



The Position of Selected English Dominicans Towards the Immaculate Conception in the Pre-tridentine Era

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Abstract: The Immaculate Conception of the Mother of Christ is a truth of the Catholic faith that was only dogmatised by Pius IX in 1854. Until then, there had been debate among theologians regarding this Marian privilege. By means of selected examples the article shows the attitude of English Dominicans to the Immaculate Conception of Mary between the 13th and 16th centuries. It transpires that the members of the Order of Preachers in the British Isles presented an extremely diverse positions. One can find both strongly dissenting positions and those manifestly in favour of the Immaculate Conception. It is extremely interesting to note that in their arguments for the Immaculate Conception, some Dominicans distanced themselves from the continental theology represented by Aquinas. The way the Dominicans conceptualised the Immaculate Conception was closer to that represented by the twelfth-century theologian and historian Eadmer.

Keywords: Mary, Order of Preachers, Immaculate Conception, England, Middle Ages, theology

A copy of the *Office of the Mass for the Immaculate Conception* is held at the London headquarters of the British Library. The rich illustration depicts King Henry VII (1457–1509) kneeling before Mary holding the Infant Jesus in her arms. The book itself dates from 1485–1509, the pre-Reformation period. It is during this time, although the Immaculate Conception of Mary had to wait several more centuries to be dogmatised, that one can find references to the celebration of this Marian truth in the liturgy. The Church's prayer was accompanied, as it were, by a parallel theological reflection on the subject. Although the area of present-day England was called the “land of benedictines” (cf. Pauley 2011, 165), it was the spiritual sons of Saint Dominic who played a major role in the intellectual and ecclesiastical development of England.

The purpose of this article is to exemplify the attitude of medieval English Dominicans to the truth of the faith of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. We will focus on the period between the 13th and the 16th century. The exploration will be broken down into three points. The first will expound the general theological climate around the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of the Lord.

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This is necessary because theological reflection never takes place in a vacuum, but is conditioned by many factors. A figure who had a not inconsiderable influence on the traits of Marian piety and theology on English soil was Eadmer. In order to understand the arguments of the Dominican opponents and supporters of Mary's Immaculate Conception, it is necessary first to familiarise oneself with the position of Eadmer, who lived several centuries earlier. This will be followed by the presentation of the positions of the theologians of the Order of Preachers who defended the Immaculate Conception along with those who opposed this truth and authors who cannot be easily classified as opponents or supporters of this truth. It is necessary at this point, in addition to presenting the positions, to briefly show the life path of the Dominicans of interest. Their education and place of action may have influenced the views they held. In the final section, the positions presented will be theologically evaluated and contrasted with the position of Thomas Aquinas. This is important for at least two reasons. The first is the time of Aquinas' life, which coincides with the time of the selected authors, and the second is the great authority of the Angelic Doctor.

At this point it is worth noting that to date no serious theological literature has elaborated the position of the medieval English Dominicans towards the Immaculate Conception. The bibliography on this issue is extremely meagre. Indeed, the prevailing general opinion is that the Order of Preachers always spoke with one voice on the Immaculate Conception, following the position of Thomas Aquinas. Although the Angelic Doctor spoke with great reserve about the Immaculate Conception of Mary, he was not the only Dominican voice on the matter. However, it must be acknowledged that it was the most audible and respected voice due to Thomas's unquestionable authority (see Gumbley 1921a, 62). Noteworthy is the work *Les dominicains favorables à l'Immaculée Conception de Marie* by the Dominican Reginald Masson (see Masson 1955, 177–186). Unfortunately, the author, by failing to make sufficient criticism of the sources and by examining passages of texts without considering their context, mentioned the names of Dominicans who did not speak on the Immaculate Conception (see Kochaniewicz 2004, 199).

1. Eadmer's Work as a Context for the Theological Activity of the Order of Preachers

The Marian piety of the Middle Ages within England was undoubtedly influenced by Eadmer. He is known primarily in historiography as the biographer of his teacher, namely Anselm of Canterbury. He was not merely a historian, however, but also a preacher, theologian and the first English author to produce a single compact work on the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of the Lord. This work takes the form

of a sermon, which he may have preached on the feast of Mary's conception. In this work, which was written around 1125, he advocated the restoration of the feast of Mary's Immaculate Conception in the liturgy (see Ihnat 2016, 64). Before the Norman conquest of England, the Anglo-Saxons celebrated the feast of the conception of the Mother of the Lord in what is now Great Britain (see Clayton 1990, 89). However, when Lanfranc was installed on the archbishop's throne at Canterbury, the feast was temporarily abolished. Eadmer deplored the abolition of this feast:

Moreover, indeed, it was celebrated from the very earliest times more frequently by those especially in whom pure simplicity and lowly devotion to God flourished. Where, though, greater knowledge, and very exalted scrutiny of things, imbued and raised the minds of certain people, despising the simplicity of the poor, they did away with this solemnity, treating it with disregard as if it were entirely without rational foundation. This opinion carried all the more weight because those who subscribed to it were preeminent in secular and ecclesiastical authority and in abundance of riches.¹

According to Eadmer, the truth of Mary's Immaculate Conception was deeply rooted in the faith of the English People of God. One can sense in this theologian's words a criticism of some theologians who were dismissive of the belief that the Mother of Christ was preserved from original sin.²

Although the work takes the form of a homily and contains numerous invocations to Mary reminiscent of prayers, it is worth examining it in terms of the theology of the Immaculate Conception. For Eadmer gives specific theological arguments for Mary's preservation from the stain of original sin, although he also understands non-acceptance of the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of Christ as a truth revealed by God. The biblical argumentation deserves to be noted. Eadmer makes several

¹ Translation from Latin into English after: Eadmer 2021, 1. Latin original: "Et quidem priscis temporibus frequentiori usu celebrabatur, ab iis praecipue, in quibus pura simplicitas et humilior in deum vigeat devotio. At ubi et maior scientia et paepollens examintio rerum mentes quorundam imbuat et erexit, eandem selementem, sprete pauperum simplicitate, de medio sustulit, et eam quasi ratione vacantem redegit in nichil. Quorum sententia eo maxime in robur excrevit, quod ii, qui eam protulerunt, seculari et ecclesiastica auctoritate divitiarumque abundantia praeeminebantia." (Eadmeri Monachi Cantuariensis 1904, 1–2).

² "According to the simple, in the very words [of Scripture] is found what is for them the Divine teaching. On the other hand, those who are illuminated by much knowledge but are without charity, are puffed up by that same knowledge rather than finding a firm foothold in the integrity of true goodness. The teaching of God instructs the former; while the latter are distended as if made flatulent by their knowledge. Let us judge things impartially and see to whom the greater attention should be paid in this matter. I beg you, make it clear whether we should cling to the words of God, or go along with the penetrating insights of that heart which is unreasonably puffed up." (Eadmer 2021, 1). Latin original: "Et de simplicibus quidem in ipsis verbis invenitur quod cum eis sit sermocinatio dei. Illos vero quos multa scientia inflari, potius quam veri boni integritate solidari. Cum igitur illos dei sermocinatio instruat, et istos sua scientia quadam ventositate distendat, qui aequa discernere non verentur, cui magis part sit cedendum precor edicat, colloquio videlicet dei inhaerenti, an de sui cordis prorspicacia ultra aequum tumentia." (Eadmeri Monachi Cantuariensis 1904, 2–3).

references to Scripture passages from which to derive the truth of Mary's conception without sin. The first reference is a passage from Isaiah (11:1–3):

Of Mary indeed, many centuries before her rise or conception, Isaiah, inspired by the Holy Spirit declares: "A shoot shall come forth from the root of Jesse and a flower shall ascend from his root; and the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, a Spirit of wisdom and understanding, a spirit of counsel and fortitude, a spirit of knowledge and of piety, and the spirit shall fill him with the fear of the Lord" (Isa. 11.1–3). Accordingly, this shoot which bore such a flower was the Virgin Mary – no-one will deny that. And the flower which ascended from this root was the blessed Son, upon whom and in whom all the fullness of divinity rested in its essence.³

According to Eadmer, Mary can be compared to the shoot that produced the beautiful flower that is Jesus Christ. If Mary's Son was God and a true Man without the stain of sin, then His Mother too must have been preserved from any sin.

The following passages cited in support of the truth of the Immaculate Conception come from both the Old and New Testaments:

Certainly a divine voice said to Jeremiah: "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; and before you came forth from the womb, I sanctified you; and I gave you as a prophet to the nations" (Jer. 1.5). Moreover, the angel who announced the birth of John [the Baptist] declared that he would be filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb (Luke 1.15). If, therefore, Jeremiah was sanctified in the womb because he was to be a prophet among the nations; and if John, who was to go before the Lord in the spirit and power of Elijah, was filled with the Holy Spirit in his mother's womb, who will dare to say that the sweetest resting place of the Son of God almighty, should, from the beginning, in her conception, have been deprived of the light of the grace of the Holy Spirit? Indeed, Scripture bears witness: "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom" (2 Cor. 3.17). Free from the servitude of every sin was she who was to be the palace of the propitiator of all sins – she in whom and from whom he would personally become man, as was brought about by the presence and working of the Holy Spirit.⁴

³ Eadmer 2021, 3–4. Latin original: "De ipsa quippe, multis saeculis ante ortum eius vel conceptum, isaiam spiritu sancto afflatum dixisse constat: egredietur virga de radice iesse, et flos de radice eius ascendet; et requiescet super eum spiritus domini, spiritus sapientiae et intellectus, spiritus consilii et fortitudinis, spiritus scientiae et pietatis, et replebit eum spiritus timoris domini. Haec itaque virga quae talem ex se protulit florem, Nullo dissentiente, virgo maria fuit, et flos, qui de radice eius ascendit, benedictus filius eius, super quem et in quo omnis plenitudo divitatis essentialiter requievit." (Eadmeri Monachi Cantuariensis 1904, 7–8).

⁴ Eadmer 2021, 4. Latin original: "Utique voce divina dicitur ad ieremiam: priusquam te formarem in utero, novi te: et antequam exires de ventre, sanctificavi te; et prophetam in gentibus dedi te. De iohanne quoque Angelus, qui eum nasciturum praenuntiabat, asseruit quod spiritu sancto repletur adhuc ex utero matris suae. Si igitur ieremias, quia in gentibus errat propheta futurus, in vulva est sanctificatus, et iohannes, dominum in spiritu, et virtute eliae praecessurus, spiritu sancto est ex utero matris suae repletus, quis dicere

Eadmer cited passages from Jeremiah, the Gospel of Luke and the Second Letter to the Corinthians and read them in a Marian perspective. The medieval author did not give an explicit biblical quotation to confirm Mary's Immaculate Conception, but used an allegorical and comparative method. If Jeremiah and John the Baptist were sanctified in the womb of their mothers, how much more worthy was the Mother of Christ! Eadmer, therefore, drew the conclusion that the grace given to Mary must have been far superior to that given to the prophets and other saints. Elsewhere, Anselm of Canterbury's biographer referred to a passage in the Apostle Paul's Letter to the Romans: "Death came into the world by the sin of Adam and so has passed throughout humanity" (5:12). Eadmer argued that the death of the soul, or sin, entered the world and all human beings are under its influence. God, however, in accepting human nature, wished to accept it fully, but without the injury of sin. The author of the treatise on Mary's Immaculate Conception concluded from this that God had prepared the mother of His Son as free from all sin.⁵

Eadmer's argument also contains extra-biblical and even extra-theological comparisons. He likened Mary to the fruit of a chestnut, which develops in a shell that has thorns. However, the chestnut itself is devoid of thorns. The Mother of Christ – according to the medieval author – was to develop from the first moments of her life in the midst of a sinful world, being herself free from sin. The preacher used a simple example taken from nature to bring the intricate theological content closer to less educated listeners.⁶

audeat singulare totius saeculi propitiatorium, et unici filii dei omnipotentis unicum ac dulcissimum reclinatorium, mox in suae conceptionis exordio spiritus sancti gratia et illustratione destitutum? Testante vero sacra scriptura, ubi est spiritus domini, ibi libertas. A servitute itaque omnis peccati libera fuit, quae omnium peccatorum propitiatori aula, in qua et ex qua personaliter homo fieret, spiritus sancti praesentia et operatione construebatur." (Eadmeri Monachi Cantuariensis 1904, 8–9).

- 5 "Therefore He was able, from the mass of human sinfulness, to make one human nature immune to every stain of sin. From this nature He would take up His humanity in one Person, so that He would be wholly human while nothing of His Divinity would be diminished. Predestined and pre-ordained to this wonderful work, Mary stands out, incomparable among all God's works, she who is that most noble star of the great sea. She is the enlightenment of the whole world, the unfailing help and consolation of the wavering in all the tempests of divers events. She is, moreover, the help and redemption of those who fear the destruction of eternal death and who fly to her safe protection." (Eadmer 2021, 10). Latin original: "Poterat ergo de massa peccatrice naturam humanam ab omni labe peccati immunem facere, unde in unam personam sui susciperet, ut homo integer esset et divinitati suae nichil minueret. Praeordinata fuit et praeordinata in hoc opus mirabile, et omnibus operibus dei praestans et incomparabile, maria, scilicet, illa magni maris nobilissima stella, hoc est totius seculi illustratio, et omnium in tempestatibus diversorum casum titubantium indeficiens levamen et consolatio, nec non ab aeternae mortis interitu paventium ac sub eius praesidium confugientium tutum iuvamen atque redemptio." (Eadmeri Monachi Cantuariensis 1904, 21–22).
- 6 Eadmer compared Mary in the womb of her mother Anne to a chestnut that was developing in a spiky capsule. A perfect chestnut surrounded by the capsule denotes holy Mary surrounded by a sinful world. A careful reading of Eadmer's treatise reveals that his vision of Mary's holiness was closer to the idea of her Immaculate Conception than to the sanctification (*sanctificatio*) later advocated by Aquinas. It is not possible to state unequivocally that Eadmer was a proponent of Mary's Immaculate Conception as defined in

The work *Tractatus de Conceptione Sanctae Mariae* makes good use of biblical passages to show Mary's Immaculate Conception as a truth revealed by God. Eadmer was aware that Scripture is the primary source for reading God's revelation. The entire argumentation of this theologian is balanced at the same time by loving invocations to Mary, especially in the second part of the treatise.

The author also cited arguments that were directed against the liturgical celebration of the feast of the Conception of the Mother of the Lord. The most common was that the liturgy already celebrated – through a special feast – the birth of Mary. It was argued that it was not necessary to introduce a feast of Mary's conception because if she was born, it meant that she was also conceived. The separation of conception and birth was to be avoided. In addition, the arguments of the theologians of the time against the feast of the Conception of the Mother of the Lord were substantiated by the knowledge that can be situated today at the interface between theology and biology. For the opponents of the liturgical feast of the Immaculate Conception, it was clear that the infusion of the soul by God occurs only after the formation – even imperfectly – of the body. To venerate Mary's conception would be to venerate – in some indirect way – her still unformed body before its union with the soul. Hence, the feast of Mary's conception in the liturgy appeared as an additional feast whose content was already expressed in the commemoration of her birth (see Ihnat 2016, 65). Eadmer, rebutting the arguments of his adversaries, referred, among other things, to apocryphal accounts that endowed not only the birth, but already the conception of Mary a miraculous and unique character. Her conception was, according to the *Protoevangelium of James*, to be announced by the angels to Anna and Joachim (see Ihnat 2016, 66). Although this apocryphal text did not enter the canon of New Testament books, it nevertheless indicates some premonition of the miracles that were to accompany the conception of the Mother of the Lord (see Laurentin 1972, 139).

2. The Position of the English Dominicans Towards the Immaculate Conception of Mary

The feast of Mary's conception was already found in southern England in eleventh-century liturgical books. Cornelius A. Bouman points out that before 1066 the feast of Mary's conception (*Conceptio Sanctae Dei genitricis Mariae*) was already celebrated in English churches (see Bouman 1958, 127). Examples of texts attesting to the liturgical commemoration of the conception of the Mother of Christ are three calendars

the dogma. However, a cautious hypothesis can be put forward that he was describing Mary's exceptional holiness, which surpasses her sanctification, as the medieval author suggested in relation to, for example, Jeremiah or John the Baptist.

found in Newminster Priory, in St. Mary's Cathedral Priory at Old Minster and in St. Mary's Cathedral Priory at Worcester (see Bouman 1958, 127). The same author also relates in his research to the text of a pontifical blessing – consisting of three prayers – for the feast of Mary's conception. One of the oldest such blessings is that found in a pontifical and a book of blessings written for the Canterbury Cathedral between 1023 and 1066 (see Woolley 1917, 118–19). Eadmer's work was therefore not some theological treatise without meaning or relevance to the life of the English Church. Theology and belief in the Immaculate Conception went hand in hand with liturgy and complemented each other (Burridge 1936, 575–79).

In such a theological and liturgical context, the Preachers arrived in what is now England at the behest of their founder, St Dominic. In 1221, twelve Dominicans, led by Gilbert de Fresnay, sailed to the British Isles (see Gumbley 1921a, 54). They took their first steps to the then Archbishop of Canterbury, who was Stephen Langton. He was – according to the story – so impressed by the Dominicans' preaching that they began to enjoy increasing privileges, which included lecturing in theology and philosophy at Oxford University (see Gumbley 1921a, 54). Over time, in addition to the theological issues discussed in those days, such as the nature and number of the sacraments and the presence of Christ in consecrated forms, they began to address issues concerning the Mother of the Lord, including her Immaculate Conception.⁷ Examples of the English Dominicans' approach to the truth of Mary's preservation from original sin will be presented below.⁸

2.1. Robert Kilwardby

One figure that demonstrates the approach of medieval English Dominican theologians to the Immaculate Conception of Mary and Mariology in general is Robert Kilwardby. The date and place of birth of the future Dominican remain unknown (see Lagerlund and Thom 2012, 2). He was a Paris-educated theologian and philosopher (see Sommer-Seckendorff 1937, 130–62), Archbishop of Canterbury and cardinal. After completing his theological studies, he joined the Order of Preachers. Robert Kilwardby is regarded as a follower of the theological school of St Augustine. We largely owe our understanding of original sin to his attempt to describe the fall of human nature after the sin of our first parents. Robert Kilwardby went to Viterbo soon after receiving his cardinal dignity, where he died in 1279.

Robert Kilwardby did not write explicitly about Mary's Immaculate Conception in any of his works, but his way of framing the issue allows us to hypothesise that he was neither favour of recognising the privilege of the Immaculate Conception of

⁷ It is worth mentioning that the Mother of the Lord was invoked at many points in the Dominican liturgy e.g. in the sequences. See Fassler 2004, 229–78.

⁸ More information about the arrival of the Dominicans in the British Isles can be found in the following publications: Röhrkasten 2021, 31–68; Lafaye, 2021, 69–111.

the Mother of Christ nor was he interested in the issue. Peter Lombard's commentaries on *The Sentences* (*The Book of Sentences*) seem useful for understanding the mode of academic theological discussion of the thirteenth century. This author addressed the problem of the incarnation of the Son of God in Book Three. The questions that arose for this section of Peter Lombard's work increasingly began to raise Mariological issues over time (Bell 2001, 153). Robert Kilwardby, in his *tabula*, asked only one question (question twenty-three) that touched on Mariological issues in the context of Christology: "whether it ought to be conceded that a divine nature should be born from a Virgin?" (quoted in: Bell 2001, 153–54). In the original Latin version, the question of the Dominican Archbishop of Canterbury reads "quaeritur utrum concedendum sit quod divina natura sit nata de Virgine." (Kilwardby 1982, 248). If, therefore, Robert Kilwardby was asking questions about the Mother of the Lord, he was asking them in the context of her virginity and divine motherhood, not her Immaculate Conception. In other words, he mentioned Mary, but in the context of Christology, as it were. If this author did not ask directly and did not write about the Immaculate Conception, it can be assumed that this was not as important a theological problem for him as it was for his contemporary theologians such as Thomas Aquinas or Franciscan thinkers such as William of Ware and Bonaventure. It is also significant that Robert Kilwardby is viewed by theologians and historians as one of the thinkers following the thought of Augustine of Hippo, who emphasised the universality of sin and the corruption of human nature (see Little and Pelster 1934, 70).

2.2. Thomas Hopeman

Another important figure from the English circle of the Order of Preachers was Thomas Hopeman, who lived in the 14th century. This trained theologian taught theology at the General College of England between 1344 and 1345. Around 1348, he was awarded the title of *magister theologiae* and was given a place in the Cambridge convent. At the general chapter in Montpellier in 1350, Thomas Hopeman was transferred to a monastery in London. There he lectured on biblical theology. King Edward III in 1355 issued a warrant for the arrest of the Dominican. Thomas Hopeman travelled to Avignon without the king's permission. The reason for his trip to the papal court was a discussion between the bishop of the diocese of Ely and King Edward III (see Forte 1955, 317).

When it comes to issues related to the Immaculate Conception of Mary his opinion is definitely unequivocal (Forte 1955, 334). This Dominican took a position strongly in favour of the privilege of Immaculate Conception that Mary received. Among his numerous theological works, we can mention such as his commentary on Genesis, his commentary on the Letter to the Hebrews and his commentary on the Letter of James (see Kaeppli and Panella 1993, 368–69). Various types of biblical commentaries and sermons rather than just university treatises were important

sources for medieval theology (see Wenzel 1995, 305). It was in the Latin commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews – in the section explicitly called *De Conceptione Immaculata B(eatae) M(ariae) Virginis* – that this Dominican clearly defended the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of Jesus Christ. It is worth noting at this point that Thomas Hopeman distinguished between several types of conception. The first is *conceptio seminum*, or the act of procreation. As a result of it, all human beings come into the world in a state of original sin.⁹ The second type of conception is *conceptio naturarum*, which concerns the union of the soul with the body.¹⁰ The last type of conception is *spiritual conception*, or *conceptio spiritualis*. It is supposed – according to the Dominican – to concern, as it were, the two mothers of the human being: the natural mother and the supernatural mother, that is, the Church. Thomas Hopeman thus saw in the *conceptio spiritualis* God's protection of man in the womb and sanctification in the sacrament of baptism.¹¹

The English Dominican, reflecting on Mary's conception, concluded that in all these types of conception she was free from sin. Starting from the *conceptio seminum*, the act of procreation of Joachim and Anne, he stressed that it was free from any sin.¹² If the act of the procreation of Mary's parents was free from sin, even light sin, then, according to Thomas Hopeman, the fruit of intercourse was also preserved from sin. Communicated by conception and childbirth, original sin was not to affect Mary.¹³ The Dominican therefore already linked the sanctification of the Mother of Christ to the sexual act of Joachim and Anne. For this medieval theologian, not even the shadow of sinfulness is to be found in the *conceptio naturarum* either. If Mary's conception took place without sin, the union of soul and body also made her immaculate from the first moments of her life.¹⁴ The argument linking Mary's Immaculate Conception to her Son is extremely interesting. Using the connection between Mary's body and Christ's body (*caro Mariae caro Christi*), Hopeman concluded that there

⁹ "Conceptio seminum satis nota est in filiis Adae, qui in peccatis concepti sunt." (Hopeman 1955, 335).

¹⁰ "Conceptio naturarum est, quando anima corpori infunditur, quando res diversarum naturarum ad unius persone constitutionem concurrunt." (Hopeman 1955, 335).

¹¹ "Conceptio spiritualis est, quando aliqua persona sanctificata quadam privilegiata sanctificatione in utero matris carnalis facta, aut virtute verbi accedentis ad elementum in aquis salutaribus renascens in utero sancte matris ecclesie concipitur." (Hopeman 1955, 335).

¹² "Prima conclusio est: quod actus maritalis parentum beatae Marie, scilicet, Joachim atque Anne, quo concepta fuit, non fuit alicuius peccati obnoxius. Hec astruitur, quia actus coniugalitatis spe prolis solummodo executus nullo peccato mortali vel veniali aliquatenus maculatur." (Hopeman 1955, 336).

¹³ "Quod conceptio seminum, ut est concipientis, ut conceptio accio vel conceptio ut est matris, non fuit peccati alicuius vicio maculata. Hec patet ex conclusione premissa, quia non originalis: quia illa macula a parentibus et progenitoribus eius fuit per prius purgata; nec actualis, sicut patet ex precedenti. Quod conceptio seminum, secundum quod est idem quod conceptus vel concepta materia, prout se tene ex parte prolis, numquam fuit originalis vicii macula obfusa." (Hopeman 1955, 336).

¹⁴ "Quod loquendo de conceptione naturarum, conceptio gloriose virginis matris Dei peccati originalis obnoxia numquam fuit, quia anima eius sancta a principio semper fuit. Et hec conclusio ex precedenti relucet, quia caro vel materia cui infunditur anima vel cui anima est infusa numquam huius fuit vicio infectiva." (Hopeman 1955, 338).

was a similarity between the state of holiness of Christ and that of His Mother. For Thomas Hopeman, if the Lamb is without blemish then the Mother of the Lamb also remains without blemish (*qualis Agnus talis et mater Agni*) (Hopeman 1955, 338).

Although the Dominican's argumentation demands a critical look from the theological side, his attempt to read Mary in a Christological key is worth noting. Importantly, Thomas Hopeman did not refer in his work to the thought of Thomas Aquinas or to the solution developed by the Franciscan school of, for example, John Duns Scotus. Thomas Hopeman argued for the Immaculate Conception by linking it to the sexual act of Joachim and Anne. He pointed out that there was not the slightest sin between these spouses during sexual intercourse. The question can therefore be posed: is there always some sin, even slight sin, in the conjugal act? Following Thomas Hopeman's thought, one would have to assume that any marital intercourse without sin can bear fruit in the form of the Immaculate Conception of a child. One might *conclude* that such an argument for Mary's Immaculate Conception is related to Augustine's teaching on lust (*concupiscentia*), which always accompanies sexual intercourse, even intercourse within marriage. This was a theological position popular in the Middle Ages. In this perspective, the conjugal cohabitation of Anne and Joachim was supposed to be free from lust and therefore ended in the Immaculate Conception of Mary.

2.3. Thomas Ringstead

Thomas Ringstead is an author whose position is difficult to clearly qualify in the controversy over Mary's Immaculate Conception. Little is known about this Dominican thinker. Even his name is sometimes recorded in two forms: Ringstead or Ryngston (see Kennedy 1988, 39). Like Robert Kilwardby and Thomas Hopeman, he was theologically very well educated, having taught for several years at Cambridge (see Gumbley 1921b, 158). Before 1351 he had earned a *magister in theologiae*. In 1329 he was ordained an acolyte. From 1357 until his death in 1366 he ruled as bishop of the Welsh Diocese of Bangor (see Gumbley 1921, 158). Of Thomas Ringstead's works, two survive in manuscript, namely *Postilla super Proverbia Salomonis* and *Commentary on the Sentences* (see Kennedy 1988, 39). The last of these works is only available in a copy in Erfurt, which was written between 1357 and 1366. This is suggested by the fact that Thomas Ringstead was indeed already referred to by the scribe as a bishop (see Kennedy 1988, 39). For the theology of Mary's Immaculate Conception, however, it is the first of the works, *Postilla super Proverbia Salomonis*, that is important.

Thomas Ringstead saw a link between Mary's Immaculate Conception and her virginity.¹⁵ On the one hand, the Dominican suggested that in the case of the Mother of Christ there was a harmony between spirit and flesh in a way that was impossible in all human beings after the Fall.¹⁶ This harmony was supposed to be a result of freedom from sin and, which made Mary also free from original and venial – even light – sin. On the other hand, this author stated that all human beings are subject to the fall caused by Adam's sin, and then added that there were persons in salvation history who were free from the stain of sin. Thomas Ringstead mentioned figures such as Mary, John the Baptist, Jeremiah and Saint Nicholas.¹⁷ The Dominican theologian and bishop seemed to espouse Mary's Immaculate Conception, though it is difficult to draw a clear conclusion from his teaching. It is also difficult to reconstruct his theological argumentation: we can only make general statements. An additional difficulty is his list of the many persons who were to be preserved from sin. While this privilege with regard to Mary can be justified by her future motherhood, what made this English author also believe that this privilege was granted to other biblical figures and saints of the Church? Was holiness – in Thomas Ringstead's terms – equated with sinlessness in some cases? The English author therefore implied the Immaculate Conception not only of Mary, but also of other saints.

2.4. Simon of Boraston

Another author who alluded to the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of Christ was Simon of Boraston, a well-known English Dominican preacher who earned his doctorate in theology in 1322 and taught at Oxford University from 1337 to 1338 (see Gelber 2004, 44–45). He was also provincial of the English province from 1327 to 1336 (see Kaeppli and Panella 1993, 384). As superior of the spiritual sons of Saint Dominic, he was concerned with the good education of his brothers and the high standard of preaching in the monasteries (see Gelber 2004, 45). His whole life was associated with Oxford, where he died. Like the aforementioned authors, Simon of Boraston can be counted among the Dominican theologians who had a very good

¹⁵ “Hec fuit virgo benedica quam peccatum originale inter omnes montes solam attingere non potuit propter altitudinem status perfecte virginitatis, qui in ea viguit” (Ringstead, fol. 84^r; quoted from: Forte 1955, 331).

¹⁶ “[...] enim per primos parentes mortificata fuit potentia rationalis ne quid meritorium velle posset, sic per oppositum in Virgine beata mortificata fuit sensualitas et vivificata ratio.... In principio igitur, cum sic erat caro sub dominio rationis ut nihil posset nisi ipsa imperante, iustum fuit, ut quia malum imperavit potentiam illam perderet, quapropter et nunc caro concipiscit adversus spiritum. Sed iste defectus reparatus fuit in Virgine benedicta, in qua nec venialia caro adversus spiritum concupivit” (Ringstead, fol. 69^v; quoted from: Forte 1955, 331).

¹⁷ “Et illa auctoritas est vera simpliciter de omni carne preter quam de carne Christi, secundum Alexandrum, ubi supra, ubi hereticos dicit conceptionem b. Virginis ratione conceptionis et non concepti celebrantes, eo quod omnis caro quoad corruptionem corrumpet viam suam, nisi Christi caro; quamvis natiuitas aliquorum sine macula fuit, ut b. Virginis, Johannis Baptiste, Jeremie et Remigii. Alibi tamen tectat cum istis s. Nicolaum.” (Ringstead, fol. 137^v; quoted from: Forte 1955, 331).

education and were at the same time theologically and pastorally active (see Forte 1955, 322). Simon of Boraston authored *Distinctiones Theologicae*, which is sometimes also called *Alphabetum de vocalibus predicabilibus* (see Wenzel 2016, 197–98).

It is in the work – *Distinctiones Theologicae*, held in the Bodleian Libraries in Oxford – that the Dominican mentions Mary’s drawing from the water of grace (*aqua gratiae*) and her pure womb prepared for the Saviour.¹⁸ The theologian does this in the section on the incarnation of the Son of God (*Incarnatio Christi*) (see Forte 1955, 330). It is difficult to identify in this passage a direct reference to Mary’s Immaculate Conception to at the same time clearly reject the hypothesis that Simon of Boraston was an advocate of this Marian privilege. Like Thomas Ringsead, he, too, can be classified both as a supporter and as an opponent of the truth of the preservation of the Mother of the Lord from all sin. It is not entirely clear what this Dominican theologian had in mind when he wrote about Mary’s drawing from the waters of grace.

2.5. Thomas Sutton

Thomas Sutton was also an important figure in the Order of Preachers and seminal for the subject of this article. It is worth noting that there were ‘several Suttons’ in Oxford in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries: Hugo de Sutton, Henry de Sutton, and Peter de Sutton. They belonged to the Order of Preachers or the Franciscan Order (see Little and Pelster 1934, 281–82). Thomas Sutton was ordained a deacon by the Archbishop of York Walter Giffard in 1274. Thomas Sutton formed his views through exposure to the works of Thomas Aquinas and Albert the Great. He had a particular respect for the former. Although Thomas Sutton only knew the Angelic Doctor from his writings, he was able to defend a theology practised in an Aristotelian spirit. The Dominican faced criticism from the Oxford community, which favoured an Augustinian model of practising theology. Despite the atmosphere hostile to Thomism, Sutton’s academic career lasted some thirty years.

Thomas Sutton’s encounter with Augustinian and Franciscan criticism led him to express his opinion on the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of Christ. It was from this Dominican-Franciscan coexistence – so it may be presumed – that Thomas Sutton became familiar with John Duns Scotus’ position on the Immaculate Conception of Mary. However, he considered Thomas Aquinas’ argumentation sufficient on the question of Mary’s Immaculate Conception (Carolus Balić 1956, 118). Scotus’ argument was also challenged, among others, by the Franciscan Robert Cowton. It is worth adding that usually Franciscans were considered to be supporters of the truth of the Immaculate Conception. Thomas Sutton was of the opinion

¹⁸ “Delectatio quam Filius Dei habuisse dignoscitur cum genere humano ouri et mundo potest patere si advertatur mora quam Christus fecit in utero Virginis puro. Illa enim que primo hausit aquam gratiae a Deo fonte sapientie pro se et pro omnibus aliis fuit b. Virgo, quam Deus Pater preparavit filio suo Christo” (quoted from: Forte 1955, 330–31).

that the Angelic Doctor had sufficiently explained the matter of Mary's Immaculate Conception and, in his view, it was no longer necessary to deal with the issue.¹⁹ It can therefore be considered that Thomas Sutton's argumentation was identical to that of Thomas Aquinas. This Dominican was one of the first defenders of Thomism at Oxford University.

3. Aquinas' Position on the Immaculate Conception of Mary and the Views of the English Dominicans

Thomas Aquinas is ranked among the opponents of the truth of the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of Christ. His views and arguments were important because of the position Thomas held among Dominican thinkers. The English Dominicans who wrote on the Immaculate Conception were therefore familiar with the works of Aquinas, or at least must have heard of the great fame of the Angelic Doctor. However, they did not, apart from Thomas Sutton, refer directly to the theology developed by Thomas Aquinas. Aquinas expressed his stance on the sanctification of Mary in, among others: *Scriptum super libros Sententiarum*, *Quaestiones quodlibetales*, *Summa theologiae*, *Compendium theologiae*, *Expositio Salutationis Angelicae*, *Postilla super Psalmos*. He provided several arguments that suggest great reserve towards accepting the truth of Mary's preservation from original sin. At the same time, he proposed a solution to show the unique role and holiness of the Mother of the Lord in the history of salvation.

St Thomas considered the possibility of Mary being preserved from the stain of original sin before animation (the union of soul and body), during animation and after animation. According to Aquinas, Mary could not be preserved from sin before the union of soul and body, because what does not exist cannot be sanctified. In other words, sanctification could not take place before Mary's existence as a person.²⁰ Thomas also reflected on the possibility that the Mother of the Lord was preserved from original sin during the act of procreation of Joachim and Anne. The Dominican posed the question of whether it was possible for Mary to be sanctified through her descent from holy parents. Aquinas's answer was negative, since sanctity is a quality of individual persons and not of human nature. The sanctity of Anne and

¹⁹ "In libris suis omnes difficultates theologiae sufficienter dilucidavit.... Scripta praedicti doctoris... propter suam sufficientiam finem imponunt Scripta super Sententias componendi." (After: Hechich 1958, 15–16).

²⁰ "Sed contra Quod non est, non potest sanctificari. Sed beata Virgo non fuit antequam conciperetur in utero matris suae. Ergo non potuit ante conceptionem sanctificari." (S. Thoma Aquinatis, *Super Sent.*, lib. 3 d. 3 q. 1 a. 1 qc. 1 s. c. 1; quoted from: Thomas Aquinatis 1933, 95).

Joachim could not be transmitted to their daughter.²¹ In addition, Thomas referred to Augustine's conviction that the act of procreation is always accompanied by lust and therefore original sin is transmitted in it. Thomas, reflecting in turn on the possibility of Mary being preserved from original sin at the moment of the union of soul and body, gave a negative answer. According to Aquinas, Mary's conception without original sin would mean that Mary was equal to Christ and as such would not need redemption.²² This is Thomas' primary argument against the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of the Lord. Reflecting on Mary's state after the union of soul and body, Aquinas concluded that Mary was conceived in a state of original sin, but in her mother's womb she was sanctified, like John the Baptist and the Old Testament prophets.²³ By speaking of Mary's sanctification, rather than her Immaculate Conception, Thomas wished to preserve the teaching of the universality of the redemption accomplished by Christ while at the same time showing her unique holiness. It is not, therefore, that Thomas denied this special holiness of Mary; rather, he did not believe in the complete preservation of the Mother of Christ from original sin from the first moments of her life.

When comparing the argumentation of Thomas Aquinas with that of the English Dominicans, it is important to note the fact that the latter did not use or refer to Thomas' argumentation when practising theology. The exception to this was Thomas Sutton, who referred explicitly to Aquinas' theology. This was probably due to the distancing of English theology from European scholastic thought represented by Thomas on the issue of Mary's Immaculate Conception.²⁴ The closest to Thomas' argument among authors sympathetic to the Immaculate Conception was Thomas

21 "Ad secundum dicendum quod gratia sanctificans non omnino directe opponitur peccato originali, sed solum prout peccatum originale personam inficit. Est enim gratia perfectio personalis, peccatum vero originale directe est vitium naturae. Et ideo non oportet quod gratia sanctificans a parentibus traducatur, si peccatum originale traducatur; sicut et originalis iustitia, cui directe opponitur traducta fuisset." (Thomas Aquinas, *Super Sent.*, lib. 3 d. 3 q. 1 a. 1 qc. 1 ad 2; quoted from: Thomas Aquinas 1933, 99).

22 "Est erroneum dicere quod aliquis sine peccato originali concipiatur, praeter Christum, quia ille qui sine peccato originali conciperetur, non indigeret redemptione quae facta est per Christum et sic Christus non esset omnium Redemptor. Oportet autem ponere, quod quilibet personaliter redemptione Christi indigeat, non solum ratione naturae. Liberari autem a malo vel a debito absolvi non potest nisi qui debitum incurrit, vel in maculam deiectus fuit." (Thomae Aquinas, *Super Sent.*, lib. 4 d. 43 q. 1 a. 4; quoted from: Thomas Aquinas 1927, 62).

23 "Primo quantum ad animam, in qua habuit omnem plenitudinem gratiae. Nam gratia Dei datur ad duo: scilicet ad bonum operandum, et ad vitandum malum; et quantum ad ista duo perfectissimam gratiam habuit beata Virgo. Nam ipsa omne peccatum vitavit magis quam aliquis sanctus post Christum. Peccatum enim aut est originale, et de isto fuit mundata in utero; aut mortale aut veniale, et de istis libera fuit. Unde Cant. IV, 7: "tota pulchra es, amica mea, et macula non est in te." (Thomas Aquinas 1927, 457).

24 In 1323, Thomas Aquinas was canonized, becoming a theological reference point for the Order of Preachers and its theologians. However, it appears that the Dominicans from the British Isles, who suggested Mary's Immaculate Conception, distanced themselves from Aquinas' position on this issue. On the question of Mary's Immaculate Conception, Thomas Aquinas was therefore not an authority for them. This is particularly evident in the example of Thomas Hopeman. This should not be understood, of course, that the Dominicans advocating Mary's Immaculate Conception belonged directly to Eadmer's theological

Hopeman, who wrote about the three types of human conception. Citing the sanctity of Joachim and Anne and their act of procreation, he came to a completely opposite conclusion to that of Aquinas. Hopeman argued that Mary was immaculately conceived because there was not even a shadow of sinfulness in the sexual act of Mary's parents. However, this is an argument for which it is difficult to seek a biblical basis. It seems that the Angelic Doctor, in assuming lust in the act of procreation after Augustine, remained more faithful to the theological convictions of the time than Thomas Hopeman. He saw no reason why Mary's conception should be devoid of desire. Thomas Ringstead, on the other hand, linked Mary's Immaculate Conception to her virginity and gave examples of persons who were to be free from the stain of sin. Like Thomas Aquinas, the English Dominican referred to the figure of John the Baptist. It is, however, difficult to say whether the Bishop of Bangor – like Aquinas – assumed sanctification after conception in the state of original sin, or whether, he postulated the assumption of Immaculate Conception from the first moments of a person's existence, i.e., at the union of soul and body. It is noteworthy, however, that he refers to the same figure of John the Baptist when reflecting on the Immaculate Conception of Mary. Thomas Sutton, on the other hand, was the only one to refer directly to the thought of Thomas Aquinas. He regarded the Angelic Doctor's explanation as sufficient. It can therefore be assumed that he agreed with the concept of the sanctification of the Mother of the Lord after her conception in a state of original sin.

It is also worth comparing at this point John Duns Scotus' argumentation for the Immaculate Conception with that of Thomas Hopeman, who explicitly proclaimed the Immaculate Conception of Mary. Doctor of the Immaculate, and at the same time a disciple of William of Ware, preached the Immaculate Conception at the end of the 13th century in Paris as a certain theological thesis. In Oxford, by contrast, he saw Mary's Immaculate Conception as a theologically plausible opinion, in fear of ecclesiastical caesuras. It can be found in five places in the *Reportationes*, a collection of lectures that *Doctor Subtilis* was to give in Paris and Oxford (Carlo Balić 1958, 209). John Duns Scotus went some way to solving the problem posed by Thomas Aquinas, namely to answer the question: would Mary, immaculate from the first moment of her existence, need redemption at all? The Franciscan theologian pointed to anticipatory grace, which gave Mary freedom from original sin from the very first moment of her existence. Mary was to be preserved from original sin in a more perfect way, that is, because of the future merits of Jesus Christ. Responding to Thomas' question about the necessity of the Mother of the Lord's redemption, he wrote: "the most perfect mediator exercises the most perfect act of mediation possible with respect to some person for whom He mediates: therefore Christ had

school or contested the theology pursued in other European countries. However, in some way their theology was distinct from European scholastic theology.

the most perfect form of mediation possible with respect to someone for whom He was Mediator. But for no one did He exercise a more excellent form of mediation than for Mary [...]. But this would not be so if He had not merited to preserve her from original sin.”²⁵

Mary, in the thought of John Duns Scotus, was therefore in need of redemption, as any human being. However, her redemption was accomplished in a more perfect way: by preserving her from original sin.

The selected English Dominicans who were sympathetic to Mary's Immaculate Conception and who wrote between the 13th and 16th centuries devoted too little space to showing the Christological dimension of this Marian truth. Yes, they presented Mary as the Mother of Christ, but in mentioning the Immaculate Conception, they did not support their argument with Christology; they did not sufficiently attempt to reconcile Mariology with Christology; they did not ask about the privilege of the Immaculate Conception in the face of the truth of the universality of the redemption accomplished by her Son. This is important because for Thomas Aquinas, the question of Mary's sinlessness in the context of Christ's sinlessness and His saving work was a fundamental question.²⁶ The texts of the selected English Dominicans were preaching texts and were not texts prepared for academic theological disputation. English Dominicans sympathetic to the truth of Mary's Immaculate Conception argued for this Marian privilege in a way that was closer to that of Eadmer than to that of Thomas Aquinas. The sons of Saint Dominic in creating the English theology of Mary's Immaculate Conception drew on the way of thinking presented in the *Tractatus de Conceptione Sanctae Mariae*. At the same time, they distanced themselves from the solution developed by John Duns Scotus. Thomas Hopeman, who was an ardent supporter of Mary's Immaculate Conception, created his own theological argumentation in favour of it. It was completely independent of the argumentation of John Duns Scotus. The English Dominican's argument was more preachy in nature and theologically referred to the act of procreation of Joachim and Anne, the union of Jesus with his mother and the holiness of Mary and her Son. The theology of John Duns Scotus, on the other hand, attempted to respond to the doubts of academic,

²⁵ See Carlo Balić 1958, 207. Latin text: “Perfectissimus enim mediator perfectissimum actum habet medianti possibilem respectu alicuius personae pro qua mediatur, ergo Christus habuit perfectissimum gradum mediandi possibilem respectu alicuius personae respectu cuius errat mediator; respectu nullius personae habuit excellentiorem gradum quam respectu Mariae [...]. Sed hoc non esset nisi meruisset eam praeservare a peccato originali.” (Carolus Balić 1933, 35–36).

²⁶ “Posset tamen intelligi quod totaliter fuit sublatus fomes hoc modo, quod praestitum fuerit Beatae Virgini, ex abundantia gratiae descenditis in ipsam, ut talis esset dispositio virium animae in ipsa quod inferiores vires nunquam moverentur sine arbitrio rationis, sicut dictum est, fuisse in Christo, quem constat peccati fomitem non habuisse; et sicut fuit in Adam ante peccatum per originalem iustitiam; ita quod, quantum ad hoc, gratia sanctificationis in virgine habuit vim originalis iustitiae. Et quamvis haec positio ad dignitatem Virginis matris pertinere videatur, derogat tamen in aliquo dignitati Christi, absque cuius virtute nullus a prima damnatione liberatus est.” (Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* III, q. 27 a. 3).

scholastic theology towards Mary's Immaculate Conception. In assessing the positions of selected English Dominicans in the late Middle Ages, it should be noted that the proponents of this Marian privilege did not thereby provide their adversaries with a solid theological argumentation. They unequivocally distanced themselves from scholastic theology, whose greatest representative was Thomas Aquinas. More than once, they limited themselves to merely stating the fact that Mary was preserved from original sin and venial sins. The lack of a developed argumentation may be surprising in view of the presence of the feast of Mary's conception already in English territory and in Dominican liturgical books. At the same time, it must be noted that the doubts of the opposing side had a solid theological basis: they raised the question of the necessity of redemption in the case of the Mother of Christ. It was a controversy that lasted until Pius IX dogmatised this truth. Dominicans sympathetic to the privilege of the Immaculate Conception situate themselves in the realm of preaching like Eadmer rather than the typical academic discussion. However, their position is worth noting against the background of the general attitude of the Order of Preachers against the Immaculate Conception of Mary.

Conclusions

The Immaculate Conception of Mary is a dogma with its own rich and turbulent history. The small fragment of this history, which is the Dominican disputes in England, shows the complexity of the approach to this Mariological issue. Many times, the modern reader of medieval theological works may feel lost in the arguments presented by Dominican authors. For their argumentation is closer to the language of ecclesiastical sermons than to academic theology, even that practised during the lifetime of the English Dominicans. What, then, was the position of selected English Dominicans towards Mary's Immaculate Conception? In the light of the statements of these authors presented above, it must be said that it was far diverse and, in some cases, ambiguous. Theologians such as Robert Kilwardby and Thomas Sutton strongly rejected the Immaculate Conception. Discussion of this truth seemed to them to be unnecessary, obscuring the truth of the necessity of Christ's passion and death for the redemption of all men. Thomas Sutton – the only one of the authors cited – sought support in the authority of Aquinas. Thomas Hopeman made a straightforward case for the Immaculate Conception, but his argument lacked solid theological argumentation. It is interesting to note that Hopeman was a Dominican preaching the Immaculate Conception of Mary only a few years after John Duns Scotus, but presenting a completely different argument. Finally, Thomas Ringstead and Simon of Boraston are authors who suggested Mary's preservation from original sin, but never definitively affirmed it. Rather, they situated this privilege in the realm of

theologically plausible truths. In other words, they emphasised Mary's exceptional holiness, but it cannot be said unequivocally that this exceptionality is founded on the privilege of her Immaculate Conception.

The writings of the English Dominicans on the Immaculate Conception are undoubtedly a valuable testimony to the efforts of Dominican scholars. At the same time, they show a lack of a solid theological argumentation on the matter. The Mariology of these authors is not a meeting space of Christology, soteriology and pneumatology. Rather, they present a kind of autonomous Mariology. The Dominicans are closer to the way of speaking about the Immaculate Conception represented by Eadmer than by Aquinas. These writings also show the distancing – at least on this matter – of some English Dominicans from the continental scholastic way of doing theology. Just as for Dominican theologians on the European continent the authorities on Mariology were Thomas Aquinas and Bernard of Clairvaux, so Dominican theologians in England followed Eadmer's Mariology. It should be noted, however, that the proponents of the Immaculate Conception and its tentative supporters were in a small minority in the ecclesiastical and theological world of the time. Undoubtedly, however, the history of the formation of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception calls for further exhaustive study and critical examination. The conclusion that can be drawn from the research is that, even on the basis of the writings of only the English province of the Order of Preachers, the position towards the Immaculate Conception from the thirteenth to the sixteenth century was far from homogeneous.

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