

CHAPTER XV

The Immaculate Conception of Mary, the Mother of God, in Virtue of the Divine Power.

208. The divine Wisdom had now prepared all things in order to extract in purity the Mother of Grace from the stain infecting all of human nature. The number and congregation of the ancient Patriarchs and Prophets had been completed and gathered, and the mountains had been raised upon which this Mystical City of God was to be built (Ps. 86:1). By the power of his right hand He had already selected incomparable treasures of the Divinity with which to enrich and endow Her. A thousand Angels were ready for her garrison and custody so they could serve as most faithful vassals of their Queen and Lady. He had prepared a royal and most noble ancestry from whom She would descend, and had chosen most holy and perfect parents from whom She would presently be born, without there being any more holy in that age; for if better and more ideal parents had existed the Almighty would have selected them for Her who was to be chosen to be the Mother of God himself.

209. He endowed these parents with abundant graces and blessings of his right hand, and enriched them with all virtues, with the enlightenments of divine science, and with the gifts of the Holy Ghost. After having announced to the two saints Joachim and Anne that He would grant them a Daughter, admirable and blessed among women, He permitted the work of the first conception to take place, namely that of the most pure body of Mary. The age of these parents when they were married was twenty-four for St. Anne and forty-six for St. Joachim. They lived twenty years in married life without having an issue of children, and thus St. Anne at the time of the conception of her Daughter was forty-four years old, and St. Joachim sixty-six. Although the conception happened according to the ordinary course of nature, yet the Most High freed it from imperfections and disorders, permitting only what was strictly required according to nature so the proper material could be furnished for the formation of the most perfect substance within the limits of a mere creature.

210. God limited the natural activity in the two parents and by his grace prevented any fault or imperfection, substituting for them virtue and merit, and entire propriety in the manner of conception, which though natural and according to the common order was nevertheless directed, supplemented and perfected by the action of divine grace, without disturbing the proper effects due to the law of nature. Regarding the holy matron Anne the divine power was more manifest because of her natural sterility; in her the conception was miraculous, not only in regard to the manner but in regard to its very substance. In regard to the conceptions which happen entirely according to the natural order and in virtue of the natural powers, there is no necessity of having recourse to or depending upon any supernatural cause, for the parents in concurring are sufficient causes of the propagation, even when they furnish the material and the concurrent acts of generation with imperfection and without proper measure.

211. But in this conception, although the father was not naturally sterile, yet because of his age and moderation his natural powers were suppressed and somewhat attenuated, and therefore he was enlivened, restored and enabled to act on his part with entire perfection and with the plenitude of his faculties, in proportion to the sterility of the mother. In both of them nature and grace concurred: The former briefly, with measure, and in that which was necessary; the latter superabundantly, powerfully and generously, absorbing yet not confounding nature, exalting it and perfecting it in a miraculous manner. Thus grace was the origin of this conception, while it

called into its service the activity of nature insofar as was necessary for the birth of that ineffable Daughter from her natural parents.

212. The mode of repairing the sterility of the most holy mother Anne did not consist in the restitution of that condition which was lacking in her natural faculties of conception, for thus restored she would have conceived in no way different from the rest of women. The Lord concurred with her sterile faculties in a more miraculous manner for the formation of the body from natural material. Thus the faculties and the material were of the natural order, but the manner of moving them happened by the miraculous power of the Divinity. As soon as the miracle of this conception had ceased the mother was left in her former sterility never to conceive again, since no new quality was taken from or added to the natural temperament. This wonder, it seems to me, can be made intelligible by that which Christ our Lord wrought when St. Peter walked over the water (Mt. 14:29). In order to sustain him it was not necessary to harden the water, or change it into crystal or ice over which he and others could have walked without requiring any miracle other than hardening it; yet without thus changing the water into hard ice the Lord gave it the power to sustain the body of the Apostle walking miraculously upon it. Hence the water remained a liquid during the miracle; and though it remained such when St. Peter walked upon it, yet he began to falter and sink. Thus Christ worked the miracle without altering the water by a new quality.

213. Very similar to this (although much more admirable) was the miracle of conception in Anne, mother of most holy Mary. In this her parents were governed by grace, so withdrawn from concupiscence and delectation that this conception was lacking the accidental imperfection of original sin which ordinarily accompanies the material or instrument by which it is communicated. Only material free of imperfection remained, the act itself being meritorious; hence for this reason this conception could very well not result in sin, divine Providence having thus determined it. This miracle the Most High reserved solely for Her who was to be his worthy Mother; for if it was proper that in the substance of her conception She would be engendered according to the order of the other children of Adam, it was also most proper and due that while preserving nature grace would concur with it in all its virtue and power, distinguishing Her and working in Her above all the children of Adam, and above Adam and Eve themselves, who gave origin to the corruption of nature and its disorderly concupiscence.

214. In this formation of the most pure body of Mary the wisdom and power of the Most High worked with such vigilance (according to our understanding) that the quantities and qualities of the four natural humors of the human body, the sanguine, melancholic, phlegmatic and choleric, were composed with great weight and measure, so by this most perfect proportion in its mixture and composition it would assist the operations of that holy soul with which it was to be endowed and animated. This miraculous temperament in her generation was afterwards as it were the principle and cause of the serenity and peace preserved in the faculties of the Queen of heaven during all her life. Never did any of these humors contradict or war against Her,* or seek to predominate over the others, but each one of them supplemented and served the others, continuing in this well-ordered fabric without corruption or decomposition. Never did the body of most holy Mary suffer corruption, nor was there anything lacking or excessive found in it, but all the conditions and proportions of the different humors were adjusted in proportion, with neither more nor less dryness or moisture necessary for her conservation. Neither was there more

* cf. I Peter 2:11 [Ed.]

heat than was sufficient for bodily defense or digestion, nor more cold than was necessary to refresh and ventilate the bodily humors.

215. Nor was this body, due to its admirable composition, less sensible to the influence of heat and cold and the other inclemencies of the weather, but rather as it was more delicately and perfectly constituted so it was more acutely affected by any extremes, not being able to furnish a defense against the excess of temperature in those parts which were more subject to them. Certainly, on the one hand, these extremes would find in such a harmoniously constituted frame much less material in which they could work their changes; however, on the other hand the delicacy of its composition made even ordinary influences much more penetrating than greater ones in other bodies. This admirable body (formed in the womb of St. Anne) was not capable of spiritual gifts before it was animated by the soul, but it was capable of receiving the natural ones; these were granted to this body by a supernatural decree and power according to such conditions as were proper for the end in view, the singular grace toward which that formation was ordained above the entire order of nature and grace. Thus were given to it a complexion and faculties so excellent that all nature would never of itself be able to produce one similar to it.

216. Just as the hand of our Lord formed the first parents Adam and Eve in such a way as to befit original justice and their state of innocence, and therefore also more excellently than their descendants (for the works of the Lord alone are most perfect), so his omnipotence in a more excellent and superior manner operated in the formation of the virginal body of most holy Mary. And this He did with so much the greater solicitude and abundance of grace as this creature was to exceed in perfection not only the first parents, who were to sin so soon, but all the other creatures, corporal and spiritual. According to our way of speaking God exerted more care in composing this little body of his most holy Mother than in creating all the celestial orbs and the whole universe. In accordance with this rule must be measured the gifts and privileges of this City of God, from the first trenches and foundations upon which was raised her grandeur unto the pinnacle of existence next to and closest to the infinity of the Most High.

217. So far was this miraculous conception from sin and its cause, concupiscence, that not only was there no sin in Her, the dawn of grace (always distinguished and treated according to this dignity by the Lord), but even in her parents sin and concupiscence were restrained and impeded for her conception, so nature itself would not be insubordinate or disturbed in this work in which nature was inferior to grace, and served merely as an instrument to the supreme Artificer, who is superior to the laws of nature and grace. From that point He already began to destroy sin, and to undermine and beat down the castle of the strong-armed one (Lk. 11:21-22), in order to divest and despoil him of his tyrannical possession.

218. The day on which the first conception of the body of most holy Mary happened was a Sunday, corresponding to the day on which the angels were created, whose exalted Queen and Lady She was to be, superior to all. And although for the formation and growth of other human bodies, by the natural and common order, many days are necessary in order to organize them for the reception of the final disposition for the infusion into them of the rational soul, and they say*

* Ven. Mary is here referring to the common opinion of Scholastic theologians in her time, which they of course took from St. Thomas Aquinas himself. Another opinion is the rational soul is infused at the moment of bodily conception. Since the Magisterium has not definitely spoken on this issue, either opinion is acceptable. This passage regarding ensoulment follows Thomistic theology exactly. In fact, Dom Guéranger reports (*L'Univers*, Dec. 5, 1858) that research submitted to the Sacred Congregation of Rites found 29 specific instances in which the text of Ven. Mary follows the Thomist School over the Scotist School, one of the exceptions being the Immaculate Conception, later infallibly defined by Pope Pius IX in 1854. [Ed.]

for a male are required forty days and for females eighty,* more or less, according to the natural heat and disposition of the mothers; yet in the bodily formation of most holy Mary the divine power accelerated the natural time, and the work which would require eighty days (or however many would naturally be necessary) was accomplished most perfectly in seven days. During this time was organized and prepared in the womb of St. Anne, in due growth and quantity, that miraculous body, in order to receive the most holy soul of her Daughter, our Lady and Queen.

219. On the Saturday following this first conception the Most High created the soul of his Mother, infusing it into her body, by which entered into the world the mere creature more holy, perfect and agreeable in his eyes than all He had created or will create to the end of the world or through his eternities. In his attention in executing this work the Lord maintained a mysterious correspondence with the work of creating all the rest of the world in seven days, as is related in the book of Genesis (Ch. 1); hence without doubt He then rested in truth, according to the figurative language of Scripture, since He had now created the most supreme creature of all, giving through Her a beginning to the work of the Incarnation of the divine Word and the Redemption of the human race. Thus for God this day was as a Paschal feast, and also for all creatures.

220. Due to this mystery of the Immaculate Conception of most holy Mary the Holy Ghost has ordained that Saturday be consecrated to the Virgin in the holy Church, since that was the day on which She received the greatest benefit through the creation of her soul and its union with her body without contracting sin or its effects. The day of her Immaculate Conception which the Church now celebrates is not the day of her first conception, when the body alone was conceived, rather it is the day of the second conception or infusion of the soul; body and soul being joined, She remained for nine months in the womb of St. Anne, which are the days intervening between the Immaculate Conception and the Nativity of this Queen. During the other seven days preceding the animation, when only the body was present, it was disposed and organized by the divine power so this creation would correspond with the account which Moses gives of the creation of all things, comprising the formation of the world in its beginning (Gen. 1). At the instant of the creation and infusion of the soul of most holy Mary, the most blessed Trinity, with greater affection of love, spoke those words referred to by Moses (Gen. 1:26): "Let Us make Mary to our image and likeness to be our true Daughter and Spouse, in order to be the Mother of the Onlybegotten of the substance of the Father."

221. By the force of this divine pronouncement, and through the love with which it proceeded from the mouth of the Omnipotent, was created and infused into the body of most holy Mary her most blessed soul, filling Her in the same instant with grace[†] and gifts above the most exalted Seraphim of heaven, without there being a single instant in which She was found devoid or deprived of the light, friendship and love of her Creator, or in which She was touched by the stain or darkness of original sin; on the contrary She possessed the most perfect justice, superior to that of Adam and Eve in their creation. To Her was also conceded the most perfect use of reason corresponding to the gifts of grace She had received, so not for one instant would She be idle, but engage in admirable works of highest pleasure for her Maker. In the intelligence and light concerning this great mystery I confess myself absorbed, such that my heart (due to my lack of ability to explain it) is transformed in affections of admiration and praise, since my tongue falls silent. I see the true Ark of the Covenant joined together, enriched and placed in the temple

* cf. *Coronation* 281 [Ed.]

† cf. Lk. 1:28 [Ed.]

of a sterile mother with greater glory than the figurative one in the house of Obededom and of David (II Kg. 6:11-12), and in the temple of Solomon (III Kg. 8:6). I see formed the altar of the Holy of Holies (Ib. 6:16ff.), where is to be offered the first sacrifice which is to overcome and appease God; I see the order of nature break in order to be rearranged; I see new laws established against sin, without keeping the common laws, or those of guilt, or of nature, or of grace itself; I see these new laws begin to form a new earth and a new heaven (Is. 65:17), being first formed in the womb of a most humble woman, whither the attention of the most holy Trinity is focused, with innumerable courtiers of the ancient heaven as witnesses, and whither a thousand Angels are delegated to take custody of the treasure of a tiny, animated body the size of a little bee.

222. In this new creation is heard resounding with a greater force the voice of her Maker, who pleased with the work of his omnipotence says it is very good (Gen. 1:31). Let human frailty with humble piety approach this wonder, confess the grandeur of the Creator, and render gratitude for this new benefit conceded to the entire human race in their Reparatrix. Let the zeal of disputation cease, vanquished by the force of divine light; for if the infinite goodness of God (as shown to me) in the Immaculate Conception of his most holy Mother looked upon original sin with, as it were, anger and disgust, and glorying to have a just cause and opportune occasion of casting forth and stopping its current, how can that seem proper to human wisdom which was so abhorrent to God?

223. At the time of the infusion of the soul into the body of this heavenly Lady the Most High desired her mother St. Anne to feel and recognize the presence of the Divinity in a most exalted manner by which she was filled with the Holy Ghost and moved interiorly with such rejoicing and devotion as was above her ordinary powers. She was rapt in a supreme ecstasy in which she was enlightened with most high intelligences of many hidden mysteries, and praised the Lord with new canticles of joy. These effects lasted during all the rest of her life, but they were greater during the nine months in which she bore in her womb the Treasure of heaven, for during that time these benefits were more continually renewed and repeated, with enlightenment regarding Holy Scriptures and their most profound sacraments. O most happy woman, let all the nations and generations of the world extol thee and call thee blessed.