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and unrelenting war with sin; and that the more carefully and resolutely we guard ourselves against even venial faults and imperfections,—in other words, *the more closely we resemble the Immaculate Mother of God,*—the more we shall grow in God's favor. *Beata Mater et intacta Virgo, gloriosa Regina, mundi, intercede pro nobis ad Dominum!*

ST. THOMAS AND THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

By P. Lumbreras, O.P., S.T.Lr., Ph.D.

Some years ago I was traveling with a Baptist minister. In the course of our conversation he attacked the traditional basis of Catholic dogmas. As an instance, he pointed out the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, a dogma, he said, that was never taught by the Fathers of the Church, and was even denied by St. Thomas Aquinas, one of the greatest of ecclesiastical Doctors. Three years afterward, on the feast of the Immaculate Conception, while dining with some Catholic priests, who were also learned professors, one of them remarked that the only opponents of the Feast had been the Dominicans. In fact, he contended that St. Thomas denied the Immaculate Conception.

It would be interesting to hear this Catholic priest discussing the above question with the Baptist minister. What would be his answer to the minister's last statement? Of course, I am told, he could say that St. Thomas is *one* of the Doctors, and that our Faith is not based on the particular opinion of one Doctor, but on the unanimous teaching of them all. This answer, however, is anything but satisfactory; for a learned interlocutor can reply that St. Thomas is not alone; that at the side of Aquinas we can number St. Anselm, St. Bernard, and St. Bonaventure. Although they are four Doctors only, they belong to the most brilliant period of Catholic theology. They were, moreover, perfectly acquainted with the writings of the Fathers and Doctors, their predecessors, and they preserved in every way the most perfect devotion and the closest attachment to them. They compete, finally, with those Fathers and Doctors in extolling the singular prerogatives and unlimited excellency of Mary. In fact, in language more precise, though less rhetorical, they surpass the former writers; for there is no praise of Mary in those authors which could not be found in St. Thomas, not merely reproduced, but even improved;[1] while, on

[1] Here are a few instances: *Beata Virgo tantam gratia obtinuit plenitudinem, ut esset propinquissima Auctori gratia; ita quml^Eum, qui est plenus gratia, in se reciperet; et, Èum paricudo, quodammodo c/raliam ad omnes derivaret (Summa Thcol,,* p. III, o. 27, a. 1, ad *Magnum est in quolibet sancto, quando habet*

instrumental virtue—by which the semen evolves the ovum into flesh—flesh which will rebel against reason—and by which the flesh makes necessary the infusion of the soul—a soul which will share the corruption of the flesh.[8]* For as the semen comes from a body which habitually revolts against reason, it moves to the formation of a *body which will keep itself in identical* rebellion. This habitual rebellion (or concupiscence, or *fomes peccati)* is formally and properly in the body. Though it is derived from sin—the sin of Adam-—and inclines to sin—the actual rebellion,—-it is not yet a sin. Still, this corruption of the body is a disposition which makes the corruption of the soul necessary, inasfar as at the moment of animation the body makes up with the soul a person unworthy of God's grace, so that this person deserves to receive no grace and has to *be* deprived of grace and to contract as a consequence original sin.

It is easy now to see in how many different senses the term "Immaculate Conception" may be employed, and in how many different ways we may speak of a person being conceived exempt from original sin. We classify thorn as follows.

We have a first Immaculate Conception, or a first mode in which a human individual could be conceived without original sin, if we hold that Adam was not constituted the moral head or prince of that individual for the transmission of either original grace or original sin. God could communicate to some individual sanctifying grace absolutely independent of Adam's grace.[9]

We have a second Immaculate Conception, or a second mode in which some human individual could be conceived without original sin, if we hold that Adam was not constituted the natural principle or source of that individual, for the transmission of human nature. God could form another man from the dust, as He formed Adam.[10]

We have a third Immaculate Conception, or a third mode in which some human individual could be conceived without original sin, if we hold that Adam, though constituted such a principle and source for the transmission of the human nature, does not move hv means of seminal power in this transmission. As God could form a

sSn>nm. Theol., p. I, II, q. 81, a. 1, ad 2m and 3m; q. 83, a. 1; p. III, q. 33. a. 1.
8Smn. Theol., p. III, q. 1, a. 3.
10 Sumin. Theol., p. III, q. 31, a. 1, arg. 2 and 3.

man from the rib of Adam or from that of any of his descendants, so He could reserve a portion of Adam's flesh before Adam's sin, and have that portion of flesh transmitted from generation to generation to form out of that flesh the body of that individual.[11]

We have a fourth Immaculate Conception, or a fourth mode in which some human individual could be conceived without original sin, if we hold that Adam, though moving by means of seminal power, reaches the individual through descendants who were granted sanctifying grace for themselves and for their children. God could confer His grace on any of the descendants of Adam in the very measure in which He conferred it on Adam himself.[12]

We have a fifth Immaculate Conception, or a fifth mode in which some human individual could be conceived without original sin, if we hold that the immediate parents of that individual, though descendants of Adam and not previously granted the aforesaid sanctification, were, at the moment of generation or active conception, filled and purified by the Holy Ghost and freed, thus, from sexual concupiscense. As God could sanctify the parents previously to the coition, He could sanctify them at that very moment.[13]

We have a sixth Immaculate Conception, or a sixth mode in which some human individual could be conceived without original sin, if we hold that God purifies the fetus previously, with a priority of time, to the animation or passive conception. God could purify the flesh in the womb of the mother during the several weeks which precede the infusion of the rational soul.[14]

We have a seventh Immaculate Conception, or a seventh mode in which some human individual could be conceived without original sin, if we hold that God purifies the fetus at the moment of the animation or passive conception, in such a way, however, that with apriority of nature this purification precedes the animation. *To be* comes first; next, *to be willed*.[15]

We have an eighth Immaculate Conception, or an eighth mode in which some human individual could be conceived without original

^*Suwn. Theol.,* p. I, П, q. 81, a. 4 ami 5.

i- St. Thomas, *in II Sent.,* d. 31, q. 1, a. 2, ad 5m; *in III Sent.,* q. 1, a. 1, solut. 1, ad Im,

«St. Thomas, « *III Sent.,* d. 3, q. 1; a. 1; *Suemi. Theol.,* p. HI, q. 27, a. 2, arg. 3.

u Surum *Theol.,* p. III, q. 27, a. 2, arg. 2.

15 St. Thomas, *in III Sent.,* d. 3, q. 4, a. 1, ad 5m.

sin, if we hold that God sanctifies the soul at the moment of its creation and infusion or animation, so, however, that with a priority of nature the sanctification precedes the animation. This is the rational order : creation, infusion, animation.[10]

We have a ninth Immaculate Conception, or a ninth mode in which some human individual could be conceived without original sin, if we hold that God sanctifies the soul at the moment of its creation and infusion or animation, in such a way, however, that with a priority of nature, the animation precedes the sanctification. We conceive then the union of soul and body as previous to the sanctification of the soul.

We have, thus, nine different modes which God could use for having the Virgin Mary conceived without original sin; we have nine possible Immaculate Conceptions. Still, the present question is not concerned with the possibility, but with the fact. We want to know in which one of these ways the Virgin Mary was conceived without original sin. And, since an opposition is claimed between St. Thomas and the Church, let us seek the answer of St. Thomas and of the Church. Which are the Immaculate Conceptions denied by St. Thomas? St. Thomas answers: the first eight. Which is the Immaculate Conception affirmed by the Church? The Church answers : the last one.

St. Thomas denies the first eight Immaculate Conceptions in terms and in principle.

In terms he denies the first when he opposes Scotus' theory of the Incarnation independent of Adam's sin, from which theory that Immaculate Conception follows as the logical result.[17] In terms he denies the second when he says : "Christ assumed human nature in order to cleanse it from corruption. But human nature did not need to be cleansed save inasfar as it was soiled in its whereby it was descended from Adam. Therefore, it was becoming that He should assume flesh of matter derived from Adam/'[18] In terms he denies the third when he writes: "Error may occur by

[15] St. Thomas, *tn III Sent.,* d. 3, p. 1, a. 1, solut. 2; St. Bonaventure, ibidem.

[16] *Smnm. Theol.,* p, HI, q. 1, a. 3. *Thesis Franciscaliuni de praelectione Christi logica deductione ipsos du.rit ad Immaculatam l'irgâiis Conceptionem viribus tuendam* (Carmelus ab Iturgoycn, O. M. C., cit. by Del Prado, p, 1

[17] *Summ. Theol.,* ρ. III, q. 31, a. 1. Cf. ibid., ad 3m.

attributing the condition of Christ or of His flesh to that which was actually in .the patriarchs, by saying, for instance, that because Christ's flesh, as existing in Christ, was not subject to sin, therefore in Adam also and in the patriarchs there was some part of his body that was not subject to sin, and from which afterwards Christ's body was formed, as some indeed held."[18] In terms he denies the fourth, saying: "Sanctification is two-fold: One is that of the whole nature: inasmuch as the whole nature is freed from all corruption of sin and punishment. This will take place at the resurrection. The other is personal sanctification. This is not transmitted to the children begotten of the flesh, because it does not regard the flesh, but the mind. Consequently, though the parents of the blessed Virgin were cleansed from original sin, nevertheless she contracted original sin."[20] In terms he denies the fifth for a similar reason,[21] and by adding: "It is not the actual lust that transmits original sin; for, supposing God were to permit a man to feel no inordinate lust in the act of generation, he would still transmit original sin."[22] In terms he denies the sixth in these words: "I answer that the sanctification of the blessed Virgin cannot be understood as having taken place before the animation."[23] In terms he denies the seventh, when he argues: "In whatever manner the blessed Virgin would have been sanctified before animation, die could never have incurred the stain of original sin: and thus she would not have needed redemption and salvation which is by Christ. . . . But this is unfitting. . . ,"[24] In terms, finally, he denies the eighth in those, few lines of his *Commentary on the Sentences:* "The sanctification of the blessed Virgin could not be conveniently before the infusion of the soul . . nor even at the

Theol., p. III, q. 31, a. 7. Cf. ibid., a. 6.

[20] St. Thomas, *in III Sent.,* d. 3, q. 1, a. 1; *Thocil.,* p. III, q. 27, a. 2, ad 4m; *in II Sen!.,* d. 31, q. 1, a. 2.

[21] St. Thomas, *in III Sent.,* d. 3, q.1, a. 1; *Suivit Theol.,* p. III, q. 14, a. 3, ad Im; q. 31, a. 7; p. I, II, q. 81, a. 3, ad *2m.*

[22] *Summ. Theol.,* p. I, II, q. 82, a. 4, ad 3m. It is to the objection: "No feast is celebrated except of some saint, but some keep (on December 8th) the feast of the Conception of the Blessed Virgin; therefore, it seems that, in her very (active) Conception she was holy, and hence that she was sanctified before animation," that St. Thomas answers: "The celebration of this feast does not give us to understand that she was holy in her (active) conception. But since it is not known when she was sanctified, the feast of her Sanctification rather than the feast of her (active) Conception, is kept on the day of her (active) conception" *(Summ. Theol.,* p. III, q. 27, a. 2, ad 3m.).

[23] *Summ. Theol.* p. III, q. 27, a. 2; *in III Sent.,* cl. 3, q. 1, a. 1, q. 2.

[24] *Summ. Theol.,* p. III, q. 27, a. 2.

moment of the infusion, in such a way, namely, that by grace then infused into the soul, the soul would be preserved exempt from incurring original sin/'25*lines whose interpretation we find in St. Bonaventure: "Some claimed that in the soul of the glorious Virgin the. grace of sanctification preceded the stain of original sin. . . . Thus, at the moment of its creation, grace was infused into the soul: and at. that very moment, the soul was infused into the body. . . . But others say that the sanctification came after tlie contraction of original sin. . . . /And this second opinion is more common, and more reasonable, and more sure. . . . More reasonable, because the natural is prior to the spiritual, with priority either of time or of nature. . . . First, consequently, the soul is conceived to be united with the body, and then grace to be infused by God into the soul."20

St. Thomas denies all these first eight Immaculate Conceptions in principle. The principle is this: "It is unfitting that Christ be not the Saviour of all men, as lie is called in I Tim. iv. κρ.''27 And by this principle St. Thomas means that every man needs, as a person, to be redeemed by Christ; that every man needs personal redemption, which is by Christ.28* It is true that such personal redemption does not: imply the person as already fallen into sin, but it implies, at least, that the person has to incur the sin.28 And because, as St. Thomas· warns us, "We may not attribute to the Mother anything· that would diminish the honor of the Son, who is the Saviour of all men,''30 St. Thomas was perfectly right in opposing the first and the second and the third Immaculate Conceptions, where not even the flesh has to contract in any way the infection of original sin; and he was perfectly right in opposing the fourth and the fifth, where the flesh, though as existing in the parents *it* contracts infection, yet. as found in the offspring enjoys immunity; and he evas perfectly right in opposing the sixth and the seventh, where, though the flesh of the offspring contracts the

25 St. Thomas, *in III Sent.,* <l. 3, q. 1, a. 1, q. 2.

2ll St. Bonaventure, *in IIf Sent.* d. 3, par. 1, a. 1, q. 2.

27 *Sitmm. Theol.,* p. HI, q. 27, a. 2, *et passim.*

iSS'umin. Theol., p. I, II, q. 81, a. .3; cf. Del Prado, p. 31 ss.

w Sitmm. Theol., p. I, II, q. 81, a. 3, ad Im; cf. Cajetan, *Comment,* in h. l.

tantiim debemus dare Matri quad substrahat aliquid honori Filii qui est Salvator omnium hominum, ut dicit Apostolus, I Tim. iv (St. Thomas *Quodlib.* 6, a. 7).

infection, the soul has not to contract the sin; and perfectly right in opposing the eighth, where, though the flesh contracts and the soul has to contract, the person has not to contract original sin. In no one of these eight cases can we speak of a personal debt. As a consequence, neither of a personal redemption. For in the first, the second, and the third, not even the flesh needed redemption; in the fourth and the fifth, only the parents had to be redeemed; in the sixth and the seventh, only the flesh; whereas in the eighth, it is exclusively the soul.

Now what is the Immaculate Conception affirmed by the Church? Here is the dogma: "We declare, pronounce, and define that God has revealed the doctrine which holds that the most blessed Virgin Mary in the first instant of her conception, by a singular grace and privilege granted her by Almighty God, in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the human race, was preserved exempt from all stain of original sin."[31]

The Immaculate Conception, as defined by the Church stands, then, for the person of the Blessed Virgin, being preserved exempt at the moment of animation from original sin, and this personal preservation being granted her on account of her personal redemption by Christ.

The only way of saving the dogma is the ninth and last way. We have to conceive the union of the soul with the corrupted body as previous, with a priority of nature, to the sanctification of the soul. Thus we have a corrupted body, as it is the body of this person; and we have a soul, which, being the soul of this person, has to be corrupted by the body. We have, thus, and thus only, a person who has to incur original sin, who has to be redeemed with personal redemption.[32]

But such a preservation was never denied by St. Thomas Aquinas. He has not denied it in terms, for he never discussed it. All he says is that the sanctification cannot be in a convenient way previous to the animation. While the Church declares that it happened in the very moment of the animation, St. Thomas, time and again, says that he did not know the moment when the sanctifica-

31 Bull "*Ineffabilis Deus,*" Dec. 8, 1854.

32 *Beata Cirgo non fuit sanctificato nisi postquam cuncta eius perfecta sunt, scilicet corpus et anima* (*Sum. Theol.,* P. III, q. 27, a. 2, Sed contra).

lion took place.[33] Why did he not know? because things which are entirely dependent on the free will of God cannot be ascertained save through divine revelation.[34] This revelation is made known to us by the Roman Church, and at the time of St. Thomas the Roman Church did not even celebrate the Feast.[35]* Mus! we wonder at St. Thomas' position when, four centuries afterward, Pope Gregory XV declared that "the Idoly Ghost, though urged by the earnest prayers of the Faithful, did not yet reveal to the Church the secret of such a Mystery."[31']

On the contrary St. Thomas, rather than Scottis or anybody else, settled the principles which had to lead, and in fact did lead, *to the* definition given ultimately by Pius IX. For we have in St. Thomas not only that the sanctification stands for a personal sanctification by the merits of Christ the Redeemer, but also that it was proper that the blessed Virgin should have all purity possible to be granted by God,[37] and, moreover, that a posteriority of nature[38] is sufficient within a single instant of time.[35] Did not St. Thomas teach that the blessed Virgin was granted more grace than any man or angel,[3*] and that the first man and the angels were granted grace at the very moment of their creation, though their creation preceded their sanctification with priority of nature?[10]

St. Thomas, therefore, has promoted directly the definition given by the Church. He has promoted it indirectly, also, by opposing

33 *Summ. Theol,, p. III, q.* 27, a. 2, ad 3m ; *in HI Sent.,* d. 3, q. 1, *a. 1* ; *Oiiodlib. 6,* a. 7.

;*f Summ. Theol.,* p. IT!', q. 1, a. 3.

35 *Summ. Theol.,* p. III, q .27, a. 2, ad 3m.

3« July 4, 1622.

37 *Oportebat ut Mater Dei maxima puritate niteret: non enim est aUquid digne receptaculum Dei nisi sit mundum (Summ. Theol.,* p. I, II, q. KI, a. 5, ad 3m *)--C tedendum 'est (Beafce Virgini) collatum esse quidquid conferri potuit (in III Sent.,* d. 3, q. 1, a. 1).

38 Cf. *Summ. Theol.,* p. ILI, q. *6,* a. 4, ad 3m ; q. 34, a. I ; a. 2, ad Ini : a. 3, c. et ad 2m. Hence the statement: "To them (the theologians of the XIII Century.) the idea seemed strange that what was subsequent in the order of nature could be simultaneous in point of time," given by the writer of the article "Immaculate Conception" in *"The Catholic Encyclopedia,"* is as gratuitous as several others to be found in his contribution.

3u *Quanto aliquis magis appropinquat principio in quolibet Renere, tanto magis participat effectum illius principii . . . Christus autem est principium gratiae . . . Beata autem Virgo, propinquissima Christo fuit ... Et ideo pree ceteris maiorem debuit a Christo gratia plenitudinem obtinere (Summ. Theol. p.* IJI. q, 27 a. 51,— *Beata Virgo super omnes alios sanctos a peccato purior fuit, veluti' 'Divime Sapientiae Mater electa (m HI Sent.,* d. 3, q. 1, a. *D.— Beata' Virao ercessit Angelos in iribus. et primo in plenitudine gratia, qua magis est in Beata Virgine quam in aliquo Angelo (in Salut. Angel.).*

40*Summ. Tïheol.,* p. I, q. 95, a. 1 ; q. 62, a. 3.

the eight other Immaculate Conceptions and thus warning Catholic theologians to leave wrong paths and to take the right highway.

This advice of St, Thomas, however, was not followed by some Catholic theologians. In opposing these theologians the Dominican School was believed to be opposing the Immaculate Conception which became a dogma. Still, the Dominican School, supposedly against the definition, was the only one which was sustained by the definition. For the Immaculate Conception, as defined, is a conclusion of the Dominican theory of the Incarnation dependent on Adam's sin.

It may be true that in the controversy concerning the Immaculate Conception a few Dominicans misunderstood the teaching of St. Thomas; but it is also true that the great public did misunderstand and does still misunderstand the position of the Dominicans.[41]

[41] Cf. Del Prado, pp. xxiv and xxviii, note 4.