Blessed John Duns Scotus: Defender of the Immaculate Conception

Bl. John Duns Scotus (b. 1266; d. 1308 A.D.), Franciscan Priest and theologian, was the first coherently to explain the Apostolic Faith in the Immaculate Conception as something entirely coherent with Christ’s universal primacy and mediation. Since his time the Sacred Magisterium of the Church has solemnly defined this doctrine and declared it to belong to the deposit of the Faith, which Christ entrusted to His Apostles.
ON THE FITTINGNESS OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION
by Bl. John Duns Scotus (b. 1266; d. 1308 A.D.)

Was the Blessed Virgin conceived in sin? The answer is no, for as Augustine writes: "When sin is treated, there can be no inclusion of Mary in the discussion." And Anselm says: "It was fitting that the Virgin should be resplendent with a purity greater than which none under God can be conceived." Purity here is to be taken in the sense of pure innocence under God, such as was in Christ.

The contrary, however, is commonly asserted on two grounds. First, the dignity of Her Son, who, as universal Redeemer, opened the gates of heaven. But if blessed Mary had not contracted original sin, She would not have needed the Redeemer, nor would He have opened the door for Her because it was never closed. For it is only closed because of sin, above all original sin.

In respect to this first ground, one can argue from the dignity of Her Son qua Redeemer, Reconciler, and Mediator, that She did not contract original sin.
For a most perfect mediator exercises the most perfect mediation possible in regard to some person for whom he mediates. Thus Christ exercised a most perfect act of mediation in regard to some person for whom He was Mediator. In regard to no person did He have a more exalted relationship than to Mary. Such, however, would not have been true had He not preserved Her from original sin.

The proof is threefold: in terms of God to whom He reconciles; in terms of the evil from which He frees; and in terms of the indebtedness of the person whom He reconciles.

First, no one absolutely and perfectly placates anyone about to be offended in any way unless he can avert the offense. For to placate only in view of remitting the offense once committed is not to placate most perfectly. But God does not undergo offense because of some experience in Himself, but only because of sin in the soul of a creature. Hence, Christ does not placate the Trinity most perfectly for the sin to be contracted by the sons of Adam if He does not prevent the Trinity from being offended in someone, and if the soul of some child of Adam does not contract such a sin; and thus it is possible that a child of Adam not have such a sin.

Secondly, a most perfect mediator merits the removal of all punishment from the one whom he reconciles. Original sin, however,
is a greater privation than the lack of the vision of God. Hence, if Christ most perfectly reconciles us to God, He merited that this most heavy of punishments be removed from some one person. This would have been His Mother.

Further, Christ is primarily our Redeemer and Reconciler from original sin rather than actual sin, for the need of the Incarnation and suffering of Christ is commonly ascribed to original sin. But He is also commonly assumed to be the perfect Mediator of at least one person, namely, Mary, whom He preserved from actual sin. Logically one should assume that He preserved Her from original sin as well.

Thirdly, a person reconciled is not absolutely indebted to his mediator, unless he receives from that mediator the greatest possible good. But this innocence, namely, preservation from the contracted sin or from the sin to be contracted, is available from the Mediator. Thus, no one would be absolutely indebted to Christ as Mediator unless preserved from original sin. It is a greater good to be preserved from evil than to fall into it and afterwards be freed from it. If Christ merited grace and glory for so many souls, who, for these gifts, are indebted to Christ as Mediator, why should no soul be His debtor for the gift of its innocence? And why, since the blessed Angels are innocent, should there be no human soul in heaven (except the human soul of Christ) who is innocent, that is, never in the state of original sin?
Blessed John Duns Scotus: Defender of the Immaculate Conception

Taken from the Catholic Encyclopedia

Surnamed DOCTOR SUBTILIS, died 8 November, 1308; he was the founder and leader of the famous Scotist School, which had its chief representatives among the Franciscans. Of his antecedents and life very little is definitely known, as the contemporary sources are silent about him. It is certain that he died rather young, according to earlier traditions at the age of thirty-four years (cf. Wadding, Vita Scoti, in vol. I of his works); but it would seem that he was somewhat older than this and that he was born in 1270.

The birthplace of Scotus has been the subject of much discussion and so far no conclusive argument in favor of any locality has been advanced. The surname Scotus by no means decides the question, for it was given to Scotchmen, Irishmen, and even to natives of northern England. The other name, Duns, to which the Irish attach so much importance, settles nothing; there was a Duns also in Scotland (Berwick). Moreover, it is impossible to determine whether Duns was a family name or the name of a place. Appeal to supposedly ancient local traditions in behalf of Ireland's claim is of no avail, since we cannot ascertain just how old they are; and their age is the pivotal point.
This discussion has been strongly tinged with national sentiment, especially since the beginning of the sixteenth century after prominent Irish Franciscans like Mauritius de Portu (O'Fihely), Hugh MacCaghwell, and Luke Wadding rendered great service by editing Scotus's works. On the other hand, the English have some right to claim Scotus. As a professor for several years at Oxford, he belonged at any rate to the English province; and neither during his lifetime nor for some time after his death was any other view as to his nationality proposed.

It should not, however, be forgotten that in those days the Franciscan cloisters in Scotland were affiliated to the English province, i.e. to the custodia of Newcastle. It would not therefore be amiss to regard Scotus as a native of Scotland or as a member of a Scottish cloister. In any case it is high time to eliminate from this discussion the famous entry in the Merton College manuscript (no. 39) which would make it appear that Scotus was a member of that college and therefore a native of Northern England.

The statutes of the college excluded monks; and as Scotus became a Franciscan when he was quite younger he could not have belonged to the college previous to joining the order. Besides, the entry in the college register is under the date of 1455, and consequently too late to serve as an argument.

The case is somewhat better with the entry in the catalogue of the library of St. Francis at Assisi, under date of 1381, which designates Duns Scotus's commentary on the "Sentences" of Peter Lombard as "magistri fratri Johannis Scoti de Ordine Minorum, qui et Doctor Subtilis nuncupatur, de provincia Hiberniæ" (the work of master John
Scotus of the Franciscan Order known as the subtle doctor, from the province of Ireland). This, though it furnishes the strongest evidence in Ireland's favor, cannot be regarded as decisive.

Since Scotus labored during several years in England, he cannot, simply on the strength of this evidence, be assigned to the Irish province. The library entry, moreover, cannot possibly be accepted as contemporary with Scotus. Add to this the geographical distance and it becomes plain that the discussion cannot be settled by an entry made in far-off Italy seventy-three years after Scotus's death, at a time too when geographical knowledge was by no means perfect. Finally, no decisive evidence is offered by the epitaphs of Scotus; they are too late and too poetical.

The question, then, of Scotus's native land must still be considered an open one. When he took the habit of St. Francis is unknown; probably about 1290. It is a fact that he lived and taught at Oxford; for on 26 July, 1300, the provincial of the English province of Franciscans asked the Bishop of Lincoln to confer upon twenty-two of his subjects jurisdiction to hear confessions. The bishop gave the permission only to eight; among those who were refused was "Ioannes Douns".

It is quite certain, too, that he went to Paris about 1304 and that there he was at first merely a Bachelor of Arts, for the general of the Franciscans, Gonsalvus de Vallebona, wrote (18 November, 1304) to the guardian of the college of the Franciscans at Paris to present John Scotus at the university for the doctor's degree. The general's letter mentions that John Scotus had distinguished himself for some time past by his learning *ingenioque subtilissimo*. 
He did not teach very long in Paris; in 1307 or 1308 he was sent to Cologne, probably as a professor at the university. There he died, and was buried in the monastery of the Minorities. At the present time (1908) the process of his beatification is being agitated in Rome on the ground of a *cultus immemorabilis*.

Duns Scotus's writings are very numerous and they have often been printed; some, in fact, at a very early date. But a complete edition, in 12 folio volumes, was published only in 1639 by Wadding at Lyons; this, however, included the commentaries of the Scotists, Lychetus, Poncius, Cavellus, and Hiquæus. A reprint of Wadding's edition, with the treatise "*De perfectione statuum*" added to it, appeared 1891-95 at Paris (Vives) in 26 vols. 4to. Whether all the writings contained in these editions are by Duns Scotus himself is doubtful; it is certain, however, that many changes and additions were made by later Scotists. A critical edition is still wanting. Besides these printed works, some others are attributed to Scotus, especially commentaries on several books of Scripture.

The printed writings deal with grammatical and scientific, but chiefly with philosophical and theological subjects. Of a purely philosophical nature are his commentaries and *quaestiones* on various works of Aristotle. These, with some other treatises, are contained in the first seven volumes of the Paris edition. The principal work of Scotus, however, is the so-called "*Opus Oxoniense*", i.e. the great commentary on the "Sentences" of Peter Lombard, written in Oxford (vols. VIII-XXI). It is primarily a theological work, but it contains many treatises, or at least digressions, on logical, metaphysical, grammatical, and scientific topics, so that nearly his whole system of philosophy can be derived from this work. Volumes XXII-XXIV contain
the "Reportata Parisiensia", i.e., a smaller commentary, for the most part theological; on the "Sentences". The "Quæstiones Quodlibetales", chiefly on theological subjects, one of his most important works, and the above-mentioned essay, "De perfectione statuum", fill the last two volumes. As to the time when these works were composed, we know nothing for certain. The commentaries on Aristotle were probably his first work, then followed the "Opus Oxoniense" and some minor essays, last the "Quæstiones Quodlibetales", his dissertation for the doctor's degree. The "Reportata" may be notes written out after his lectures, but this is merely a surmise.

Scotus seems to have changed his doctrine in the course of time, or at least not to have been uniformly precise in expressing his thought; now he follows rather the sententia communis as in the "Quæstiones Quodlibetales"; then again he goes his own way. Many of his essays are unfinished. He did not write a summa philosophica or theologica, as did Alexander of Hales and St. Thomas Aquinas, or even a compendium of his doctrine.

He wrote only commentaries or treatises on disputed questions; but even these commentaries are not continuous explanations of Aristotle or Peter Lombard. Usually he cites first the text or presupposes it as already known, then he takes up various points which in that day were live issues and discusses them from all sides, at the same time presenting the opinions of others.

He is sharp in his criticism, and with relentless logic he refutes; the opinions, or at least the argument, of his opponents. In his fervor he sometimes forgets to set down his own view, or he simply states the
reasons for various tenable opinions, and puts them forward as more or less probable; this he does especially in the "Collationes". Hence it is said that he is no systematizer, that he is better at tearing down than at building up.

It is true that none of his writings plainly reveals a system; while several of them, owing no doubt to his early death, betray lack of finish. His real teaching is not always fully stated where one would naturally look for it; often enough one finds instead the discussion of some special point, or a long excursus in which the author follows his critical bent. His own opinion is to be sought elsewhere, in various incidental remarks, or in the presuppositions which serve as a basis for his treatment of other problems; and it can be discovered only after a lengthy search.

Besides, in the heat of controversy he often uses expressions which seem to go to extremes and even to contain heresy. His language is frequently obscure; a maze of terms, definitions, distinctions, and objections through which it is by no means easy to thread one's way. For these reasons the study of Scotus's works was difficult; when undertaken at all, it was not carried on with the requisite thoroughness.

It was hard to find a unified system in them. Not a few unsatisfactory one-sided or even wrong opinions about him were circulated and passed on unchallenged from mouth to mouth and from book to book, growing more erroneous as they went. Nevertheless, there is in Scotus's teaching a rounded-out system, to be found especially in his principal work, a system worked out in minutest details. For the
present purpose, only his leading ideas and his departures from St. Thomas and the *sententia communis* need be indicated.

**System of Philosophy**

The fundamental principles of his philosophical and theological teaching are his *distinctio formalis* and his idea of being. The *distinctio formalis* is intermediate between the *distinctio rationis tantum*, or the distinction made by the intellect alone, and the *distinctio realis* or that which exists in reality. The former occurs, e.g., between the definition and the thing defined, the latter, within the realm of created reality, between things that can exist separately or at least can be made to exist separately by Divine omnipotence, as, e.g., between the different parts of a body or between substance and accident. A thing is "formally distinct" when it is such in essence and in concept that it can be thought of by itself, when it is not another thing, though with that other it may be so closely united that not even omnipotence can separate it, e.g. the soul and its faculties and these faculties among themselves. The soul forms with its faculties only one thing (res), but conceptually it is not identical with the intellect or the will, nor are intellect and will the same.
Thus we have various realities, entities, or formalities of one and the same thing. So far as the thing itself exists, these entities have their own being; for each entity has its own being or its own existence. But existence is not identical with subsistence. The accident e.g., has its own being, its own existence, which is different from the existence of the substance in which it inheres, just because the accident is not identical with the substance. But it has no subsistence of its own, since it is not a thing existing by itself, but inheres in the substance as its subject and support; it is not an independent being.

Moreover, only actually existing; things have real being: in other words, being is identical with existence. In the state of mere ideality or possibility, before their realization, things have an essence, an ideal conceivable being, but not an actual one; else they could not be created or annihilated, since they would have had an existence before their creation. And since being is *eo ipso* also true and good, only those things are really good and true which actually exist. If God, therefore, by an act of His free will gives existence to the essences, He makes them by this very act also true and good.

In this sense, it is quite correct to say that according to Scotus things are true and good because God so wills. By this assertion, however, he does not deny that things are good and true in themselves. They have an objective being, and thence also objective truth and goodness, because they are in the likeness of God, Whose being, Goodness, and truth they imitate.

At the same time, in their ideal being they are necessary; the ideas of them are not produced by the Divine free will, but by the Divine intellect, which, without the co-operation of God's will, recognizes
His own infinite essence as imitable by finite things and thus of necessity conceives the ideas. In this ideal state God necessarily wills the things, since they cannot but be pleasing to Him as images of His own essence. But from this it does not follow that He must will them with an effective will, i.e. that He must realize them. God is entirely free in determining what things shall come into existence.

God alone is absolutely immaterial, since He alone is absolute and perfect actuality, without any potentiality for becoming other than what He is. All creatures, angels and human souls included, are material, because they are changeable and may become the subject of accidents. But from this it does not follow that souls and angels are corporeal; on the contrary they are spiritual, physically simple, though material in the sense just explained. Since all created things, corporeal and spiritual, are composed of potentiality and actuality, the same *materia prima* is the foundation of all, and therefore all things have a common substratum, a common material basis. This *materia*, in itself quite indeterminate, may be determined to any sort of thing by a form--a spiritual form determines it to a spirit, a corporeal form to a material body.

Scotus, however, does not teach an extreme Realism; he does not attribute to the universals or abstract essences, e.g. genus and species an existence of their own, independent of the individual beings in which they are realized. It is true, he holds that *materia prima*, as the indeterminate principle, can be separated from the *forma*, or the determining principle, at least by Divine omnipotence, and that it can then exist by itself. Conceptually, the *materia* is altogether different from the *forma*; moreover, the same *materia* can be determined by entirely different forms and the same form can
be united with different materiæ, as is evident from the processes of
generation and corruption.

For this reason God at least can separate the one from the other,
just as in the Holy Eucharist He keeps the accidents of bread and
wine in existence, without a substance in which they inhere. It is no
less certain that Scotus teaches a plurality of forms in the same thing.
The human body, e.g., taken by itself, without the soul, has its own
form; the forma corporeitatis. It is transmitted to the child by its
parents and is different from the rational soul, which is infused by
God himself. The forma corporeitatis gives the body a sort of human
form, though quite imperfect, and remains after the rational soul has
departed from the body in death until decomposition takes place.

Nevertheless, it is the rational soul which is the essential form of the
body or of man; this constitutes with the body one being, one
substance, one person, one man. With all its faculties, vegetative
sensitive and intellectual, it is the immediate work of God, Who
infuses it into the child. There is only one soul in man, but we can
distinguish in it several forms; for conceptually the intellectual is not
the same as the sensitive, nor is this identical with the vegetative,
nor the vegetative with that which gives the body, as such, its form.
Yet all these belong formally, by their concept and essence, to the
one indivisible soul.

Scotus also maintains a formal distinction between the universal
nature of each thing and its individuality, e.g. in Plato between his
human nature and that which makes him just Plato--his Platoneity.
For the one is not the other; the individuality is added to the human
nature and with it constitutes the human individual. In this sense the
property or difference, or the \textit{hæccitas}, is the \textit{principium individuationis}. Hence it is clear that there are many points of resemblance between matter and form on the one hand and universal natures and their individualization on the other.

But Scotus is far from teaching extreme Realism. According to his view, matter can exist without form, but not the universal essence without individuation; nor can the different forms of the same thing exist by themselves. He does not maintain that the uniform matter underlying all created things is the absolute being which exists by itself, independent of the individuals, and is then determined by added forms, first to genera, then to species, and lastly to individuals. On the contrary, materia prima, which according to him can exist without a form, is already something individual and numerically determined. In reality there is no materia without form, and vice versa.

The materia which God created had already a certain form, the imperfect form of chaos. God could create matter by itself and form by itself, but both would then be something individual, numerically, though not specifically, different from other matter and other forms of the same kind. This matter, numerically different from other matter, could then be united with a form, also numerically different from other forms of the same kind; and the result would be a compound individual, numerically different from other individuals of the same kind. From such individualized matter, form, and compound we get by abstraction the idea of a universal matter, a universal form, a universal compound, e.g. of a universal man. But by themselves universal matter and universal form cannot exist. The universal as such is a mere conception of the mind; it cannot exist by
itself, it receives its existence in and with the individual; in and with the individual it is multiplied, in and with the individual it loses again its existence.

Even God cannot separate in man the universal nature from the individuality, or in the human soul the intellectual from the sensitive part, without destroying the whole. In reality there are only individuals, in which, however, we can by abstraction formally separate both the abstract human nature from the individuality and the several faculties from one another. But the separation and distinction and formation of genera and species are mere processes of thought, the work of the contemplating mind.

The psychology of Scotus is in its essentials the same as that of St. Thomas. The starting-point of all knowledge is the sensory or outer experience, to which must be added the inner experience, which he designates as the ultimate criterion of certitude. He lays stress on induction as the basis of all natural sciences. He denies that sense perception, and a fortiori intellectual knowledge, is merely a passive process; moreover, he asserts that not only the universal but also the individual is perceived directly.

The adequate object of intellectual knowledge is not the spiritual in the material, but being in its universality. In the whole realm of the soul the will has the primacy since it can determine itself, while it controls more or less completely the other faculties. The freedom of the will, taken as freedom of choice, is emphasized and vigorously defended. In presence of any good, even in the contemplation of God, the will is not necessitated, but determines itself freely. This doctrine does not imply that the will can decide what is true and
what is false, what is right and what is wrong, nor that its choice is blind and arbitrary. Objects, motives, habits, passions, etc. exert a great influence upon the will, and incline it to choose one thing rather than another. Yet the final decision remains with the will, and in so far the will is the one complete cause of its act, else it would not be free. With regard to memory, sensation, and association we find in Scotus many modern views.
It has been asserted that according to Scotus the essence of God consists in His will; but the assertion is unfounded. God, he holds, is the ens infinitum. It is true that according to him God's love for Himself and the spiration of the Holy Ghost by Father and Son are not based upon a natural instinct, so to say, but upon God's own free choice. Every will is free, and therefore God's will also. But His will is so perfect and His essence so infinitely good, that His free will cannot but love it. This love, therefore, is at once free and necessary. Also with regard to created things Scotus emphasizes the freedom of God, without, however, falling into the error of merely arbitrary, unmotived indeterminism. It has been asserted, too, that according to Scotus, being can be attributed univocally to God and creatures; but this again is false.

Scotus maintains that God is the ens per essentiam, creatures are entia per participationem--they have being only in an analogical sense. But from the being of God and the being of creatures, a universal idea of being can be abstracted and predicated univocally of both the finite and the infinite; otherwise we could not infer from the existence of finite things the existence of God, we should have no proof of God's existence, as every syllogism would contain a quaternio terminorum. Between God's essence and His attributes, between the attributes themselves, and then between God's essence and the Divine Persons, there is a formal distinction along with real identity. For conceptually Divinity is not the same as wisdom,
intellect not the same as will; Divinity is not identical with paternity, since Divinity neither begets, as does the Father, nor is begotten, as is the Son. But all these realities are formally in God and their distinction is not annulled by His infinity; on the other hand it remains true that God is only one res. The process constituting the Blessed Trinity takes Place without regard to the external world. Only after its completion the three Divine Persons, as one principle, produce by their act of cognition the ideas of things. But quite apart from this process, God is independent of the world in His knowledge and volition, for the obvious reason that dependence of any sort wood imply imperfection.

The cognition, volition, and activity of the angels is more akin to ours. The angels can of themselves know things; they do not need an infused species though in fact they receive such from God. The devil is not necessarily compelled, as a result of his sin always to will what is evil; with his splendid natural endowments he can do what in itself is good; he can even love God above all things, though in fact he does not do so. Sin is only in so far an infinite offense of God as it leads away from Him; in itself its malice is no greater than is the goodness of the opposite virtue.

In his Christology, Scotus insists strongly on the reality of Christ's Humanity. Though it has no personality and no subsistence of its own, it has its own existence. The unio hypostatica and the communicatio idiomatum are explained in accordance with the doctrine of the Church, with no leaning to either Nestorianism or
Adoptionism. It is true that Scotus explains the influence of the hypostatic union upon the human nature of Christ and upon His work differently from St. Thomas. Since this union in no way changes the human nature of Christ, it does not of itself impart to the Humanity the beatific vision or impeccability. These prerogatives were given to Christ with the fullness of grace which He received in consequence of that union.

God would have become man even if Adam had not sinned, since He willed that in Christ humanity and the world should be united with Himself by the closest possible bond. Scotus also defends energetically the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin. All objections founded on original sin and the universal need of redemption are solved. The merits of Christ are infinite only in a broader sense, but of themselves they are entirely sufficient to give adequate satisfaction to the Divine justice; there is no deficiency to be supplied by God's mercy. But there is needed a merciful acceptation of the work of Christ, since in the sight of God there is no real merit in the strictest sense of the word.

Grace is something entirely supernatural and can be given only by God, and, what is more, only by a creative act; hence the sacraments are not, properly speaking, the physical or instrumental cause of grace, because God alone can create. Sanctifying grace is identical with the infused virtue of charity, and has its seat in the will; it is therefore conceived rather from the ethical standpoint. The sacraments give grace of themselves, or ex opere operato, if man places no obstacle in the way. The real essence of the Sacrament of
Penance consists in the absolution; but this is of no avail unless the sinner repent with a sorrow that springs from love of God; his doctrine of attrition is by no means lax. As to his eschatology it must suffice to state that he makes the essence of beatitude consist in activity, i.e. in the love of God, not in the Beatific Vision; this latter is only the necessary condition.

In ethics Scotus declares emphatically that the morality of an act requires an object which is good in its nature, its end, and its circumstances, and according to the dictate of right reason. It is not true that he makes God's free will decide arbitrarily what is good and what is bad; he only asserts that the Commandments. Of the second table of the Decalogue are not in such strict sense laws of nature as are those of the first table; because God cannot grant a dispensation from the laws of the first, whereas He can dispense from those of the second; as in fact He did when He commanded Abraham to sacrifice his son. But the precepts of the second table also are far more binding than the other positive laws of God. In the present order of things God cannot permit manslaughter universally, taking the property of others, and the like. There are also indifferent actions in individuo. Absolutely speaking, man should direct all his actions towards God; but God does not require this, because He does not wish to burden man with so heavy a yoke. He obliges man only to observe the Decalogue; the rest is free. Social and legal questions are not treated by Scotus ex professo; his works, however, contain sound observations on these subjects.
Scotus does not, as is often asserted, maintain that science and faith can contradict each other, or that a proposition may be true in philosophy and false in theology and vice versa. Incorrect, also, is the statement that he attaches little importance to showing the harmony between scientific knowledge and faith and that he has no regard for speculative theology. Quite the contrary, he proves the dogmas of faith not only from authority but, as far as possible, from reason also. Theology presupposes philosophy as its basis.

Facts which have God for their author and yet can be known by our natural powers especially miracles and prophecies, are criteria of the truth of Revelation, religion, and the Church. Scotus strives to gain as thorough an insight as possible into the truths of faith, to disclose them to the human mind, to establish truth upon truth, and from dogma to prove or to reject many a philosophical proposition. There is just as little warrant for the statement that his chief concern is humble subjection to the authority of God and of the Church, or that his tendency a priori is to depreciate scientific knowledge and to resolve speculative theology into doubts. Scotus simply believes that many philosophical and theological proofs of other scholars are not conclusive; in their stead he adduces other arguments. He also thinks that many philosophical and theological propositions can be proved
which other Scholastics consider incapable of demonstration. He indeed lays great stress on the authority of Scripture, the Fathers, and the Church but he also attaches much importance to natural knowledge and the intellectual capacity of the mind of angels and of men, both in this world and in the other. He is inclined to widen rather than narrow the range of attainable knowledge. He sets great value upon mathematics and the natural sciences and especially upon metaphysics. He rejects every unnecessary recourse to Divine or angelic intervention or to miracles, and demands that the supernatural and miraculous be limited as far as possible even in matters of faith.

Dogmas he holds are to be explained in a somewhat softened and more easily intelligible sense, so far as this may be done without diminution of their substantial meaning, dignity, and depth. In Scripture the literal sense is to be taken, and freedom of opinion is to be granted so far as it is not opposed to Christian Faith or the authority of the Church. Scotus was much given to the study of mathematics, and for this reason he insists on demonstrative proofs in philosophy and theology; but he is no real sceptic. He grants that our senses, our internal and external experience, and authority together with reason, can furnish us with absolute certainty and evidence.

The difficulty which many truths present lies not so much in ourselves as in the objects. In itself everything knowable is the object of our knowledge. Reason can of its own powers recognize the existence of God and many of His attributes, the creation of the world out of nothing, the conservation of the world by God, the spirituality, individuality, substantiality, and unity of the soul, as well
as its free will. In many of his writings he asserts that mere reason can come to know the immortality and the creation of the soul; in others he asserts the direct opposite; but he never denies the so-called moral evidence for these truths.

Theology with him is not a scientific study in the strictest sense of the word, as are mathematics and metaphysics, because it is not based upon the evidence of its objects, but upon revelation and authority. It is a practical science because it pursues a practical end: the possession of God. But it gives the mind perfect certainty and unchangeable truths; it does not consist in mere practical, moral, and religious activity Thus Scotus is removed from Kant and the modern Gefühlstheologen, not by a single line of thought but by the whole range of his philosophical speculation.

Scotus is no precursor of Luther; he emphasizes ecclesiastical tradition and authority, the freedom of the will, the power of our reason, and the co-operation with grace. Nor is he a precursor of Kant. The doctrine regarding primacy of the will and the practical character of theology has quite a different meaning in his mind from what it has in Kant's. He values metaphysics highly and calls it the queen of sciences. Only as a very subtle critic may he be called the Kant of the thirteenth century. Nor is he a precursor of the Modernists. His writings indeed contain many entirely modern ideas, e.g. the stress he lays on freedom in scientific and also in religious matters, upon the separateness of the objective world and of thought, the self-activity of the thinking subject, the dignity and value of personality; yet in all this he remains within proper limits,
and in opposition to the Modernists he asserts very forcibly the necessity of an absolute authority in the Church, the necessity of faith, the freedom of the will; and he rejects absolutely any and every monistic identification of the world and God. That he has so often been misunderstood is due simply to the fact that his teaching has been viewed from the standpoint of modern thought.

Scotus is a genuine Scholastic philosopher who works out ideas taken from Aristotle, St. Augustine, and the preceding Scholastics. He is universally recognized as a deep thinker, an original mind, and a sharp critic; a thoroughly scientific man, who without personal bias proceeds objectively, stating his own doctrines with modesty and with a certain reserve. It has been asserted that he did more harm than good to the Church, and that by his destructive criticism, his subtleties, and his barbarous terminology he prepared the ruin of Scholasticism, indeed that its downfall begins with him. These accusations originated to a great extent in the insufficient understanding or the false interpretation of his doctrines.

No doubt his diction lacks elegance; it is often obscure and unintelligible; but the same must be said of many earlier Scholastics. Then too, subtle discussions and distinctions which to this age are meaningless, abound in his works; yet his researches were occasioned for the most part, by the remarks of other Scholastic philosophers, especially by Henry of Ghent, whom he attacks perhaps even more than he does St. Thomas. But the real spirit of scholasticism is perhaps in no other Scholastic so pronounced as in Scotus. In depth of thoughts which after all is the important thing,
Scotus is not surpassed by any of his contemporaries. He was a child of his time; a thorough Aristotelean, even more so than St. Thomas; but he criticizes sharply even the Stagirite and his commentators. He tries always to explain them favourably, but does not hesitate to differ from them. Duns Scotus's teaching is orthodox. Catholics and Protestants have charged him with sundry errors and heresies, but the Church has not condemned a single proposition of his; on the contrary, the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception which he so strongly advocated, has been declared a dogma.
ON THE FITTINGNESS OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION
by Bl. John Duns Scotus (b. 1266; d. 1308 A.D.)

Bl. John Duns Scotus (b. 1266; d. 1308 A.D.), Franciscan Priest and theologian was the first coherently to explain the Apostolic Faith in the Immaculate Conception as something entirely coherent with Christ's universal primacy and mediation. Since his time the Sacred Magisterium of the Church has solemnly defined this doctrine and declared it to belong to the deposit of the Faith which Christ entrusted to His Apostles.

Was the Blessed Virgin conceived in sin? The answer is no, for as Augustine writes: "When sin is treated, there can be no inclusion of Mary in the discussion." And Anselm says: "It was fitting that the Virgin should be resplendent with a purity greater than which none under God can be conceived." Purity here is to be taken in the sense of pure innocence under God, such as was in Christ.
The contrary, however, is commonly asserted on two grounds. First, the dignity of Her Son, who, as universal Redeemer, opened the gates of heaven. But if blessed Mary had not contracted original sin, She would not have needed the Redeemer, nor would He have opened the door for Her because it was never closed. For it is only closed because of sin, above all original sin.

In respect to this first ground, one can argue from the dignity of Her Son qua Redeemer, Reconciler, and Mediator, that She did not contract original sin.

For a most perfect mediator exercises the most perfect mediation possible in regard to some person for whom he mediates. Thus Christ exercised a most perfect act of mediation in regard to some person for whom He was Mediator. In regard to no person did He have a more exalted relationship than to Mary. Such, however, would not have been true had He not preserved Her from original sin.

The proof is threefold: in terms of God to whom He reconciles; in terms of the evil from which He frees; and in terms of the indebtedness of the person whom He reconciles.
First, no one absolutely and perfectly placates anyone about to be offended in any way unless he can avert the offense. For to placate only in view of remitting the offense once committed is not to placate most perfectly. But God does not undergo offense because of some experience in Himself, but only because of sin in the soul of a creature. Hence, Christ does not placate the Trinity most perfectly for the sin to be contracted by the sons of Adam if He does not prevent the Trinity from being offended in someone, and if the soul of some child of Adam does not contract such a sin; and thus it is possible that a child of Adam not have such a sin.

Secondly, a most perfect mediator merits the removal of all punishment from the one whom he reconciles. Original sin, however, is a greater privation than the lack of the vision of God. Hence, if Christ most perfectly reconciles us to God, He merited that this most heavy of punishments be removed from some one person. This would have been His Mother.

Further, Christ is primarily our Redeemer and Reconciler from original sin rather than actual sin, for the need of the Incarnation and suffering of Christ is commonly ascribed to original sin. But He is also commonly assumed to be the perfect Mediator of at least one person, namely, Mary, whom He preserved from actual sin. Logically one should assume that He preserved Her from original sin as well.
Thirdly, a person reconciled is not absolutely indebted to his mediator, unless he receives from that mediator the greatest possible good. But this innocence, namely, preservation from the contracted sin or from the sin to be contracted, is available from the Mediator. Thus, no one would be absolutely indebted to Christ as Mediator unless preserved from original sin. It is a greater good to be preserved from evil than to fall into it and afterwards be freed from it. If Christ merited grace and glory for so many souls, who, for these gifts, are indebted to Christ as Mediator, why should no soul be His debtor for the gift of its innocence? And why, since the blessed Angels are innocent, should there be no human soul in heaven (except the human soul of Christ) who is innocent, that is, never in the state of original sin?
Blessed Duns Scotus: Defender of the Immaculate Conception (DVD) 
Movie Review

5.0 out of 5 stars "Potuit, decuit, ergo fecit!,

By semperfidelis "udayajmj" (Canada) –
This review is for: Blessed Duns Scotus: Defender of the Immaculate Conception (DVD)

The words of St. Anselm of Canterbury's principle is the heading for this review. It means "God could do it, it was appropriate, therefore he did it". A defense taken by Blessed Duns Scotus. And this line is from the movie itself.

This film has got to be one of the most intense movies made about the lives of the saints.....not so much about his life but his teachings and convictions.

Blessed Duns Scotus was one of the most prolific theologians of the middle ages and for his works he was given the title 'Doctor Subtilis' (literally means the Subtle Doctor) for his deep thoughts and the eloquent manner in which he presented them. He is most renowned for making a very public defense on the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, taking on even the thoughts and teachings of that great Doctor of the Church, Saint Thomas Aquinas.
The Immaculate Conception was actually a hotly debated topic and it had its supporters and detractors. Even the greatest devotee of the Virgin Mary, St. Bernard of Clairvaux belonged to the latter group. Hence we get a picture of a man with lots of guts who was willing to debate the teachings of the great philosophers and theologians of all time.

His motivation? A love for truth and study united with the Crucified Christ and a great love for the Eucharist, the Virgin Mary and charity for neighbor. To paraphrase a part of the dialogue from the film, Blessed Scotus admonishes his protege, William, that study, without being united to the Crucified Christ is not worth anything, and could lead to ruin... but united with Him is true Wisdom and Peace.

FANTASTIC!!!!!

Eventually his teaching would form the basis of the declaration of the Dogma of the Immaculate Conception that was proclaimed in 1854.

All this is magnificently portrayed in this film. Along with the most beautiful backdrops of ancient monasteries and rolling fields, and mixed in with deep provoking thoughts on Christian teaching. Truly, the viewer feels like a student transported to that time, witnessing the lectures and the intellectual debates that abound in this film and would deeply benefit from the sagacity of the dialogue. But be forewarned.....the main aspect of this film lies in the teachings (dialogue), hence one must watch this film with rapt attention. Even missing one line would seem like losing a treasure trove. It is very profound, so there might be some who just might find this film dull.

The running time for this movie is 90 minutes in Italian with English
and Spanish subtitles. The only special feature is a trailer for the movie.

As with all movies from Ignatius press this DVD comes with a booklet, albeit a rather thin one of 8 pages but with great stills from the film. Its contents are as follows:

1) About the film.
2) Comments from the Director
3) The life and thoughts of Blessed Duns Scotus
4) Theology of Scotus
5) The Immaculate Conception
6) Praise of Scotus by Pope Benedict XVI
7) Scene Selections

A big part of this film was shot in a monastery so it seems a bit dark. However it creates the necessary ambiance to appreciate the times and the place.

It is noteworthy that this film won 2 awards at the Mirabile Dictu International Catholic Film Festival, for Best Film and Best Actor. (OK, OK....so its not the Oscars.....!)

This movie was also the official film for World Youth Day 2011, that was held in Madrid, Spain.

To conclude, if you are devoted to the Blessed Mother or if you are just a religious movie junkie like me,.....this movie is definitely worth a buy!