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DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.12775/BPTh.2024.012>

17 (2024) 1: 215–238

ISSN (print) 1689-5150

ISSN (online) 2450-7059

The arguments of John Duns Scotus in defence of Mary's Immaculate Conception

Argumenty Jana Duns Szkota w obronie Niepokalanego Poczęcia Maryi

Abstract: This article aims to specify the theoretical approaches through which the conspicuous Scottish Franciscan theologian John Duns Scotus (c.1265/66–1308) became the leader of the defenders of the belief in the Virgin Mary's Immaculate Conception. The article is structured in two parts. The first relates summarily the authors and works that have dealt with Duns Scotus's doctrine on Mary's Immaculate Conception to a greater or lesser extent. The second part (much more critical) develops Duns Scotus's arguments to defend the belief in the Immaculate Conception of Mary. In this sense, the author of the article exposes step by step the argumentative structure of the Scottish theologian, based on the traditional model of medieval Scholasticism, namely: first, he exposes and refutes the arguments and objections of the deniers of Mary's Immaculate Conception; then he subtly explains his personal arguments with which he supports his fervent defence of the thesis of the Virgin Mary's Immaculate Conception.

Streszczenie. Celem niniejszego artykułu jest określenie teoretycznego podejścia, dzięki któremu wybitny szkocki teolog franciszkański Jan Duns Szkot (ok. 1265/66–1308) stał się głównym obrońcą wiary w Niepokalane Poczęcie Najświętszej Maryi Panny. Artykuł składa się z dwóch części. Pierwsza z nich w skrócie odnosi się do autorów i dzieł, które w większym lub mniejszym stopniu zajmowały się doktryną Duns Szkota dotyczącą Niepokalanego Poczęcia Maryi. Druga, znacznie bardziej krytyczna, część rozwija argumenty Duns Szkota w obronie wiary w Niepokalane Poczęcie Maryi. W tym kontekście autor artykułu przedstawia krok po kroku strukturę argumentacyjną szkockiego teologa, opartą na tradycyjnym modelu średniowiecznej scholastyki, a mianowicie: najpierw przedstawia i obala argumenty i zastrzeżenia przeciwników Niepokalanego Poczęcia Maryi; następnie subtelnie wyjaśnia swoje osobiste argumenty, którymi wspiera gorącą obronę tezy o Niepokalanym Poczęciu Najświętszej Maryi Panny.

Keywords: mariology; Franciscan School; original sin; sanctification; dogma.

Słowa kluczowe: mariologia, Szkoła Franciszkańska, grzech pierworodny, uświęcenie, dogmat.

Introduction

It is well known that the Franciscan John Duns Scotus (c.1265/66–1308) was, in the Middle Ages, the main defender of the belief in the Virgin Mary's immaculate conception. However, his ardent defense of such a belief will be countered by many other theological masters opposed to it, in the context of the heated doctrinal debates around this controversial topic that persisted for more than five centuries. Only in 1854 will the belief in Mary's immaculate conception be defined as a dogma by Pope Pius IX through the bull *Ineffabilis Deus*.

Duns Scotus's position in favor of Mary's immaculate conception has been widely commented on, although almost always briefly and superficially. Therefore, this article aims to detail this Scottish master's doctrine on the topic above, documenting it in his primary texts. Before making this exposition of Duns Scotus's doctrine, we will briefly review the main contributions of other commentators of this Scottist doctrine.

Perhaps it is not a trivial detail that this article is part of the Doctoral Thesis "Franciscan Mariology of the 13th century", which the author recently defended in the International Doctorate in Medieval History at the National University of Distance Education (UNED), Spain, and for which the evaluation panel granted him the highest rating.

1. Some comments on Duns Scotus' doctrine on Mary's immaculate conception

In this section 2 we will present a simple Status Quaestionis that summarizes the comments that modern authors who were accessible to us in specialized libraries from Rome proposed on Duns Scotus's immaculist doctrine. Therefore, our purpose here is not to establish a critical dialogue with these secondary authors, but simply to report on their comments on the topic at hand, which are almost always very brief and fragmentary. In fact, none proposes

a specific and complete treatment of the immaculist doctrine of Duns Scotus, as we will try to do in the subsequent sections.

In 1904, Pierre Pauwels and Candido Mariotti, in separate monographs on the contributions of the Franciscan school to the belief in the immaculate conception of Mary, presented the opinion of Duns Scotus on the matter: Pauwels deals at length with the position of the Scottish master and the debates he faced to defend it (Pauwels 1904, 51–75), while Mariotti deals with the topic briefly (Candido 1904, 65–70). In 1905, Niccolò Dal Gal, in his booklet on the work of the Franciscans in the triumph of the dogma of Mary's immaculate conception, dedicated special consideration to Duns Scotus as the leading promoter of this Mariological belief (Dal Gal 1905, 14–18).

In 1955 Gabriele Roschini, in an article on Duns Scotus and the Immaculate Conception (Roschini 1955, 183–258), briefly presents the author's arguments that he considers authentic (Roschini 1955, 186–194); nevertheless, the main part of the article consists of discussing Scotus's position with other commentators (Roschini 1955, 195–230), as well as verifying the alleged dispute of our author at the University of Paris (Roschini 1955, 231–251).

In 1960, Jean-François Bonnefoy published an extensive monograph on the context, opinion, and influence of Duns Scotus on the thesis of Mary's immaculate conception (Bonnefoy 1960, 564 p). In 1986, Stefano De Fiores, in the voice that he subscribes to on this theme in the *Nuovo Dizionario di Mariologia*, gives some brief information about the role of the Scottish master in the triumph of the doctrine on Mary's immaculate conception (De Fiores 1986, 613–619). In 1987 Roberto Zavalloni and Eliodoro Mariani edited a collective book on Duns Scotus's Mariology (Zavalloni & Mariani 1987, 255 pp.), which includes ten contributions on various aspects of his thought on the immaculate conception. Among these ten essays, we can highlight the dissertations by Celestino Piana (who significantly exposes the contribution of the Scottish master to the field) (Piana 1987, 96–110), Efrem Longpré (Longpré 1987, 111–126), and especially Alfonso Pompei (who writes about the arguments through which Scotus managed to enforce the doctrine above mentioned) (Pompei 1987a, 35–50). In 1996, Luigi Gambero published in his famous collection of Marian writings the Italian translation of Duns Scotus's text on the immaculate conception (III, d. 3, q. 1) and other Mariological questions (Gambero 1996, 450–462).

In 2001, Stefano M. Cecchin, in a book on the immaculate conception of the Virgin about the Franciscan School, gives some brief indications about

our author's Mariology, in which he highlights the primacy of Christ, God as the highest good, Mary's predestination, her immaculate conception and assumption into heaven (Cecchin 2001, 137–147). In 2003, Cecchin, in a brief monograph on the history of the dogma of the immaculate conception (Cecchin 2003, 248 pp.), sets out in detail the position of Duns Scotus on the matter (Cecchin 2003, 61–73), highlighting him as one of the three Franciscan defenders of that belief, along with Robert Grosseteste (Cecchin 2003, 56–58) and William of Ware (Cecchin 2003, 58–61). In 2005, Cecchin himself edited the minutes of the Congress on the Immaculate Conception and the Franciscan School (held in December 2003 in Assisi) (Cecchin 2005a, 882 p.), in which he, Barnaba Hechich, and Alfonso Pompei offered specific studies about Duns Scotus's doctrine on Mary's immaculate conception. Hechich presents his contributions from the context of preceding and contemporary thinkers, some of whose ideas and arguments the Scottish master adopted to support his position (Hechich 2005, 159–192). Pompei analyzes the originality of the Scotist solution to the problem of Mary's immaculate conception by comparison with other preceding and contemporary authors (Pompei 2005, 193–217). Cecchin, after highlighting some antecedents of Duns Scotus's doctrine above, exposes the contestations and acceptances of the Scotist doctrine, especially among contemporary and later authors (Cecchin 2005b, 219–272).

In 2004, Ernesto Piacentini, in the booklet published on the immaculate conception of the Virgin 150 years after the definition of the dogma (Piacentini 2004, 136 p), dealt above all with Scotus's position (Piacentini 2004, 19–30), although without contributing anything new in this regard. In 2005, Stefano M. Cecchin published a collective book on the contribution of the Franciscan School to the immaculate belief (Cecchin 2005^a), a book in which Barnaba Hechich (Hechich 2005, 159–192) and Alfonso Pompei (Pompei 2005, 193–217) expose various aspects of the Scotist doctrine on the immaculate conception. In 2005, in the Proceedings (edited by Francesco Lepore) of a Congress held in 2004 in Benevento (Lepore 2005, 422 p.), Stefano M. Cecchin presented a contribution on the influence of Franciscan Mariology over the triumph of the doctrine on Mary's immaculate conception (Cecchin 2005c, 65–106), in which he highlights the decisive contribution of Scotus (Cecchin 2005c, 79–95). In these Proceedings Edoardo Scognamiglio analyzed the Mariological doctrine of the Scottish master in the context of his philosophical system (Scognamiglio 2005, 269–326).

In 2009, in the dictionary *Mariologia*, edited by Stefano De Fiores, Valeria Ferrari Schiefer and Salvatore M. Perrella (De Fiores, Ferrari Schiefer, Perrella 2009), Marielle Lamy wrote the voice “Immacolata” (Lamy 2009, 612–628), in which she briefly explained the role of Duns Scotus in the doctrine above mentioned (Lamy 2009, 614–616). In 2010, Maria Gabriella Iannelli dedicated the first part of her study to the predestination of Mary and the immaculate conception in Franciscan thought (Iannelli 2010, 199–233) to the contributions provided by Duns Scotus. In 2021 Stefano M. Cecchin, in a monograph on the Mariology of the Franciscan School (Cecchin 2021), cataloged an extensive bibliography on our Scottish author (Cecchin 2021, 271–277).

2. The doctrine of Duns Scotus on Mary's Immaculate Conception

As we already said, the most determined and influential defender of the thesis of Mary's immaculate conception during the Middle Ages was John Duns Scotus. In analyzing the problem of whether the Virgin Mary was conceived in original sin,¹ he proceeds according to the traditional scholastic methodology of beginning by critically examining the arguments for and against this thesis before arguing his position. Therefore, we will present his position following his argument according to this structure: in section 3.1. we expose the opinions that Duns Scotus found contrary to the belief in the immaculate conception of the Virgin; in section 3.2. we present two foreign opinions that he considers favorable to the immaculist thesis; in section 3.3. we analyze the arguments through which the Scottish mariologist rejects opinions contrary to the thesis of the immaculate conception of Mary; in section 3.4, undoubtedly the most important, we explain in detail the various specific arguments which Duns Scotus proposes to demonstrate that Mary was conceived without original sin; finally, in section 3.5. we present the reasoning by which the Scottish master refutes the objections that seek to invalidate the immaculist thesis.

¹ Ioannes Duns Scotus, *Utrum Beata Virgo fuerit concepta in originale peccato*, d. 3 q. 1. En Ioannes Duns Scotus, *Opera omnia editio minor. III/2. Opera Theologica* (a cura di Giovanni Lauriola), Alberobello: Editrice Alberobello, 2001, 49–56.

2.1. Dealing with some opinions hostile to the belief in Mary's immaculate conception

Duns Scotus begins by explaining the ten opinions that affirm that Mary contracted original sin when she was conceived. The first is that of those who, assuming the sentence of Saint Paul in his *Epistle to the Romans* according to which "In Adam, all have sinned," deduce that all, including the Virgin Mary, were generated with the paternal semen and, therefore, in sin.²

The second opinion, due to Saint John Damascene, affirms that the Holy Spirit purified Mary, which means that, since purification implies that there is sin from which to be purified, Mary contracted the sin, although not the current one, but the original one.³

The third opinion of Saint Augustine in his *De fide ad Petrum*, who considers true that all human beings, because of their conception through the sexual intercourse of their parents, are born with original sin.⁴ And that also affects the Virgin Mary.

The fourth opinion is also by Augustine, who, commenting on the passage from the Gospel of John, "Behold the Lamb of God," says that Christ was the only innocent man who was not begotten like other human beings.⁵

The fifth contrary opinion is by Pope Leo the Great, who in a sermon on the nativity declares that Christ, finding no human being without sin, came into the world to redeem everyone.⁶

² "*Utrum Beata Virgo fuerit concepta in originale peccato*

Circa primum quod sic:

1. «In Adam omnes peccaverunt», *Romanorum* 5 [12], non nisi quia fuerunt in eo secundum rationem seminalem, ita fuit in eo Beata Virgo; igitur, etc." (Ioannes Duns Scotus, *Utrum Beata Virgo fuerit concepta in originale peccato*. d. 3 q. 1. En Ioannes Duns Scotus, *Opera omnia editio minor*. III/2. *Opera Theologica*, 2001, 49).

³ "2. Item Damascenus [III *De fide orthodoxa*] cap. 10 et 48: 'Spiritus Sanctus purgavit eam'; purgatio non est nisi a peccato, igitur habuit peccatum, non actuale igitur, etc." (Ibid.).

⁴ "3. Item, Augustinus *De fide ad Petrum* [III, cap. 3]: Firmissime tene et nullatenus dubites, omnem hominem, qui per concubitum viri et mulieris concipitur, cum peccato originali nasci." (Ibid.).

⁵ "4. Item, idem super illud *Ioannis* 'Ecce agnus Dei' [*In Ioannem*, tract. IV, cap. 1], etc.: 'Solutus innocens, quia non sic venit', scilicet secundum communem propagationem." (Ibid.).

⁶ "5. Item, Leo Papa in *Sermone de nativitate Domini*: 'sicut a reatu nullum liberum repent, ita pro liberandis omnibus venit'; igitur, etc." (Ibid.).

Quite similar is the opinion of Saint Jerome when commenting on the verse of Psalm 22: "Save my only [soul] from the clutches of the dog [the devil]." ⁷

The seventh opinion, from a commentator on the decree *De consecratione*, asserts that the feast of the Conception of Mary should not be celebrated, because she too was conceived in original sin. ⁸

Duns Scotus alleges as the eighth and ninth opinions those of Saint Bernard ⁹ and Saint Anselm, ¹⁰ both maintaining that the Virgin was conceived in original sin.

As a tenth opinion antagonistic to the belief in Mary's immaculate conception, Duns Scotus alleges that of Saint Bernard, when he writes that the Virgin was not sanctified before her conception or even at the very moment of her conception, since this was produced through her parents's concupiscence, ¹¹ and, therefore, with original sin.

2.2. Exposing two opinions favorable to Mary's immaculate conception

Duns Scotus then considers the two opinions opposing the thesis that Mary was conceived in original sin. The first is from Saint Augustine, who in his *De natura et gratia* states that, when it comes to sins, he does not refer in any way to the Virgin Mary, ¹² because he considers her exempt from them.

As a second opinion favorable to immaculate conception's thesis, he presents that of Saint Anselm, who in *De conceptu virginali* maintains that it was convenient for the Virgin to shine with a purity such that it made impossible to think of a greater purity after God, with a purity as absolute as the of Christ. ¹³

⁷ "6. Item, Hieronymus super illud *Psalmi* [21, 21]: 'Et de manu canis unicum meam, videtur idem dicere.' (Ibid., 50).

⁸ "7. Item, *De consecratione*, [III] distinctione 3, cap. 1, ibi: 'Nativitas in gloria.'" (Ibid.).

⁹ "8. Item, Bernardus de conceptu eius dicit, quod fuit in peccato originali concepta." (Ibid.).

¹⁰ "9. Item, Anselmus II *Cur Deus homo* cap. 16." (Ibid.).

¹¹ "10. Item, hoc idem vult Bernardus in quaedam epistola, et probat, quia non fuit sanctificata ante conceptum, patet; nec in conceptu, quia ibi fuit libido." (Ibid.).

¹² "[2] Contra:

1. Augustinus *De natura et gratia* circa medium, et ponitur in littera cap. 2: 'Cum de peccatis agitur, de Maria nullam prorsus volo habere quaestionem.'" (Ibid.).

¹³ "2. Et Anselmus *De concepta virginali* cap. 18: 'Decuit, ut ea puritate Virgo niteret, qua maior sub Deo nequit intelligi, posset autem intelligi pura innocentia sub Deo qualis fuit in Christo; igitur etc.'" (Ibid.).

2.3. Refuting some opinions contrary to the belief in Mary's immaculate conception

Duns Scotus then criticizes all the opinions of the masters who deny the thesis of Mary's immaculate conception, according to two orders of argument. The first argument of these deniers is based on the excellence of his Son Jesus, since, as universal Redeemer, he opened the door of heaven to all. However – the deniers of this thesis argue –, if the Virgin had not contracted original sin, she would not have needed a redeemer to open the heavenly door to her, which would have remained closed to her, since sin, especially original sin, is what closes the door of heaven.¹⁴

The second order of thoughts of the adversaries of Mary's immaculate conception is based on the person of the Virgin. Considering that she was engendered like other human beings through libidinous intercourse, her body was formed by corrupted paternal semen, which is why her body was stained like that of other humans. Furthermore, since the infected body also contaminates the soul, the opponents conclude that Mary's soul was contaminated with the same bodily corruption as other human beings.¹⁵

As additional proof of these adversaries, Duns Scotus exposes that the Virgin suffered the same pains as all human beings, such as thirst, hunger, and other miseries derived from original sin. Moreover, since such sufferings were not voluntarily assumed by her, as if she were our Redeemer, instead of her Son is our Redeemer, it follows that those sufferings were inflicted on

¹⁴ “[I – Ad quaestionem]

[3] Dicitur communiter quod sic, propter auctoritates adductas, et propter rationes assumptas ex duobus mediis, quorum unum est excellentia filii sui; ipse enim ut redemptor universalis omnibus ianuam aperuit; sed si Beata Virgo non contraxisset originale, non indignisset redemptore, nec ipse sibi ianuam aperuisset, quia non fuisset sibi clausa; non enim clauditur nisi propter peccatum, et maxime originale.” (Ibid.).

¹⁵ “Secundum medium est ex his quae apparent in Beata Virgine. Ipsa enim fuit propagata communi lege, et per consequens corpus eius propagatum et formatum de semine infecto, et ita eadem ratio infectionis in corpore eius, quae erat in corpore alterius sic propagati, et cum ex corpore infecto inficiatur anima, eadem ratio infectionis erat in anima eius, quia et in animabus aliorum communiter propagatorum.” (Ibid.).

Mary with all justice by God because of the original sin, from which she was not exempt.¹⁶

After exposing them objectively, Duns Scotus refutes these three arguments of opponents of the belief in the Virgin's immaculate conception. Regarding their first argument, based on the excellence of Christ as Redeemer, reconciler, and Mediator, our author states that it can be hypothesized that Mary did not contract original sin. In his opinion, a most perfect mediator can mediate as perfectly as possible in favor of the person for whom he is mediating. Therefore, Christ had the most perfect mediating power for the benefit of those he mediated, and for none could he do so more excellently than for his Mother Mary. That –the Scottish master concludes – would not have happened if she had not deserved to be preserved from original sin.¹⁷

Duns Scotus demonstrates this mediatory action of Christ in three complementary ways: 1) about God, with whom he has the mission of reconciling; 2) about evil, whose liberation is his mission; and 3) about the obligation of the reconciled person.¹⁸

To analyze the first proof, our author takes the example offered by Saint Anselm in *Cur Deus Homo*, in which he imagines that someone offends a king with an injury so significant that the king also feels offended by all the offender's sons, who the king would thus disinherit them. This imaginary example further establishes that such an offense can be forgiven only if some innocent person renders a gift more satisfactory to the king than the offense of the sin

¹⁶ “Similiter habuit poenas communes naturae humanae, ut sitim, famem et huiusmodi, quae infliguntur nobis propter peccatum originale; et illae non erant voluntarie assumptae, quia non erat redemptrix vel reparatrix nostra, quia tunc Filius eius non fuisset redemptor omnium generaliter, igitur erant sibi inflictae a Deo, et non iniuste; ergo propter peccatum, et ita ipsa non erat innocens.” (Ibid.).

¹⁷ “[II – Contra rationes ad oppositum]

[4] Contra primam rationem arguitur ex excellentia Filii sui, in quantum redemptor, reconciliator et mediator, quod ipsa non contraxit peccatum originale. Perfectissimus enim mediator habet perfectissimum actum mediandi respectu alicuius personae, pro qua mediat; sed Christus est perfectissimus mediator; igitur Christus habuit perfectissimum gradum mediandi possibilem respectu alicuius creaturae sive personae, respectu cuius erat mediator; sed respectu nullius personae habuit excellentiorem gradum quam respectu Mariae, igitur, etc.” (Ibid., 50–51).

¹⁸ “Sed hoc non esset nisi meruisset eam praeservari a peccato originali. Quod probo tripliciter: primo per comparisonem ad Deum cui reconciliat; secundo per comparisonem ad malum a quo liberat; tertio per comparisonem ad obligationem personae quam reconciliat.” (Ibid., 51).

committed. Supposing, finally, that there is someone capable of offering the king such a gift and reconciling the sons of the offender with him so that they are not disinherited, however, all this does not mean that the king is offended by any son of the offender, although he forgive the offense on the merits of the Mediator.¹⁹ Duns Scotus further specifies that if the Mediator could perfectly appease the king to prevent his wrath against any offender's son, this would be much more so than if the king were to forgive the offense received. Moreover, this is not impossible because that offense is not a personal fault of the offender's son, but rather a fault incurred by the offender.²⁰

From this example, Duns Scotus deduces that no one fully appeases someone for an offense contractable through the fault of another unless he can prevent this person from being offended since, if he already appeases the offended party to obtain forgiveness, he does not appease him perfectly. Nevertheless, in this case, God is not offended by the inner impulse of the soul but only by the guilt existing in the soul.²¹ Therefore, Christ would not perfectly appease the Holy Trinity for the guilt that the children of Adam are condemned to contract if he did not prevent the Holy Trinity from being offended by anyone: from this, it follows that among the children of Adam, there must be a soul exempt from this guilt.²² this –our author infers– is precisely the Virgin Mary.

When analyzing the second proof, Duns Scotus adduces two arguments, the first of which is because a most perfect mediator deserves to obtain the re-

¹⁹ “[5] Ad videndum primam probationem pono exemplum consonum exemplo Anselmi *Cur Deus homo*, II cap. 16. Aliquis offendens regem demeretur in tantum, ut omni filio naturali eius rex offendatur, et offendens exhaeredit eum; ista offensa statuitur non remittenda, nisi offeratur regi ab aliquo innocente aliquod obsequium magis placans et gratum, quam peccatum fuerit offensivum. Aliquis offert obsequium ita gratum, quod reconciliet filios, ut non exhaereditentur, tamen cuilibet nato rex offenditur, licet postea remittat offensam propter merita mediatoris” (Ibid.).

²⁰ “sed si ille mediator posset ita perfecte placare regem, ut praeveniret respectu alicuius filii irae, nec ei offenderetur, hoc magis esset quam si rex offensam habitam contra talem remitteret, sed hoc non est impossibile, cum haec offensa non est ex culpa propria, sed ex alia contracta.” (Ibid.).

²¹ “Ex illo [exemplo] arguitur sic: nullus summe vel perfectissime placat aliquem pro offensa alicuius contrahenda, nisi posset praevenire, ne ille offendatur, nam si iam offensum placat, ut remittat, non perfectissime placat; sed in proposito Deus non offenditur anima, propter motum interiorem in ipso, sed tantum propter culpam in ipsa anima” (Ibid.).

²² “igitur Christus non perfectissime placat Trinitatem pro culpa contrahenda a filiis Adae, si non praeviat, ut alicui Trinitas non offendatur, et per consequens quod anima alicuius filii Adae non habeat culpam talem.” (Ibid.).

moval of all punishment for the one he reconciles. But original sin is a greater punishment than the deprivation of the vision of God itself since sin is the most significant punishment that can be inflicted on an intelligent nature. Therefore, if Christ reconciled us most perfectly with God, he deserved that this severe punishment be avoided for someone who is none other than his Mother.²³ The Scottish Mariologist concludes by saying that if the worst punishment for a son of Adam consists of the king being offended with him, no one would perfectly reconcile him except the one who is capable of eliminating not only the disinheritance but also the enmity of the king.²⁴

As a second proof, derived from the first, Duns Scotus exposes that Christ is considered our reconciler and repairer of original sin more immediately than actual sin since we usually recognize that his incarnation and passion are necessary for original sin. Nevertheless, since it is usually assumed that Christ was the perfect Mediator of Mary, for having preserved her from all actual sin, we therefore assume that he also preserved her from original sin.²⁵

As to the third proof, the Scottish master says that the reconciled person does not undertake the most significant duty towards the Mediator if he does not obtain from him the greatest good that can be obtained from a mediator; but, since the preservation of guilt contracted or to be contracted can be obtained by the Mediator, therefore, no one should feel extremely obligated towards Christ as Mediator, if he did not preserve someone from original sin.²⁶

²³ “Ex secunda via arguitur dupliciter. Primo, quia perfectissimus mediator meretur amotionem omnis poenae ab eo quem reconciliat; sed culpa originalis est maior poena, quam ipsa carentia visionis divinae, sicut declaratum fuit distinctione secundi libri [cf *Ordinatio*, II, d. 36] quia peccatum est maxima poena naturae intellectualis inter omnes poenas eius; igitur si Christus perfectissime reconciliavit, istam poenam grasissimam meruit ab aliquo auferri, non nisi a matre; igitur, etc.” (Ibid.).

²⁴ “Confirmatur istud per exemplum, quia si filio Adae esset maxima poena regem contra eum offendi, nullus eum perfectissime reconciliaret, nisi auferret ab eo, non tantum exhaeredationem, sed etiam esse inimicum regis; igitur, etc.” (Ibid.).

²⁵ “Ex eadem via arguitur secundo sic: Christus immediatius videtur fuisse reparator et reconciliator noster a peccato originali quam ab actuali, quia necessitas incarnationis, passionis, etc. assignatur communiter ex peccato originali; sed supponitur communiter, quod ipse fuit ita perfectus mediator respectu alicuius personae, puta Mariae, quod eam praeservavit ab omni peccato actuali; igitur similiter a peccato originali.” (Ibid.).

²⁶ “[7] Ex tertia via arguo sic persona reconciliata non summe obligatur mediatori, nisi ab ipso summum bonum habeat, quod potest per mediatorem haberi, sed innocentia illa, scilicet praeservatio a culpa contracta vel contrahenda, potest haberi per mediatorem,

Duns Scotus adds that preserving someone from evil is a more excellent benefit than allowing him to fall into evil and freeing him from it. Furthermore, since Christ deserved grace and glory for many souls, who are therefore indebted to him as Mediator, why –our author asks– should there not be some soul that would be indebted to him because of his innocence? Moreover, why, if all angels are innocent, should there not be a human soul besides Christ that is innocent from its origin?²⁷

Regarding the second consideration, the Scottish thinker assures that alleging the corruption of the flesh due to paternal insemination does not prove anything in the case of Mary, according to Saint Anselm’s opinion on original sin. According to Duns Scotus, even admitting that original sin is commonly contracted through paternal insemination, the infection of the flesh, which persists even after baptism, does not necessarily cause original sin to remain in the soul since this body’s corruption also remains when the original sin is canceled by baptism. Therefore, God could erase the original guilt by granting grace and healing from the corruption of the flesh from the first moment of Mary’s conception so that this corruption of the body would not necessarily infect her soul if grace removed the guilt of the soul.²⁸

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ergo nulla persona summe tenebitur Christo, ut mediatori, si nullam praeservavit a peccato originali.” (Ibid., 52).

²⁷ “*imo excellentius beneficium es praeservare a malo, quam permittere incidere in malum, et ab eo postea liberare. Videtur etiam quod cum Christus multis animabus meruerit gratiam et gloriam, et pro his sic Christo debitores, ut mediatori, quare nulla anima erit ei debitorum pro innocentia? Et quare etiam omnes Angeli beati sint innocentes, et nulla humana anima erit innocens in patria, nisi sola anima Christi.*” (Ibid).

²⁸ “*Confirmatur istud per exemplum, quia si filio Adae esset maxima poena regem contra eum offendi, nullus eum perfectissime reconciliaret, nisi auferret ab eo, non tantum exhaeredationem, sed etiam esse inimicum regis; igitur, etc.*” (Ibid.).

flesh from the first moment of Mary's conception so that this body's corruption would not necessarily infect her soul if grace removed the soul's guilt.²⁹

Duns Scotus then asserts that relying on Mary's sufferings to prove she was conceived in original sin is inconclusive since the Mediator can reconcile someone by exonerating them from useless suffering. Thus, while the original sin would not have benefited Mary, the other temporal punishments, which were not exempted from her, were helpful to her because they allowed her to acquire merits.³⁰

2.4. Arguing his opinion in favor of Mary's immaculate conception

After analyzing the arguments for and against Mary's immaculate conception, Duns Scotus justifies his favorable position on the matter, saying that God could have acted on the Virgin according to these three possibilities: 1) he could have made her never be in original sin; 2) he could cause her to be in original sin only for an instant; 3) she could also cause her to be in original sin for some time, and only at the last moment she was purified.³¹

Regarding the first possibility, our author maintains that grace is equivalent to original justice before God, so the soul that possesses grace does not have the original sin. Thus, from the first moment, God was able to instill in Mary's soul as much grace as he instills in those who receive circumcision or baptism, and, therefore, at this exact moment, Mary's soul would not have had

²⁹ "Aut dato quod sic contrahitur peccatum originale communiter, tamen infectio carnis manens post baptismum, non est necessaria causa quare maneat peccatum originale in anima, sed ipsa manente peccatum originale deletur per gratiam collatum; ita posset Deus in primo instanti conceptionis Virginis dando tunc gratiam delere, ne esset causa necessaria infectionis in anima, si gratia tolleret culpam in anima." (Ibid.).

³⁰ "Aliud de passionibus Mariae [cf supra n. 16] non concludit, potest enim mediator reconciliare aliquem, ut auferantur ab eo poenae, sibi inutiles, et relinquatur in poenis sibi utilibus; originalis culpa non fuisset utilis Mariae, poenae temporales tamen fuerunt utiles, quia in eis meruit; igitur, etc." (Ibid.).

³¹ "[9] [Opinio propria] – Ad quaestionem dico quod Deus [primo] potuit facere quod ipsa nunquam fuisset in peccato originali; [secundo] potuit etiam fecisse, ut tantum in uno instanti esset in peccato; [tertio] potuit etiam facere, ut per tempus aliquod esset in peccato, [quarto] et in ultimo instanti illius temporis purgaretur." (Ibid.).

the original sin.³² Moreover, even if, in that first moment, Mary's flesh became infected, this did not necessarily determine the infection of her soul. The author goes so far as to affirm that it cannot be excluded that the Virgin's flesh itself may have been purified before the infusion of her soul so that it would not be contaminated by it.³³

Duns Scotus considers the second possibility evident: when Mary was conceived, she was in the original sin only for a moment. According to the author, that is evident, because, if a natural agent can begin to act at a specific moment, in a way that at this moment it remains at rest due to one of the opposites, and at the next moment it finds itself becoming due to the effect of the opposite way, God can also act with even greater propriety than this natural agent. Therefore, God can produce grace in someone at any given moment.³⁴ This is also confirmed, since, when a soul is in sin, it can also find itself in grace by divine power. Nevertheless, at the very moment the Virgin was conceived, she could have been in original sin, and, consequently, could also have been in grace.³⁵ Moreover, she didn't need to be in grace at the first moment of her conception. Furthermore, God could perfectly well have created grace in Mary in the first moment of her conception.³⁶

³² "Primum declaro, quia gratia aequi valet iustitiae originali, quantum ad acceptationem divinam, ut propter hanc animae habenti gratum non insit peccatum originale. Potuit enim Deus in primo instanti illius animae infundere sibi gratiam tantam, quantum alii animae in circumcissione vel baptismo, igitur in illo instanti anima non habuisset peccatum originale, sicut nec habuisset et postea fuisset baptizata." (Ibid.).

³³ "Et si etiam infectio carnis fuit ibi in primo instanti, non fuit tamen necessaria causa infectionis animae, sicut nec post Baptismum, quando manet secundum multos, et infectio animae non manet; aut potuit caro mundari ante infusionem animae ut in illo instanti non esset infecta." (Ibid.).

³⁴ "[10] Secundum patet, quia si agens naturale potest incipere agere in instanti, ita quod in illo instanti fuerit in esse quieto sub uno contrario, et in tempore habito est sub forma contraria in fieri, et quandocumque agens naturale potest agere, Deus potest agere; igitur potest et in tempore habito alicui instanti causare gratiam." (Ibid., 53).

³⁵ "Hoc etiam confirmatur, quia quando anima est in peccato, potest per potentiam divinam esse in gratia; sed in tempore illo quo fuit concepta, potuit esse in peccato, et per te fuit; igitur similiter potuit esse in gratia." (Ibid.).

³⁶ "Nec necesse fuit tunc quod fuisset in gratia in primo instanti illius temporis, sicut nec de mutatione et motu. Praeterea, in primo instanti potuit creasse gratiam in illa anima; ergo, etc." (Ibid.).

Duns Scotus considers the third possibility evident: when Mary was conceived, she was in original sin for some time, and only at the last moment was purified.

When asked which of the three possibilities came true, the Scottish Mariologist answers that only God knows. Furthermore, if it is not repugnant to the authority of the Church and Scripture, it seems likely to attribute to the Virgin the most excellent possibility,³⁷ namely, that she never had original sin.

According to Duns Scotus, against the argument of the second possibility –that Mary was in original sin only for an instant when she was conceived– the adversaries to this Marian privilege could raise two objections:

a) The first states that what God operates directly in a creature, he does in a single instant since, as Aristotle states in his VIII Book of *Physics*, an infinite power acts in a single instant, considering the disproportion between the action of an infinite power and a finite power. For this reason –the opponents of the belief above argue–, it is impossible that, after an instant of sin, God has sanctified a soul in a subsequent time.³⁸

b) According to the second objection, when asked whether the sanctification of Mary's soul in her conception is a movement or a change, the adversaries of Mary's immaculate conception reply that it is not a change since it would not happen in a single instant; but it is not a movement either, neither from the soul, because it is indivisible, nor from grace, nor from a non-existing intermediate term between these two extremes. In fact, the soul and grace are indivisible forms since they are immaterial; so, in this case there would not be a succession of moving materials parts, as a movement requires.³⁹

Duns Scotus flatly refutes both objections.

³⁷ "Tertium est manifestum. Quod autem horum trium, quae ostensa sunt esse possibilia, factum sit, Deus novit; si auctoritati Ecclesiae vel auctoritati Scripturae non repugnet, videtur probabile quod excellentius est, attribuere Mariae." (Ibid.).

³⁸ "[11] [Obiectiones contra secundum dictum] – Contra secundum istorum membrorum [cf supra n. 29] instatur dupliciter. Primo sic: quidquid Deus immediate agit circa creaturam, agit in instanti, quia secundum Philosophum VIII *Physicorum* virtus infinita agit in instanti, quia virtus infinita et finita non possunt agere in aequali mensura; igitur non potest justificare animam in tempore, habito instanti culpae." (Ibid.).

³⁹ "Praeterea, aut illa justificatio esset motus aut mutatio; non mutatio, quia non esset in instanti; non motus, quia non esset successio secundum partes mobilis, scilicet animae, quia ipsa est indivisibilis, neque secundum partes formae, scilicet gratiae, neque secundum media inter extrema." (Ibid.).

- a) To the first objection, he answers that if God does not act voluntarily at a non-necessary instant, it is convenient for him to wait a while to act at a specific instant, but he can act at a time, in the first instant of which he did not act. Therefore, God can immediately and directly do anything in an instant without necessarily needing to do it at a specific instant.⁴⁰
- b) To the second objection, Duns Scotus replies that rigorously considering what Aristotle says about movement and change, the sanctification of Mary's soul at her conception is neither a movement nor a change in the strict sense, but it has a small quantity of both: it has some change since it concerns the subject as a simple and indivisible form; it has some movement since it concerns time and is not an indivisible measure, and in this, it differs from change. Nevertheless, it also differs from movement because it is not a flow according to the parts of the form or according to intermediate stages between two extremes.⁴¹

Duns Scotus then points out that if his negative opinion on the problem proposed at the beginning of the speech is accepted, it contradicts the opinions of the doctrinal authorities cited, namely, that every son of Adam would receive the original justice of which he was deprived by the fault of Adam, and that this is the cause why every human being, including the Virgin Mary, contracts original sin. Against this prestigious general opinion, our author replies that if sanctifying grace is conferred on someone (Mary) from the very moment of the creation of her soul, she is never deprived of original justice, although this is not attributable to her personal merit, but to the merit of someone else (God), who grants him grace. Therefore, each human being, as far as it depends on him, would have the original sin unless the unique mediation of

⁴⁰ “[12] Ad primam instantiam [cf supra 33], dico quod si Deus voluntarie non agit in aliquo instanti non necessario, propter hoc oportet eum expectare tempus, ut in instanti determinato illius temporis agat; sed potest agere in tempore, in cuius primo instanti non agit. Verum est igitur quod Deus potest agere in instanti quidquid immediate agit, sed non est necesse ipsum agere in instanti.” (Ibid.).

⁴¹ “Ad secundum [cf supra n. 34] dico quod stricte loquendo, sicut Philosophus loquitur de motu et mutatione, ista iustificatio passio nec est motus nec mutatio, sed aliquid habens de utroque, hoc quidem habens de mutatione, quod, ut forma simplex et indivisibilis, inest subiecto; hoc autem de motu, quia in nulla mensura indivisibili inest, sed in tempore, et in hoc deficit a mutatione; deficit autem a motu, quia non est fluxus secundum partes formae vel mobilis, vel secundum media inter extrema, quia hic nulla sunt media, sicut probatum est.” (Ibid.).

someone else preserves it⁴² The Virgin Mary –Scotus infers– would have thus been preserved from the original sin by a privilege granted by God.

The Scottish master further asserts that the conspicuous opinions of doctrinal authorities, according to which all who come from Adam are sinners, must be interpreted thus: by how their nature is derived from Adam, they are deprived of due justice unless it is granted to them by another means. But grace, just as it can be conferred after the last instant, can also be conferred in the first instant.⁴³ Duns Scotus thus deduces that the Virgin Mary would have received complete sanctification at the exact moment of her conception.

Therefore, to the arguments that defend the first opinion denying the thesis of Mary's immaculate conception, the Scottish master contrasts the thesis that Mary had more need than all humans of Christ as Redeemer since she too would have contracted the original sin by natural generation, if not have been preserved by the divine Mediator's grace. Moreover, just as other human beings needed Christ so that through him, the original sin already contracted could be taken away from them, so she also had a greater need for this divine Mediator, who would preserve her from the original sin so that she would not be subjected to contracting it, and did not actually contract it.⁴⁴

⁴² “[14] Si autem teneatur pars negativa quaestionis, ad omnes auctoritates in contrariam partem respondetur, quod quilibet filius Adae naturaliter est debitor iustitiae originalis, et ex demerito Adae, caret ea, et ideo omnis talis habet unde contrahat peccatum originale; sed si alicui in primo instanti creationis animae detur gratia, ille licet careat iustitia originali, nunquam tamen est debitor eius, quia merito alterius praeventis peccatum, datur sibi gratia, quae aequivalet illi iustitiae, quantum ad acceptationem divinam, imo excedit; ergo quantum est ex se, quilibet haberet peccatum originale, nisi alius praeventiret merendo.” (Ibid.).

⁴³ “Et ita exponendae sunt auctoritates, quod omnes naturaliter propagati ab Adam sunt peccatores, hoc est, ex modo quo habent naturam ab Adam, habent unde careant iustitia debita, nisi eis aliunde conferatur; sed sicut posset post primum instans conferre ei gratiam, ita posset et in primo instanti.” (Ibid.).

⁴⁴ “Per illud patet ad rationes factas pro prima opinione, quia Maria maxime indiguisset Christo, ut redemptore; ipsa enim contraxisset originale peccatum ex ratione propagationis communis, nisi fuisset praeventa per gratiam mediatoris; et sicut alii indiguerunt Christo, ut per eius meritum remitteretur eis peccatum iam contractum, ita illa magis indiguit mediatore praeventiente, peccatum ne esset ab ipsa aliquando contrahendum, et ne ipsa contraheret.” (Ibid.).

2.5. Refuting objections against the belief in Mary's immaculate conception

Duns Scotus then answers the objections raised by some doctrinal authorities. The first objection expresses that because the Virgin Mary was naturally the daughter of Adam, she contracted the original sin before receiving grace.⁴⁵ To this objection, our author replies that when two opposites are related to the same subject in nature, both cannot coexist simultaneously, so if something comes before nature, it cannot coexist at the exact moment with its opposite.⁴⁶

Then, although he admits that the Virgin, because she was the daughter of Adam, should not have had grace at the exact moment of her natural conception, he nevertheless maintains that Mary was not necessarily deprived of grace at the absolutely first moment of her conception, because according to such absolute priority the Virgin's corporeal nature preceded both the deprivation of justice and the presence of justice. Consequently, the Subtle Doctor argues that it is possible to maintain only that Mary is the daughter of Adam rationally, but that does not include either the presence or the absence of grace.⁴⁷

To the objection that the priority of nature could be understood in that the Virgin Mary's nature is first naturally deprived of grace and then justified, the Scottish master argues that such priority in nature does not exist. It would exist –Duns Scot points out– if no external cause prevented it by giving it its opposite; in the same way, if matter received the form in the first instant

⁴⁵ “[15] Et si argutes contra hoc, quia prius naturaliter fuit filia Aadae, quia prius fuit persona, quam habens gratiam; in illo igitur priori tenebatur ad iustitiam originalem, quia naturalis filia Aadae, et non habuit eam, ergo in illo priori contraxit originale peccatum.” (Ibid., 54).

⁴⁶ “Respondeo et dico, quod quando opposita comparantur ad idem secundum ordinem naturae, non simul ambo insunt, sed tantum alterum inest. Reliquum autem quod dicitur prius natura non inest, quia in eodem instanti oppositum inest; sed dicitur prius natura, quia tunc inesset quantum est ex parte subiecti, nisi aliquid extrinsecum impediret.” (Ibid.).

⁴⁷ “Quando igitur arguitur, quod prius naturaliter fuit filia Aadae, quam iustificata [cf 46 supra n. 42; concedo, quia illam naturam in primo instanti naturae, sic conceptam consequeretur esse filiam Aadae, et non habere gratiam in illo instanti naturae, sed non sequitur, ergo in illo instanti naturae fuit privata, loquendo de omnino primo instanti, quia secundum illam primitatem, natura animae ita naturaliter praecessit privationem iustitiae, sicut ipsam iustitiam; sed tantum potest hoc inferri quod in ratione naturae, quae est fundamentum filiationis Aadae, non includitur iustitia, nec eius carentia, quod concedo.” (Ibid.).

of its natural existence, the privation that would correspond to it would never exist.⁴⁸

About the objection of the opening of the gate of heaven, our author maintains that by the merits of Christ's passion, the heavenly gate was opened to the Virgin foreseen and accepted in terms of her person, so that, by this passion, sin or anything that closed this door would never dwell in her, even though by birth also for her, as for other human beings, the door to heaven should have been closed.⁴⁹

Regarding the objection that if the Virgin Mary had died before her Son's passion, she would have been a saint, the Scottish Mariologist assures that we can affirm that the holy Fathers in limbo have been purified from original sin. However, the gate of heaven remained closed to them until the due penalty was deducted.⁵⁰ In his opinion, in effect, God had decided that even accepting that Christ's passion had been foreseen to redeem the original sin of every current and future believer in this passion, he would not have forgiven the penalty due for sin, namely, the deprivation of the beatific vision, until after Christ's passion. For this reason –Duns Scotus ventures to conjecture–, just as the door to heaven was not opened to the ancient fathers until the passion of Christ was consummated, so, probably, it would not have been opened to the Virgin Mary either if she would have died before her Son's passion.⁵¹

⁴⁸ “[17] Sed si obiicias de alio modo prioritatis naturae, quod ipsa est naturaliter prius carens iustitia quam habens eam, cum hoc insit sibi a causa intrinseca, dico, quod hoc prius natura nunquam inest sibi, sed tantum inesset, si causa extrinseca non impediret, et poneret oppositum eius inesse; sicut etiam si in primo instanti, materia informaretur, privatio, quae prius naturaliter inest materiae, nunquam et inesset.” (Ibid., 55).

⁴⁹ “Ad aliud de apertione ianuae [cf supra n. 14], patet quod ianua fuit sibi aperta per meritum passionis Christi praevisae et acceptae specialiter in ordine ad hanc personam, ut propter illam passionem nunquam huic personae inesset peccatum, et ita nec aliquid propter quod ianua clauderetur, cum tamen sibi ex origine competeret, unde ianua clauderetur sicut aliis.” (Ibid., 56).

⁵⁰ “[19] Si quaeratur, utrum si fuisset mortua ante passionem Filii, fuisset beata? Dicitur potest, quod sancti Patres in Limbo, purgati fuerunt a peccato originali, et tamen clausa fuit ianua usque ad solutionem poenae debitae.” (Ibid.).

⁵¹ “Ita enim determinaverat Deus, quod licet acceptaret passionem Christi praevisam ad remittendum culpam originalem, omni credenti et credituro illam passionem, non tamen remittebat poenam illi peccato debitam, scilicet carentiam visionis divinae, propter passionem praevisam, sed propter ipsam exhibitam, et ideo sicut illis patribus non patuit ianua, quousque passio Christi fuit exhibitae, ita probabile est, quod nec Beatae Virgini.” (Ibid.).

To the argument of Saint Bernard, the Subtle Doctor retorts that at the exact moment of conception of Mary's nature, her sanctification would have occurred, not because of an existing guilt (which was not present in her), but because of a guilt that should have been present in her, if grace had not been infused into the Virgin's soul at that very moment of being conceived.⁵²

Finally, to the objection that would claim that in the conception of Mary, there was concupiscence on the part of her parents, Duns Scotus replies that this is false as regards the conception of natures, although it is true as regards conception by mixture of semen; and, even admitting that in this conception through semen the soul of Mary was created, it would not have been inconvenient for grace to have been infused into her soul so that it would not become infected with the flesh or with the body inseminated through concupiscence.⁵³

According to the Scottish master, just as after the first instant after baptism, the corruption of the body contracted by generation through sexual intercourse can remain together with the baptismal grace in the soul sanctified by baptism, so it can also have happened in the first instant of Mary's conception, if then God created grace in her soul, in such a way that it would not be contaminated with the flesh, produced by libidinous insemination.⁵⁴

Conclusions

Swimming against the majority current of those, led by influential leaders of Christian doctrine, who denied the belief in Mary's immaculate conception, Duns Scotus emerged at the end of the 13th century as the brave leader of the defenders of that belief.

⁵² “[20] Ad argumentum Bernardi [cf supra n. 9. 11] potest responderi, quod in instanti conceptionis naturae fuisset sanctificatio non a culpa quae tunc infuit, quia nulla fuit, sed a culpa quae tunc infuisset nisi tunc gratia illi animae fuisset infusa.” (Ibid.).

⁵³ “Et si arguatur, quod ibi fuit libido, falsum est de conceptione naturarum, licet posset concedi fuisse in conceptione et commixtione seminum.” (Ibid.).

⁵⁴ “Et dato quod in conceptione seminum fuisset creatio animae, non fuisset aliquod inconueniens, gratiam tunc fuisse infusam animae, propter quam anima non contraxisset aliquam infectionem a carne cum libidine seminata; sicut enim post primum instans baptismi potuit manere infectio corporis contracta per propagationem cum gratia in anima munda, ita potest esse in primo instanti, si Deus tunc creavit gratiam in anima Maria.” (Ibid.).

To justify his theological position on the matter, the Scottish Mariologist, following the traditional scholastic model, proceeds through a double and complementary methodological path: first he exposes and refutes the objections and arguments of the opponents of that belief; then, he rigorously reasons the arguments with which he justifies his defense of Mary's immaculate conception.

In this sense, Duns Scotus argues that God could infuse Mary's soul with his absolute grace from the first moment of her conception; therefore, at that exact moment, Mary's soul would not have had original sin. Moreover, even if, in that first instant, there was the corruption of Mary's flesh, this did not necessarily determine the corruption of her soul.

Duns Scotus complements this proof by specifying that at the very moment of conception of Mary's nature, her sanctification would have occurred, not due to an existing guilt (which was not present in her), but due to a guilt that should have been present if grace had not been infused into the Virgin's soul at the very moment of being conceived. Furthermore, God infused full grace into Mary's soul at the very instant of her conception, preventing her from being contaminated with the original sin when she was conceived.

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