



William of Ware's Arguments in Defense of Mary's Immaculate Conception

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Abstract: The current article aims to shed light on the reasoning used by the 13th century English Franciscan master William of Ware to defend the belief in the immaculate conception of the Virgin Mary. To do so, this English theologian begins by dismantling the alleged reasons of those who opposed such belief. He then examines the numerous proofs that, in his opinion, confirm the truth of the thesis under study. As a methodological strategy, the author of this article sets out step by step and in detail the interrelated arguments of William of Ware to rationally support his defense of the immaculate conception thesis. The results of this research highlight the courageous and innovative pro-immaculate stance of William of Ware in the face of the then dominant current of deniers of the belief in the immaculate conception of Mary.

Keywords: Mariology, original sin, human conception, purification, Franciscan School, William of Ware, immaculate conception

It is well known that from the very early times the Christian Church had to defend orthodoxy by facing heated doctrinal debates against Docetists, Arians, Nestorians, and various other heretical currents. These debates reached their high and decisive points in the Ecumenical Councils of Nicaea (325), Ephesus (431), Chalcedon (451) and Constantinople II (553), where the Christological and two Mariological dogmas were definitively established. These Christological dogmas define Christ as true God the Son (of the same substance as the Father) and as true man; furthermore, the two Christ's natures, divine and human, are essentially and indissolubly united in the unique person of Christ. As necessary correlates of these Christological dogmas, these first Ecumenical Councils also established the principal Mariological dogmas, namely, the virginal divine motherhood of Mary (the Virgin is the true Mother of Christ) and, secondly, her perpetual virginity, since she was a virgin before childbirth, a virgin during childbirth and a virgin after childbirth.

However, despite the relatively early establishment of these two fundamental Mariological dogmas, two other important Mariological theses, that of the Immaculate Conception of Mary and that of her Assumption body and soul into heaven, far from achieving clear unanimity among the Fathers and theologians at that time (from the 6th-7th centuries), would be heatedly debated within Christianity for almost a millennium and a half. In fact, although both theses were admitted as pious beliefs since ancient times, and even as liturgical feasts, in numerous regions of the

Christian universe, it was only at a very late date that they became dogmas accepted by the whole Church: that of the Immaculate Conception in 1854, proclaimed by Pope Pius IX with the bull *Ineffabilis Deus* (De Fiores 1986, 613–19; Serra 1986, 619–25); and that of the Assumption in 1950, proclaimed by Pope Pius XII with the bull *Munificentissimus Deus* (Cecchin 2003; Piacentini 2004).

These last two Mariological beliefs were progressively affirmed and consolidated on the basis of a growing number of favorable opinions from some masters of Christian doctrine and fervent devotional practices on the part of the faithful. As in this article we will restrict ourselves only to the thesis of the Immaculate Conception, as argued by William of Ware, a Franciscan thinker of the 13th century, I will mention in passing some of the precursor positions of this thesis. Pierre Pauwels, in a pioneering monograph on the Franciscan contributions to the Immaculate dogma—published in 1904, on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the proclamation of the dogma (Pauwels 1904, 611–17)—mentions some antecedents of this belief in the immaculate conception of Mary (Pauwels 1904, 23; see also De Fiores 1986, 613–17): among them he includes the early declarations of some Greek Church Fathers on the role of the Virgin, essentially united to her son Jesus in the work of salvation of humanity, when Mary, as the new Eve and mother of the living, obtained full victory over the devil/sin (Pauwels 1904, 614). Stefano M. Cecchin, for his part, cites other Immaculate antecedents coming from Pope Honorius I (died in 638) and the Lateran Synod, both in the 7th century. According to Cecchin, Pope Honorius I wrote in a letter to Sergius, Patriarch of Constantinople, the following assertion: “Christ, effectively conceived without sin by the work of the Holy Spirit, was also born without sin of the Immaculate Virgin Mary.”¹

Thus, in this environment of progressive Marian interest, in the 8th century the belief in Mary’s exceptional freedom from sin was gradually strengthened. In that century, the conviction that Mary received “sanctification” in the body and a sanctification in the soul, with the purpose of becoming a worthy mother of God, spread in Eastern and Western Churches. According to the most common belief of the Church, represented, among others, by St. John Damascene, this sanctification or purification of Mary occurred at the Annunciation (Cecchin 2003, 12). Now, in this context of intense debates for and against the belief in Mary’s immaculate conception, the great doctrinal rivalry became apparent from the 13th century onwards between the philosophical-theological schools of the Dominicans and the Franciscans (Cecchin 2003, 39–74; 2021, 1–2). Based on the negative opinion of Bernard of Clairvaux on immaculate conception and his important impact on subsequent thinkers, especially on Thomas Aquinas, and then on the whole maculist

¹ “Christus . . . sine peccato conceptus de Spiritu sancto, etiam absque peccato est partus de sancta et immaculata virgine Dei genitrice.” (Honorius I, *Epistola IV ad Sergium Constantinopolitanum Episcopum* [PL 80, 472] as cited in Cecchin 2003, 13)

movement, the Dominican School, mostly opposed to this belief; the Franciscan School,² divided between a group of convinced adversaries and another group of enthusiastic defenders of the immaculist thesis, the latter thesis being the one that, in the end, would prevail.

In this sense, as Cecchin notes, the antagonism between the Dominican and Franciscan schools in the second half of the 13th century on the belief in the immaculate conception notably benefited the theology and Mariology of the whole Church, as it increasingly illuminated the mystery of Christ and his Virgin Mother. Cecchin adds that in this matter the Franciscan masters of that century went from an initial denial of the immaculate belief to an unconditional defense of that belief, in whose dogmatic proclamation in 1854 the Franciscan Mariological School would play a decisive role throughout the 13th and 19th centuries.³

In the context of the antithetical Mariological positions of the Franciscan School's thinkers on the subject under scrutiny, I will study in this article the pro-immaculist position of only one of these 13th-century Franciscan masters: William of Ware (1260–1305), who, together with Robert Grosseteste and John Duns Scotus (Salvador-González 2024, 215–38), is part of the trio of 13th-century Franciscan masters who defend the immaculist thesis.

William of Ware, by systematically addressing this ardent Mariological problem in his *Disputed Question Concerning the Immaculate Conception of Mary*,⁴ becomes the initiator of the immaculist movement at the University of Oxford, as Marielle Lamy (2000), Cecchin (2003, 58–61) and Maria Gabriella Iannelli (2010, 380) point out.⁵

Like some of his Franciscan colleagues of that period, this English teacher also tackles the controversial problem of Mary's Immaculate Conception with the traditional methodology of Scholasticism: he first analyzes the evidence that contradicts

² On this subject Cecchin points out: "Generalmente per 'Scuola' si intende l'insieme di pensatori, scrittori, scienziati, ecc., che seguono e sviluppano le teorie, i metodi, lo stile, il pensiero, ecc. d'un maestro, o che seguono comunque un medesimo metodo o indirizzo. Così che per 'Scuola francescana' si potrebbe intendere l'insieme dei vari autori, maestri, teologi, filosofi, predicatori e santi dell'Ordine francescano, che si sono occupati in modo speciale della Vergine Madre, e che hanno costituito una linea di pensiero, definita da san Massimiliano M. Kolbe un 'filo d'oro', che, iniziata con l'intuizione mistica di Francesco d'Assisi e fondata sulla teologia di Antonio, Bonaventura, Giovanni Duns Scoto, ecc., ha costituito una corrente di pensiero giunta sino ai nostri giorni e che ha accomunato tutti gli autori francescani in un unico metodo di indagine intorno al mistero di Maria, la donna attraverso cui si è realizzato il meraviglioso evento dell'Incarnazione." (Cecchin 2021, 1–2)

³ On this respect, Cecchin manifests: "Per la sua originalità e per l'enorme produzione teologica, omiletica, liturgica, devozionale e letteraria in onore della Vergine Maria, si può dare a questa speciale corrente di pensiero il nome di 'Scuola mariologica francescana.' Essa si fonda sulle intuizioni teologiche di Francesco d'Assisi e si sviluppa nella storia con vari e diversi autori che apportano diversità e originalità di vedute sul mistero mariano. L'apice del cammino si è parzialmente raggiunto con la proclamazione dei dogmi dell'Immacolata Concezione e dell'assunzione di Maria in cielo." (Cecchin 2021, 2)

⁴ William of Ware 1904, 1–11.

⁵ For a minimal bibliography on William of Ware, see Longpré 1922, 71–82; Glorieux 1933, 144–45; Gál 1954, 155–80; Höld 1990, 96–141.

this thesis, then unravels the arguments that would certify its validity and, finally, argues in detail and rigor his personal position on the matter.

1. Evaluating the Arguments Against the Immaculist Thesis

In trying to answer the question of whether the Virgin Mary was conceived in original sin, William of Ware begins by presenting the five arguments that would confirm such a hypothesis. The first three are opinions of the Church Fathers: one is from St. John Damascene, who says that if the Holy Spirit intervened to purify Mary, this means that she had something sinful that needed to be purified. The other two arguments are from St. Augustine, who in both cases maintains that only Christ was born without sin.⁶

The fourth argument against the immaculist thesis assumes that sin is the obstacle that prevented human beings from entering heaven, the door which was opened only by the Passion of Christ. Taking this into account—the opponents of the immaculate belief argue—if the Virgin had been conceived without sin and had died before the Passion of Christ, she would have entered heaven without the need of the redemption produced by her Son Jesus; and that is something totally inconvenient, because no one can be saved if Christ does not redeem him.⁷

As a fifth argument against Mary's immaculate conception, the English author presents a quotation from a certain work *De consecratione*, that is the third part of *Decretum Gratiani*,⁸ which, in announcing the liturgical solemnities of the Church, states that nothing is said about the feast of the conception of the Virgin, because it should not be celebrated, since Mary was conceived in original sin.

⁶ "Quaeritur utrum beata Virgo concepta fuerit in originali peccato.

Quod sic:

1. Damascenus libro III c. 2: *Spiritus Sanctus supervenit purgans ipsam*: ergo aliquid habuit, quod purgandum fuit; hoc non est nisi peccatum; non actuale: ergo originale.

2. Item, Augustinus libro 1 *De baptismo parvulorum* dicit, quod solus Christus sine peccato natus fuit.

3. Item, idem dicit libro II *De baptismo parvulorum*." (William of Ware 1904, 1)

⁷ "4. Item, peccatum fuit obstaculum, propter quod excluderentur homines ab ingressu caelestis patriae, quae quidem ianua aperta fuit per passionem: ergo, si beata Virgo fuisset sine omni peccato et mortua fuisset ante passionem, intrasset in caelum, et ita non omnibus fuisset ianua aperta per passionem Christi, nec beata Virgo indiguisset redemptione Filii sui; quod est inconveniens." (William of Ware 1904, 1)

⁸ "*De consecratione* is the third part of the *Decretum Gratiani*, an important source of canon law. This information is given in the notes to the cited edition. The *apparatus* is a commentary in the form of glosses. This source is important in the line of argument: not only are the Church Fathers against the Immaculate Conception, but so are the jurists." (I sincerely thank one of the reviewers of my article for this important information, which I have placed in quotation marks, since it is his/her own wording.)

2. Presenting Two External Arguments in Favour of the Immaculate Belief

William of Ware then presents two brief and inconsistent reasons that other thinkers adduced in favour of the thesis of Mary's immaculate conception. According to the first, St. Paul says in his Epistle to the Romans that "If the root is holy, the branches are also holy" (Rom 11:16) (New International Version–NIV); therefore, as the parents of the Virgin were saints, she was also holy. The second reason is that, if Mary in the act of conception had not been holy, the liturgical feast of her conception could not be celebrated, since there can be no relationship between sin and holiness.⁹ Our author does not grant greater validity to these two alleged proofs in favor of the immaculate thesis.

3. Arguing His Own Opinion on the Subject

After having presented the reasons for and against the immaculate belief, William of Ware argues in detail his personal position on the matter. To do this, he begins by analyzing one by one the different possibilities in which Mary's conception and birth could have occurred.

3.1. Analyzing Two Possibilities in the Conception of Mary

3.1.1. On the Possibility that Mary Contracted Original Sin and Was Purified at the Same Instant

The first opinion put forward by some is that Mary was conceived in original sin and at the same instant was purified and sanctified, although according to two different aspects of the same instant, so that it can be said that in one and the same instant one can be one way under one aspect, and in another different way under another aspect. According to the defenders of this possibility, an example of this apparent contradiction is the fact that, when a form of fire must be introduced into an aeriform matter, at the same instant the corruption of the aeriform matter and the introduction of the flaming form occur, according to a different aspect of the same instant. In this

⁹ "Contra:

1. Ad Rom. 11: *Si radix sancta, et rami; sed parentes beatæ Virginis fuerunt sancti: ergo et ipsa.*

2. Item, aliter festum Conceptionis non posset convenienter celebrari, quia quæ connexio peccati ad sanctitatem? Quare etc." (William of Ware 1904, 1)

way it is admitted that two contradictory things can be present at the same instant, although under two different aspects.¹⁰

William of Ware rejects this contradictory possibility outright, giving two *cuases*, and the second in the form of an *ad hominem* argument. The first proof, based on logics, shows that if we were to admit the contradictory possibility that we are analyzing, we would be admitting the absurdity of two contradictory things being true at the same time and in the same indivisible measure in reality. In fact, the multiplication of instants is a rational multiplication; but rational diversity cannot be made in such a way that completely contradictory things exist in a being at the same instant. For this reason—the English master concludes—Mary could not have been infected by original sin and at the same time be purified.¹¹

Our author then proposes as an “*ad hominem* argument” (as he calls it) that those who affirm the stated above deny it on a similar occasion, when they say that the angel could not sin in the first instant of his creation, because in that first instant he performed his first good act. But to do a good act and a bad act (sin) at the same instant, even if they were under different aspects of the same instant, is totally impossible.¹² William justifies the comparison between the sinless creation of the angels and the immaculate conception of the Virgin Mary with this reasoning: it is contradictory to affirm that the angels, in the first instant of their creation, in which they already perform a good act, can commit some sin, because it is contradictory that the good act (grace) and sin coexist in the same instant; in the same way, there is no reason to doubt that the Virgin Mary was, like the angels and by special privilege of God, in grace and without sin from the very instant of her conception.

¹⁰ “Respondeo:

Una opinio dicit, quod concepta fuit in originali peccato, et quod in eodem instanti fuit purgata et sanctificata, in alio tamen et ali signo eiusdem instantis.

Unde ponunt, quod unum possit esse in uno instanti ratione unius signi et aliud in eodem ratione alterius. Quod autem sit in eodem instant accipere plura signa, hoc probant per exemplum . . . : quando in materiam aeris debet induci forma ignis, in eodem instanti est corruptio formae aeris et inductio formae ignis, pro alio et alio signo eiusdem instantis. Et sic ponunt, contradictoria posse esse in diversis signis eiusdem instantis.” (William of Ware 1904, 2)

¹¹ “Contra hoc arguitur sic: Istud non intelligo propter duplicem causam: una est realis, et alia est contra hominem. Causa realis est, quia tunc contradictoria essent simul vera in eadem mensura indivisibili realiter; multiplicatio enim instantium est multiplicatio secundum rationem; diversitas autem secundum rationem non potest facere contradictoria esse in eodem instanti realiter: ergo beata Virgo non potuit simul in eodem instanti esse infecta peccato reatus originalis et sanctificata.” (William of Ware 1904, 2)

¹² “Alia causa est ad hominem. Ipsi enim, qui hoc dicunt, negant hoc in consimili. Dicunt enim, quod angelus non potuerit peccare in primo instanti suae creationis, quia in primo instanti habuit primum actum bonum; si autem in eodem instanti peccasset, habuisset actum malum, et ita habuisset actum bonum et actum malum in eodem instanti; quod est impossibile. Et tamen secundum eos hoc fuisset possibile secundum diversa signa eiusdem instantis.” (William of Ware 1904, 2)

William then complements his reasoning on this example, which he considers invalid,¹³ because, in his opinion, the generation of fire and the corruption of air are not two opposite phenomena, and therefore they can coincide at the same instant; on the contrary, the generation of fire and its corruption are opposites, for which reason these last two phenomena could not coexist at the same instant in a being.¹⁴

3.1.2. On the Possibility that Mary Contracted Original Sin and Was Purified Shortly Afterwards

William of Ware then examines the ten arguments that would support, as a second opinion, that the Virgin Mary was conceived in original sin, before being purified shortly afterwards: this is the maculistposition. The first is provided by St. Bernard, when in a writing against the feast of Mary's Conception, he says that the Virgin does not want to receive an honour that harms her Son.¹⁵

The second proof is offered by St. Anselm, when in *Cur Deus homo* he says categorically that Mary, mother of Christ, was conceived in iniquity and, therefore, was born with original sin.¹⁶

As a third argument, the English thinker offers another argument from St. Anselm, when in *De conceptu virginali* he says that the semen received by the Virgin in her conception by Anne, although pure and holy, comes from the sinful mass of the human race.¹⁷

William takes the fourth argument from St. Augustine, who in *De nuptiis et concupiscentia* asserts without hesitation that no one is conceived by a man and a woman without contracting original sin.¹⁸

According to the fifth demonstration, the axiom that every effect requires a cause allows us to infer that, since sin is the cause of death, from the mere fact that the

¹³ This concept is that of Henry of Ghent. See Lamy 2000, 306–23. I am grateful to the reviewer of my article for providing this important information.

¹⁴ “Quidquid sit de primo exemplo, alias erit sermo de hoc. Secundum exemplum non est ad propositum, quia generatio ignis et corruptio aeris non sunt opposita, et ideo possunt stare simul in eodem instanti; sed generatio ignis et corruptio ignis sunt opposita.” (William of Ware 1904, 2)

¹⁵ “Alia est opinio, quod in originali sit concepta et non in eodem instanti mundata.
1. Et haec est intentio Bernardi in quodam libello *De festo conceptionis B. Mariae Virginis*; et ibi dicit, quod non vult Beata talem honorem, per quem fit derogatio Filio suo.” (William of Ware 1904, 3)

¹⁶ “2. Item, Anselmus libro II *Cur Deus homo* c. 16: ‘Virgo ipsa, unde assumptus est Christus, in iniquitatibus concepta est, et in peccatis concepit eam mater eius, et cum originali peccato nata est.’” (William of Ware 1904, 3)

¹⁷ “3. Item, Anselmus, *De conceptu virginali* c. 14: ‘Hoc autem nullatenus refragatur rationi nostrae, quae semen de Virgine sumtum asserit esse mundum, quamvis sit de massa peccatrice.’” (William of Ware 1904, 3)

¹⁸ “4. Item, Augustinus, *De nuptiis et concupiscentia*: ‘Nullus concipitur ex mare et femina, nisi contrahat originale.’” (William of Ware 1904, 3)

Virgin died it is inferred that she committed sin, not actual sin (for she was exempt from all mortal and venial sin), but original sin.¹⁹

In the sixth argument, Ware's thinker analyses three possibilities: that Mary was sanctified before her conception, or in the moment of her conception, or after her conception. In this regard, he rules out the first two alternatives: she could not have been sanctified before her conception, because she did not yet exist; nor could she have been sanctified at her conception, because at that very moment the libidinal pleasure of her parents was active and, therefore, so was original sin. As a consequence, according to the third possibility, Mary was sanctified after her conception, after contracting original sin.²⁰

As a seventh proof against the immaculate belief, our author assumes the phrase of St. Augustine, when he says "He firmly believes that anyone who is born among a man and a woman contracts original sin."²¹

In the eighth argument against Mary's immaculate conception, William combines several sentences of St. Augustine and St. Paul. Augustine says that between God and men there is only one mediator, who is Christ, without whom no one can be freed from sin; and whoever thinks that there is someone who does not need the remission of sins, because he believes himself to be outside our universal mediator before God, is opposed to the Holy Scriptures, when St. Paul says in his Epistle to the Romans that through one man (Adam) sin entered the world, and through sin death entered, through whom all have sinned.²² Therefore, the English Franciscan concludes that it would be impious to maintain that there are men free from sin, without the mediator Christ needing to come to free them from it and to save them.²³

19 "5. Item, effectus alicuius existens in aliquo, arguit causam illius effectus: peccatum autem est causa mortis; beata autem Virgo mortua fuit: ergo habuit peccatum; non actuale: ergo originale." (William of Ware 1904, 3)

20 "6. Item, aut fuit sanctificata ante conceptionem aut in conceptione aut post conceptionem. Non ante, quia ante non fuit; nec in, quia tunc fuit libido parentum actualis, et simul fuissent contradictoria: ergo sanctificata fuit post conceptionem, et ita contraxit originale." (William of Ware 1904, 3)

21 "7. Item, Augustinus, *De fide ad Petrum*: 'Firmissime tene, quod omnis, qui inter hominem et mulierem nascitur, contrahit originale.'" (William of Ware 1904, 3)

22 "8. Item, si non contraxisset originale, non indiguisset morte Christi, quod est contra Augustinum, *De perfectione iustitiae*: 'Unus est Deus et unus mediator Dei et hominum, Christus Iesus, sine quo nemo a condemnatione liberatur, sive quam traxit ex illo, in quo omnes peccaverant, sive quam postea suis iniquitatibus addidit'. Et post: 'Quisquis ergo fuisse vel esse aliquem hominem vel aliquos homines putat, excepto uno *mediatore Dei et hominum*, quibus necessaria non fuerit peccatorum remissio, contrarius est divinae scripturae, ut apostolus dicit *per unum hominem peccatum intrasse in mundum, et per peccatum mortem, et ita in omnes homines pertransisse, in quo omnes peccaverunt*.'" (William of Ware 1904, 3–4) William of Ware takes this text from Rom 5:12: "Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned" (Rom 5:12) (New International Version–NIV).

23 "et necesse est, ut impia contentione asserat, esse posse homines, qui sine mediatore Christo liberante atque salvante sint liberi salvique a peccato, cum Iesus dixerit: 'Non est opus sanis medicus, sed male habentibus. Non veni vocare iustos, sed peccatores.' Et loquitur ibi de peccato originali, sicut patet expresse." (William of Ware 1904, 4)

William explains that the defenders of the maculist thesis, following the Apostle Paul and Augustine, affirm that all human beings are born in sin, except Christ, who is also the only intermediary between God and humanity capable of freeing them from sin. In this sense, the maculists maintain that the Virgin Mary was not an exception to the general rule, and, therefore, having been conceived in sin, she also needed the intermediation of Christ to be redeemed from original sin.

As a ninth proof against the immaculate thesis, William refers to a sentence of St. Jerome, who comments on a verse of the Psalms to the effect that Christ says of himself that his soul is unique, because it was the only one without sin.²⁴

As a tenth and final argument against immaculist belief, our author quotes St. Augustine, when he speaks of the concupiscence from which the Virgin's body came and which her Son could not contract: here concupiscence is either original sin or its consequence, from which it follows that the Virgin contracted original sin.²⁵

3.2. Presentation and Justification of His Personal Position on Mary's Immaculate Conception

After evoking the first two opposing opinions, William of Ware presents the third opinion, according to which the Virgin Mary did not contract original sin when she was conceived. Our author enthusiastically defends the thesis of the Virgin's Immaculate Conception, asserting that he prefers to err by excess in attributing this prerogative to Mary, even though she did not have it, rather than to err by default, denying her this privilege received by her, considering the power of her divine Son.²⁶

Regarding such an exclusive privilege, the English theologian proposes to examine in the following paragraphs its possibility, its convenience, its current nature, the multiplicity of power, the need to celebrate the feast of the Conception, and the obligation to celebrate this feast even in the case that the Virgin was conceived in original sin.²⁷ This is how Sarah Jane Boss has been able to convincingly explain it.²⁸

²⁴ "9. Item, Hieronymus super illud Psalmi: *De manu canis uncam meam*, dicit, quod uncam meam nominet Christus animam suam, quae sola fuit sine peccato." (William of Ware 1904, 4)

²⁵ "10. Item, Augustinus libro X *Contra Iulianum* dicit: 'Concupiscentiam, ex qua trahebatur corpus Virginis, quam non potuit contrahere Filius Virginis'; sed constat, quod concupiscentia vel est peccatum originale vel consequitur ipsum: ergo." (William of Ware 1904, 4)

²⁶ "Alia est opinio, quod non contraxit originale. Quam volo tenere, quia, si debeam deficere, cum non sim certus de altera parte, magis volo deficere per superabundantiam, dando Mariae aliquam praerogativam, quam per defectum, diminuendo vel subtrahendo ab ea aliquam praerogativam, quam habuit; sicut in quaestione, qua quaeritur de potentia Filii sui." (William of Ware 1904, 4–5)

²⁷ "Inde primo volo ostendere *possibilitatem*, secundo *congruentiam*, tertio quarto *potentiae multipliciter*, quinto, quod *festum conceptionis* est *celebrandum*, et sexto, quod *festum esset celebrandum, etiamsi esset concepta in originali*." (William of Ware 1904, 4–5)

²⁸ In this regard Boss expresses: "William of Ware, for instance, argued that the feast of Mary's Conception should be celebrated even if she contracted original sin, because her flesh is the 'original principle' of the body of Christ. Now, if William had held a 'high' doctrine of original sin—that is, if he had placed

William of Ware begins by demonstrating the possibility of the prerogative of Mary's Immaculate Conception, first reasoning it and then confirming it with various examples. So he argues that way: although the condition of illness (sin) of the offspring's body is derived from the paternal semen, nevertheless, before the mass of the flesh of the Virgin Mary was formed, it (the flesh) was purified, not sanctified, because only that which is susceptible to sin and grace can be sanctified, that is, only the soul, not the body.²⁹ This bodily mass of the Virgin, derived from the paternal semen, inherited from it a condition of illness or contamination, which in other human beings causes them to contract original sin, when their soul unites with that mass of sick flesh. But—our author infers—since this condition of illness does not coincide with the substance of the flesh (the body), but is its fault, God was able to preserve the mass of Mary's flesh from the contamination derived from the condition of illness: this is because with this mass of flesh the body of the Virgin had to be formed, so that her mass of flesh would not be contaminated by her parents when providing the semen.³⁰

This reasoning of William is related to the medieval belief that the moment of biological conception of the body and its animation by the soul are different. William stresses that, even if the conception of Mary's body was derived from the paternal semen, it was preserved by God from the contamination by her parents when providing the semen.

To confirm this reasoning, William of Ware uses two examples, one taken from St. Augustine, the other from St. Anselm. St. Augustine, in his letter to Elvidius, says that even if the soul of Christ had come from someone who had transmitted it to him, it would not necessarily have had original sin, since it could have been sanctified at the very moment of its transmission. Similarly—the thinker from Ware adds—although the Virgin's flesh was transmitted by her parents, and, therefore, was

great emphasis on its severity—then the fact of original sin would have made it improper to celebrate Mary's conception, as St. Bernard and others had already argued was the case. The fact that William is willing to promote the feast regardless of whether or not Mary's conception was sinless indicates that he takes a relatively light view of original sin. Yet the argument just cited follows on immediately from arguments in favour of the immaculate conception." (Boss 2007, 217)

²⁹ "1. Possibilitatem ostendo sic: primo narrando, secundo exempta adducendo.

Primo narrando sic: Illa massa carnis, ex qua corpus Virginis fuit formatum, simul fuit seminata et mundata. Ex parte autem seminantis fuit in ea qualitas morbida: sed ea tenuis, qua fuit inde formandum corpus Virginis, fuit mundata, non dico sanctificata, quia sanctificari non potest, nisi quod est susceptivum peccati et gratiae, cuiusmodi est sola anima." (William of Ware 1904, 5)

³⁰ "In massa, inquam, illa fuit ratione parentum seminantium qualitas morbida, ratione cuius qualitatis ex unione animae ad carnem talem in aliis hominibus contrahitur originale. Cum igitur infectio ista sive qualitas morbida non sit substantia carnis, sed reatus differens ab ea, possibile fuit Deo praeservare illam massam ab infectione vel qualitate morbida, in quantum ex ea debuit formari corpus Virginis, quamvis infecta fuerit illa massa a parte seminantium." (William of Ware 1904, 5)

infected, nevertheless, it could have been purified at the very moment of paternal transmission.³¹

As a second example confirming his argument, the English theologian presents the opinion of St. Anselm, who in his *De veritate* proposes the following reasoning: when a sinner is punished by someone who does not have such a competence, as, on the one hand, he should be punished, but, on the other hand, it is not for the other to punish him, the punishment should and should not be given, and furthermore it cannot be denied that it is just or unjust.³² From such an anomalous example offered by Anselm, William deduces that it was analogously possible for the mass of the Virgin's flesh to have been contaminated by her parents and, therefore, to have been affected by an injustice; however, even granting this to the Virgin, it does not mean that such a circumstance harmed the prerogative of the virginal conception of her Son, because He was conceived pure of a pure mother (the Virgin Mary, who conceived Christ supernaturally, without human mediation, by the direct intervention of God); on the other hand, the Virgin was conceived pure from impure parents, as opposed to other human beings, who are conceived impure from impure parents. From this William infers the possibility of Mary's immaculate conception.³³

The theologian of Ware then goes on to demonstrate the convenience of the Virgin's immaculate conception, based on the assumption that, since her Son is purity itself, it was just that he should form for himself a mother as pure as possible, so that he would not limit himself to purifying her, but to preserve her from all impurity. Our author reinforces his argument by accepting two passages from St. Anselm in *De conceptu virginali*. In the first of these, Anselm says that it was fitting that Christ's conception should take place in a most pure mother, so that it was fitting that this Virgin should shine with such purity that there was no greater below God; because God the Father was preparing to entrust his only Son, whom he loved as himself,

³¹ "Ad hoc potest adduci illud exemplum Augustini in *Epistola ad Elvidium*, ubi dicit, quod, si anima Christi fuisset ex traduce, non fuisset necesse habuisse originale, quia in eodem instanti fuisset sanctificata, quo fuisset traducta: ergo similiter, quamvis caro beatae Virginis fuerit traducta et sic infecta, potuit tamen in eodem instanti mundari." (William of Ware 1904, 5)

³² "Aliud exemplum est, quod dicit Anselmus, c. 7 sive 8 *De veritate*, ubi dicit: 'Cum peccans ab eo, ad quem non pertinet, percutitur, quoniam et ipse percuti debet, et ille non debet percutere, debet et non debet esse percussio, et ideo recta et non recta negari non potest'. Ex hoc habetur, quod eadem res propter diversam relationem dici potest recta et non recta." (William of Ware 1904, 5–6)

³³ "Igitur similiter in proposito massa ista a parte parentum beatae Virginis possibilis fuit habere infectionem sive non rectitudinem et a parte sui, in quantum ex ea debuit corpus beatae Virginis formari, possibile fuit, quod haberet munditiam et rectitudinem. Et tamen istud dando beatae Virgini non est contra praerogativam conceptionis Filii, quia Filius suus conceptus est mundus et de munda, beata autem Virgo concepta est munda, sed de immundis, ceteri autem homines concepti sunt immundi et de immundis. Sic patet possibilitas." (William of Ware 1904, 6)

so that the Son of God the Father and the Son of the Virgin were the same and unique person.³⁴

As a complement to these disquisitions, the English Franciscan immediately takes up the second (analogous) passage from St. Anselm, who argues that God could have created a human being without the slightest sin, and that this person would then have been purer than Mary, if she had contracted original sin; however, this would not have been appropriate, because a son must honour his mother as much as possible, and so Christ had to do everything possible to honour his mother by granting her to be conceived without original sin.³⁵ And in this way, Anselm's authority, which was invoked to support the maculist thesis, is used by Wilhelm to support the immaculist thesis.³⁶

William of Ware then asserts that Mary's immaculate conception became a reality, as several authorities affirm. According to him, the Lincolnian (Robert Grosseteste) affirms it, and, for his part, Alexander Neckam interprets the verse from Song of Songs "You are all beautiful, my love, and there is no spot in you" to mean that there is no actual or original sin in the Virgin. This is also affirmed by St. Anselm and Richard of St. Victor, in a sermon on the Virgin's conception.³⁷ As the final authority that allows him to confirm the truth of the immaculate thesis, William turns to St. Augustine, who in *De natura et gratia* asserts that the Virgin Mary constitutes an exception with respect to sin, since we know that she was granted a superior grace to overcome any kind of sin, having deserved to conceive and give birth to one who had never had any sin.³⁸ Just as earlier William used the authority of Anselm to defend the

34 "2. Congruentia autem patet, quia, postquam Filius eius est ipsa munditia, congruum fuit, ut faceret Matrem suam ita mundam, sicut potuit, et sic non solum mundaret, sed ab omni immunditia praeservaret; et hoc dicit Anselmus, *De conceptu virginali* c. 18: 'Decebat, ut istius hominis conceptio de matre purissima fieret; nempe decens erat, ut ea puritate, qua maior sub Deo nequit intelligi, Virgo illa niteret, cui Deus Pater unicum Filium, quem de corde suo aequalem sibi genitum tanquam se ipsum diligebat, ita dare disponebat, ut naturaliter unus esset idemque communis Dei Patris et Virginis Filius, et quam ipse Filius facere sibi matrem substantialiter eligebat, et de qua Spiritus sanctus volebat et operaturus erat, ut conciperetur et nasceretur ille, de quo ipse procedebat.'" (William of Ware 1904, 6)

35 "Item, Anselmus, c. 13 et 15 *De conceptu* ostendit, quod Deus potuit fecisse unum hominem sine omni peccato; si ergo Virgo Maria traxisset originale, talis fuisset mundior Virgine; quod est inconueniens, quia decet filium matrem summe honorare; et quod potuit, congruum fuit, quod fecerit; et ex hoc sequitur, quod ita fecerit, cum filius debeat matrem honorare." (William of Ware 1904, 6)

36 I sincerely thank the reviewer of my article for this valuable information.

37 "3. Quod sic factum sit, sunt auctoritates. Lincolnensis, ut dicitur, hoc posuit. Et Alexander Nequam in ultimo vitae suae exposuit illud Canticorum: *Tota pulchra es, amica mea, et macula non est in te*, neque actualis neque originalis de beata Virgine.

Item, Anselmus hoc videtur dicere quem condidit de ista materia.

Item, Richardus de S. Victore in *beatae Virginis*." (William of Ware 1904, 6–7)

38 "Item, Augustinus in libro *De natura et gratia* circa medium dicit: 'Excepta itaque sancta Virgine Maria, de qua propter honorem Domini nullam prorsus, cum de peccato agitur, volo haberi quaestionem; unum enim scimus, quod ei plus gratiae collatum fuerit ad vincendum omni ex parte peccatum, quae concipere ac parere meruit quem constat, nullum habere peccatum.' Hac igitur Virgine excepta etc. Haec Augustinus." (William of Ware 1904, 7)

immaculist thesis so now he uses the authority of Augustine, even though the starting point for this argument was William's fellow theologians.³⁹

Ware's writer then analyses the multiple possibilities of grace, in which he sees a double power, one natural and the other the obedience power. In his opinion, the quasi-natural power of grace is the one which is acted upon in correspondence with the elicited act of power: such is the case of the angels, who received grace with elicited acts according to their effort and merit.⁴⁰ On the contrary—our author assures—the obedience power is threefold: one is that which can be actualised unconditionally with respect to nature in the subject itself; the second is that which can be actualised not unconditionally, but in relation to the nature present in the subject itself, as when the subject is the Mother of God; the third obedience power is that of created grace, which cannot be actualised in the subject itself, but only in a divine subject.⁴¹

In the English thinker's opinion, the second power of obedience to grace has not been realized in any nature, except in the Virgin Mary, and it is only possible for it to be fulfilled in a creature destined to be the Mother of God; and he does not believe that any pure creature, except the Virgin, is filled with as much grace as it could receive according to the power of obedience.⁴² For this reason—William infers—Mary has been filled with grace according to both obedience powers, to the point of surpassing in grace every pure creature according to the double degree of grace; and, therefore, the grace of God and God himself are present in the Virgin by a special privilege.⁴³

The Franciscan of Ware considers that the third grace cannot be received by a pure creature until it remains in the subject itself, which is the case of Christ. But it would not have been possible for that grace to have remained in the soul of Christ, if it had been separated from the Word.⁴⁴ Thus—the author concludes—the grace

³⁹ I wish to thank the reviewer of my article for this valuable information.

⁴⁰ "4. Quarto ostenditur multiplicitas potentiae ad gratiam. Est enim duplex potentia ad gratiam, scilicet naturalis et obediencialis. Potentia quasi naturalis ad gratiam est illa, quae impletur secundum correspondentiam ad actum elicited a potentia; et sic angeli receperunt gratiam per comparisonem ad actus elicited, quia secundum conatum suum et meritum." (William of Ware 1904, 7)

⁴¹ "Potentia autem obediencialis est triplex: una, quae potest repleti, natura stante in proprio supposito absolute; alia est potentia ad gratiam, quae potest repleti, natura stante in proprio supposito non absolute, sed in relatione, ut suppositum illud sit Mater Dei: tertia potentia obediencialis est ad gratiam creatam, quae non potest repleti natura stante in proprio supposito, sed solum in supposito divino." (William of Ware 1904, 7)

⁴² "Credo, quod in nulla natura sit impleta potentia obediencialis secunda ad gratiam, nisi in sola beata Virgine; nec esset possibile impleri, nisi creatura illa fieret Mater Dei; nec credo, quod aliqua pura creatura repleta sit tanta gratia, quantam posset habere de potentia obedienciali primo modo dicta, nisi beata Virgo." (William of Ware 1904, 7)

⁴³ "Unde beata Virgo impleta est gratia secundum utramque potentiam obediencialem: et ita excellit omnem puram creaturam in gratia secundum duplicem gradum gratiae; et ideo gratia et Deus est in ipsa per quandam specialem illapsus." (William of Ware 1904, 7)

⁴⁴ "Tertiam vero gratiam non potest pura creatura accipere manens in proprio supposito; et hanc habuit Christus. Nec fuisset possibile, quod tanta gratia remansisset in anima Christi, si per impossibile fuisset anima Christi separata a Verbo." (William of Ware 1904, 8)

of the soul of Christ surpasses the soul of the Virgin by only one step, which, in any case, makes the distance in excellence between the grace of the soul of Christ and that of the soul of Mary greater than the two steps with which the Virgin excels above the grace of other human beings.⁴⁵

Our author adds that Mary in her first sanctification in the moment of conception was filled with as much grace as a creature could receive; and in her second sanctification in the moment of annunciation she was so confirmed in grace that she could not sin venially or mortally. In such circumstances Mary received such great grace that a pure creature could not receive it, unless she were the Mother of God.⁴⁶ William then argues about the need to celebrate the feast of the Conception, because everything related to the Virgin is pure, as confirmed by St. Anselm when he writes to the bishops of England that he does not believe that anyone who refuses to celebrate the feast of her Conception is a true lover of the Virgin.⁴⁷ It should be noted that William of Ware relies on the English tradition of celebrating the conception of Mary, in frank opposition to the strong reluctance of Bernard of Clairvaux and the Parisian theologians in this regard: in fact, Bernard and the latter considered it was inappropriate to celebrate such a feast without being absolutely certain that Mary had been conceived without original sin.

To conclude his reasoning in defense of the immaculate belief, William of Ware says that the feast of the Conception can be celebrated even in the case that if Mary had been conceived in original sin, because her corporal matter had to be the principle from which the body of Christ was engendered. In his opinion, it is not necessary for holiness to be formally present in the one whose feast is being celebrated, since it is enough that there be holiness in relation to another person, in this case, his Son Christ.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ “Et sic gratia animae Christi excedit gratiam animae beatae Virginis per unum gradum; qui tamen gradus facit plus distare gratiam animae Christi a gratia beatae Virginis in excellentia quam duo gradus, in quibus excellit beata Virgo omnem puram creaturam, faciunt gratiam beatae Virginis distare in esse a gratia aliorum hominum.” (William of Ware 1904, 8)

⁴⁶ “Sciendum est etiam, quod beata Virgo fuit repleta tanta gratia in prima sanctificatione, quantam potuit pura creatura habere, stans in proprio supposito absolute. In secunda fuit confirmata, quod nec venialiter nec mortaliter postea potuit peccare, in qua recepit tantam gratiam, quantam non potest pura creatura recipere, nisi fieret Mater Dei.” (William of Ware 1904, 8)

⁴⁷ “5. Et ex hoc sequitur quantum, quod, ex quo totum mundum est quod est a parte Virginis in conceptione, festum conceptionis est celebrandum; et ideo dicit Anselmus in *Epistola ad episcopos Angliae*: ‘Non credo, esse verum amatorem beatae Virginis, qui respuat celebrare festum conceptionis.’” (William of Ware 1904, 8)

⁴⁸ “6. Et supposito, quod contraxisset originale, adhuc posset celebrari, in quantum illa massa debuit esse originale principium corporis Christi, non in quantum vitiata. Sic in ortu filiorum regis fit solemne festum; sic cathedra S. Petri celebratur, in quantum ibi incipiebat futura ecclesiae dignitas. Nec oportet, quod sanctitas formaliter insit illi, de quo festum celebratur, ut patet in festo dedicationis ecclesiae, vel in festo S. Crucis, sed sufficit, quod sit sanctitas in relatione ad aliud.” (William of Ware 1904, 8–9)

3.3. Refuting the Objections Against Mary's Immaculate Conception

Next, William of Ware presents ten responses against those who object to the purification of Mary at her conception. To the first objection, deduced from St. Bernard, the English Franciscan replies that Bernard does not go so far as to deny altogether the purification of the Virgin at her conception, since at the end of his letter he refers the question to the judgment of the Pope; and, in any case, even if Bernard had denied the immaculate conception of Mary, there are many other saints and Doctors of the Church who affirm it, and, therefore, one should piously believe them, rather than Bernard. Moreover—the English Mariologist goes on—what Bernard affirmed during his lifetime he retracted in the visions after his death. In fact, in a posthumous vision to a monk of Clairvaux, he appeared to him all luminous, although with a spot on his chest, which, as Bernard himself explained to the monk who received the vision, was a spot he had received for having said that the Virgin Mary contracted original sin when she was conceived. Therefore—William concludes—what St. Bernard did not retract in life he retracted after death in a vision granted to a monk.⁴⁹ We cannot certify the sources of this posthumous vision or the alleged Immaculate “retraction” of St. Bernard. William undoubtedly accepts this account without further ado, considering the ratifying power that the prestigious Bernard would give to the Immaculist thesis.

To the second and third objections, presumably raised by St. Anselm, the master of Ware responds that these objections, not exhaustive, but interrogative, are from Anselm's disciple; and the fact that Anselm did not answer them does not mean that he approves them; all the more so since in a later pamphlet Anselm affirmed the truth that Mary did not contract original sin.⁵⁰

Concerning a fourth objection, derived from St. Augustine, William says that the fact of not having any impurity either personal or derived from the parents is an exclusive prerogative of the Son of God, while possessing personal purity and impurity from the parents can be a prerogative of Mary.⁵¹

⁴⁹ “Vel dic, quod id, quod dixit in vita, retractavit per visiones; apparuit enim beatus Bernardus uni monacho de Claravalle desideranti ipsum videre totus lucidus, excepto pectore, in quo fuit quaedam macula; et cum quaesivisset, unde haberet illam maculam, cum totum residuum esset lucidum, respondit, quod talem maculam habuit, quia dixit de beata Virgine, quod originale contraxit; et ita quod non retractavit vivendo, retractavit mortuus per somnia.” (William of Ware 1904, 9)

⁵⁰ “2. et 3. Ad aliud de Anselmo dico, quod sunt verba discipuli, et ideo non dicuntur determinative, sed inquisitive. Si dicas, quod Anselmus hoc videtur approbare, ex quo non reprehendit eum, dico, quod, quamvis ibi non reprehendatur, tamen postea in quodam libello dixit veritatem illam, scilicet, quod beata Virgo non contraxit originale.” (William of Ware 1904, 9)

⁵¹ “4. Ad aliud de Augustino dico, quod non habere immunditiam, nec a se nec ex parte parentum, praerogativa solius Filii sui est; habere tamen munditiam in se et immunditiam a parentibus potest esse praerogativa beatae Virginis.” (William of Ware 1904, 9)

To the fifth objection our author replies that, even if a man had uninfected natural qualities, but did not have the gratuitous habit that prevents him from dying, he would die naturally; therefore St. Augustine says that Christ would have died of old age, had he lived, which would not have happened to Adam (if he had not sinned), because death is not always the consequence of sin.⁵²

To the sixth objection, which asks whether Mary was sanctified before, during, or after conception, our author replies that the question is wrongly put, because Mary's flesh was cleansed (purified) at conception, but was not sanctified; and the reasoning is based on the false assumption that sanctification and purification are the same. In this case, the flesh and the irrational nature (the body) of the Virgin are susceptible of purification, but not of sanctification.⁵³ It should not be forgotten that for medieval people the conception of a human being (that is, the engendering of his body or flesh) was not identified with body's animation by the soul. In fact, it was thought that the animation of the body by the soul could happen long after the conception of the body. That is why, according to William, the body of the Virgin Mary could have been purified at its conception, before her soul was sanctified in the animation of the body by the soul.

On the seventh objection, based on a passage from St. Augustine's *De fide ad Petrum*, William alleges that the saint speaks of the impurity of the parents.⁵⁴

To the eighth objection of those who say that Mary, if she had been conceived without sin, would not have needed to be redeemed by the passion of Christ, our author answers that this is true, because the purity of the Virgin Mother proceeded from her Son. In this order of ideas, William bases himself on a sentence of St. Anselm, when, to a disciple who asked him how Christ could be pure by himself, if he had received purity from his Mother, he answers that the purity of the Mother, thanks to which Christ was pure, comes only from Christ himself, for which reason he was pure by means of himself and by himself, not by means of his mother.⁵⁵ Therefore—the English thinker deduces—all the filth was granted to Mother Mary through her

52 "5. Ad aliud dico, quod, si unus homo haberet pura naturalia non infecta et non haberet habitum gratuitum, qui proberet eum mori, moreretur naturaliter; et ideo dicit Augustinus, II *De baptismo parvulorum*, quod Christus defecisset si vixisset et tamen Adam non; hoc dixit propter hoc, quod mors non est semper propter peccatum." (William of Ware 1904, 9–10)

53 "6. Aliud, cum quaeritur: vel fuit sanctificata ante conceptionem vel in vel post, dico, quod argumentum procedit ex falsa imaginatione; quia ipsa caro mundata fuit in ipsa conceptione, non tamen sanctificata. Caro enim et natura irrationalis bene est susceptibilis mundationis, licet non sanctificationis: argumentum autem procedit, ac si idem esset sanctificatio et mundatio." (William of Ware 1904, 10)

54 "7. Ad aliud Augustini. *De fide ad Petram*, dico, quod loquitur de immunditia ex parte parentum." (William of Ware 1904, 10)

55 "8. Ad aliud, cum dicitur: si fuisset sine peccato, non indiguisset redimi per passionem Christi, dico, quod sic: quia tota munditia Matris Virginis fuit a Filio; dicit enim Anselmus II *Cur Deus homo* c. 16. ubi quaerit discipulus, quomodo Christus fuit mundus per se, si accepit munditiam a matre, et respondet Anselmus: 'Quoniam Matris munditia, per quam mundus est, non fuit nisi ab illo: ipse ergo per se ipsum et a se mundus fuit.'" (William of Ware 1904, 10)

Son, and that is why she needed the passion of Christ, not because of sin, which did not exist in her, but which would have existed in her, if her Son had not preserved her from contracting it.⁵⁶

To the ninth objection, taken from the statement of St. Jerome, when he says in his Gloss that only the soul of Christ was without sin, William replies that the term “only” does not exclude the soul of Mary, which must necessarily be clean, as clean must also be her flesh, from which the body of her Son would be assumed in all purity.⁵⁷

To the tenth and last objection coming from a phrase of St. Augustine, the English Franciscan replies that the bishop of Hippo speaks of the concupiscence of the parents.⁵⁸

Finally, William of Ware refutes the five main objections that oppose the thesis of the immaculate conception of Mary. To the first of these, derived from a statement of St. John Damascene about “purifying” Mary, our author replies that the purification of something can be understood in two ways: either as something impure being eliminated, or as some perfection being added to it. In his opinion, the Damascene speaks of purification in the second sense of the term, that is, in that Mary was not purified from a sin that she did not have, but that she would have had, had she not been preserved from it.⁵⁹

To the second and third objections, William asserts that the objector is speaking of the Virgin's parents.⁶⁰

To the fourth objection, according to which the gate of heaven would not have been opened to Mary because of the death of Christ, some say that it is not inappropriate to attribute this prerogative to the Mother of God, while others say that the precise cause of the closing of heaven's gate is not sin, but the divine decree, as is shown by the fact that many saints remained in limbo before the passion of Christ. Therefore—our writer concludes—if the Virgin Mary had died before the passion of

⁵⁶ “Unde tota munditia Matris fuit ei per Filium suum: unde indiguit passione Christi non propter peccatum, quod infuit, sed quod infuisset, nisi ipsemet Filius eam per fidem praeservasset. Et ideo dicit Augustinus in sermone *De Magdalena*, quod duplex est debitum, scilicet vel commissum et dimissum, vel non commissum, sed possibile committi: ‘nullum enim peccatum facit unus homo, quod non posset facere alius homo, nisi praeservaretur a Deo.’” (William of Ware 1904, 10)

⁵⁷ “9. Ad aliud de Hieronymo, cum dicit in glossa, quod sola anima Christi fuit sine peccato, dico, quod *sola* non excludit animam Matris, quam oportebat mundam esse, sicut et carnem, de qua corpus Filii debuit assumi in omni munditia.” (William of Ware 1904, 10)

⁵⁸ “10. Ad aliud Augustini dicitur, quod loquitur de concupiscentia a parte parentum.” (William of Ware 1904, 11)

⁵⁹ “1. Ad primum principale in quaestione, cum dicit: ‘Dicit Damascenus: purgans etc.’, dico, quod aliquid purgari potest dupliciter. scilicet quod aliquid immundum auferatur, vel quod aliqua perfectio superaddatur; primo modo non intendit de purgatione, sed secundo; vel purgans non a peccato, quod infuit, sed quod infuisset, nisi praeservata fuisset; sicut matrimonium excusat a peccato, non quod inest, sed quod inesset, nisi bonum matrimonii excusaret.” (William of Ware 1904, 11)

⁶⁰ “2. e 3. Ad secundum et tertium dico, quod loquitur ex parte parentum.” (William of Ware 1904, 11)

her Son, perhaps she would not have ascended to heaven, but not because of any impediment of sin, but because of the validity of the divine decree.⁶¹ It is interesting to note that William did not wish to attribute to the Virgin Mary unfounded privileges. This is evident when he states that, if Mary had died before Christ died on the cross, she too, like the other saints in Limbo, would in all probability have had to wait for the redemptive Passion of her Son before being able to ascend to heaven.

Finally, the English theologian answers the fifth objection, according to which a Gloss on the consecration states that nothing is said about the feast of the Conception, because it is not obligatory to celebrate it; and the reason is that Mary remained in sin like the other saints, except for Christ, the only exception in this regard. William of Ware answers this objection by specifying that these are the words of the Gloss, but nothing of the sort is said in the text. Our author even ends with the surprising statement that this celebration should not be maintained, because it is contrary to the saints.⁶²

Conclusions

William of Ware demonstrates the possibility of the prerogative of Mary's immaculate conception through several arguments. In his opinion, even though the Virgin's body mass, derived from the paternal semen, inherited from it a condition of contamination—which in other human beings causes them to contract original sin, when their soul unites with that mass of contaminated flesh—God was able to preserve the mass of Mary's flesh from the contamination derived from the condition of illness, since this condition of illness does not coincide with the substance of the flesh (the body), but is its guilt. This is explained because with that mass of flesh coming from Joachim and Anna the body of the Virgin had to be formed, so that her mass of flesh would not be contaminated by her parents when providing and receiving the semen.

William of Ware also justifies the appropriateness of the Virgin's immaculate conception based on the assumption—taken from St. Anselm—that, since her Son is purity itself, it was appropriate that he should form for himself a mother as pure

61 “4. Ad aliud, cum dicitur, quod tunc non fuisset sibi ianua aperta per mortem Christi, dicunt aliqui, quod non est inconveniens attribueri hanc praerogativam Matri Dei. Aliter dicitur, quod peccatum non est causa praecisa clausonis ianuae nisi meritoria, sed divinum decretum; sicut patet in sanctis, qui fuerant in limbo ante passionem. Unde, si fuisset beata Virgo mortua ante passionem Filii, forte non evdasset, non propter Impedimentum a parte peccati, sed propter stabilitatem divini decreti.” (William of Ware 1904, 11)

62 “5. Ad aliud, cum dicitur sic: ‘In quadam glossa *De consecratione* d. III c. 1: De festo conceptionis nihil hic dicitur, quia celebrandum non est, sicut in multis regionibus fit et maxime in Anglia: et haec est ratio, quia in peccatis fuit sicut ceteri sancti, excepta unica persona Christi,’ haec sunt verba glossae, quia in textu nil dicitur de hoc. Adhuc dico, quod iste apparatus non est tenendus, quia est contra sanctos.” (William of Ware 1904, 11)

as possible, so that he would not limit himself to purifying her, but to preserve her from all impurity.

To conclude his reasoning in defense of the immaculate belief, William of Ware—in a position contrary to that of Bernard of Clairvaux—presents as proof of Mary's immaculate conception the fact that the Church celebrates the liturgical feast of the birth of Mary, which would be improper if she had been conceived in original sin. Our author even goes so far as to assert that the feast of Mary's Immaculate Conception should be celebrated even in the case that Mary had been conceived in original sin, because her corporal matter should be the principle from which the purest body of Christ was engendered. William's reasoning is pivotal in the history of the theology of the immaculate conception, and it's what allowed another English Franciscan theologian, John Duns Scotus, to think about the possibility of Mary's immaculate conception.

Finally, it is important to note that, as some specialists have pointed out, William of Ware had a notable influence with his arguments on his Franciscan colleague John Duns Scotus. The latter, in turn, was a decisive protagonist in the triumph of the Immaculate thesis, which, after long centuries of heated debate, ended up being defined in 1854 as an official dogma of the Catholic Church by Pope Pius IX.

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