I shall rejoice greatly while grieving with you... If you grieve I shall still hope for your salvation; if you do not grieve what else can I expect but your damnation?'.<sup>357</sup>

---

<sup>352</sup> Augustine, *Confessiones* X.viii (13)

<sup>353</sup> Augustine, *Confessiones* X.viii (14); cf. Bestul, T. (1988) p.602

<sup>354</sup> Ward, B. *trns.* (1973) p.54

<sup>355</sup> Cf. Ward, B. *trns.* (1973) pp.54-6

<sup>356</sup> Cf. Nussbaum, M. (1999) p.61ff.

<sup>357</sup> *Ep.* 168 (c.1093/4)

In his Marian prayers Anselm's schema takes a unique form. Mary herself is the impetus behind the realisation of one's iniquity and the focus for the consequent 'ascent' or restoration. *Compunctio cordis* takes the form of the Sacrament of Penance and Mary is the means to come to terms with sin, repent and be healed. Firstly, her purity throws vice into sharp relief enabling the sinner to recognise it. Anselm directed the following words to sin itself. They are provided in Latin as well as English, to show that they are an excellent example of his use of rhyming couplets:

Alas, what a shameful thing is the filth of sin before the brightness of holiness.	Heu pudor sordentis <b>iniquitatis</b> ,
Alas, what confusion there is for an impure conscience in the presence of shining purity.	in praesentia nitentis <b>sanctitatis!</b> Heu confusio immundae <b>conscientiae</b> , in conspectus fulgentis <b>munditiae!</b> <sup>358</sup>

Secondly, recognition of sin inspires repentance:

My sins cannot be cured unless they are confessed...  
Lady, before God and before you my sins appear vile;  
and therefore so much the more do they need  
his healing and your help.<sup>359</sup>

Thirdly, repentance leads to restoration by receptiveness to the grace Mary mediates. This final citation demonstrates that whilst Mary is the ostensible object of Anselm's meditation, her restorative power belongs to God:

Hear me, Lady,  
and make whole the soul of a sinner who is your servant,  
by virtue of the blessed fruit of your womb,  
who sits at the right hand of his almighty Father  
and is praised and glorified above all for ever. Amen.<sup>360</sup>

In short, Anselm's letters to women and his Marian prayers both exhibit the twofold character of *compunctio cordis*, the third stage of his schema of moral restoration: (1) recognition of sin; (2) longing for God.

#### iv. *'In Caelis'*

The final stage of the Anselmian schema is union with God in heaven, which Anselm regarded as the ultimate goal of Christian life. He did not believe that moral

---

<sup>358</sup> *Prayer to St Mary* 1, Ward, B. *trns.* (1973) p.108; Schmitt, F.S. *ed.* (1984) p.13

<sup>359</sup> *Prayer to St Mary* 1, Ward, B. *trns.* (1973) p.109

<sup>360</sup> *Ibid.* p.109

restoration could be entirely completed on earth. Ward observes that his prayers all end with some reference to coming to know God in his fullness.<sup>361</sup> This is true of his Marian prayers, which end by requesting Mary's intercession for the sake of his salvation. His third *Prayer to St Mary* has the most theologically compelling conclusion. It builds to a meditation on the synergy of Christ and his Mother in the economy of salvation.<sup>362</sup> His Marian prayers also reveal Anselm's confidence that Mary enjoys the bliss of eternal beatitude. He writes that on account of her fruitful virginity: '...to you the joyous company of the saints gives thanks'.<sup>363</sup> His letters to women concern future salvation, which he believed to be attainable even for those who had lost virginity. The soteriological dimensions of these letters and Anselm's Marian writings will be explored in greater depth in Chapter IV.

## CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter has analysed Anselm's understanding and presentation of virginity (*virginitas*) in his letters to women and his Marian prayers. Its main contention has been that virginity is a central concept in the moral-theological vision of both sets of texts. Throughout the analysis I have maintained that Anselm believed virginity to be the exterior manifestation of an interior rectitude of will, which he called 'justice'. The chapter began by demonstrating that Anselm understood 'justice' (*iustitia*) to mean 'rectitude of the will', which is regained and preserved by a synergy of grace and human effort. Focus then moved to his letters to women, wherein he distinguishes between two kinds of sexual continence: virginity and chastity (*castitas*). I explained that the former is the absence of sexual experience whilst the latter is the designation for sexual continence once virginity is lost. Subsequently, I argued that Anselm acceded to all three dimensions of the doctrine of Mary's perpetual virginity: *ante partum*, *in partu* and *post partum*. The analysis concluded by postulating that his letters and his Marian writings contain a schema for moral restoration after, for example, the loss of virginity. I gave an account of the schema, suggesting that it follows the fourfold 'pattern' of his prayers and meditations identified by Ward.

---

<sup>361</sup> Cf. Ward, B. *trns.* (1973) p.56

<sup>362</sup> Cf. *Prayer to St Mary* 3, Ward, B. *trns.* (1973) p.126

<sup>363</sup> *Prayer to St Mary* 2, Ward, B. *trns.* (1973) p.110

## IV SALVATION AND INTERCESSION

This chapter examines the soteriological dimensions of Anselm's theological vision in his letters to women and his Marian writings. Its unfolding argument will refer to both 'objective' and 'subjective' redemption, meaning the general salvation of humankind and individual salvation respectively. Its central assertion is that both sets of texts show salvation to be the overriding aim of earthly and heavenly friendships according to Anselm. He admonished, cajoled, advised and even threatened his female friends because he wanted them to achieve eternal happiness.<sup>364</sup> Conversely, he subjected himself to Mary for the sake of his own salvation. The analysis begins by critically exposing Anselm's preoccupation with salvation and the consequences of its perceived uncertainty in both cases. His letters to women make an explicit connection between moral rectitude and salvation. His Marian writings posit a synergetic relationship between God and Mary in the accomplishment of objective salvation. The chapter then considers the intercessory dimension of Anselm's letters and his Marian prayers. Both sets of texts demonstrate that he believed it to be advantageous to have an intercessor at court. His letters contain an earthly paradigm of intercession, which reflects his place in the medieval *realpolitik* in which the archbishop required the queen to intercede for him with the king. It does not suggest that his writings participated in the emergence of the twelfth century chivalric courtly love movement. His Marian writings include a heavenly paradigm of intercession, which credits Mary with participating in the outpouring of divine grace and love for the sake of subjective redemption.

### A. Salvation

#### i. Anselm's preoccupation with salvation in his letters to women

Whether they concern spiritual or temporal matters, Anselm's letters to women are preoccupied with salvation. They especially emphasise the uncertainty of particular salvation in order to deter his friends from becoming complacent about their moral

---

<sup>364</sup> He described heaven as a 'state of bliss', which he equated with 'being blessedly happy' (I *CDH* 24)

condition. He twice uses the scriptural phrase ‘many are called but few are chosen’ (Mt 22.14) and he issues the following warning to Countess Ida: ‘...never feel confident that you are reckoned among the chosen...’<sup>365</sup> This analysis contests that salvation is the overriding concern of his correspondence with women; to this end, his letters address themselves directly to their recipients’ souls. As the rational principle of created being the soul is regarded as the source of the good deeds that will lead to paradise. This is intimated in Anselm’s letter to Basilia, which characterises life as a ‘journey’ of continuous ascent to heaven or descent to hell according to deeds: ‘For as long as man lives, he is always moving... Whenever he does any good deed he makes one step up, and when he sins in any way he makes one step down. This ascent or descent is perceived by each soul when it leaves the body.’<sup>366</sup>

Brian Patrick McGuire (1988) argues that Anselm’s letters stand out from those of his contemporaries because they do not dwell on the expectation of the spiritual reunion of friends in heaven. Rather, their aim is to facilitate the ascent to heaven by nurturing union between the souls of good people for mutual support. McGuire focuses exclusively on Anselm’s letters to his male monastic contemporaries, observing that his overriding concern is to cultivate friendship for the sake of beatification: ‘He looked at friendship as a way to enrich the content of monastic life, which Anselm considered the best and often the only way to reach paradise.’<sup>367</sup> Anselm’s esteem for the religious life is also evident in his letters to women: he encourages Ermengard to allow her husband to join a monastery (*Ep.* 134); he exhorts Gunhilda to return to Wilton (*Ep.* 168, 169); he encourages Matilda, Countess of Tuscany, to imitate women in the religious life by carrying a veil (*Ep.* 325); he desires Atla, Countess of Blois and Chartres, to join a convent (*Ep.* 448). These and his other letters to women demonstrate that he believed the religious life to be the most effective way for women to achieve salvation. As a highly regulated way of life, Anselm considered it to be conducive to the cultivation of righteousness. In a letter to Abbess Eulalia of Shaftesbury (*Ep.* 183) he highlighted the importance of the monastic rule, as the regulating force in the religious life:

...whoever fails little by little does not make progress but falls back;  
and whoever falls back does not go upwards but downwards.

---

<sup>365</sup> *Ep.* 167 (c.1093); cf. *Ep.* 184 (c.1094/5)

<sup>366</sup> *Ep.* 420 (c.1107); cf. *Ep.* 183 (c.1094/5)

<sup>367</sup> McGuire, B.P. (1988) p.214

Therefore take care solicitously that you violate nothing, however small it may be, of the rule under which God has placed you: for so you may ascend into heaven by holy steps. May this come about with God's help!<sup>368</sup>

Like *Ep.* 420, this letter testifies to Anselm's dichotomised worldview in which the soul is either ascending to heaven or descending to hell. Here he asserts that the nun's best defence against descent is to diligently observe the precepts of her rule. We have observed that Anselm did not believe human beings to be able to regain or retain rectitude without divine grace. This citation draws attention to the same facet of his teaching by juxtaposing human effort – observance of the rule – with the need for assistance. For Anselm, the highly regulated life of a nun was the highest form of life a woman could undertake because it was the most likely to lead to beatification. By contrast, he believed in the increased vulnerability of his female friends leading secular lives and so frequently admonished them to guard against infatuation with worldly things. This is evident in one of his letters to Queen Matilda, which congratulates her on the restoration of something unknown ('those things') to her.<sup>369</sup> Having praised God as the source of all good things, Anselm warns Matilda not to neglect her journey to eternal beatitude for the sake of transient worldly glory:

Since it is my duty to encourage you to desire the heavenly kingdom, I exhort, beg and advise with as much affection as I can that you do not have more pleasure in rejoicing exceedingly in the passing glory of an earthly kingdom than in yearning for the eternal bliss of the heavenly one. *You could do this more sincerely and efficaciously if you arranged the matters subject to your authority according to the design of God rather than to the design of men.*<sup>370</sup>

The final sentence of this passage (*italics*) strikes an ominous note, reading like a rebuke. Although he does not elaborate on what is meant by the phrase, 'the design of God', Anselm's tone is direct and his advice is fairly unambiguous. The previous year Anselm had written to Matilda with concerns about her husband's choice of counsellors.<sup>371</sup> Perhaps he is referring here to those same advisors when he uses the phrase, 'the design of men'. Anselm believed that even political matters should be ordered according to the divine will. During his second period of exile (1103-5), vis-

---

<sup>368</sup> *Ep.* 183 (c.1094/5); Anselm reiterates many of these ideas in his second letter to Eulalia (*Ep.* 403)

<sup>369</sup> *Ep.* 296 (c.1103); Walter Fröhlich (1993) suggests that Anselm is referring to the remittance of 3000 marks by Robert Curthose (c.1054-1134), Duke of Normandy, to Henry I and Matilda in 1103 (cf. *Ep.* 294, 294n1, 296n1).

<sup>370</sup> *Ep.* 296 (c.1103) [*italics added*]

<sup>371</sup> Cf. *Ep.* 246 (c.1102)

à-vis the investiture crisis, he lamented his absence from England but concluded that he could not return and capitulate to Henry I because of the damage it might do to his soul: 'I do not see that he in whose power my return chiefly rests – as far as it depends on a man – agrees in this matter with the will of God, and it would not be good for my soul to disagree with God's will.'<sup>372</sup>

We have observed that Anselm's letters to women were preoccupied with salvation, even in political matters. Many of them also warned his friends not to feel certain that they were destined for salvation. Anselm explored the uncertainty of salvation in letters to Countess Ida (*Ep.* 167) and the unknown nun (*Ep.* 184). Holle Canatella (2007) asserts that Anselm's friendship with Ida was one of the most significant of his life. It lasted from his time at Bec until his death and was marked by '...reciprocity, respect, and love'.<sup>373</sup> Unfortunately, *Ep.* 167 does not yield much information about this relationship. Anselm explains that he cannot include in the letter the information about himself that Ida seeks but that he is sending their mutual friend, Dom Rainer, to give her tidings. Yet, the letter is indispensable because it contains Anselm's teaching on the uncertainty of salvation. He warns Ida not to be complacent about her own salvation, even though she leads a holy life. Anselm recalls the scriptural phrase, 'many are called but few are chosen' (Mt 22.14) and it becomes the foundation for his subsequent consideration of the uncertainty of salvation. He exhorts Ida to continue to strive diligently towards salvation even after she achieves a life of incomparable virtue: '...[strive] until you live in such a way that there are few with whom your life ought to be compared. And when you recognize that you are among the few, go on being fearful...'<sup>374</sup> Anselm proceeds to explain the second clause of Mt 22.14, '...few are chosen', implying that the saved would comprise a specific number of people, although it is impossible to know how many: 'For he who says: *few are chosen* certainly did not say how few...'<sup>375</sup>

Anselm explored the question of how many people would be saved in the first book of *Cur Deus Homo*. Although this question was not strictly within the remit of his treatise, Anselm grudgingly gave an account of his belief at Boso's request. He explained that a 'rationally calculated and perfect number' of reasoning beings is

---

<sup>372</sup> *Ep.* 346 (c.1104/5)

<sup>373</sup> Canatella, H.M. (2007) p.361

<sup>374</sup> *Ep.* 167 (c.1093)

<sup>375</sup> *Ibid.*

destined to be drawn into happy contemplation of the divine in the heavenly city. Characteristically he uses the category of ‘fittingness’ to make his point: it would have been inappropriate for God not to bestow a numerical order upon his relationship with creation. He rejects the alternative that ‘...God does not know in what number it would be best for reasoning beings to exist’.<sup>376</sup> He believed that the number of elect human beings would be determined according to quantitative and qualitative criteria. Firstly, he develops a quantitative argument asserting: ‘...it was God’s plan to make up for the number of angels who had fallen, by drawing upon the human race, which he created sinless’.<sup>377</sup> He believed that the number of human beings admitted to the heavenly city would befit the ‘perfect number’ determined by God. Therefore, the elect would at least equate to the number of fallen angels who could no longer be counted among the population of the just.

He then proceeds to outline a qualitative argument postulating that the number of the elect will actually be greater than the number of fallen angels. Although he admits that he cannot conclusively prove his supposition, Anselm suggests that at the moment of creation the number of angels did not equal the ‘perfect number’ in the mind of God. Therefore, humanity would have to yield more people than there were fallen angels in order to make up the required number.<sup>378</sup> Anselm also posits that the population of the heavenly city should represent the diversity of creation. Human beings have a place in Anselm’s soteriological vision both to make up the required number and on their own account: ‘Hence it is plain that, even if no angel had perished, human beings would none the less have their place in the heavenly city’.<sup>379</sup>

It is reasonable to suggest that the impossibility of knowing the required population of the heavenly city lay at the heart of the uncertainty about salvation expressed in Anselm’s letters. It is an implicit theme in a great number of his letters but it is particularly explicit in *Ep.* 184 to the unknown nun. At first, this letter reiterates his admonition to Ida almost exactly:

*Ep.* 167 to Ida:

My dearest friend in God, the Lord says:  
*Many are called, but few are chosen.*  
Therefore, never feel confident that you are

*Ep.* 184 to the unknown nun:

You have read, my dearest friend, that *many are called but few are chosen.*  
Therefore... never feel confident that you

---

<sup>376</sup> I *CDH* 16

<sup>377</sup> I *CDH* 16

<sup>378</sup> I *CDH* 18

<sup>379</sup> I *CDH* 18

to be reckoned among the chosen until you live in such a way that there are few with whom your life ought to be compared

And when you recognize that you are among the few, go on being fearful, because there will still be doubt as to whether you are among the chosen few until you see yourself among those few about whose election there remains no doubt. For he who says: *few are chosen* certainly did not say how few...<sup>380</sup>

are certainly among the number of the chosen unless you certainly seem to have progressed to such a degree of holiness that you are truly among the number of the few.

And when you imagine yourself to be among the number of the few, you should not yet feel secure, since you still do not know whether you are among those few who have been chosen.

For he who says that *few are chosen* does not say how few they are.<sup>381</sup>

The main distinction between these letters is that in *Ep.* 184 Anselm illustrates his admonition with examples from among the saints: Agnes (c.291-304) and Scholastica (c.480-547), the twin sister of Benedict. There are several possible explanations as to why Anselm chose these two women to illustrate his teaching. Perhaps they were in some way connected to the convent of the unknown nun. They certainly bear witness to the central tenets of Anselm's understanding of the pattern of behaviour which befitted his correspondent. Agnes was an avowed virgin who was executed for her refusal to marry the son of a Roman prefect. She may have come to Anselm's mind because of his familiarity with Ambrose who wrote a panegyric about her.<sup>382</sup> Scholastica was a consecrated virgin within the monastic framework of early Christianity. She lived the kind of highly regulated life which Anselm regarded as the surest means of ascent for women. Both Agnes and Scholastica spurned worldly things for the sake of their beatification. Thus, they exemplified Anselm's recurring teaching, which he expressed in his letter to the nun, Mabilia: '...no one can love the goods of the world and those of eternity at the same time. [...] Say with St Paul the Apostle: *The world has been crucified to me, and I to the world* [Gal 6.14]. With the same Apostle regard all the transitory things of this world as dung.'<sup>383</sup>

## ii. **Salvation not Romance: the overriding concern of Anselm's Marian writings**

Like his letters to women, Anselm's Marian writings are deeply soteriological. It is the contention of this analysis that they posit a synergetic relationship between God and Mary in the accomplishment of *objective redemption*. We have already asserted

---

<sup>380</sup> *Ep.* 167 (c.1093)

<sup>381</sup> *Ep.* 184 (c.1094/5)

<sup>382</sup> Cf. reference in *ODCC* p.25 (article, 'Agnes, St.')

<sup>383</sup> *Ep.* 405 (c.1106/7)

that Mary's *fiat* was an act of free and active cooperation with the divine will. We shall now explore Anselm's understanding of the effects of this initial act for Mary's relationship with God and, consequently, for human beings. His three Marian prayers propose a soteriological schema in which Mary is *co-redemptrix* (although he does not use this term)<sup>384</sup> on account of her virgin motherhood. They do not testify to Sally N. Vaughn's (2010) view that Anselm's Mariology contributed to the rise of romantic love by divinising sexual experience (*eros*). Nor do they support Hilda Graef's (2009 Edn) argument that Anselm's Mary was the object of a chivalric courtly quest. Anselm believed that Mary was chosen by God prior to the Incarnation to be the Mother of Christ.<sup>385</sup> His third *Prayer to St Mary* demonstrates that he also believed her to enjoy a mutually beneficial relationship with God in the accomplishment of objective redemption. In a series of profound exclamations, Anselm plots the important stages in her unfolding relationship with God. His intention in the following highly significant section is to explain why Mary has been elevated to the heights of celestial dignity and power. His opening exclamation draws attention to the great scope of her accomplishment in the redemption of creation. It acts as a catalyst for his subsequent exposition by inviting the reader to reflect on her exceptional status. He seems to challenge the reader to think anew about Mary, whose greatness was perhaps taken for granted. He cries out:

O woman [*o femina*], uniquely to be wondered at,  
and to be wondered at for your uniqueness,  
by you the elements are renewed, hell is redeemed,  
demons are trampled down and men are saved,  
even the fallen angels are restored to their place.<sup>386</sup>

The first two lines of this citation are the most important because they attempt to provoke the reader to acknowledge Mary's uniqueness and whet the appetite for Anselm's subsequent exposition. Having expressed his amazement at Mary's exalted position, Anselm proceeds to offer a twofold explanation of her superlative dignity. The following citations are provided in Latin, as well as English, to emphasise the beauty and force of his prose. Firstly, her pure maternity breathed new life into creation: 'O woman full and overflowing with grace, plenty flows from you to make

---

<sup>384</sup> Instead Anselm employs phrases like *mundi reconciliatrix* ('reconciler of the world'), cf. *Prayer to St Mary* 2, Ward, B. *trns.* (1973) p.113.

<sup>385</sup> Cf. *DCV* 18

<sup>386</sup> *Prayer to St Mary* 3, Ward, B. *trns.* (1973) p.120

all creatures green again' (*O femina plena et superplena gratia, de cuius plenitudinis exundantia respersa sic revirescit omnis creatura!*).<sup>387</sup> Anselm equated being alive with being ruled over and used by God. He credited the Incarnation through Mary with the restoration of creation to God:

Heaven, stars, earth, waters, day and night,  
and whatever was in the power or use of men was guilty;  
they rejoice now, Lady...  
They are brought back to life and give thanks.  
For all things were as if dead...  
And now they bound with joy,  
in a new and inestimable grace,  
for they know the very God, the Creator,  
not only ruling invisibly over them all  
but visibly among them, sanctifying them by use.  
So much good has come into the world  
through the blessed fruit of Mary's womb.<sup>388</sup>

Secondly, her perpetual virginity gave honour to God: 'O virgin blessed and ever blessed, whose blessing is upon all nature, not only is the creature blessed by the Creator, but the Creator is blessed by the creature too' (*O virgo benedicta et superbenedicta, per cuius benedictionem benedicitur omnis natura, non solum create a creatore, sed et creator a creatura!*).<sup>389</sup> In respect of both of these propositions, Anselm's clever juxtapositions (*plena, superplena; benedicta, superbenedicta; creata, creatore; creator, creatura; etcetera*) give life and vigour to his theology. They clearly suggest that Anselm believed Mary's soteriological status to be consequent upon her decisive role in the recreation of the world through her virginal motherhood.

It would be unfortunate to underestimate the importance of Mary in Anselm's understanding of objective redemption. His third Marian prayer clearly attests to a synergism between her and God in the recreation of the world. Among modern scholars, only Sally N. Vaughn acknowledges the profound Mariological dimension of his soteriology. She does so in the context of unfolding her argument that Anselm's letters to women were seminal to the emergence of the romantic love movement in the late twelfth century. Vaughn's article challenges C. Stephen Jaeger (2010) who mapped the development of the Christian understanding of love from 'Ciceronian, all male, and sexual only in the language used...' to courtly love which

---

<sup>387</sup> *Prayer to St Mary* 3, Ward, B. *trns.* (1973) p.120; Schmitt, F.S. *ed.* (1984) vols.3-6, p.21, lines 84-5

<sup>388</sup> *Prayer to St Mary* 3, Ward, B. *trns.* (1973) pp.118-9

<sup>389</sup> *Prayer to St Mary* 3, Ward, B. *trns.* (1973) p.120; Schmitt, F.S. *ed.* (1984) vols.3-6, p.21, lines 85-7

gave a new prominence to women and erotic love (alongside ‘agape’).<sup>390</sup> Jaeger locates Anselm’s letters in the first phase of this development, crediting the works of his younger contemporary, Peter Abelard (c.1079-1142), as being foundational to the rise of a romantic love paradigm in theology. Vaughn rightly points out that ‘...[Anselm] had a number of vibrant and close friendships with women as well as men’.<sup>391</sup> Her thesis is that he ‘...interpreted [friendship’s] ideal state in chaste male-female relationships and in married love as profoundly ennobling’.<sup>392</sup> In particular, she asserts that Anselm developed his ideas in his Marian prayers, in contemplation of ‘...her womanly nature as it related to the universe... As he contemplated the role of Mary and its reflection in the roles of women, especially married women, Anselm developed theological theories that were foundational to the development of the twelfth-century concepts of courtly love and to Western romantic love in general.’<sup>393</sup> Vaughn’s consideration of the Mariological vision undergirding his letters to women centres on the passage from his third prayer which follows directly from the citations given above. She provides the following passage in full saying, ‘Let us consider Anselm’s words in all their majesty’:<sup>394</sup>

All nature is created by God and God is born of Mary.  
 God created all things, and Mary gave birth to God.  
 God who made all things made himself of Mary,  
 and thus he refashioned everything he had made.  
 He who was able to make all things out of nothing  
     refused to remake it by force,  
     but first became the Son of Mary.  
 So God is the Father of all created things,  
     and Mary is the mother of all re-created things.  
 God is the Father of all that is established,  
     and Mary is the mother of all that is re-established.  
 For God gave birth to him by whom all things were made  
     and Mary brought forth him by whom all are saved.  
 God brought forth him without whom nothing is,  
     Mary bore him without whom nothing is good.  
 O truly, ‘the Lord is with you’,  
     to whom the Lord gave himself,  
     that all nature in you might be in him.<sup>395</sup>

---

<sup>390</sup> Vaughn, S.N. (2010) p.55

<sup>391</sup> Ibid. p.55

<sup>392</sup> Ibid. p.55

<sup>393</sup> Ibid. p.55

<sup>394</sup> Ibid. p.69

<sup>395</sup> *Prayer to St Mary* 3, Ward, B. *trns.* (1973) pp.120-1

Glittering prose and daring theology make this passage extraordinary. For Vaughn, it testifies that Anselm believed in a profound ‘reciprocity’ between God and Mary in the accomplishment of objective redemption. She interprets Anselm as saying that through Mary’s giving birth to Christ, God incorporated humanity into himself. By juxtaposing God and Mary, Anselm reaffirms the truth of the Incarnation, drawing attention to the union of divinity and humanity by which the incarnate Christ was constituted. It is a creative, restorative and salvific corporeal union. Anselm’s final sentence proclaims that God gave himself to Mary so that, paradoxically, she might be fully possessed by him. It reflects his teaching in *De Conceptu Virginali* that whatever Christ had of human nature he accepted from the divine.<sup>396</sup> Even in the act of giving, Anselm reflects, the dominance of divinity over humanity means that it acts like gravity drawing human nature to itself. Vaughn’s interpretation of Anselm’s understanding of the union of divinity and humanity is different: ‘Implied here is the union of God and Mary into one flesh, an analogy for sexual union...’<sup>397</sup> She speculates: ‘In the re-creation of the universe, perhaps sexual love was also transformed, because human beings, sharing God’s nature once more, were freed from sin’.<sup>398</sup>

Vaughn’s raising of the profile of Anselm’s letters to women was desperately needed, they were not explored by Adele Fiske (1961) and given only limited attention by Richard Southern (1959, 1990). Like Vaughn, this study has repeatedly emphasised that they are passionate and theologically daring expressions of friendship. Her brief exploration of Anselm’s Mariology is also welcome, especially her acknowledgment of the ‘reciprocity’ between God and Mary in objective redemption. Unfortunately, however, her analysis of Anselm’s letters and his Marian prayers overstretches the evidence; she goes beyond the limits of credulity by reading romance and courtly love into texts which epitomise the pre-courtly period. The substance of Anselm’s letters to women reflects the pillars of the first phase described by Jaeger; they are not erotic but ‘...idealistic, spiritual, chastely passionate, morally instructive, and reverential...’<sup>399</sup> Likewise, his Marian writings use romantic language but their purpose is not the rehabilitation of sexual love. They propose an Incarnational paradigm, which includes a new understanding of the free and active

---

<sup>396</sup> Cf. *DCV* 21

<sup>397</sup> Vaughn, S.N. (2010) p.70

<sup>398</sup> *Ibid.* p.70

<sup>399</sup> *Ibid.* p.54

role played by human beings in redemption. Although he does not use the term, Anselm proposes that Mary is *co-redemptrix* with God on account of their spiritual, not pseudo-sexual, accomplishment of Christ's birth. They are united not in sexual love but in the person of Jesus Christ with his two natures. Hence, Anselm says: 'God gave his own Son...and of Mary was then born a Son not another but the same one, that naturally one might be the Son of God and of Mary.'<sup>400</sup>

Vaughn is not, however, the only scholar to have interpreted Anselm's Mariology in connection with the emergent courtly love movement. Hilda Graef refers to him as 'the knight of Mary' and reads into his prayers the knightly pursuit of a noble lady. Passages which would seem to support such a view include: 'O highly exalted... O beautiful to gaze upon... Lady, wait for the weakness of him who follows you... Have mercy, Lady, upon the soul that pants after you with longing'.<sup>401</sup> Anselm's use of the term 'Lady' (*domina*) gives the impression of nobility and it is regularly employed throughout his three Marian prayers. In his first prayer, it is used five times on its own and several times in conjunction with a variety of adjectives; for example, 'Good Lady' (*pia domina*).<sup>402</sup> In his second prayer, it is also used five times and with a greater variety of adjectives; for example, 'Great Lady' (*domina magna*)<sup>403</sup> and 'most gentle Lady' (*domina clementissima*).<sup>404</sup> In his third prayer, it is used thirteen times; for example, 'great Lady' (*domina magna*)<sup>405</sup> and 'my Lady' (*dominam meam*). This liberal scattering of *domina* throughout Anselm's Marian prayers creates the impression that he is addressing himself in the romantic language of courtly love to a spiritual version of a royal woman. Graef asserts: '...divine activities are attributed to Mary, on account of her divine motherhood, followed by personal effusions reflecting the spirit of courtly love in a religious setting. The great Theotokos, who is also the tender Mother suckling her child, now becomes the beautiful Lady, delightful to behold and to love, the spiritual counterpart of the worldly mistress of the knight.'<sup>406</sup>

There are two other ways in which the content of Anselm's Marian prayers resonates with courtly love themes as they are described by Marina Warner (1983);

---

<sup>400</sup> *Prayer to St Mary* 3, Ward, B. *trns.* (1973) p.120

<sup>401</sup> *Ibid.* p.120

<sup>402</sup> *Prayer to St Mary* 1, Ward, B. *trns.* (1973) p.107

<sup>403</sup> *Prayer to St Mary* 2, Ward, B. *trns.* (1973) p.110

<sup>404</sup> *Ibid.* p.110, 111 (*mitissima*)

<sup>405</sup> *Prayer to St Mary* 3, Ward, B. *trns.* (1973) p.115, 124

<sup>406</sup> Graef, H. (2009 Edn) p.167

although, of course, Anselm's writings subvert the courtly love paradigm by purifying the intentions of the knight and the moral rectitude of its object. Firstly, Mary seems to be portrayed as the archetypal feudal lady who is the object of her vassal's loyalty and affection because she offers him protection; he calls her, 'most mighty helper'.<sup>407</sup> Warner comments: 'In her traditional aspect of queen, she [Mary] blended in easily with the aristocratic lady of the lyricists' passion...'<sup>408</sup> Secondly, proximity to Mary seems to cause Anselm great emotional turmoil just as intimacy with a noble lady did for the knight; he cries out, '...I blush before the gaze of such purity... I shudder, Lady, to show you all my foul state, lest it makes you shudder at the sight of me'.<sup>409</sup> For him, closeness to Mary resulted in a keener, self-abasing knowledge of one's own moral parlousness, rancour and filth compared to the sublimity of her purity. Warner describes the highly charged character of troubadour literature: '...it needs only the first-hand experience of a love affair for anyone to understand that yearning, pain and frustration do not necessarily cease with the attainment of the beloved object, but that indeed possession itself can exacerbate the fear of loss, the sensitivity to pain, and set the pendulum of the human heart in an anguished and erratic motion, and that in the very midst of union and delight the loved one can seem even more remote than before...'<sup>410</sup>

Anselm's Marian prayers demonstrate all of these characteristics of romantic and courtly love literature. However, it is disingenuous to associate Anselm with a movement that, as Warner clarifies, did not truly emerge until the late twelfth/early thirteenth century.<sup>411</sup> She is highly critical of the tendency to confuse courtly love and devotion to Mary in analysis of the late eleventh/early twelfth century: '...these two strands of medieval thought have been confused and the cult of the Virgin is traditionally seen as both a cause and an effect of courtly love. Such thinking is a crude amalgamation of two independent and disparate social currents.'<sup>412</sup> Anselm's Marian writings use the language of courtly love but, as Southern says, '...his aim was not that of romance – the possession of a person: his aim was the fulfilment of a

---

<sup>407</sup> *Prayer to St Mary* 3, Ward, B. *trns.* (1973) p.116

<sup>408</sup> Warner, M. (1983) p.147

<sup>409</sup> *Prayer to St Mary* 1, Ward, B. *trns.* (1973) p.108

<sup>410</sup> Warner, M. (1983) p.137

<sup>411</sup> Cf. Warner, M. (1983) p.137

<sup>412</sup> Warner, M. (1983) p.134

purpose'.<sup>413</sup> Anselm's purpose was the salvation of souls and his Marian prayers demonstrate his thinking on Mary's role in both objective and subjective redemption.

## **B. Intercession**

### **i. Queenship and Intercession in Anselm's letters to women**

Anselm's letters to royal women, especially Queen Matilda of England, testify that he stood on the cusp of an emerging epoch in ideas about the role of the medieval queen. They give intellectual expression to the reality of medieval monarchy in which, Lois Huneycutt (1989) and Lisa Hilton (2008) show, queens were often very dominant figures. They managed property, issued decrees and sometimes governed as regents when their husbands were overseas. Huneycutt's study of three medieval queens, including Matilda, leads her to reject the view that increased central administration and church reform from the mid-eleventh century led to the diminution of the power of medieval queens.<sup>414</sup> She takes issue with the conclusion of JoAnn McNamara and Suzanne Wemple (1988) that from this period, 'queens and empresses, as well as ladies on a somewhat modest level, were excluded from public life'.<sup>415</sup> Anselm's letters to royal women support Huneycutt's thesis: they reflect, endorse and encourage a *realpolitik* in which the queen was at the heart of government, acting as an influential intercessor for the church with the king.

The dignity accorded to royal women in Anselm's letters has led some scholars to mistakenly associate him with the chivalric courtly love movement of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. This movement had three distinct dimensions, which together gave rise to a new appreciation of womanhood and the feminine. The first dimension was the Christianisation of knighthood in the late eleventh century. A chivalric code was promulgated at the Council of Clermont (1095) at which the First Crusade was launched by Pope Urban II (c.1035-99). Essentially, Clermont handed down an ethical code to feudal knights, encouraging them to take responsibility for innocent and vulnerable people. F.J.C. Hearnshaw (1928) portrays the feudal knight prior to Clermont as a subservient vassal, beholden to mighty overlords, required to

---

<sup>413</sup> Southern, R.W. (1990) p.143

<sup>414</sup> Cf. Huneycutt, L.L. (1989) pp.61-2

<sup>415</sup> McNamara, J. & Wemple, S. (rev. 1988): *The Power of Women through the Family in Medieval Europe* in, Huneycutt, L.L. (1989) p.62

perform military service, supply troops and make payments. He concludes: '[the knight] was not an attractive individual. No one loved him.'<sup>416</sup> The Christianisation of knighthood precipitated a change of attitude towards women because it wedded the knight to Christian standards of moral behaviour. It inculcated a blend of piety, courage and social responsibility which was more respectful towards women.<sup>417</sup> Perceptions of women were really challenged and transformed in the second dimension of the movement: the rise of courtly love, expressed in the songs of the troubadours from southern France. 'Courtly love' is:

The modern name for a literary and social concept...of a particular kind of love between men and women, involving service and veneration on the part of the man, and a nominal or actual domination on the part of the woman.<sup>418</sup>

C.S. Lewis (1951) explains that the type of 'love' idealised in the songs and poems of this movement is 'highly specialised', characterised by: '...Humility, Courtesy, Adultery, and the Religion of Love'.<sup>419</sup> The values of feudal overlordship were applied to the relationship between a knight and the object of his quest: his lady. He was obliged to give the same unquestioning fealty to her, for the sake of her affection, as the pre-Clermont knight was required to give his lord. In this context, Hearnshaw explains: 'Ladies were encouraged to seek and find the emancipation of illicit intrigue... Similarly, knights and squires were required, as part of their chivalric duty, to gain the favour of a lady...and having won it, to make it the lodestone of their lives.'<sup>420</sup> In so far as they became the objects of knightly affection, the status of noble (especially, royal) women was raised. Whilst courtly love in the secular context gave illicit contact with women a mystical aura, the Christianisation of courtly love tied its expression firmly to the ethical code of chivalry outlined at Clermont. This final dimension of the movement rose to prominence in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, having been endorsed by Bernard of Clairvaux (c.1090-1153) and given expression in the form of crusading orders (for example, the Knights Hospitaller, the Knights Templar and the Teutonic Knights). The noble female who was the object of the knight's quest was now expected to act morally and facilitate his education

---

<sup>416</sup> Hearnshaw, F.J.C. (1928) p.4

<sup>417</sup> Cf. Hearnshaw, F.J.C. (1928) pp.8-10

<sup>418</sup> 'Courtly love' in, Ousby, I. *ed.* (1988) p.228

<sup>419</sup> Lewis, C.S. (1951) p.2

<sup>420</sup> Hearnshaw, F.J.C. (1928) pp.17-18

through love by resisting his advances. Hence, courtly literature took on an expressly religious purpose: 'Courtly terminology often appears in English lyrics only to lead us to the supreme Lady, the Virgin Mary'.<sup>421</sup>

Owing to unfortunate constraints of space our exploration of the chivalric courtly love movement has been brief. But it has defined the movement that was embryonic in Anselm's time and which has provided some scholars with a frame of reference for interpreting his relationships with royal women. Anselm does not, however, fit comfortably into the movement at any stage. Firstly, he shared the ethical ideals of Clermont simply because he was a Christian, motivated by a desire for salvation. He did not need the social phenomenon of chivalry to justify his morality. Secondly, he abhorred the sexual licentiousness which characterised secular courtly love, described by Lewis as 'the idealization of adultery'.<sup>422</sup> We have already demonstrated that his letters to Gunhilda (*Ep.* 168, 169) rail against sexual impropriety, whilst his letter to Ermengard praises chastity (*Ep.* 134). Thirdly, whilst he might have supported the consecration of chivalric courtly love to Christian morality his letters predate this epoch by too many years to credibly link them. Sally N. Vaughn's thesis that Anselm's writings contributed to the rehabilitation and recreation of romantic love and sexuality has been strongly contested. This study agrees with Richard Southern (1990), that:

...Anselm's surprising statements about friendship have nothing in common with the experience of romantic love, whether heterosexual or homosexual... He uses phrases which foreshadow the language of romantic love; but the system within which he employs these phrases has nothing in common with romantic love.<sup>423</sup>

Anselm operated within a feudal socio-political system, which heavily influenced his relationships with royal women, as his correspondence with Queen Matilda shows. Their exchange is the only extant example of a dialogue between Anselm and one of his female friends and it offers a compelling insight into the relationship which dominated the final years of his life. As queen and archbishop, the two friends were pillars of the feudal system. Their correspondence illustrates their respective roles and shows how medieval political machinations could be expressed in elegant and evocative prose. They address one another fondly and sometimes emotionally.

---

<sup>421</sup> 'Courtly love' in, Ousby, I. *ed.* (1988) p.230

<sup>422</sup> Lewis, C.S. (1951) p.13

<sup>423</sup> Southern, R.W. (1990) p.158

Anselm refers to Matilda by extravagant appellations like ‘glorious queen of the English’ (*gloriosae reginae Anglorum*), ‘reverend lady’ (*reverendae dominae*) and ‘beloved lady and daughter’ (*dominae et filiae carissimae*). Likewise, she calls him: ‘brave athlete of God’ (*forti dei athletae*), ‘holy lord’ (*domine sancte*) and ‘merciful father’ (*pater misericors*).<sup>424</sup> Their correspondence demonstrates a friendship which epitomised the ennobling effects of the love of a noblewoman or religious leader for its recipient, as described by C. Stephen Jaeger (1999):

...the love of a queen or court lady “raises the worth/worthiness/reputation” of the man she loves; the love of a religious leader “exalts,” “magnifies,” “elevates” the recipient and giver of that love.<sup>425</sup>

Matilda and Anselm’s relationship was spiritual and chaste but they needed each other for the reasons Jaeger describes. In this respect their relationship echoed that of Matilda’s mother, Margaret of Scotland (c.1045-93) with Anselm’s predecessor, Lanfranc (c.1005-89).<sup>426</sup> Matilda needed Anselm to provide the spiritual counsel which, when enacted, would lead her to exaltation and salvation. He was, in short, her heavenly intercessor: ‘[You are a man] by whose consecration I was raised to the dignity of earthly royalty and by whose prayers I shall be crowned, God granting, in heavenly glory.’<sup>427</sup> It was also on account of his friendship with Matilda that Anselm exercised forbearance with King Henry who confiscated ecclesiastical land and revenues in the archbishop’s absence. Anselm considered the king to have committed a grave sin: ‘For whoever despoils a bishop of his goods can in no way be reconciled to God unless he restores to him all his good intact’.<sup>428</sup> Yet, he wrote: ‘Your [Matilda’s] kindness prays me not to take my love away from my lord the King but to intercede for him, for yourself, for your offspring and for your realm’.<sup>429</sup> As Sally N. Vaughn explains, the strength of their friendship was such that even when they were adversaries Matilda and Anselm’s mutual love was evident.<sup>430</sup>

---

<sup>424</sup> Many more examples can be found elsewhere in their correspondence: *Ep.* 242, 243, 246, 288, 296, 317, 320, 321, 329, 346, 384, 385, 395, 406

<sup>425</sup> Jaeger, S.C. (1999) p.145

<sup>426</sup> Cf. Huneycutt, L.L. (1989) p.66

<sup>427</sup> *Ep.* 242 (c.1102/3)

<sup>428</sup> *Ep.* 321 (c.1104)

<sup>429</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>430</sup> Cf. Vaughn, S.N. (2002) p.250; unfortunately, Vaughn’s argument is over-conditioned by her feminist hermeneutic, leading her to conclusions about Anselm’s relationships with royal women which are at best speculative. Two in particular find little supporting evidence: (1) that Anselm loved these women *more* because they ‘...functioned in a man’s world with all the vigour and audacity of their male counterparts’; (2) that Anselm’s ‘...ideal woman in society was a married lady who

Likewise, Anselm needed Matilda to intercede for him, raising his worthiness in the eyes of the king, especially during the investiture crisis. In *Ep.* 321, he acknowledges that Matilda has interceded with Henry on his behalf: 'By trying to soften the heart of my lord the King towards me because of your desire for my return I perceive that you are doing what is fitting for you and advantageous for him'.<sup>431</sup> His letters enumerate several areas in which he wishes Matilda to exert her influence in the realm: to take care of the churches in England in his absence (*Ep.* 288); to return and safeguard episcopal revenues (*Ep.* 321); to advise her husband to avoid evil counsellors (*Ep.* 246) and pursue the things of heaven (*Ep.* 296). They show that Anselm perceived the queen to be his earthly intercessor; his confidence in her reflects the reality of her influence to which historical sources attest.

Huneycutt explains that a queen in the high Middle Ages could exercise a profound influence in three spheres: political life, family life (as mother) and cultural life (through patronage): 'The tropes of peacemaker, mother, nurse, benefactress and intercessor combined to create a new image for the high-medieval queen'.<sup>432</sup> Matilda made the most of her influence in all these areas. In the political sphere, for example, she governed England as Regent during Henry's frequent absences abroad. Citing studies by Robert Bartlett (2000) and William Farrer (1919), Hilton explains that after his acquisition of Normandy from his brother in 1106 Henry spent around sixty percent of his time there.<sup>433</sup> Matilda proved herself capable of governing with him as well as alone: '[She] was a member of Henry I's *curia*, a frequent attestor to his charters and on several occasions served as head of his vice-regal council. She once referred to the Exchequer as 'my court and the court of my husband,' and she may have sealed Exchequer documents with her personal seal...'<sup>434</sup> Anselm's letters to Matilda tacitly acknowledge her political importance and they are notable for addressing her as Henry's partner in government. He implies that she rules in conjunction with her husband when he refers to England as '...the kingdom of my

---

functioned as an equal partner to her husband and a strong and wise mother to her children...' (Vaughn, S.N. (2002) p.250). In fact, Anselm's letters express admiration and love for his royal friends simply because they perform their God-given roles well; they attach greater value to virginity and chastity than marriage; and they make no mention of teaching children.

<sup>431</sup> *Ep.* 321 (c.1104)

<sup>432</sup> Huneycutt, L.L. (1989) p.70

<sup>433</sup> Cf. Hilton, L. (2008) p.59; Hilton cites, Bartlett, R. (2000): *England Under the Norman and Angevin Kings 1075-1225* (Oxford) pp.38-41 and, Farrer, W. (1919): *An Outline Itinerary for Henry I* (Oxford)

<sup>434</sup> Huneycutt, L.L. (1989) p.65

lord the King and yours...'<sup>435</sup> Anselm letters ascribe an especially prominent role to Matilda in the preservation of the English church. In *Ep.* 243, he posits a causal link between her behaviour towards the church and her salvation:

Those who honour her will be honoured in her and with her; those who maltreat her will be maltreated away from her. Those who exalt her will be exalted with the angels; those who degrade her will be degraded with the demons. Therefore, exalt, honour and defend this spouse so that with her and in her you may be pleasing to her spouse, God, and live, reigning with her, in eternal beatitude.<sup>436</sup>

Giles Gasper (2004) remarks upon what he calls Anselm's '...lack of interest in ecclesiology'.<sup>437</sup> Whilst it is true that Anselm did not develop a systematic ecclesiology, citations such as this raise a question mark over Gasper's conclusion. This forceful and ominous warning points to Anselm's exalted view of the church. He regarded it as one of Matilda's primary responsibilities as queen to protect the church in its various local manifestations: '...I beseech you as my lady, advise you as my queen and admonish you as my daughter...that the churches of God which are in your power should know you as mother, as nurse, as kind lady and queen'.<sup>438</sup>

Fundamentally, Anselm's correspondence with Matilda demonstrates that his understanding of queenship reflected, endorsed and encouraged the status quo in which queens were often very influential. One of the most important dimensions of queenship was intercession, which Matilda exercised on behalf of Anselm and the church with King Henry. Whilst she was his earthly intercessor as queen, he was her heavenly intercessor as archbishop. Perhaps Anselm's letters to royal women also contributed to the development of an ideal of queenship, described by Huneycutt, which began with their recognition by religious leaders:

...far from ignoring the royal ladies, the bishops and other churchmen of the high Middle Ages recognized the importance of the queen, and...began to play an increasingly didactic role in shaping a new and lasting image of an ideal queen. In doing so they created a perception of medieval queenship that stretched far beyond the personality of an individual queen.<sup>439</sup>

---

<sup>435</sup> *Ep.* 296 (c.1103)

<sup>436</sup> *Ep.* 243 (c.1102/3)

<sup>437</sup> Gasper, G. (2004) p.149

<sup>438</sup> *Ep.* 346 (c.1104/5)

<sup>439</sup> Huneycutt, L.L. (1989) p.62

## ii. The Nobility and Intercession of Mary

Anselm understood Mary to play an important role in *subjective* as well as *objective* redemption. His prayers clearly postulate a synergetic relationship between Mary and Christ in its accomplishment. This analysis seeks to demonstrate that they characterise Mary as the great and powerful Lady of the heavenly court, the counterpart of Christ the Lord. They show that her intercessory prerogative is predicated upon her celestial status as ‘Queen of angels, Lady of the world...’<sup>440</sup> Anselm regarded Mary’s intercession as a powerful and essential tool in the accomplishment of subjective redemption. His prayers are especially challenging because they suggest that achieving salvation is more difficult without Mary’s divine maternity and her ongoing intercession. We have observed elsewhere that Anselm believed all humanity to be incorporated into Christ through Mary: ‘...he was born of a mother to take our nature, and to make us, by restoring our life, sons of his mother. He invites us to confess ourselves his brethren. So our judge is our brother...’<sup>441</sup> He was also clear that Christ would be affronted if Mary was not shown respect:

When I have sinned against the son,  
I have alienated the mother,  
nor can I offend the mother without hurting the son. [...]  
Who can reconcile me to the son if the mother is my enemy,  
or who will make my peace with the mother  
if I have angered the son?<sup>442</sup>

This is a fine demonstration of Anselm’s belief in an intimate and coactive relationship between Christ and Mary, which is given particular prominence in his second *Prayer to St Mary* describing the predicament of the human soul on its day of judgment. The soul is brought before a heavenly tribunal to account for its sins and Christ sits in judgement. Anselm was clear that Christ represented both divine justice and mercy in their fullness; he refers to Christ as both ‘the just God’ and ‘the merciful God’.<sup>443</sup> In the context of the heavenly tribunal, Mary exercises a mission of mercy. She acts as an advocate for the accused, looking kindly upon pitiable sinners and appealing to her Son’s mercy. Benedicta Ward (1973) explains that after Anselm a tendency developed in western Christianity to dichotomise justice and mercy. Justice

---

<sup>440</sup> *Prayer to St Mary* 3, Ward, B. *trms.* (1973) p.115

<sup>441</sup> *Ibid.* p.123

<sup>442</sup> *Prayer to St Mary* 2, Ward, B. *trms.* (1973) p.112

<sup>443</sup> *Ibid.* p.112

and the power of judgement were ascribed to Christ, whilst mercy and intercession became the preserve of Mary.<sup>444</sup> Anselm's Marian prayers show that, as Ward says, 'nothing was further from Anselm's intention...'<sup>445</sup>

Anselm used 'justice' and 'mercy' to describe the divine nature (i.e. 'God is justice' and 'God is mercy') and to denote two applications of divine power: judgement and forgiveness. In the *Proslogion*, he speculates about whether or not it is consistent to claim that God is both just and merciful. He acknowledges the apparent problem of reconciling the need to punish the wicked according to justice and forgive them according to mercy. He asks: 'How then, O good God, good to the good and to the wicked, how do you save the wicked if this is not just and You do not do anything which is not just'.<sup>446</sup> Anselm's conception of the relationship of justice and mercy is a central tenet of the soteriology which underpins his letters to women and his Marian writings. His response to this apparent problem is an outworking of his belief in the superlative goodness of God. It has two premises: (1) it is a greater good for God to love as well as punish the wicked, rather than simply to punish them; (2) justice is roughly synonymous with goodness. Thus, he concludes that God's mercy is the fruit of his justice:

Truly, if You are merciful precisely because You are supremely good, and if You are supremely good only in so far as you are supremely just, truly then You are merciful precisely because You are supremely just.<sup>447</sup>

He defined punishment and forgiveness as two operations of justice. He explained that it is just for God both to punish wrongdoers according to their sins and to forgive them according to his goodness: '...as You are merciful...You are just not because You give us our due, but because You do what befits You as the supreme good'.<sup>448</sup> In his soteriological schema, justice and mercy are coactive; they are both expressions of the goodness and love of God. This discourse in the *Proslogion* concludes on a note of puzzlement or abandonment to mystery. He admits that it remains unclear why God only forgives some wrongdoers according to his mercy: '...it cannot be

---

<sup>444</sup> Cf. Ward, B. *trns.* (1973) pp.62-3

<sup>445</sup> Ward, B. *trns.* (1973) p.62

<sup>446</sup> *Pros.* 9

<sup>447</sup> *Pros.* 9

<sup>448</sup> *Pros.* 10

understood by any reason why from those who are alike in wickedness You save some rather others through Your supreme goodness...'<sup>449</sup>

He goes some way towards resolving this problem in *Cur Deus Homo*. Anselm did not believe that the wicked could obtain eternal beatitude without forgiveness: '...this state of bliss ought not to be given to anyone whose sins have not been utterly forgiven...'<sup>450</sup> Here, he also rejects two types of forgiveness. Firstly, writing off of a debt on the basis that the debtor cannot make repayment; this would make a 'mockery of mercy'. Secondly, excusing a sinner from the punishment whereby recompense is made; this would be 'absolutely contrary to God's justice'.<sup>451</sup> When he refers to those who are 'alike in wickedness' in the *Proslogion*, Anselm means according to deeds rather than intentions. The crux of his solution in *Cur Deus Homo* is that those who are truly repentant can be forgiven *in spite* of the fact that they cannot repay their debt. The position Anselm adopts here is consistent with his Marian prayers which, we have demonstrated, demand repentance prior to restoration.

Mary's mission of mercy on behalf of indicted sinners, to which Anselm's prayers attest, represents her participation in the outpouring of divine love. His prayers do not juxtapose justice and mercy as opposites but rather express a theology that is consonant with the position of the *Proslogion* and *Cur Deus Homo*. Ward explains: 'The sinner knows his guilt and the justice of the Judge, so he turns to the Mother of Christ to be his advocate...he asks here for Mary's intercession just because of her unique share in that aspect of the love of God which we call mercy...'<sup>452</sup> Anselm believed that Mary would show mercy to the accused on account of the same love by which she became God's mother. He regarded her intercession as an extension of her role in objective redemption, which began with her *fiat*. When she accepted the annunciation she showed herself willing to cooperate with God for the sake of sinners. Anselm believed that she continues to provide assistance to imperilled souls. He also attributed the power of Mary's intercession to her intimacy with Christ, through the divine maternity:

---

<sup>449</sup> *Pros.* 11

<sup>450</sup> I *CDH* 24

<sup>451</sup> Cf. I *CDH* 24

<sup>452</sup> Ward, B. *trms.* (1973) p.62

Most gently Lady,  
 whose intercession should I implore  
 when I am troubled with horror, and shake with fear,  
 but hers, whose womb embraced  
 the reconciliation of the world? [...]  
 Who can more easily gain pardon for the accused  
 by her intercession,  
 than she who gave milk to him  
 who justly punishes or mercifully pardons each one.<sup>453</sup>

Anselm's use of 'Lady' typifies the feudal language used to express his soteriology. He characterises Mary as the influential Lady at the heart of her son's court where she is chief counsellor. Mary's power is beyond question; Anselm calls her, 'most mighty helper'.<sup>454</sup> His first *Prayer to St Mary* depicts her as the *Mediatrix* of purifying grace. He approaches her penitently and requests her healing help: 'However near I am to death, I reach out to you, and I long to ask that by your powerful merits and your loving prayers, you will deign to heal me.'<sup>455</sup> Having described his own parlous moral condition, he expresses his hope that Mary will convey the means by which he may be purified: '...do not withhold such true mercy...heal my weakness...take away my sickness...'<sup>456</sup> His third prayer makes explicit Anselm's belief that she possesses the power, usually associated with God, to impart grace for healing. Addressing Christ and Mary, he cries out that divine grace alone will enable him to overcome injustice and repay his debt: 'Lord and Lady... Give us then your grace, so that you may receive what is owing to you'.<sup>457</sup> At the end of the first prayer, he makes it clear that Mary's power to heal is consequent upon her maternal intimacy with Christ. He says: '...make whole the soul of a sinner who is your servant, by virtue of the blessed fruit of your womb'.<sup>458</sup> Mary's position as the counterpart to Christ in subjective redemption is reinforced in his second Marian prayer, which contains many references to her as 'Lady'. It inculcates her in Christ's salvific mission, calling upon them both to heal and save:

...and see, before both son and mother  
 is a human sinner, penitent and confessing,  
 groaning and praying.

---

<sup>453</sup> *Prayer to St Mary 2*, Ward, B. *tns.* (1973) p.110

<sup>454</sup> *Prayer to St Mary 3*, Ward, B. *tns.* (1973) p.116

<sup>455</sup> *Prayer to St Mary 1*, Ward, B. *tns.* (1973) p.107; slightly later he reiterates his request: 'I desire to come to you and be cured' (*Prayer to St Mary 1*, Ward, B. *tns.* (1973) p.108).

<sup>456</sup> *Ibid.* p.109

<sup>457</sup> *Prayer to St Mary 3*, Ward, B. *tns.* (1973) p.125

<sup>458</sup> *Prayer to St Mary 1*, Ward, B. *tns.* (1973) p.109

I beg you both,  
Good Lord and good Lady, dear son and dear mother,  
by this truth which is the only hope of sinners,  
that you will be her son and you will be his mother  
to save this sinner.<sup>459</sup>

This citation demonstrates that Anselm understood Mary and Christ's relationship to be for the sake of salvation. They are the powerful Lord and Lady of the heavenly court for the sake of sinners. The crux of Anselm's understanding of their relationship is that they have distinct roles yet remain coactive in subjective redemption. He ascribes to Christ the power to 'condemn', 'save', 'command' and 'forgive'.<sup>460</sup> To Mary, he attributes the authority to 'reconcile', 'pray', 'consent' and 'intercede'.<sup>461</sup> Mary's power is not conceived in an absolute sense nor does she possess it on her own account. It is conditional upon her maternity of Christ and it takes the form of influence via her intercession. Anselm believed that Mary is best placed to bridge the chasm between the sinner and Christ: 'Who can reconcile me to the son if the mother is my enemy...'<sup>462</sup> He posits that her prayers are especially effective because of Christ's affection for her.<sup>463</sup> In his *Prayer for Friends*, Anselm says, '...I anxiously seek intercessors on my own behalf...'<sup>464</sup> His Marian prayers depict Mary as the archetypal saintly intercessor, as described by Ward: 'The need for an intercessor, a friend a court, who will speak a word with the great Lord, was behind [Anselm's] approach to prayer... Mercy and justice had to be combined, and the image of a great king surrounded by courtiers who can ask him favours was one way of demonstrating this connection.'<sup>465</sup>

## CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter has considered the importance of salvation (objective and subjective) and intercession to the theological vision of Anselm's letters to women and his Marian writings. It began by demonstrating that the uncertainty of salvation is a prominent theme in his correspondence with women. In consequence, he admonished his female

---

<sup>459</sup> *Prayer to St Mary 2*, Ward, B. *trns.* (1973) p.112

<sup>460</sup> Cf. *Prayer to St Mary 2*, Ward, B. *trns.* (1973) p.113

<sup>461</sup> Cf. *Prayer to St Mary 2*, Ward, B. *trns.* (1973) p.113

<sup>462</sup> *Prayer to St Mary 2*, Ward, B. *trns.* (1973) p.112

<sup>463</sup> Cf. *Prayer to St Mary 3*, Ward, B. *trns.* (1973) p.126

<sup>464</sup> *Prayer for Friends*, Ward, B. *trns.* (1973) p.213

<sup>465</sup> Ward, B. (2009) p.18

friends to be vigilant about their moral condition because they could not count themselves among the elect until the rectitude of their deeds was perfect. I suggested that Anselm regarded the highly regulated life of a nun as the highest form of life a woman could adopt because it was the most likely to lead to beatification. His Marian writings demonstrate an overriding concern with Mary's place in the economy of salvation. I suggested that he believed her to have enjoyed a synergetic relationship with God in the accomplishment of objective redemption. I critiqued the important work of Sally N. Vaughn, who raised the profile of the Marian dimension of Anselm's soteriology. I challenged her assertion that Anselm conceived Mary's union with God in sexual terms, leading to the rehabilitation of *eros*. I also argued against the view that Anselm's Mary was the object of a chivalric courtly quest. The chapter then turned to the earthly and heavenly paradigms of intercession which Anselm's texts explore. His letters show a great deal of respect for Queen Matilda of England, whom he regarded as playing an important intercessory role with the king on behalf of the church. I demonstrated that they support Lois Huneycutt's thesis that the medieval queen was a very dominant socio-political figure. The chapter concluded by exploring the theme of intercession in relation to Anselm's Marian writings. I argued that Anselm understood Mary as the noble Lady of the heavenly court who participated in the outpouring of divine love by conducting a mission of mercy on behalf of imperilled souls.

## CONCLUSION

This study has critically explored the theological content of Anselm of Canterbury's letters to women and his Marian writings. It has closely analysed the forty-one letters comprising his correspondence with women and his references to the Virgin Mary in his treatises (especially, *De Incarnatione Verbi*, *Cur Deus Homo* and *De Conceptu Virginali*) and *orationes*. It has also drawn upon the insights of an array of secondary literature, which has been constructively critiqued. Its central contention has been that his texts are distinct expressions of a fourfold theological vision, which can be summarised under four headings: Christocentricity, virtue, virginity and salvation. Its title, *Humanity and Sanctity*, points to the two paradigms which Anselm's letters to women and his Marian writings represent. Their paradigmatic dissimilarity is the reason for the distinct expressions they give to his theological vision. His letters offer a human paradigm in which his four theological focal points are explored in relation to the frailties and weaknesses of human nature. His female friends, like Gunhilda (*Ep.* 168, 169), often personify the moral parlousness of humanity. His Marian writings represent a saintly paradigm in which Mary exemplifies the four tenets of his theology. She is united to Christ by her divine maternity, she is morally pure and perpetually virginal, and she is a vital intercessor in the economy of salvation. For Anselm, Mary represented the beauty of holiness, which he wanted his female friends to achieve.

In the course of this study the concept of 'friendship' has emerged as an important linchpin binding his letters to women and his Marian writings together. Both sets of texts are expressions of his friendships with women. His letters demonstrate that he enjoyed deep and regularly passionate friendships with women, associating him strongly with his older contemporary, Goscelin of Saint-Bertin. They epitomise Brian Patrick McGuire's (1988) observation that, '...in the later eleventh century male bonds with women in the religious life could be just as important as men's friendships with each other'.<sup>466</sup> Anselm enjoyed close relationships with both female religious and a variety of women living secular lives. His letters represent a human and earthly paradigm in which friendship is mutually beneficial for the friends both spiritually and politically. His Marian writings express a different paradigm of

---

<sup>466</sup> McGuire, B.P. (1988) p.203

friendship, in which Anselm is subordinate to Mary for the sake of his salvation. Only once, in his first *Prayer to St Mary*, does Anselm suggest that their friendship is beneficial to her:

Most gentle Lady, heal my weakness,  
and you will be taking away the filth that offends you.  
Most kind Lady, take away my sickness,  
and you will not experience the dirt you shudder at.<sup>467</sup>

His letters to women and his Marian writings show that Anselm had a keen sense of the immanence of heavenly as well as earthly affairs. Although they are distinct groups of texts they have proven to be worthy partners in dialogue. Together they testify to Richard Southern's (1959) assertion that Anselm's letters and prayers were contemplations of ideals.<sup>468</sup> Mary's personification of a variety of ideals – including love, maternity, freedom, cooperation with God, obedience, virginity and nobility – might have shaped Anselm's advice to his female friends.

Chapter I considered the distinct expressions given to the idea of a right relationship between human beings and God in Anselm's letters to women and his Marian writings. Both sets of texts show that his theological vision located Christ at the heart of relationships with the divine. For some of his female friends this took the form of spousal union through the religious life; for Mary it was epitomised by her divine maternity. Chapter II focussed on virtue, especially the virtue of obedience, as a foundational concept in both sets of texts. In respect of his letters to women, it posited a link between Anselm's approach to friendship and the two central tenets of John Cassian's understanding of true friendship: (1) it is predicated upon a similitude of virtue in friends; (2) it transcends time and space. His letters to women show that Anselm's female friends were only imperfectly virtuous and that they were sometimes sinful and disobedient. His Marian writings attest to Mary's perfect sanctity and they suggest that, as a result of her obedience, she became the New Eve (Christ's counterpart in the accomplishment of redemption). Chapter III concentrated on virginity (*virginitas*), which is preeminent in the moral-theological vision expressed in both Anselm's letters to women and his Marian prayers. His definition of virginity differed from those of his predecessors, such as Jerome, because he understood it to mean the absence of any sexual experience. He used chastity (*castitas*) to refer to

---

<sup>467</sup> *Prayer to St Mary* 1, Ward, B. *trms.* (1973) p.109

<sup>468</sup> Cf. Southern, R.W. (1959) p.73

sexual continence after virginity has been lost, including through the consummation of marriage. He also understood virginity to be the outward sign of interior justice. His letters to women reflect the difficulties encountered by his female friends in remaining pure. They explore virginity lost, regained and kept in the form of chastity. His Marian writings express the perfect virginity of Mary *ante partum, in partu* and *post partum*. Chapter IV examined the distinct expressions given to the uncertainty of salvation and the need for intercession in Anselm's correspondence with women and his Marian writings. It observed that salvation was the overriding aim of his friendships with women and with Mary. He acted as an intercessor for the sake of his earthly friends' salvation and in turn they interceded for him in political matters. By contrast, he sought the intercession of Mary with Christ for the sake of his own salvation; he believed it to be difficult to achieve salvation without Mary's help.

This study had two stated aims: (1) to contribute to an expanding body of knowledge relating to Anselm's letters to women and his Marian writings; (2) to demonstrate the ways in which elements of the theological vision they express relate to the rest of his theology. Both of these aims have been met but much more remains to be done. Firstly, we have engaged with and built on scholarship relating to both sets of texts, supporting and challenging particular conclusions. This study's contribution includes laying before the reader a detailed exposition of Anselm's writings and the ways in which they express the four dimensions of his theological vision. It has also identified and challenged several scholars whose conclusions do not find support in the texts. These include Dániel Deme's (2003) reductionist interpretation of Anselm's understanding of Mary's *fiat*; Sally N. Vaughn's (2010) assertion that his Marian writings contributed to the restoration of sexual love; Hilda Graef's (2009 Edn) characterisation of Anselm as the 'knight of Mary' whose writings reflect a chivalric courtly love paradigm. This study has tried to analyse Anselm's letters to women and his Marian writings rigorously and objectively. It has challenged scholars whose hermeneutics and prolegomenal frameworks detract from an authentic understanding of Anselm. In attempting to elucidate his ideas it has drawn on evidence from his other works. This method has served its second aim by weaving the theology of his letters to women and his Marian writings into the larger tapestry of his work. Anselm's other writings have been used on several occasions: in the interpretation of Mary's *fiat* as an act of free and active cooperation with the divine

will it drew upon *De Concordia*; in associating disobedience and the Fall it used *De Conceptu Virginali*; in asserting that Anselm understood virginity to the outward sign of interior justice it cited the *Monologion* and *De Veritate*. Thus, his treatises have been used to define and illustrate the theological concepts which undergird the theological vision of his letters to women and his Marian writings.

This has not been a thesis in women's studies or gender history but it has purposefully sought to raise the profile of medieval engagement with representations of the feminine. Anselm's letters to women and his Marian writings are human and saintly paradigms of such engagement *par excellence*. Above all, they demonstrate that romantic language can be used to great effect in relationships between men and women, not for romantic ends but in the pursuit of salvation. In her analysis of Anselm's prayers Benedicta Ward (1973) argues that they responded to '...a new demand for personal and more intimate forms of prayer'.<sup>469</sup> She also suggests that they '...influenced piety to the end of the Middle Ages and beyond'.<sup>470</sup> The primary texts scrutinised in this thesis are intimate, personalistic and reciprocal expressions of Anselm's theological vision. Further research could do more to locate them within an intellectual context and suggest the ways in which they influenced correspondence with women and Mariology in succeeding decades.

---

<sup>469</sup> Ward, B. *trms.* (1973) p.275

<sup>470</sup> *Ibid.* p.275

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

*Biblia Sacra Vulgata* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 5<sup>th</sup> Edn, 2007)

*Documents of the Christian Church* (Oxford: OUP, 1953 Edn)

*New Jerusalem Bible* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1994)

*The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Oxford: OUP, 1957)

Adams, M.M. (1995): 'Praying the *Proslogion*: Anselm's Theological Method',  
Senor, T. ed. (1995): *The Rationality of Belief & the Plurality of Faith* (Ithaca  
and London: Cornell University Press)

Alcuin

- Dales, D. ed. (2004): *A Mind Intent on God – The Prayers and Spiritual Writings of Alcuin: an anthology* (Norwich: Canterbury Press)

Anselm

- Schmitt, F.S. ed. (1984): *S. Anselmi, Cantuariensis Archiepiscopi, Opera Omnia, Tomus Primus, vol.1-2* (Stuttgart – Bad Cannstatt: Friedrich Frommann Verlag (Günther Holzboog))
- Schmitt, F.S. ed. (1984): *S. Anselmi, Cantuariensis Archiepiscopi, Opera Omnia, Tomus Secundus, vol.3-6* (Stuttgart – Bad Cannstatt: Friedrich Frommann Verlag (Günther Holzboog))
- Davies, B. & Evans, G. eds. (1998): *Anselm of Canterbury, The Major Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press)
- Fröhlich, W. trns.: *The Letters of Saint Anselm of Canterbury*, 3 vols. (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Cistercian Publications)
  - Vol.1. Cistercian Studies Series: Number Ninety-Six (1990)
  - Vol.2. Cistercian Studies Series: Number Ninety-Seven (1993)
  - Vol.3. Cistercian Studies Series: Number One Hundred Forty Two (1994)
- Hopkins, J. & Richardson, H. trns. (2000): *Complete Philosophical and Theological Treatises of Anselm of Canterbury* (Minneapolis: The Arthur J. Banning Press)
- Ward, B. trns. (1973): *The Prayers and Meditations of Saint Anselm* (Middlesex: Penguin Books)

Augustine

- Chadwick, H. trns. (1991): *Saint Augustine – Confessions* (Oxford, OUP)

Barber, R. (2005): *The Reign of Chivalry* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press)

Barral, M. (1988): 'Reflections on Anselm's Friendship and *Conversatio*',  
Schnaubelt, J.C.; Losoncy, T.A.; Van Fleteren, F. & Frederick, J.A.: *Anselm Studies: An Occasional Journal II* (White Plains, New York: Kraus International Publications), pp.165-182

Benedict

- Fry, T. ed. (1981): *RB 1980 – The Rule of St. Benedict in Latin and English with Notes* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press)

Bestul, T.H. (1999): 'Self and Subjectivity in the *Prayers and Meditations* of Anselm of Canterbury', Majeran, R. & Zieliński, E.I. (1999): *Saint Anselm: Bishop and Thinker* (Lublin: The University Press of the Catholic University of Lublin), pp.147-156

Bestul, T.H. (1988): 'St. Augustine and the *Orationes sive Meditationes* of St. Anselm', Schnaubelt, J.C.; Losoncy, T.A.; Van Fleteren, F. & Frederick, J.A.: *Anselm Studies: An Occasional Journal II* (White Plains, New York: Kraus International Publications), pp.597-606

- Brantley, J. (2007): *Reading in the Wilderness: Private Devotion and Public Performance in Late Medieval England* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press)
- Brown, R.E., Donfried, K.P., Fitzmyer, J.A. & Reumann, J. eds. (1978): *Mary in the New Testament – A Collaborative Assessment by Protestant and Roman Catholic Scholars* (London: Geoffrey Chapman)
- Bruder, J.S. (1939): *The Mariology of Saint Anselm of Canterbury* (Dayton, Ohio: Mount St John Press)
- Carmichael, L. (2004): *Friendship: Interpreting Christian Love* (London: T&T Clark International)
- Campbell, R. (1996): 'The Conceptual Roots of Anselm's Soteriology', Luscombe, D.E. & Evans, G.R. (1996): *Anselm, Aosta, Bec and Canterbury* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press)
- Campbell, R. (1976a): *From Belief to Understanding* (Canberra: The Australian National University)
- Campbell, R. (1976b): 'Anselm's Theological Method', *Scottish Journal of Theology*, Vol.32, No.6 (1979), pp.541-562
- Canatella, H.M. (2007): 'Friendship in Anselm of Canterbury's Correspondence: Ideals and Experience', *Viator: Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, Vol.38, No.2 (2007), pp.351-367
- Carruthers, M. (1998): *The Craft of Thought: Meditation, rhetoric and the making of images, 400-1200* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press)
- Cassian, John
- 'The First Conference of Abbot Joseph: On Friendship', Schaff, P. ed. (1997): *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Vol.11 (The AGES Digital Library Collections, USA: AGES Software, Version 2.0)
- Crouse, R. (1958): 'The Augustinian Background of St. Anselm's Concept of *Justitia*', *Canadian Journal of Theology*, Vol.4 (1958), pp.111-119
- Deme, D. (2003): *The Christology of Anselm of Canterbury* (Kent: Ashgate)
- Eadmer
- Southern, R.W. ed. (1962): *Eadmeri monachi Cantuariensis Vita Sancti Anselmi archiepiscopi Cantuariensis* (London, Edinburgh, Paris, Melbourne, Toronto and New York: Thomas Newlson and Sons Ltd)
  - Southern, R.W. trns. (1962): *The Life of St Anselm, Archbishop of Canterbury by Eadmer* (London, Edinburgh, Paris, Melbourne, Toronto and New York: Thomas Newlson and Sons Ltd)
- Evans, G.R. (2004): 'Anselm's life, works, and immediate influence', Davies, B. & Leftow, B. eds. (2004): *The Cambridge Companion to Anselm* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press)
- Evans, G.R. (1980): *Anselm and a New Generation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press)
- Evans, G.R. (1978): *Anselm and Talking About God* (Oxford: Clarendon Press)
- Fiske, A. (1961): 'Saint Anselm and Friendship', *Studia Monastica*, Vol.3 (1961), pp.259-290
- Gambero, L. (1999): *Mary and the Fathers of the Church – The Blessed Virgin Mary in Patristic Thought* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press)
- Gambero, L. (2005): *Mary in the Middle Ages – The Blessed Virgin Mary in the Thought of Medieval Latin Theologians* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press)
- Gasper, G. (2004): *Anselm of Canterbury and his Theological Inheritance* (Hampshire: Ashgate)

- Gilson, E. (1939): *Reason and Revelation in the Middle Ages* (London and New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, Ltd.)
- Graef, H. (2009 Edn): *Mary: A History of Doctrine and Devotion* (Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press)
- Haffner, P. (2004): *The Mystery of Mary* (Herefordshire: Gracewing)
- Haseldine, J. ed. (1999): *Friendship in Medieval Europe* (Gloucestershire: Sutton Publishing)
- Hearnshaw, F.J.C. (1928): 'Chivalry: Its Civilising Influence', Prestage, E. ed. (1928): *Chivalry: A Series of Studies to Illustrate its Historical Significance and Civilising Influence* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner and Co, Ltd)
- Hilton, L. (2008): *Queens Consort – England's Medieval Queens* (London: Phoenix, Orion Books Ltd)
- Hogg, D.S. (2004): *Anselm of Canterbury – The Beauty of Theology* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate)
- Hopkins, J. (1972): *A Companion to the Study of St. Anselm* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press)
- Huneycutt, L.L. (1989): 'Images of Queenship in the Middle Ages', Patterson, R.B. (1989): *The Haskins Society Journal, Studies in Medieval History*, Vol.1 (London and Ronceverte: The Hambledon Press)
- Jacob, E.F. (1928): 'The Beginnings of Medieval Chivalry', Prestage, E. ed. (1928): *Chivalry: A Series of Studies to Illustrate its Historical Significance and Civilising Influence* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner and Co, Ltd)
- Jaeger, S.C. (1999): *Ennobling Love – In Search of a Lost Sensibility* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press)
- Jaeger, S.C. (2002): *Scholars and Courtiers: Intellectuals and Society in the Medieval West* (Hampshire: Ashgate)
- Just Jr, A.A. (2003): *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture – New Testament III: Luke* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press)
- Lewis, C.S. (1951): *The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition* (London: Oxford University Press, Geoffrey Cumberlege)
- Luscombe, D. (1997): *Medieval Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press)
- Matthews, G.B. (2004): 'Anselm, Augustine and Platonism', Davies, B. & Leftow, B. eds. (2004): *The Cambridge Companion to Anselm* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press)
- McEvoy, J. (1999): 'The Theory of Friendship in the Latin Middle Ages: Hermeneutics, Contextualization and the Transmission and Reception of Ancient Texts and Ideas, from c.AD350 to c.1500', Haseldine, J. ed. (1999): *Friendship in Medieval Europe* (Gloucestershire: Sutton Publishing)
- McGrath, A.E. (1981): 'Rectitude: The Moral Foundation of Anselm of Canterbury's Soteriology', *The Downside Review*, Vol.99, No.336 (1981) pp.204-13
- McGuire, B.P. (1988): *Friendship & Community: The Monastic Experience, 350-1250* (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Cistercian Publications)
- McHugh, J. (1975): *The Mother of Jesus in the New Testament* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd)
- McIntyre, J. (1954): *St. Anselm and His Critics: A Re-Interpretation of the Cur Deus Homo* (Edinburgh & London: Oliver and Boyd)
- Nussbaum, M. (1999): 'Augustine and Dante on the Ascent of Love', Matthews G.B. ed. (1999): *The Augustinian Tradition* (London: University of California)
- Ousby, I. ed. (1988): *The Cambridge Guide to Literature in English* (London: Guild Publishing)

- Page, R.B. (1909): *The Letters of Alcuin* (PhD Thesis, Faculty of Political Science, Columbia University: [http://www.archive.org/stream/lettersofalcuin00pageuoft/lettersofalcuin00pageuoft\\_djvu.txt](http://www.archive.org/stream/lettersofalcuin00pageuoft/lettersofalcuin00pageuoft_djvu.txt), last checked 10.06.11)
- Pius IX (1854): *Ineffabilis Deus* (<http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Pius09/p9ineff.htm>, last checked 07.02.2012)
- Rogers, K. (1996): 'The Traditional Doctrine of Divine Simplicity', *Religious Studies*, Vol.32, pp.165-186
- Rubin, M. (2010): *Mother of God: A History of the Virgin Mary* (London: Penguin Books)
- Shears, F.S. (1928): 'The Chivalry of France', Prestage, E. ed. (1928): *Chivalry: A Series of Studies to Illustrate its Historical Significance and Civilising Influence* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner and Co, Ltd)
- Sheets, J.R. (1948): 'Justice in the Moral Thought of St. Anselm', *Modern Schoolman*, Vol.25, No.2 (1948), pp.132-9
- Smalley, B. (1983): *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell)
- Southern, R.W. (1959): *Saint Anselm and His Biographer: A Study of Monastic Life and Thought, 1059-c.1130* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press)
- Southern, R.W. (1973): 'Foreword', Ward, B. trns. (1973): *The Prayers and Meditations of Saint Anselm* (Middlesex: Penguin Books)
- Southern, R.W. (1995): *Scholastic Humanism and the Unification of Europe – Volume I, Foundations* (Oxford: Blackwell)
- Southern, R.W. (1990): *Saint Anselm: A Portrait in a Landscape* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press)
- Swan, L. (2007): *The Benedictine Tradition* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press)
- Vaughn, S.N. (2010): 'Saint Anselm and His Students Writing about Love – A Theological Foundation for the Rise of Romantic Love in Europe', *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, Vol.19, No.1 (January 2010), pp.54-73
- Vaughn, S.N. (2002): *St Anselm and the Handmaidens of God*, Utrecht Studies in Medieval Literacy (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols Publishing)
- Ward, B. (2009): *Anselm of Canterbury: His Life and Legacy* (London: SPCK)
- Warner, M. (1983): *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (New York: Vintage Books)