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the CORD

A MONTHLY FRANCISCAN REVIEW
OF SPIRITUAL DOCTRINE

DECEMBER 1963

YOUR KING WILL COME

Fra. Nicholas Figliola, O.F.M.

REFLECTIONS ON MY PROFESSION

Fra. Nicholas Lohkamp, O.F.M.

DUNS SCOTUS AND

THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

Fra. Frederick Doherty, O.F.M.

INDEX TO VOLUME XIII

VOL. XIII

NO. 12

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CONTENTS

YOUR KING WILL COME 354

Fr. Nicholas Figliola, O.F.M. Cap.

REFLECTIONS ON MY PROFESSION 359

Fr. Nicholas Lohkamp, O.F.M.

DUNS SCOTUS AND THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION 372

Fr. Frederick Doherty, O.F.M.

INDEX TO VOLUME XIII 382

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Your King Will Come

Fra. Nicholas Figliola, O.F.M. Cap.

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Sion, shout for joy, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold thy King will come to thee, the just and savior: he is poor, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass (Zach. 9:9).

Let us consider these words intently. They certainly are filled with happiness and hope. Well, they were meant to be glad tidings, and they were fulfilled as such. In fact, when Saint Matthew was writing that part of his Gospel which describes the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, he referred to this passage:

And when they drew near to Jerusalem, and came to Bethpage, on the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, "Go into the village opposite you, and immediately you will find an ass tied, and a colt with her; loose them and bring them to me. And if anyone say anything to

you, you shall say that the Lord has need of them, and immediately he will send them." Now this was done that thereby might be fulfilled what was spoken through the prophet, saying, "Tell the daughter of Sion: Behold, thy King comes to thee, meek and seated upon an ass, and upon a colt, the foal of a beast of burden" (Mtt. 21:1-5).

Saint Lawrence of Brindisi, the most recently declared Doctor of the Church, comments on both the prophecy of Zacharias and the passage of Saint Matthew in several of his writings. The eminent scripture scholar indicates clearly that this prophecy refers in its literal sense to Christ and His triumphal entry into Jerusalem. "Behold", says Saint Lawrence, "Christ, God and Man, entered Jerusalem this day as a king, for this entrance of Christ is that which is commemorated on Palm Sunday. This fact, moreover, is fulfilled in the prophecy of Zacharias. That king is Christ."

In his Palm Sunday sermons, Lawrence informs us:

The Lord as king wished to enter Jerusalem today with such triumph and glory, first of all to fulfill the Scriptures, as the Evangelist says: In order that what was said by the prophet might be fulfilled. The prophet specified the person: thy king...; he specified his virtues: just and a savior of men by His death, for because of this He was received into Jerusalem; he specified the nature of His coming: He will come poor; he specified the animal: sitting on an ass.

Throughout his writing Lawrence insists that Jesus entered the Holy City as a true king, and he substantiates his claim by referring in each instance to this prophecy. In one place the Capuchin tells us that Jesus entered the Holy City in glory as a king of the royal Davidic line. When Zacharias exclaimed, "Behold your king," he prophesied in fact that Jesus would enter Jerusalem "as a king, with the acclaim of the people, and in triumph; that his glory and ovation would inspire the Hebrew children to sing: Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord, the King of Israel. Hosanna to the Son of David."

Moreover, Jesus entered Jerusalem not only as king, but also in magnificent triumph.

The Apostolic Doctor says that in the words, "Rejoice, daughter of Sion, thy king will come to thee," we find a literal reference to the triumph of Christ, King and Redeemer. Commenting on this section of the prophecy, Lawrence explains that kings are said to triumph only when they have overcome the enemy or have gained a great victory in battle. We know of such triumphs in the life of King Saul, after he had defeated the Amalecites, and of King David, after he had slain the monstrous Goliath in hand to hand combat.

But — says the holy Doctor — *even when a new king is received into the metropolitan city of the kingdom, who does not know of, nor hear of, the great joy with which he is received, and how greatly his triumphal entry is celebrated? Today, Christ as a new king is received into the royal city of Jerusalem. Wherefore, the prophet cries, "Your king will come to you."*

It is precisely because Sion's king will come to her that the prophet Zacharias shouts, "Rejoice, daughter of Sion." In his Palm Sunday sermons the scholarly Capuchin investigates the reasons for the prophet's command to rejoice and exult. He reasons that joy arises from at-

A theological student of the Province of Saint Mary, Frater Nicholas is stationed at the Capuchins' Mary Immaculate Friary in Garrison, N.Y.

taining a desired good, and that the greater the desire and longing, the greater the happiness in possessing that good. This king is truly the long-awaited Son of David, that "desired one" whom the Chosen People of God had awaited for thousands of years. Relying on the eternal promise of the Redeemer, the Jews throughout the ages prayerfully waited for their messiah. With ever-increasing longing, each generation looked to the future and prayed that "the desired of all the nations" would soon come and make himself known. For ages Sion looked yearningly to heaven and cried, "When, O Lord, when?" And, out of the darkness of the eternal silence, Zacharias trumpeted, "Rejoice, daughter of Sion — your king is coming!" Yes, O Jerusalem, your Savior, your Liberator, your Divine King will visit you; therefore, be joyful. Cry out for joy: "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna to the King of Israel!"

Here, —Lawrence's seraphic heart seems unable to constrain itself any longer, and he exuberantly praises his Lord, Savior, and King, Jesus Christ.

What is this? What is the reason for such great joy? I am the rich and glorious king who will come to glorify and to en-

rich; then will your joy be seen. Behold, he is now present in order to be seen as the Messiah promised by the Patriarchs and the Prophets, the one desired by all the nations. Behold, he is here as omnipotent king, the king of heaven and earth, the king of glory, emperor, king, monarch of the universe. True God has been made yours; He gives Himself totally to you. He comes from heaven to earth, from paradise to the world, and He comes to you not for his own sake, but for yours.

Through the lips of Saint Lawrence, the prophet Zacharias echoes those vibrantly hopeful and joyous tidings of the great King's triumphant entry into the Holy City. But the holy Capuchin is not satisfied with merely identifying Zacharias' promised king; his great love for Jesus and the Sacred Word prompts him to describe Sion's king in greater detail.

Zacharias calls the king a Messiah, a Savior, and according to St. Lawrence, the prophet actually foresaw His entrance into the Holy City, whereby Christ would show Himself to be the long-awaited Messiah. Through this Messianic prophecy — Christ has shown, not by His words but in His actions, that He is the true Messiah promised and sent by

God. Lawrence increases our faith and strengthens our hope by telling us that Christ has come as the true Messiah, the author of salvation, the author of every desirable happiness, precisely because Zacharias calls the king a savior. And, as king and savior, Jesus has regained His kingdom by crushing the enemy and its powers. He has re-opened the eternal gates to each of His exiled citizens. Our king and God has enriched each of His loyal subjects with unlimited treasures of grace so that, like Him, we too may become rich.

Moreover, Christ the King is called just. And, indeed, He is just, since He merited for us and is, therefore, the cause of our justification. "But," declares Lawrence, "the charity of Christ could not merit for Himself, because the grace in Christ could not be increased; He therefore merited for us. Thereupon, he is called Jesus, that is, Savior. Since He will save the people from their sins, He is called just." Yes our King is just; and through His justice He has so justified us that we have become co-heirs of the kingdom of the heavenly Jerusalem.

Although Christ is our king, He is also poor: "He is poor, and riding upon an ass." So,

then, do we have a contradiction? How can royalty and poverty be reconciled? Is not a king always rich? Saint Lawrence solves the dilemma by saying that Christ is a true king because He is rich in heavenly goods. Yet, Jesus is also poor. He chose poverty in regard to earthly things. First of all, Sion's king is poor in spirit, since He is free of all the trifling vanities and merely earthly goods of this life. No earthly monarch was ever as rich as Sion's King, yet He came to Sion poor to prove that His kingdom is not of this world. That the people of God might be poor, that is, detached from worldly gains and pursuits, detached from luxuries and temporalities which turn His people from Him, our King came to Jerusalem poor. Our king came into the Holy City devoid of all those things which the world holds sacred: power, riches, honor. And, yet, at the same time the King of Sion entered Jerusalem in regal honor, rich in divine possessions, and empowered with the strength of God. To those who would be His subjects He would give a sharing in the divine nature, which was in His power to bestow: Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

But Zacharias' king is not only poor; He is humble and peace-loving as well. Lawrence tells us that Christ is meek and a bearer of peace because He came into Jerusalem not charging on a proud steed, but humbly and peacefully seated on a gentle and lowly beast of burden. Despite His simple and lowly manner of entrance, our King was recognized as true king and savior: "Hosanna to the King of Israel." And just as one of the noble characteristics of the promised king would be His meekness, so too must the citizens of the Eternal Kingdom be meek and humble. For, only the meek and humble, only the peace-loving and gentle of spirit, in a word, only the true imitators of Sion's King will inherit His kingdom.

Through the scholarly eyes of Saint Lawrence of Brindisi we have searched the prophecy of Zacharias and discovered the riches of joy and hope. With the Apostolic Doctor we have

rejoiced in Zacharias' inspiring message. Therefore, we must gratefully acknowledge the learning and eminent wisdom of this Doctor of the Church, and sincerely thank him for the light shed on this passage. In a scholarly, but evidently simple manner, Lawrence has explained the personality and characteristics of the King foretold in Zacharias 9:9. Let us again read this passage, bearing in mind Lawrence's elucidations. Let us meditate on its meaning. Let us derive such benefit that it may ever prompt us to learn of Christ in the Sacred Scriptures. May we always seek Christ's figure in the Old Testament, and discover Him identified in the New. For, it is in seeking Christ that we shall learn more of Him; it is in knowing more of Him that we shall love Him more; and in loving Him, we shall rejoice in, and completely serve Christ, Who is indeed our Savior and our King.

Reflections on My Profession

Fr. Nicholas Lohkamp, O.F.M.

Through Baptism we are reborn, regenerated. Quickened with God's kind of life through incorporation in Christ, we experience the love of the Father who "chose us in (Christ) before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blemish in his sight in love" (Eph. 1:4). In Christ "we have redemption through his blood, the remission of sins, according to the riches of his grace" (Eph. 1:7). Risen, then, in Christ to newness of life, we must with wholehearted endeavor seek the things that are above (cf. Col. 3:1).

Thus do we, in Christ, become committed to a goal as lofty as God Himself, for we "are to be perfect as our Heavenly Father is perfect." Apart from Christ we could not possibly achieve such a goal. But, in Him, it is not only possible, it is the call to which every

Christian *must* respond if he is not to betray his very oneness with Christ. What is more, Christ Himself has clearly indicated that no one can respond to the Father's love or achieve to any degree the Father's holiness, except in Him (Christ), who is our only Way, Truth, and Life. In this context the words of Christ reveal the fundamental response of the Christian: "If anyone will come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow me." This is our life: an all-out endeavor to say "NO" to self (Gospel renunciation), and an all-out endeavor to say "YES" to Christ (Imitation); thus do we respond to our Father's love, please Him, by becoming more and more one with Jesus, His well-beloved Son in whom He is well pleased.

As Christians, then, we must "put on Christ." We must, in short, be imitators of God, as very dear children and walk in love, as Christ also loved us and delivered himself up for us" (Eph. 5:1-2). Just so, we — in Christ — are to love one another and lay down our lives

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and now, no matter what it may cost me in the way of blood, sweat, and tears. Such is the object of my sincere efforts: to please Him more and now, in whatever I may be doing, whether it is something I like to do or something I dislike doing. Indeed, my likes and dislikes are no longer the rudder and criterion of myself, my life, or my actions. For, in the light of my profession, all my likes and dislikes are centered in Him. What He likes, that I want! What displeases Him, that I reject. He is my All; I want and desire only to please Him, to do His will.

Thus does the act of profession simplify and stabilize my whole life. All my thoughts and ideas and knowledge, all my affections and wishes and desires and decisions, all my memory and imagination and heart and emotions and passions, all that I am, I endeavor to center and root and fix in Him, My God, King, Redeemer, Friend, Spouse — indeed, “My All.” All my yearning is toward Him. All my thoughts and ideas find clarity and perspective in Him. All my affections and desires and decisions find stability and effectiveness in Him. All the warmth and tenderness and gentleness and sympathy and compassion, all my emotions

find their only sure anchor and true fulfillment in Him. He is “MY ALL”!

And just think! I belong to Him! He has accepted me. He loves me. He cares for me. He died for me. He lives for me. Indeed, He really has given Himself to me so that He may belong to me. Surely, there can be no other alternative, there can be no other course really pleasing to Him, there can be no other adequate response to such love, except to yield myself with full trust and confidence to Him, a trust that remains firm in spite of my glaring deficiencies and weaknesses, a trust that does not even pretend to rely on my strength, but only on His, a trust that knows full well that my very weakness constitutes, in a way, my attractiveness to Him, for He wants to be the fullness of my emptiness, the strength of my weakness.

Perhaps a nagging thought persists in my mind: If Christ loves me so much, why does He permit me to suffer so? Why does He allow others to hurt and injure me? God, of course, cannot in any way positively will the least sin. But God has created a world, and placed in it men and women who, because of their very finiteness and weakness, can and do abuse

their freedom and power to love, can and do sin. But — and this is most important — God, in His great Mercy, can and does draw good out of evil. As Father Most says: “The apparent triumph of evil in the world, so darkly exemplified in the Crucifixion, and so tragically before our eyes today, is in fact not the Devil’s hour but God’s hour in which He can exercise and glorify His Mercy in supreme lavishness. And this same truth gives meaning to our personal burden of misery. We are (we think) an object worthy of His love, at least worthy of His mercy, and all the while it is precisely because we are so unworthy that He is intent upon pouring out the torrent of His love upon us.”

Perhaps the difficulty that nags me takes a different form. I keep insisting that I am not worthy of such union with Christ. As I look back on my past life and see how little and how niggardly I have been in giving myself to Christ, how much and how often I have really failed to please Him, how frequently I have sought not His will but my own will; as I look back, and as I look at myself now: my emptiness, my coldness, my indifference, my sluggishness, my ingratitude, my weakness, my imperfections,

my bitterness, my naturalistic viewpoint and attitudes; as I behold myself and the reluctance with which I commit myself to Christ, I may very well indeed be tempted to discouragement. I may very well be tempted to think: “what’s the use?; how can Christ be interested in me; how can I possibly get back something of the fervor I had in the past; how can I possibly find in my heart the generosity to begin anew to give myself to Christ, to live my profession?”

These are real thoughts! But it comes home to me that it is all “I”; everything is in terms of “myself.” No wonder it all seems so hopeless. If I depend on my own strength, I am indeed doomed to failure. The fact is I am no longer my own; I am in Christ; I belong to Him. And He does not desire to wait until I am worthy of union with Him. He wills to give Himself to me *now*, just as I am. He is ready and waiting for me; His mercy reaches out to save me from myself now, if only I can bring myself to love and trust Him enough to accept His mercy. Nothing perhaps pains the Sacred Heart so much as to see me turning away from Him, holding back from Him, failing to accept His saving mercy on the unwarranted

tle token offering: there was no question of giving some little article or donation that represented me. No, the only thought that entered my mind and heart was to give Him myself. I wanted Him to have all that I am: mind, will, heart, memory, imagination, body, soul, senses, emotions — *all of me*. And, I wanted Him to have not only all that I am, but also I desired to put into His service all that I do: all my words, thoughts, and actions. I simply wanted to give Him my all, so that He might henceforth be my All.

Here, then, I must seek to realize as deeply as I can the fact that my gift of self to Christ was a *permanent* gift. I did not give Him myself for a day, a month, a year, or a few years. No, simply and without any restrictions whatsoever (including time!) I gave self to Him. All this is clearly recognized by the Church in permitting (and indeed, in most communities, insisting on) *perpetual* vows.

These vows are exactly what their name implies: perpetual, permanent, forever. This means without question, that when I profess these final vows, I am in reality "burning my bridges behind me." I am leaving myself no other alternative but to

give myself to Christ for the duration of my life. I am cutting off all exits, and putting myself in a position where I have only one way to go: forward to Christ. And, of course, by that very act whereby I burn my bridges, cut off all chance of withdrawal, I am stabilizing my gift of self to Christ, making it permanent. I am equivalently telling Him: "I am weak, vacillating, inconstant. But, I love You so much that I want to give myself to You for life. Therefore, to make sure that I don't turn and run, to make sure that I remain true and faithful to You, to make sure that I keep my eyes on You and seek only You, I am *vowing* to give myself to you *forever*."

If I were placed in a haunted house on a dark, windy, black night, and if the doors were left *open*, I would beat a hasty retreat and run at the first noise or sign of danger. But, if I were placed in that haunted house, the exits were all locked, and I knew I could not get out, then at the first little noise I would most certainly look to my defenses, find all the weapons that might help me, and make use of all the means available to protect myself. Perpetual vows are something like that.

Once, with His help and grace and light and inspiration I decide to give myself to Him forever, I seal and lock that decision by perpetual vows. So, there is now only one way to go — to him; there is only one thing to do — to give myself to Him, and keep on giving myself to Him. Knowing that there is no turning back, I really begin to look to my defenses. I really begin to make use of the spiritual weapons to ward off the devil and the dangerous tendencies in myself. I really begin to pick up and use all the spiritual resources at hand to fortify my union with Christ: prayer, the Mass, Communion, Confession, Community Life. It is only when I accept this fact that I belong to Christ; I am His; I am His forever — it is only then that I stop looking over my shoulder whenever danger or trials or temptations or problems come my way. It is only then that I stop giving in to self and seeking an easy way out. It is only then that I accept myself as His, and go on from there to solve all problems in terms of what I really am: a religious belonging to Him.

Profession — My Gift of Self

Much has been said about this already. Yet it is most important, indeed essential, that I

never forget that my profession — and the daily, moment by moment, carrying out and living of that profession — involves a *personal* relationship with Christ. This cannot be overstressed. Everything else about me and my daily life makes sense, has meaning, and is significant only insofar as it fosters and deepens this personal union with Christ. The sacraments, prayer, the vows, community life, my work, the apostolate, the Rule, Constitutions, customs: everything is but a *means* of giving myself to Christ, doing His will, pleasing Him. Everything is but a means of coming closer to Him, of growing in Him, sharing more intimately and deeply in His life, of becoming more and more like Him, more and more one with Him. He is my All! My constant endeavor is to "put on Christ." So, the deeper, the more solid, the warmer, the more tender, the more unselfish, the more personal my union with Christ, the more fervently and generously I will give myself to Him. And, in the ever fruitful redundancy of the supernatural life, the more fervently and generously I give myself to Him, the deeper and more intimate will be my union with Him.

I know this to be true, yet

to a great extent this truth has not pervaded my life, my outlook and attitude, my desires and decisions, my words and actions. Why do I have so little trust and confidence in Christ when it really counts? Why am I afraid of Christ, and of what I think He might ask of me? Surely, if there is one thing about Christ that gets through to me, it must be the fact that He *loves* me. He created me because He loves me; He became man because He loves me; He redeemed me because He loves me; He sanctifies me because He loves me; He calls me in a special way because He loves me. Why do I doubt it? How must He feel when I don't trust Him. Do I fail to really trust Him implicitly because I think He is unaware of my weakness and misery? That cannot be true. So He must love me with all my misery! If I realize this, then I must also realize that by accepting my weakness and misery and littleness, and by turning confidently to Him as my only strength, as my Savior, I give Him glory and pleasure.

I must, then, seek always to approach Jesus as a person. I must ever strive to make the person of Jesus a living reality in my life. It must be Jesus the person Whom I contact in

a rich, supernatural way in the sacraments. It must be Jesus the person with Whom I converse in personal, intimate prayer. It must be Jesus the person Whom I visit in the Blessed Sacrament. So too, in my work, my recreation, my study, my teaching — in all of these aspects of my life — it is in union with Jesus the person that I sincerely and generously strive to live. Thus is the full significance and meaning of my profession gradually realized. Thus do I come, more and more, actually to give myself to Jesus. Thus does Jesus slowly, gradually, almost imperceptibly, become my All! That is what I professed.

Profession — My Gift in Mary

What I professed, what I want, then, is simply this: to be in Christ as completely and permanently and personally as possible. To live my profession, then, is simply this: to belong to Christ, to do His will, to seek to please Him alone. Only in personal, intimate, effective union with Jesus can this be achieved.

This is precisely why Mary is so tremendously important in the Church and in my life. To appreciate the very special role that God has given to Mary in the history of salvation

is to appreciate the place of Mary in my life, in living my profession. She does not stand in the way of, or lessen, my union with Christ. That is the last thing she would want! Rather, Mary's one consuming and powerful desire for me is that I be the religious I professed to be, that I achieve the closest, most personal, most intimate union with her Son. Just as she existed, lived, acted only in and for Jesus, so her will for me is the same — that I live only in and for Jesus; and this is what I professed.

Mary tells me in no uncertain words: "Whatsoever He tells you, do it." The very same command we have from the Father: "This is my well-beloved Son in Whom I am well pleased; hear Him." To submit myself to Mary in prayer and imitation, to place myself deliberately and completely under her powerful maternal intercession,

guidance, and protection is a sure, quick, and effective way to give myself to Christ. For, if I submit wholeheartedly and generously to Mary, she will teach me the one thing necessary to live my profession; she will teach and help me to say "NO" to self, to open my heart to the influence and grace of Christ. She will teach me, as no one else can, to really say my fiat to Jesus, to really let His will be done to me, in all the various aspects of my life. Mary can, desires to, and will — if my devotion to and imitation of her is sincere and generous — exert all her maternal intercession and power to deepen my personal and intimate union with Jesus. Mary will support and assist me in the day by day living of my profession. Thus will my profession become more and more a living reality, the permanent gift of myself to Jesus in Mary.

Scotus and the Immaculate Conception

Fra. Frederick Doherty, O.F.M.

September 8 the universal Church celebrates the feast of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. It is very fitting that we Franciscans in particular should revere our Blessed Mother commemorating this singularity of hers, for it is the glorious title of the Immaculate Conception that makes her the patroness of the Holy Family.

There have been many Franciscans who cultivated an outstanding devotion to God's honor. Yet, when one speaks of the Immaculate Conception, the name is conspicuous. It is in the words of St. Thomas Aquinas, Scotus. In this article we shall describe the Sub-

...matic that our devotion to the Mother of God must be based on solid doctrine; the more we know of Our Lady, the more capable we are of loving her. While Fr. Doherty's article is quite clear, it seems to us to be a real clear exposition of Duns Scotus' doctrine on the Immaculate Conception. It is our hope that it will give our readers to share the Subtle Doctor had for

the Doctor's contribution in expounding the doctrine of this Marian privilege.

The Early Faith

From the very beginning of the human race we find prophetic reference to the sinlessness of the Blessed Mother of God. Indeed, the first prophecy was uttered by God Himself after the sin of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. To the devil, who had assumed the form of a serpent, God decreed, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, between your seed and her seed; He shall crush your head, and you shall lie in wait for his heel" (Gen. 3:15). While the literal sense of this passage probably refers to the general struggle between the devil and mankind as a whole, and to the ultimate victory of the latter through the redemption wrought by Christ, yet in the light of the historical Incarnation many theologians have seen a reference here to the sinlessness of the mother of Jesus. Saint Augustine, for

DUNS SCOTUS

instance, comments on this text in these words: "The head of the devil is original sin; Mary has crushed the head because no sin has entered the soul of the Virgin, and therefore she has been exempt from every stain" (*Comment., in loco*).

A second reference to this prerogative of Mary is found in the words of the Archangel Gabriel in his utterly unique salutation, "Hail, full of grace" (Lk. 1:28). Of this text Pope Pius IX writes in the Bull of definition *Ineffabilis Deus* that "the Fathers and Writers of the Church . . . taught that this singular and solemn salutation which had never been heard elsewhere shows that the Mother of God is the seat of all divine graces and is adorned with all the gifts of the Holy Spirit" (ed. Dominic J. Unger, O.F.M. Cap., St. Anthony Guild Press, 1946, p. 13).

To these and other texts of Sacred Scripture which assert the complete purity of Mary, the traditional teaching of the Church alligns itself. The writings of Catholic theologians from the most ancient times are studded with gems which, taken together, form a splendid crown offered to her sinlessness. It is important to notice, however, that this teaching deals explicitly only with Mary's

preeminent holiness; while a sinless conception may be implied by them, it is not found expressed in so many words. Although many averred, and no one denied, Our Lady's sinlessness, her complete sanctity at the first moment of her existence is not expressly discussed. It is as though these learned and holy men were aware that Our Blessed Mother is ever immaculate, but were somewhat perplexed as to how this might be explained.

The Paradox

In order to illustrate the problem that confronted theologians until the time of Duns Scotus, we may cite the following excerpts from the writings of three saintly scholars. Saint Augustine states in one place, "Most firmly hold and do not doubt at all that every man who is conceived by the copulation of man and woman is born with original sin" (*De Fide ad Petrum*, ch. 26); in another place, however, he declares that "concerning the Holy Virgin Mary I wish to entertain no question when sin is the subject of discussion. . . ." (*De Natura et Gratia*, ch. 23).

Saint Bernard writes that Mary could not have been purified either at the time of conception or before conception

(Litt. 174); but in another passage he addresses to Our Lady the words, "Thou, Mary, hast been innocent of all sins, actual and original" (*Sermo IV in Salve Regina*).

Saint Thomas Aquinas says that "the sanctification of the Blessed Virgin Mary cannot be understood (as having taken place) before her animation; ... the sanctification of which we speak is nothing but a cleansing from original sin" (*S. T.*, III, q. 27, a. 2); but again he says, "The Blessed Virgin was most pure with respect to every fault, since she has not incurred any sin, either original nor actual" (*IV Opusc. de Salutatione Angelica*).

The texts which we have just cited point up the state of mind of theologians up to the time of Scotus. Saint Bonaventure sums up the situation accurately when he writes, "It must be noted that some have desired to say that in the soul of the glorious Virgin the grace of sanctification prevented the stain of original sin" (*In IV. Sent.* III, dist. 3. a. 1 q. 2). These same passages serve also to highlight the value of the testimony of the Subtle Doctor: whereas from the writings of the other Fathers and Doctors the teaching of the Immaculate Conception may or may not be

inferred, John Duns Scotus is the first to declare explicitly and unequivocally that Mary was indeed conceived without the stain of original sin.

The Problems

The difficulties which confronted theologians and hindered them from asserting that Our Lady was conceived immaculate, were two, each of them arising out of a principle which had been accepted traditionally in the Church.

The first of these principles may be stated as follows: every human person who is naturally conceived is a child of Adam, and therefore incurs the stain of his sin; now, since Mary was naturally conceived, she also must have been conceived in sin.

The second principle states that Our Lord Jesus Christ, by the merits of His passion and death, redeemed all mankind; and since Mary is human, she also must have been redeemed, and that from original sin.

The attribution of an immaculate conception to the Mother of God would clearly involve a reconciliation of that privilege with these two time-honored doctrines. It fell to the young Franciscan doctor at the University of Paris to become Mary's champion by explaining

her extraordinary grace against the background of orthodox Catholic faith.

The Question

In common with his fellow Scholastics who cast their doctrine into the format of a *Commentary on the Four Books of Sentences* of Peter Lombard, Duns Scotus treats of the question of Mary's Immaculate Conception in his commentary on Book III, distinction 3, question 1. In the classical manner, he begins by asking the question "Whether the Blessed Virgin was conceived in original sin?". It is in the discussion of this question that the Subtle Doctor manages to reconcile what had been held to be irreconcilable for thirteen hundred years.

Two comments on Scotus' treatment of the problem will not, perhaps, be out of place here. The first concerns his manner of argumentation. The Subtle Doctor nowhere uses the now-famous "*Deus potuit; de- cuit; ergo fecit*" formula ("God was able to create her immaculate; and it was fitting that He do so; therefore, He so created her"). Father Ephrem Longpre, O.F.M., a Scotistic expert, observes that this was the battle-cry of the Scotistic School rather than the syllogism of the master himself.

It must be admitted, however, that if this argument is not found formally in his writings, still its general tone is evident in his arguments taken as a whole.

The second comment on Scotus' treatment of the problem concerns his apparent diffidence in asserting the Immaculate Conception to be a fact. His final solution is rather cautiously couched in the words, "If it be not contrary to the authority of the Church, or to the authority of Scripture, it seems probable that we should attribute to Mary that which is more excellent." The wording of this statement has prompted some scholars to think that our Doctor was not completely convinced of the truth of the doctrine. One must remember, however, that he is here assuming a position which up to this time had never been taken explicitly by any of the great minds of the Church. His cautiousness, therefore — which, by the way, is characteristic in his treatment of other questions as well — seems to be engendered by reverence rather than by doubt.

Argumentation

Scotus' treatment of the question follows the classical form of Scholastic disputation. We

line the disposition of material by dividing it in following five points.

He sets down citations of some of the earlier theories which imply a denial of the doctrine, together with a rich support the doctrine. The point out here that he in Saint Augustine and Anselm assertions which both the pro and contra

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Conception. We shall discuss this in more detail below.

4) Having thus presented an explanation of why the Immaculate Conception is not impossible, our Doctor states his own position positively. He gives three possibilities, as follows: "God was able to bring it about that she was never in original sin; He was also able to bring it about that she was in sin only for a single instant; and He was finally able to bring it about that she was in sin for some time, but was cleansed in the last moment of this time."

In this part of his presentation he discusses philosophically these three possibilities. He proves the first possibility, stating that "God was able to infuse into Mary's soul at the first instant (of its existence) as much grace as He can infuse into another soul in circumcision or Baptism." He also proves the possibility of, and solves two objections to, the second of these hypotheses. And he asserts that the third possibility is obvious (this, of course, being equivalent to what happens to the ordinary soul in Baptism).

It is at this point that Scotus, having set down these hypotheses, states precisely his own doctrine on the Immaculate Conception: "Now, which of

these three, which have been shown to be possible, actually took place, God knows. But if it be not contrary to the authority of the Church, or to the authority of Scripture, it seems probable that the one which is more excellent is to be attributed to Mary."

5) Finally, our Doctor sets down a rather lengthy discussion of the problem caused by Our Lady's natural generation as a child of Adam. He formulates the problem in this manner: according to the nature of things, Mary was a child of Adam before she possessed grace (since one must be a person before one has grace); and because she was a child of Adam, she lacked original justice; therefore, lacking original justice, she was at some time in original sin.

The above five-point summary sets down the framework of Scotus' explanation of the Immaculate Conception. As we have pointed out, it is in the fourth of these points that he actually states his position — modestly, indeed, but unequivocally. But the theological reason why he attributes the most excellent of the three proffered hypotheses to Mary is to be found in the third point, and the philosophical resolution of the problem arising from Mary's

natural generation is to be found in the fifth. In order, therefore, to appreciate Scotus' contribution in expounding Mary's privilege, we shall now discuss, in inverse order, each of these two points.

Mary, Child of Adam

We have described briefly, under the fifth point the nature of the philosophical problem involved in Mary's being a descendant of Adam: it would seem, in a word, that she must have existed as a person before she was sanctified (for grace is a quality inhering in a person), and therefore she was not immaculate from the first moment of her conception.

In order to solve the problem, the Subtle Doctor resorts to a distinction between priority of nature and priority of time. There is, indeed, a priority involved in Mary's conception: if grace is to exist in her, then she, the subject of grace, must be presupposed. But, explains Scotus, the problem of her conception involves the question of priority not of nature, but of time. Although the nature of things demands that a subject exist prior to the qualities that inhere in it, God could most certainly have ordered that, in point of time alone, the creation of Mary's soul and its sanctifi-

can outline the disposition of his material by dividing it into the following five points.

1) He sets down citations from some of the earlier theologians which imply a denial of the doctrine, together with a few which support the doctrine. We may point out here that he finds in Saint Augustine and Saint Anselm assertions which reflect both the pro and contra positions.

2) He states the opinion that was held commonly by his contemporaries, viz., that Mary *was* conceived in original sin. Scotus then tells us that the reasons for holding this position are four: a) the authority of earlier theologians; b) the excellence of Jesus as Redeemer: if Our Lady had not contracted original sin, she would have needed no redemption; c) Mary's own condition as a human person: having been conceived naturally, she must share the original sin common to all humans; d) Mary's possession of the sufferings common to human nature: since these are the penalty of sin, she must have had the sin itself.

3) Scotus then advances his own reasons *against* this common opinion. It is in this presentation of his arguments that we find the nucleus of his brilliant defense of the Immaculate

Conception. We shall discuss this in more detail below.

4) Having thus presented an explanation of why the Immaculate Conception is not impossible, our Doctor states his own position positively. He gives three possibilities, as follows: "God was able to bring it about that she was never in original sin; He was also able to bring it about that she was in sin only for a single instant; and He was finally able to bring it about that she was in sin for some time, but was cleansed in the last moment of this time."

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cation be effected in a single instant. There is, therefore, no philosophical impossibility of Our Lady having been immaculate in the first moment of her conception.

But our Doctor is not content merely to demonstrate the non-impossibility of Mary's sanctification at the first moment of her conception. Shifting from philosophy to theology by applying what he has said to revealed truths, he introduces at this point the notion of Christ's *pre-redemption* of His mother.

"It is evident," he writes, "that the door (to glory, and hence to grace) was opened to her through the merit of the passion of Christ, in so far as it was foreseen and accepted in a special way as applying to this person (Mary), so that on account of that passion sin would never exist in this person; and that thus there would not exist in her anything to close the door, even though, by reason of her origin (from Adam) she would have had in her that thing which would close the door to her, as it does to others."

There is no denying, then, then, that since Our Lady is completely human she *would* have needed a part of mankind's redemption, had God not accepted on her behalf the re-

demption effected by Christ, and thus eternally decreed her in the light of this acceptance to a pre-redeemed and preserved existence. Had it not been for this decree, based on God's acceptance of Jesus' sacrifice in her case, she would indeed have been in need of redemption as all men are.

As a matter of fact, continues Scotus with characteristic acumen, because of this decree she needed a redeemer even *more* than others do, since her complete lack of sin constituted a more thorough redemption than the consequent remission of sin that we experience. "... Mary needed Christ as redeemer in the greatest way; for by reason of her common propagation she would have contracted original sin unless this had been prevented through the grace of a mediator. And just as others needed Christ in order that, through His merit, the sin which had *already* been contracted might be remitted to them, so she needed a *preventing* mediator even *more*, lest sin be contracted by her at any time."

Mary Herself

In our foregoing division of Scotus' treatment, we stated that it is in the third point that he presents his own reasons for

attributing the prerogative of Immaculate Conception to Our Blessed Mother. Besides the authority of older theologians, there are, he tells us, three reasons why his contemporaries commonly held that Mary was conceived in sin: a) as universal Redeemer, Jesus must have freed everyone, including her, from sin; b) generated in the common manner as she was, Our Lady must have contracted that infection of soul which is transmitted to all humans in conception by an infected human seed; c) since the Blessed Virgin experienced the penalties of original sin, she must also have contracted that sin itself.

As one can see, the latter two of these points deal with Mary herself, while the first concerns Christ's preeminent office as Mediator. We shall say a word first about the two former reasons, which Scotus dismisses rather summarily.

The argument concerning Mary's infection of soul because of infected seed was based on an erroneous notion of the manner in which original sin is transmitted from generation to generation. Since the time of Saint Augustine it had been supposed commonly that original sin is physically transmitted as an infection of the body,

which then infects the soul. By the time of Scotus, however, this theory was being abandoned by many. Indeed, our Doctor dismisses the objection based on it simply by pointing out that Saint Anselm had corrected the misunderstanding. Scotus also reminds us here that even if original sin *were* transmitted in this manner, the grace of Baptism remits it; and God could have done for Mary at the moment of her conception what He does for others at Baptism.

The argument concerning Mary's sufferings does not militate against her Immaculate Conception, says Scotus, for her retention of the effects of sin is easily explainable. While there is no merit in being in original sin, there can be great merit in suffering its effects: "Original sin was not useful to Mary, but temporal penalties were useful to her because in them she merited." Therefore, it was possible (and even fitting) for Mary to have the effects of sin, but not the sin itself.

The Perfect Redeemer

This brings us now to a consideration of the first reason why the contemporaries of Dun Scotus held that Our Lady must have been conceived in original sin. At first glance it seems a

very cogent reason indeed, and the friar's discussion of it is completely masterful. More than anything else he ever wrote, it is this passage, perhaps, that presents the Champion of Mary at his very best.

The reasoning advanced most strongly against Our Lady's Immaculate Conception was that if, as Saint Paul states in the fifth chapter of his Epistle to the Romans, Jesus is the universal Redeemer, then Mary too must have been redeemed.

We might say that the objection played right into Scotus' Franciscan hands: so thoroughly was he imbued with Saint Francis' personal love for Jesus that the Incarnate Word lay at the very center of his entire theology. His seraphic heritage enabled him to see quite clearly that Mary's Immaculate Conception is perfectly ordered to the glory of Christ. Since the God-Man is a most perfect Redeemer, it follows — almost as a necessity — that His redemption of one creature be complete, thorough, perfect. Now, such a redemption would not be a remission of sin already contracted, but a complete preservation from sin. And, asks Scotus, for what creature should Jesus do this, if not for His Blessed Mother?

"A most perfect mediator ex-

ercises a most perfect act of mediation in respect to some person for whom he mediates. Now, Christ is most perfect mediator. Therefore, Christ exercises the most perfect possible degree of mediation in respect to some creature or person. And in respect to no person did He exercise a more excellent degree of mediation than in respect to Mary."

Jesus, who is God Himself, must therefore be perfect Redeemer. "But," continues Scotus, "He would not have done this (viz., redeemed perfectly) unless He merited that she would be preserved from original sin. And this I prove in three ways." He then sets down three basic reasons why Christ's redemption would not have been really perfect unless Mary were conceived immaculate. These reasons are consideration of a) God, to Whom Jesus pre-reconciled Mary; b) the evil from which He preserved her; and c) Mary's indebtedness to her Divine Son for this preservation.

a) Our Doctor borrows a story from Saint Anselm's *Cur Deus Homo* (2, 16) to illustrate the first of these points. If a certain king had been so offended by a subject that his displeasure extended also to that subject's progeny, a man

who could persuade the king to forgive the heirs this offense would be a good mediator. But he would be a perfect mediator only if he could do something to prevent one of the heirs from being in the least way offensive to the king. "From this I argue," says Scotus, "that no one completely or perfectly placates anyone for the offense contracted by another unless he prevents that one from being offended; if he placates the offended one so that he (merely) remits the offense, then he has not placated him perfectly. . . . Therefore, Christ does not placate the Trinity perfectly. . . . unless He prevents the Trinity from being offended by someone, and consequently unless He prevents the soul of some child of Adam from having that fault."

b) Regarding the evil from which Mary was preserved, our Doctor presents two arguments. In the first place, a perfect mediator would not only restore the thing lost by sin (as Christ restores grace to our souls), but would prevent the

sin itself by which grace is lost; returning to the story of the king, Scotus points out that the mediator would reconcile the subjects completely not if he restored their inheritance, but only if he removed all enmity on the part of the king. Furthermore, he argues, everyone holds that Mary was free from actual sin; but if Jesus mediated perfectly in her case, then she must be free from original sin as well.

c) Finally, the perfect degree of Christ's Redemption is seen from Mary's perfect indebtedness to Him. "The person reconciled is not obliged to the mediator in the highest degree unless that person has received from him the greatest good that could be had from a mediator. . . . Now, it is a more excellent benefit to preserve from evil than to permit (someone) to fall into evil and then afterward to free him from it." Therefore, in order that Mary might be perfectly indebted to Her Son as Redeemer, He must have preserved her from original sin.

Index to THE CORD

Volume XIII, 1963

A

Angels, St. Thomas on	82
Annunciation to Blessed Virgin	75
Anthony of Padua, St.	173
Antonelle, Sr. Mary, C.S.S.F.	269
Apostolate, Franciscan	103, 299
Assisi, Pope John XXIII at	127
Augustine, St.	329

B

Ballou, Fr. Benedict, O.F.M.	67
Bello, Fr. Giles, O.F.M.	241
Bernardine of Siena, St.	128, 182
Bernetta Quinn, Sr. Mary, O.S.F.	75
Bertram, Fra. Linus, O.F.M. Cap.	156
Bluma, Fr. Dacian, O.F.M.	49
Bonaventure, St.	287
Bowman, Fra. Lester, O.F.M.	195
Breviary	265
Bridges, Fr. Geoffrey, G. O.F.M.	41
Brothers, Franciscan	241
Brotherliness	101, 131

C

Capuchin Friars	156
Childishness	189
Childlikeness	189
Church, The	22, 84, 312
Church, Councils of	2, 23
Cicarelli, Fr. Marciano, O.F.M.	281
Clare of Assisi, St.	236, 350
Communion, Holy	187
Concetti, Gino	123, 345
Conrad of Parzham, St.	158
Contemplation	49
Councils, Church	2, 23
Cranny, Fr. Titus, S. A.	202
Crosby, Fra. Jeremiah, O.F.M. Cap.	138
Cummings, Fr. Juniper, O.F.M. Conv.	331

D

Dead, Care for the	329
Denial of Self	70
Doherty, Fra. Frederick, O.F.M.	372
Donnelly, Thomas	151, 218, 315
Doyle, Fr. Stephen, C., O.F.M.	11

E

Ecumenism of St. Francis	345
Epiphany, Feast of	25
Eucharist, The Blessed	181
— St. Bernardine on	181
Examination of Conscience	31

F

Faddish, Fr. John Forest, O.F.M.	131, 341
Failure	176
Faith	236
Felix of Cantalice, St.	158
Fidelis of Sigmaringen, St.	111
Figliola, Fra. Nicholas O.F.M. Cap.	354
Francis of Assisi, St.	39, 344
— Ecumenical spirit	345
— Familiarity with God	229
— Human-ness	195
— Humility	170
— Mortification	68
— Poverty	8
— Prayer	49
— Preaching	114
— Simplicity	293
Francis Mary of Camporosso, St.	138, 159
Francis, Sr. Mary, P.C.C.	106, 236
Franciscan Apostolate	259
Franciscan Brothers	241
Franciscan Educational Conference	218
Franciscan Friars	17, 241

INDEX

— Capuchin	156
— Conventual	173
— T. O. R.	255
Franciscan Sisters Educational Conference	224, 278, 313
Franciscan Spirit	165
Franciscanism	214, 290, 299
Friendship	201

G

Giles, Brother	123
God	208
— Familiarity with	227
— and Self	37
Grace	44, 208, 331, 340
— Nature and	41
Grant, Fr. Zachary, O.F.M. Cap.	111
Gregory, Pope St.	16

H

Hidden Life	16
Higgins, Fr. Daniel, T.O.R.	248
Hillabrand, J.F., M.D., T.O.S.	265
Holiness	315
Holy Name Monogram	10
Human-ness, Franciscan	195
Humility	164, 189, 274, 341
Hurley, Fr. Daniel A., O.F.M.	56, 291

Ignatowski, Fr. Bruce, O.F.M. Cap.	4, 259
Immaculate Conception	372
Individuality	134

J

Jesus	21, 167, 259, 299, 338
— Kingship	354
— Holy Name of	10, 11, 128
— Hypostatic Union	162
— Sacred Heart of	163
John XXIII, Pope	2, 127
— In Memoriam	194
— at Assisi	127
— and St. Bernardine	128
John Fisher, St.	349

Journet, Charles	340
Joy	38

K

Kindness	34
Knowledge	204, 258
— St. Francis on	80

L

Lawrence of Brindisi, St.	25, 157, 354
Learning	258
Lent, Season of	66
Literature, Franciscan	137, 145, 281
Little-ness	164, 189, 274, 341
Lohkamp, Fr. Nicholas, O.F.M.	359
Long, Fr. Valentine, O.F.M.	84
Love of God	92

M

Margaret of Cortona, St.	34, 106
Maria Crucis, Sr. O.S.F.	116
Maristell, Sr. Mary, O.S.F.	204, 299
Marshall, Fr. Regis, O.F.M.	227
Mary, Blessed Virgin	56, 138, 156, 202, 297, 372
— Annunciation	75
— Franciscan Writers on	156
— Immaculate Conception	372
— Litany of	130
— Purification	56
Masi, Roberto	182
Matzerath, Fr. Roger, S.A.	17
McCartney, Fr. Marcellus A., O.F.M.	88
McDevitt, Fr. Augustine, O.F.M.	26, 164, 281
Meditation	30
Monahan, Fr. Robert, R., O.F.M.	99
Montgomery, Bro. Benilde O.S.F.	324
Mortification	174
— Franciscan Concept of	67
Mysteries of Christ	285, 299

N

Nature, Grace and	41
— Order of	41
Newman, Cardinal	240

O		S	
O'Connell, Fr. David A	O.P. 81	Scotus, Duns	331, 372
		School, Third Order Secular in	116
		Self-denial	70
		Self-knowledge	35
Pain	177	Sheila, Sr. Mary, O.S.F.	137, 145
Papacy	226	Simplicity	291
Patricia, Sr. M., O.S.F.	189	Sister (A Prayer to Mary)	297
Paul Marie, Sr., O.S.F.	278	Sisters, Religious	269
Paul VI, Pope	226	— Franciscan	278
Peace	99	— Franciscan Teaching	
Perfection, Christian	26	(Meeting)	128
Perseverance	111	Spirituality, Schools of	248, 322
Poor Clare Nuns	350	Stigmata of St. Francis	287
Poverty	4, 276	Suffering	174
Prayer	49	Supernatural Life, Knowledge in	204
Prayer, A (of a Sister to Mary)	297	Supernatural Order	262
— (For Grace of Loving)	348		
Preaching, Franciscan	111		
Profession, Religious	359		
Purification of Blessed Virgin			
Mary	56		
R		T	
Reading, Spiritual	29, 145	Teaching	174, 269
Recessus, Sacer	49	Theology	213, 218
Regnier, Fr. Celestine,		— Franciscan School of	331
O.F.M. Conv.		— Modern Trends in	151
Religious Life	88, 135, 270, 359	Thèrèse, Sr. Mary, O.S.C.	350
Renovatio Accomodata	88	Third Order Secular in High	
Resurrection of Jesus	98	School	116
Roberto, Sr. M., O.S.F.	174	Thomas Aquinas, St.	81
Rochford, Fr. Jude, M.,			
O.F.M. Conv.	298		
		U	
		Unity, Christian	17
		V	
		Vows, Religious	324, 359

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