

JOHN DUNS SCOTUS AND HIS DEFENCE OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

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Blessed John Duns Scotus (1265/66 – 8th November 1308), besides being known as the «Subtle Doctor», is also referred to as the «Marian Doctor». It was he who presented a systematic theology of the Marian privilege of the Immaculate Conception, which the Catholic Church officially proclaimed as a Dogma of Faith in the Apostolic Constitution *Ineffabilis Deus* of Pope Pius IX (8th December 1854), of which we are this year celebrating the 150th anniversary.

The theological doctrine of John Duns Scotus regarding the Immaculate Conception is found in Volume XX of the *Lectura in Librum Tertium Sententiarum*, in the third *distincio*, first *quaestio*, which has the title *Utrum Beata Virgo fuerit concepta in peccato originali* (Regarding whether the Blessed Virgin was conceived in original sin). We now have a critical edition of this *quaestio*, published by the International Scotistic Commission of the Friars Minor, working at the Pontificium Athenaeum Antonianum in Rome.¹ Our aim is that of providing a simple presentation of the main arguments which the Subtle Doctor proposes as a defence of this unique privilege of the Virgin Mary.

Scotus' *Lectura* on the Third Book of Sentences of Peter Lombard deals with the mystery of the Incarnation. The Christological basis for Scotus' theology on the Immaculate Conception is fundamental in order to understand this privilege of the Virgin Mary in its correct theological setting. Scotus builds a theology centred upon Christ, who is eternally predestined by God the Father to assume human nature in the Incarnation. According to the Subtle Doctor the Incarnation was not primarily intended to be the condition for the redemption of humanity from sin. In God's provident plan, the Incarnation of the Word in the person of Jesus Christ was, first and foremost, the apex of the act of creation by God the Father. All creation has been fashioned according to the image of the Incarnate Word, and is the result of a pure and free act of love on the part of God. Creation, in this way, enters in a mysterious but real way into a loving relationship with God as a Trinity of Persons. Each and every creature, being complete in itself and unique in its essence, is a model of God the Son, who became Incarnate in order to glorify His Father for the beauty of creation. This vision is a direct result of Franciscan spirituality at its best. It is true that, in the history redemption, the Incarnation was then orientated toward the salvation of humankind from sin, but this aspect, important though it may be, could not be the only reason for the Incarnation. Otherwise God would not be

¹ DOCTORIS SUBTILIS ET MARIANI B. IOANNIS DUNS SCOTI, Ordinis Fratrum Minorum, *Opera Omnia*. Iussu et Auctoritate Rmi. P. Iacobi Bini, totius Ordinis Fratrum Minorum Minister Generalis, studio et cura Commissionis Scotisticae, ad fidem codicum edita. Vol. XX: *Lectura in Librum Tertium Sententiarum: a distinctione prima ad decimam septimam. Distinctio III, Quaestio I: «Utrum Beata Virgo fuerit concepta in peccato originali»*, Civitas Vaticana, Typis Vaticanis MMIII, 119-138. References to this critical edition will be given thus: SCOTUS, *Lectura III Sent.*, with the relevant page number.

seen as the personification of the primacy of the free will, expressed in love which overflows from Him onto His creatures.

It is in this Christological view of the world and of redemption that Scotus speaks about the Virgin Mary as Mother of Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Word of God. She becomes the embodiment of all perfection in creation, freed from sin and from its effects through the saving power of Jesus Christ, the universal Mediator between God and humankind. It was fitting that God would choose a Mother for His Son, who would be totally free from any stain of original and actual sin, in order to become a channel of grace to us all. Having explained in a few words Scotus' Christological vision of creation and redemption, we can now try to understand how he explains the privilege of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary within this theological context.

Arguments against the privilege of the Immaculate Conception

Scotus commences his *quaestio* by presenting arguments from Holy Scripture and the Church Fathers which the theologians of his times were quoting as being contrary to the privilege of the Immaculate Conception. The first argument is taken from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans 5,12: "Sin entered the world through one man, and through sin death, and thus death has spread through the whole human race, because everyone has sinned." According to the flesh every human person, without any exception, was conceived in original sin, inherited from Adam, the first man. The only exception to the rule was Jesus Christ. According to what Saint Augustine states in his Commentary on the Book of Genesis, Levi was generated from Adam according to the flesh, but this was not the case of Christ. Therefore Jesus Christ did not contract original sin. All other human beings were born from Adam according to the flesh, including the Virgin Mary. Therefore she also was conceived in original sin.²

Likewise the Fathers of the Church deny Mary the privilege of being Immaculate. Saint John Damascene states that the Virgin Mary was purified by the Holy Spirit. This means that she had been conceived in the state of original sin.

Saint Augustine states that it is beyond doubt that every human person who is conceived out of union between man and woman is born in the state of original sin. This view of the state of original sin depending upon human generation is then applied to the Virgin Mary, who was conceived in a natural way like every other human person. Therefore she could not possibly have averted being conceived in the state of original sin.

² SCOTUS, *Lectura III Sent.*, 119: «Circa distinctionem tertiam quaeritur utrum beata Virgo fuerit concepta in peccato originali. Quod sic: Ad Rom. 5: *In Adam omnes peccaverunt*, - quod non potest esse verum nisi quia omnes fuerunt in Adam secundum rationem seminalem; unde secundum Augustinum X *Super Genesim*, Levi fuit in Adam secundum rationem seminalem, et non Christus, - et ideo Christus non contraxit peccatum originale. Omnes igitur qui secundum rationem seminalem fuerunt in Adam, contraxerunt peccatum originale; et sic fuit beata Virgo in Adam; ergo etc».

In one of his homilies for Christmas, Saint Leo the Great writes that the Lord came into the world to heal all humankind. This would imply that the Virgin Mary is no exception to the rule.

Saint Bernard states that Mary could have been sanctified either in the moment of conception or immediately after. He rules out the possibility of her being sanctified at the moment of conception, since physical union between man and woman cannot coexist with sanctification. That leaves open the second option, of her being sanctified immediately after conception. But that would imply that she was in the state of original sin at the moment of conception.

Finally Scotus refers to the liturgical praxis of the Church in his times, which celebrated the feast of the Nativity of the Virgin Mary, but not that of her Conception, because Mary was not believed to have been conceived Immaculate. Scotus is referring to a commentary on the *Decretum Gratiani*, which mentioned the feast of the Conception which was celebrated particularly in England, but did not encourage it, since it was contrary to the Church's official teaching.³

Arguments in favour of the privilege of the Immaculate Conception

Theologians during the times of John Duns Scotus were following the Church Fathers who, in the majority of cases, had been unfavourable to the possibility of Mary having been conceived without original sin. In spite of this, Scotus quotes Saint Augustine, who in *De natura et gratia* writes: "Where there is a question of sin, in the case of Mary I do not want to comment."⁴ Saint Anselm, in *De conceptu virginali*, writes: "It was fitting that the Mother of Christ would have a purity greater than which nobody could think of."⁵

The presentation of the common opinion regarding Mary's conception

The Son of Mary was the Redeemer of all, and with his death he merited the salvation of his Mother and of all humankind. However, if his Mother had not been conceived in original sin, since she did not commit any actual sin, she could not possibly have needed a Redeemer, since she would have been without sin. If she would have been conceived without original sin, the doors of heaven would not have been closed to her, and they would not have been opened at the moment of the death of her Son. From this

³ Footnote in: SCOTUS, *Lectura III Sent.*, 120: HUGUCCIO PISANUS, *Glossae in Decretum Gratiani* pars 3 d. 3 c. 1 (ed. Venetiis 1591, 1826b): «Nativitas: De festo Conceptionis nihil dicitur [in *Decreto*], quia celebrandum non est, - sicut in multis regionibus fit, et maxime in Anglia: et haec est ratio, quia in peccatis concepta fuit sicut et ceteri sancti, excepta unica persona Christi».

⁴ Footnote in: SCOTUS, *Lectura III Sent.*, 121: AUGUSTINUS., *De nat. et gratia* c. 36 n. 42 (CSEL 60, 263-264; PL 44, 267): «Cum de peccatis agitur, nullam volo de Maria habere quaestionem»; LOMBARDUS, *Sent.* III d. 3 c. 2 (SB V 33).

⁵ Footnote in: SCOTUS, *Lectura III Sent.*, 121: ANSELMUS, *De conceptu virg.* C. 18 (ed. SCHMITT II 159; PL 158, 451): «Decuit ut Mater Christi ea puritate niteret, qua maior nequit intelligi».

follows that, if she had died before her Son died on the cross, she could immediately have seen God face to face.

Scotus is here referring to what famous theologians of his times had been saying. John de la Rochelle had stated that if the Virgin Mary had not sinned, than she would not have needed redemption. Since she was redeemed by Christ, then she was conceived in original sin. Saint Bonaventure, in the *Commentary on the Third Book of Sentences*, had written that if the Blessed Virgin was free from original sin, then Christ's redemption would not have had anything to do with her. Now for Christ it was a greater glory to redeem Mary than to redeem the other saints. In this way, if he did not redeem the Blessed Virgin, he would be deprived of a most noble glory. Saint Thomas Aquinas, also in his *Commentary of the Third Book of Sentences*, wrote that Christ did not need to be redeemed, since he is the head of the human race, but all other human persons had to be redeemed through him. Now this could not be possible if only one soul could be found which was not infected with original sin. Therefore neither the Blessed Virgin nor any other human person before Christ could have been given this privilege. In his *Summa Theologiae* Thomas Aquinas writes that if the Blessed Virgin did not contract original sin, she would not have needed redemption through Christ. Now this would have been out of place, since Christ had to be Saviour of all human persons.⁶

The body of Mary was conceived in the same manner of the conception of all other human beings. In this way she also contracted original sin. Since original sin finds its material cause in the human body, it follows that the body needs to be united with the soul before a human person can receive sanctifying grace. Now, during the moment in which the soul unites itself with the body, at that very moment it contracts original sin. Moreover, Mary underwent those sufferings which are the effect of original sin. She did not accept these sufferings out of her own free will, as Christ did in order to save humanity, but she underwent these sufferings as a consequence of her solidarity with the human race in the state of original sin.

⁶ Footnote in: SCOTUS, *Lectura III Sent.*, 122; IOANNES DE RUPELLA, *Quaestiones disp.* q. 1 in corp. (cod. Tolosae, bibl. commun. 737, f. 34^{rb}): «Si beata Virgo... non habet reatum peccati, non indiget redemptione... Redempta fuit per Christum, ergo fuit concepta in peccato»; BONAVENTURA., *Sent.* III d. 3 pars 1 a. 1 q. 2 in corp. (III 68a): «Si ergo beata Virgo caruit originali, videtur quod ad redemptionem Christi non pertineat; sed magna est gloria Christi de sanctis quos redemit; ergo si non redemit beatam Virginem, nobilissima gloria privatur. Hoc est profanum et impium dicere»; THOMAS, *Sent.* III d. 3 q. 1 a. 1 qc. 2 in corp. (ed. Parmen. VII 38a): «Christus... hoc singulariter in humano genere habet, ut redemptione non egeat, quia caput nostrum est, sed omnibus convenit redimi per ipsum; hoc autem esse non posset, si alia anima inveniretur quae numquam originali macula fuisset infecta; et ideo nec beatae Virgini nec alicui praeter Christum hoc concessum est»; *Quodl.* VI q. 5. a. 1 in corp. (XXV 302b); *Summa theol.* III q. 27 a. 2 in corp. (XI 290a); «[Si beata Virgo non] incurrisset maculam originalis culpae..., non indignisset redemptione et salute quae est per Christum...; hoc autem est inconveniens quod Christus non sit Salvator omnium hominum».

Scotus' own exposition of the common opinion

John Scotus begins his defence of the Marian privilege, by presenting his arguments against the common opinion of theologians. He builds the first argument upon the figure of Christ as the most perfect mediator.

“Christ was the most perfect mediator. Therefore he exercised the highest degree of mediation in favour of another person. Now he could not be a most perfect mediator and could not repair the effects of sin to the highest degree if he did not preserve his Mother from original sin (as we shall prove). Therefore, since he was the most perfect mediator regarding the person of his Mother, from this it follows that he preserved her from original sin.”⁷

The key notion to understand Scotus' theology in this paragraph, as indeed in all his arguments in this question on the Immaculate Conception, is the verb “to preserve”. Christ preserved his Mother from original sin, according to Scotus. In other words, the Blessed Virgin Mary, like every other human person, was bound to be conceived in original sin, but she was *preserved* from it through the merits of her Son.

Scotus goes on to show that the perfect act of mediation in favour of a person does not only concern that person's liberation from the guilt of actual sins, but also the liberation from the guilt which is a result of original sin, which he calls *culpa contracta* (contracted guilt). In order to prove this he quotes an example given by Saint Anselm in his *Cur Deus homo* II, c. 16. A king is offended by a father, and punishes him and all his future sons by sending them into exile. But the king is drawn to love in a special way one of the sons born to that man, and he would have wanted to preserve him from exile. So what he does is to forgive that man and his sons from the punishment of exile, but in his anger he does not forgive them their *culpa contracta*, or acquired guilt. In order to speak of a perfect act of mediation and forgiveness, that man has to acquire for his son not only the king's forgiveness of his acquired guilt but also the king's benevolence. In the same way, through his death on the cross, Christ merited not only the forgiveness of any sin which his Mother could have committed without the help of grace, but even that of the acquired guilt in which she was to be conceived like every other human being.

Scotus therefore states that there cannot be a most perfect mediator and reconciler if he does not acquire the remission of the greatest guilt in favour of the one he is mediating for. Christ could not have been a perfect mediator if he did not permit that at least the soul of one single person would not have been deprived of rectitude in the fullest sense. Now the Virgin Mary was innocent to the highest degree. If her Son had to be her most perfect redeemer and reconciler, he had to preserve her from original sin. The Holy Trinity, which could also foresee the merits of the passion of Christ, for this very

⁷ SCOTUS, *Lectura III Sent.*, 123: «Christus fuit perfectissimus mediator, igitur habuit quantum ad aliquam personam summum gradum mediationis; sed non fuisset perfectissimus mediator et reparator nisi Matrem praeservasset a peccato originali (ut probatur); igitur cum ipse fuerit perfectissimus mediator quantum ad personam Matris suae, sequitur quod praeservavit eam a peccato originali».

reason, permitted that the Virgin Mary be preserved from all guilt, whether it resulted from actual sin or from original sin.

Scotus' arguments regarding the common opinion

Scotus presents four main arguments regarding the common opinion of theologians on the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary. The first argument of the theologians had regarded the fact that, if the Blessed Virgin Mary had not contracted original sin, then she could not possibly have needed redemption from sin. Scotus, however, responds that the process was the reverse of what these theologians were stating. When a person receives abundance of forgiveness through the act of a mediator, that person is all the more in debt towards that mediator and owes to him any privilege that he or she acquires. Now this is the case of the Virgin Mary, who needed Christ more than all the other human beings. This was the result of her being preserved from original sin through the merits of the passion of Christ. Mary was, therefore, redeemed in a nobler manner. Above all, "it is more noble to forgive one's guilt by preserving that person from it, than by permitting that same person to fall into guilt and than to remit that person's guilt."⁸

In order to prove this fundamental assertion, Scotus gives an example. A man sins mortally only once and then God preserves him from other mortal sins. Another sins mortally more than once, and God forgives him every time he converts to Him. Now who of the two receives the more perfect forgiveness? Scotus says that it is the first one, in the sense that God not only as forgiven him in a more noble way, but has also preserved him from falling into sin in the future. Thus he is more indebted to God. The same is true in the case of the Virgin Mary being preserved from all sin.

The second argument of the contrary opinion of theologians had shown that, if the Virgin Mary had been freed from original sin, the gates of heaven would not have been closed for her, and therefore she would have been like Christ in everything. Scotus, however, shows that the gates of heaven were opened to the Virgin Mary through no merits of her own, but solely through the merits of the passion of Christ. It was only after Christ had applied the merits of his passion to Mary, that she, like the rest of humankind, could attain to beatific vision. Therefore Mary also needed the passion of Christ in order for her to enter through the gates of heaven. The only difference between her and the rest of humankind was that the Virgin Mary was preserved beforehand from all guilt through the merits of the passion of Christ, whereas the rest of the human race was liberated from guilt only after Christ applied to them the merits of his passion through grace which works in an ordinary way through the sacraments.

Regarding the third argument, which insisted that the human soul is sullied by original sin as soon as it is united to the body, Scotus answers that, in the same moment in which God created the human soul, he could endow it with the grace of sanctification.

⁸ SCOTUS, *Lectura III Sent.*, 126: «Nobilius est remittere alicui culpam ipsum praeservando ne insit, quam permittere offensam inesse et eam postea remittere».

Moreover, he could also purify the human body before it would be united with the soul. This is what happened in the conception of the Son of God in the womb of the Virgin Mary.

The fourth argument insisted that the effects of sin were to be seen in suffering and want in human nature, and particularly in death. Now we know that Christ also underwent all these sufferings. But he did this out of his own free will, in order to take upon himself our sufferings when he saved us. In the case of the Virgin Mary Scotus says that Christ merited for her to be freed from the guilt of original sin, but that it was not necessary that, as a consequence, she would also be freed of the effects of sin which are still evident in redeemed humanity. Therefore Christ merited his Mother the greatest perfection regarding the lack of the greatest guilt, but not regarding its effects, which are important for a soul in order to attain the merits of the redemption brought by Christ.

At this point Scotus arrives at refuting all the arguments which were trying to prove that it was not possible that Mary was conceived without original sin. But he still needed to prove his assertions.

Scotus' definite answer and the proofs he presents

The fundamental question which Scotus had to answer was the following: Was Mary conceived in original sin and then immediately purified from it? Scotus is wary to leave open all possibilities and answers in a very prudent way: "I say that it was possible that she (the Virgin Mary) was not conceived in original sin. It was also possible that she was in the state of original sin for a split second of time and then was in a state of grace for the rest of her life. Lastly it was possible that she was in a state of original sin for some time and then passed into the state of grace."⁹

Regarding the first possibility, which is certainly the most valid one according to Scotus, the Subtle Doctor states that it was possible that God infuses grace into the soul in the very first instants of its union with the body, and that this grace has the power to purify the body from all stain of sin.

Scotus also admits the second possibility, that is, that the Virgin Mary was in the state of original sin for a split second and then immediately passed into the state of grace. This was the opinion of Henry of Ghent, who stated that there were two moments in conception, the body which is conceived in original sin, and the soul which is sanctified by grace.¹⁰ We make a distinction on the intellectual level between these two moments,

⁹ SCOTUS, *Lectura III Sent.*, 129: «Sed quid de facto? Fuitne concepta in peccato originali et postea mundata? Dico quod possibile fuit quod non fuerit concepta in originali; et possibile etiam fuit quod fuerit in originali per unum instans tantum et per totum tempus habitum in gratia; et possibile etiam fuit quod per tempus aliquod fuerit in originali et in ultimo illius in gratia».

¹⁰ Footnote in: SCOTUS, *Lectura III Sent.*, 130: HENRICUS GAND., *Quodl.* XV q. 13 in corp. (f. 586C-586D): «Fuitne possibile, secundum naturam, Virginem vere... in instanti quo concepta est 'homo' ex semine secundum corpus et anima illi est unita, peccatum originale contraxisse et in illo nonnisi per illud instans permansisse? Et videtur mihi quod hoc bene possibile est... Forma enim corporea humana... in

but in fact, they are as far away from one another as the twinkle of an eye. After all, God has the power to operate within our category of time or in a simultaneous way.¹¹

Regarding the third possibility, in which the human person is conceived in the state of original sin and then is freed from this state through grace, Scotus does not envision any contradiction, since all human beings, in effect, are conceived in the state of original sin and then pass on to a state of grace. Scotus, however, insists on making an exception to this rule in the case of the Virgin Mary.

Scotus' solution to the principal arguments of theologians outlined above

Scotus returns to the authority of the Church Fathers who speak about the fact that the Virgin Mary was sanctified in the womb, but that she could not possibly have been conceived without original sin. He reminds us that Saint Augustine had asserted that, where it is a question of sin, he would prefer not to comment in the case of the Virgin Mary. He answers John Damascene, who had stated that the Virgin Mary was purified in her body during conception, telling him that there cannot be purification without the prior sanctifying grace of the Holy Spirit. Saint Leo the Great had stated that all human persons were born as sons of God's wrath, except Christ. Scotus reminds him that grace had already preserved the Virgin Mary from God's wrath when she was conceived without original sin. All human beings are, in fact, sons and daughters of God's wrath, and they are reconciled to God through the merits of the passion of Christ. The Virgin Mary, however, was preserved from being conceived into God's wrath because of a special privilege that God the Father gave her, because of the special love He had for his only-begotten Son.¹² Regarding Saint Anselm's statement that Mary was born into the sin of Adam like all other human persons, Scotus shows that the true words of Anselm were that the Virgin Mary had been purified of sin and that Christ assumed human nature in a purified mother.¹³ Scotus answers Saint Bernard, who had admitted that there was a split second of a moment during which Mary had contracted original sin when her body

primo instanti suae generationis ex semine habet esse..., et in eodem instanti corpus humanum... habet esse infectum...; in eodem instanti creatur [anima rationalis] in corpore... atque per hoc ab illo maculam peccati originalis contrahit...; et toto tempore praecedente non habebat illam maculam, quia nec habebat esse, - nec in Virgine habuit esse per tempus sequens, ut aestimo congruere dignitati Virginis, sicut et possibile est secundum naturam, ita quod non nisi in transitu et in instanti fuerit in peccato originali; scilicet peccatum originale in illo instanti simul habuit esse primo et ultimo, sed secundum aliud et aliud signum illius instantis, quia ut erat terminus temporis praeteriti, in illo habebat esse primo..., ut vero illud instans erat initium temporis sequentis, in illo habuit esse ultimo per sequentem impulsionem motus gratiae, velut a superiore in tempore sequente expellentem illam... Sic igitur videtur mihi quod originale in Virgine per solum momentum instantis fuisse potuit... Sed an ita factum sit, Deus novit, - quod nec scio, nec assero; sed rationabile videtur mihi et possibile secundum praedicta factum fuisse».

¹¹ SCOTUS, *Lectura III Sent.*, 133: «Est primum instans in quo Deus incepit gratificare animam: in quo instanti tantum, ponitur fuisse sub culpa et potentia Dei, in cuius potestate est agere in tempore vel instanti».

¹² SCOTUS, *Lectura III Sent.*, 134: «Unde omnes alii fuerunt praestituti futuri filii irae, et post purgandi merito passionis Christi; ista autem fuit praestituta fuisse filia irae nisi gratia praevenisset, quam Deus voluit sibi specialiter conferre (propter obsequium quod contulit Filio Dei)».

¹³ SCOTUS, *Lectura III Sent.*, 135: «Virgo fuit mundata, et de ipsa munda fuit Christus assumptus».

was conceived, after which she was immediately sanctified when the soul was infused into her body. Scotus says that there is only one moment when grace touches the human person, that is, the moment of the union between soul and body. It was at that initial moment that the Virgin Mary was freed from original sin. He even states that Saint Bernard had appeared to a certain woman after his death, showing a stain on his forehead, and telling her that he got that stain because he had stated that the Virgin Mary was conceived in original sin. Scotus reminds that we do not celebrate the conception of a human body, but the conception of a body which is vivified by the infusion of the soul. It was at this precise moment that the Virgin Mary was conceived without any blemish of original sin.¹⁴

The Subtle Doctor reasons truly in a subtle way when he affirms that there is a difference between stating that the soul of the Virgin Mary in the moment of conception did not fall under the influx of grace and stating that the soul of the Virgin Mary was, in itself, conceived without grace.¹⁵ If Scotus remains open to the possibility that, for a split second, the Virgin Mary could not have been under the power of sanctifying grace, but certainly he does not mean to imply that, even for a split second, the Virgin Mary was cut off from the gift of sanctifying grace.

Conclusion of Scotus' defence and the Church's reception of his theology

Scotus expresses his conclusion to all the arguments he brought forward to defend the privilege of the Immaculate Conception: "We can therefore say that it was possible that the Blessed Virgin was not conceived in original sin. This assertion does not diminish in any way the universal redemption of her Son, as we have outlined above. We can furthermore confirm this, since the passion of Christ was immediately and principally ordered to delete original guilt as well as actual guilt, in such a way that all the Trinity, since it had the foresight of the merits of the passion of Christ, applied them to the Virgin and preserved her from all actual sin, and also from all original sin."¹⁶

This theology forms the basis of the Church's official pronouncement of the Dogma of the Immaculate Conception, as well as of the theology of the liturgical text of the feast of the Immaculate Conception.

¹⁴ SCOTUS, *Lectura III Sent.*, 136: «Dicendum est quod conceptio seminum non est celebranda, sed conceptio animati corporis potest celebrari».

¹⁵ SCOTUS, *Lectura III Sent.*, 138: «Eodem modo simul stant quod in illo priore anima beatæ Virginis non sit sub gratia et tamen quod semper sit sub gratia, quia 'ipsam in illo priore non esse sub gratia' non est aliud quam ipsam secundum se non habere gratiam. Nunc autem non sequitur 'ipsa secundum se non habet gratiam, igitur non habet gratiam'».

¹⁶ SCOTUS, *Lectura III Sent.*, 138: «Potest igitur dici quod possibile sit beatam Virginem non fuisse conceptam in peccato originali. Nec hoc derogat universali redemptioni Filii sui, ut supra ostensum est, - et iterum confirmari potest, quia ex quo passio Christi immediatus et principaliter ordinatur ad delendum reatum originale quam actuale, sicut tunc tota Trinitas ex praevisione passionis Christi applicatae Virgini praeservavit eam ab omni actuali, sic et ab omni originali».

The Apostolic Constitution «*Ineffabilis Deus*», published on 8th December 1854, exactly 150 years ago, by Blessed Pope Pius IX, echoes in a remarkable way Scotus' own theology regarding the privilege of the Immaculate Conception, in the following solemn proclamation of this Dogma of Catholic faith:

“To the honour of the holy and undivided Trinity, to the worthiness and splendid beauty of the Virgin Mother of God, to the upholding of the Catholic faith, and to the furthering of the Christian religion, with the authority of Our Lord Jesus Christ, with that of the holy Apostles Peter and Paul, and with Our own authority, we declare, we pronounce and we define the doctrine which holds that the most Blessed Virgin Mary, in the very first moments of her Conception, through the singular grace of Almighty God, and through the foresight of the merits of Christ Jesus, Saviour of the human race, was preserved immune from all stains of original sin. We furthermore declare, pronounce and define that this doctrine has been revealed by God, and therefore has to be strongly and always believed by all the faithful.”¹⁷

The same can be said regarding the opening prayer of the Mass of the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary (8th December), which re-echoes Scotus' theology on this Marian privilege in its ability to render in a succinct way the faith of the Church in a liturgical formula:

“Father, you prepared the Virgin Mary to be the worthy Mother of your Son. You let her share beforehand in the salvation Christ would bring by his death, and kept her sinless from the first moment of her conception. Help us by her prayers to live in your presence without sin.”¹⁸

John Duns Scotus can be described as a Franciscan theologian who provided the Church with the Christological basis for the doctrine on the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary, in such a way that it could truly be seen as the result of divine revelation. His Christ-centred vision of creation and redemption proves that the primacy of God's love in the mystery of the Incarnation is still at work in the Church and in the world. The *mysterium iniquitatis*, or mystery of evil, has been won over by Christ and his Immaculate Mother, whom Saint Francis salutes as the *Virgo Ecclesia facta*, the “Virgin made Church”.

¹⁷ PIUS IX, Apostolic Constitution *Ineffabilis Deus*, in: H. DENZINGER, *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, 1641: «Ad honorem sanctae et individuae Trinitatis, ac decus et ornamentum Virginis Deiparae, ad exaltationem fidei catholicae, et christianae religionis augmentum, auctoritate Domini Nostri Iesu Christi, beatorum Apostolorum Petri et Pauli, ac Nostra declaramus, pronuntiamus et definimus doctrinam, quae tenet, beatissimam Virginem Mariam in primo instanti suae Conceptionis fuisse singulari omnipotentis Dei gratia et privilegio, intuitu meritorum Christi Iesu Salvatoris humani generis, ab omni originalis culpa labe praeservatam immunem, esse a Deo revelatam, atque idcirco ab omnibus fidelibus firmiter constanterque credendam».

¹⁸ «Deus, qui per Immaculatam Virginis Conceptionem dignum Filium tuum habitaculum praeparasti, quaesumus, ut qui ex morte eiusdem Filii tui praevisa, eam ab omni labe praeservasti; nos quoque mundos eius intercessione, ad te pervenire concedas».

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