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## Our Lady's Freedom from Concupiscence

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## OUR LADY'S FREEDOM FROM CONCUISCENCE

In the beginning of an investigation into Our Lady's freedom from concupiscence one is struck first of all by the unanimity of theologians in attributing this privilege to her. Since the twelfth century there does not seem to have been one dissenting voice about the fact of Mary's immunity from all actual concupiscence. A deeper inquiry, however, reveals that theologians have been far from unanimous in explaining the meaning of this doctrine. Because, in the present order, concupiscence is the result of original sin, the history of the explanation of Our Lady's freedom from concupiscence has been connected with the defense of the Immaculate Conception. Yet, even today, more than a century after the definition of the Immaculate Conception, we find disagreement about the exact relationship between the two truths.

For this reason our first task will be to try to define the terms in which the doctrine is presented, and then to examine its connection with the Immaculate Conception. There will be no attempt to restate the demonstration of Our Lady's freedom from concupiscence from the positive sources; we presume that this has been well taken care of elsewhere.<sup>1</sup> We shall concentrate on an evaluation of the theological arguments and having done this we shall attempt to discover whether there is anything that may lead us to a more fruitful understanding of this great privilege of the Mother of God.

### *Definition of Terms*

To specify the nature of this privilege and the notions associated

<sup>1</sup> For example: T. M. Bartolomei, O.S.M., *La Vergine Immacolata essente dalla concupiscenza e impeccabile*, *EphM* 11 (1961) 437-470; J. A. de Aldama, S.J., *Sacrae Theologiae Summa* 3,2: *Mariologia* (Madrid, 1961), n. 49, 354; G. M. Roschini, O.S.M., *Mariologia* 2,2 (Rome, 1948) 96-105.

with it is the first task in its defense as well as its understanding. Latin manuals of theology usually present this doctrine as *Immunitas a concupiscentia*, or *Immunitas a fomite peccati*, or even as *Immunitas a fomite concupiscentiae*. A feeling of clumsiness in using the words *fuel* or *tinder* as translations of *fomes* prompts me to speak simply of "Immunity from concupiscence," and whenever it must be used, to leave the word *fomes* in the Latin.

Immunity from concupiscence must of course be defined in terms of concupiscence. There is a use of the word concupiscence which identifies it with the appetites in so far as they go out to their object without any reference to its moral quality, whether it be good or bad.<sup>2</sup> This has also been called concupiscence in the psychological sense.<sup>3</sup> We shall not be immediately concerned with this use of concupiscence but shall concentrate first on its dogmatic meaning. Concupiscence understood in the dogmatic sense is an appetite (primarily sensitive and actual, secondarily spiritual and habitual) whose movement anticipates and hinders the deliberation of the reason and continues against the command of the will. In general, the *fomes peccati* is the same as concupiscence in the dogmatic sense.<sup>4</sup>

Concupiscence *in actu primo* is the habitual disposition of the appetite ready for movements anticipating and impeding the deliberation of the reason. Concupiscence *in actu secundo* is the actual movement impeding the deliberation of the reason. Habitual concupiscence is said to be bound or chained (*ligatus*) if it exists but is prevented from becoming actual; it is understood to be extinct, or absolutely absent, if the appetite is free from every disposition toward the movements of concupiscence.

<sup>2</sup> J. De Castro Engler, C.M.F., *Explicação teológica do dom da imunidade da concupiscência na Imaculada*, in *EphM* 4 (1954) 334f.

<sup>3</sup> L. Lercher S.J., *Institutiones Theologiae Dogmaticae* 2 (3rd ed., Innsbruck-Leipzig, 1940) n. 608, 361.

<sup>4</sup> L. Lercher, S.J., *op. cit.* 3 (3rd ed., Innsbruck-Leipzig, 1942) n. 130, 100.

*The Fact of Immunity*

That Our Lady was free from every actual movement of concupiscence is beyond controversy. This doctrine has been universally held by theologians since the twelfth century. The explanations of the manner in which this immunity from concupiscence was effected, however, have differed notably. St. Thomas mentioned four opinions in existence in his time: (1) some held that in the Blessed Virgin concupiscence was taken away completely; (2) others thought that concupiscence remained as far as difficulty in doing good is concerned, but was removed as far as it involves proneness to evil; (3) still others said that the concupiscence which infects the person was taken away but not that which corrupts the nature; (4) the last opinion, that of St. Thomas himself, maintained that in the first sanctification of the Blessed Virgin in the womb of her mother, the concupiscence remained (*secundum essentiam*) but was bound; only in the conception of her Son was it totally removed.<sup>5</sup>

The Scholastics in general agreed with St. Thomas that in the first sanctification of Our Lady in the womb of her mother the roots of concupiscence, what we would call concupiscence *in actu primo*, remained but were bound so that they could never issue into act. The majority of Scholastics felt that exterior helps of Providence were also necessary to guarantee the sinlessness of Mary which held as a primary truth, a first principle. For them the immunity from concupiscence was partly intrinsic and partly extrinsic.<sup>6</sup> The greater Scholastics: Alexander of Hales, St. Albert the Great, St. Bonaventure, and St. Thomas, maintained that concupiscence which was bound in the first sanctification was entirely removed by the action of the Holy Spirit in the second sanctification which took place at the time of the Incarnation. Although the followers of Scotus taught the total absence of concupiscence from

<sup>5</sup> *Summa Theologica*, 3, q. 27, a. 3.

<sup>6</sup> See Bruno Korosak, O.F.M., *Mariologia S. Alberti eiusque coaequalium* (Rome, 1954) 384-395.

the first moment of conception, Scotus himself seems to have been so preoccupied with the main question that he did not go beyond the teaching that concupiscence was bound in the Immaculate Conception and rooted out completely in the Incarnation.<sup>7</sup>

### *Relation to Immaculate Conception*

From the beginning the theological doctrine on immunity from concupiscence was intimately associated with the controversy on the Immaculate Conception. The relationship between the two privileges of Our Lady is directly perceived in the explanation of the nature of her freedom from concupiscence rather than in the fact of this freedom, for even those who denied the Immaculate Conception held that she was free from any movements inclining her to sin. At present, since the definition of the Immaculate Conception, most theologians maintain that the distinction between the binding of concupiscence and its total extinction or removal must be abandoned.<sup>8</sup> Although concupiscence is not sin itself, in the words of the Council of Trent it is "from sin and leads to sin,"<sup>9</sup> and therefore it has no place in one who is immune from sin from the beginning.

The status of this doctrine at present is that the fact of Our Lady's immunity from actual concupiscence is most certain, while her total immunity from concupiscence *in actu primo* is most commonly held. The definition of the Immaculate Conception has been decisive in determining the direction theological thought has taken.

In the definition itself Pope Pius IX declared that "the most Blessed Virgin Mary . . . was preserved free from all stain of original sin." Some theologians have found the doctrine of im-

<sup>7</sup> Valentinus a Westende, O.F.M. Cap., *De relationibus inter Immaculatam Beatae Mariae Virginis Conceptionem et dona Iustitiae Originalis*, in *Vgl* 9 (Rome, 1957) 71-89.

<sup>8</sup> See G. M. Roschini, O.S.M., *Mariologia* 2, 2 (2nd ed., Rome, 1948) 103.

<sup>9</sup> *DB* 792.

munity from concupiscence at least implicitly contained in the term "all stain of original sin."<sup>10</sup> Their conclusion is not quite so compelling as it would seem at first glance. Up to two weeks before the actual definition, attempts were made to have immunity from the *fomes peccati* included in what was defined. In these circumstances the non-inclusion takes on added significance. Since this doctrine was explicitly considered but is not explicitly included, we must presume that the omission is deliberate. Thus its theological status remained the same.

Nevertheless, in examining the teaching of the Pope we cannot entirely separate the actual definition from the document in which it is contained. In the introduction Pius IX wrote:

Wherefore, far above all the angels and all the saints so wondrously did God endow her with the abundance of all heavenly gifts poured from the treasury of His divinity that this Mother, ever absolutely free from all stain of sin, all fair and perfect, would possess that fullness of holy innocence and sanctity than which, under God, one cannot even imagine anything greater, and which, outside of God, no mind can succeed in comprehending fully. And indeed it was wholly fitting that so wonderful a mother should be ever resplendent with the glory of most sublime holiness and so completely free from all taint of original sin that she would triumph utterly over the ancient serpent.<sup>11</sup>

In another place, treating of the teaching of the Fathers, the Pope said:

This sublime and singular privilege of the Blessed Virgin, together with her most excellent innocence, purity, holiness, and freedom from every stain of sin, as well as the unspeakable abundance and greatness of all heavenly graces, virtues and privileges—these the

<sup>10</sup> The theologian whom the others seem to follow in this is L. Janssens, O.S.B., *Summa Theologica* 5, *De Deo-Homine*, pars 2 (Freiburg im Breisgau, 1902) 40-42.

<sup>11</sup> Pius IX, *Ineffabilis Deus*, in ADSC 6, 536. We quote the English text from *Papal Teachings: Our Lady*, tr. by the Daughters of St. Paul (Boston, 1961) n. 31f, 61f.

Fathers beheld in the ark of Noe, which was built by divine command and escaped entirely safe and sound from the common shipwreck of the whole world; in the ladder which Jacob saw reaching from earth to heaven, by whose rungs the angels of God ascended and descended, and on whose top the Lord Himself leaned; in that bush which Moses saw in the holy place burning on all sides, which was not consumed or injured in any way but grew green and blossomed beautifully; in that impregnable tower before the enemy, from which hung a thousand bucklers and all the armor of the strong; in that garden enclosed on all sides, which cannot be violated or corrupted by any deceitful plots; as in that resplendent city of God, which has its foundations on the holy mountains; in that most august temple of God, which, radiant with divine splendors, is full of the glory of God; and in very many other biblical types of this kind. In such allusions the Fathers taught had been prophesied in a wonderful manner the exalted dignity of the Mother of God, her spotless innocence and her sanctity unstained by any fault.<sup>12</sup>

The thoughts contained in these passages are a part of the theme of *Ineffabilis Deus*, they are not isolated. A theologian may be excused for finding Our Lady's immunity from concupiscence in them. As a matter of fact, most theologians do find this doctrine there. There is a connection between the Immaculate Conception and immunity from concupiscence. According to Janssens,<sup>13</sup> Roschini,<sup>14</sup> and others, arguing from the Council of Trent, concupiscence in the present order is a consequence of original sin; and therefore immunity from concupiscence is implicitly contained in the definition of the Immaculate Conception. Theologians like Van Hove do not find this reasoning so compelling, for they insist that concupiscence (understood in what we have described as the psychological sense) is a part of human nature. Freedom from concupiscence was granted to Adam as an added gift not due to human nature. In the words of Van Hove:

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, n. 47, 72f.

<sup>13</sup> Janssens, *loc. cit.*

<sup>14</sup> Roschini, *op. cit.*, 100-102.

Since, moreover, the Blessed Virgin truly had a human nature, she ought at the same time to have its defects unless there are present reasons why God would have made her immune from these defects. The reason is present, in relation to concupiscence, in the complete sanctity which fits the Mother of God . . . The argument then is to be taken from the sanctity but not from the Immaculate Conception by itself.<sup>15</sup>

The Immaculate Conception in isolation, then, is not admitted by all as the definitive reason for immunity from concupiscence. This is not to suggest that concupiscence could have been in the Immaculate Virgin as a penalty or punishment for sin, but only as a consequence of human nature. It is rather to see the eminent sanctity of the Blessed Virgin as the common reason for the Immaculate Conception *and* immunity from concupiscence. Nevertheless, the definition of the great privilege of total preservation from original sin would seem to demand as a consequence Our Lady's immunity from concupiscence. God gave Mary the Immaculate Conception to preserve her from every taint of sin; immunity from concupiscence would be necessary to carry out the same purpose.

Saint Paul considered the salvation of man through Jesus Christ not only as a victory over sin through justification but also as a victory over the law of concupiscence and over the empire of death by the glorification of the body in the Resurrection: it is thus that every man is saved in participating in the saving event of the Death and Resurrection of Christ which represents the victory of Our Lord over sin and death.

Mary participated in the victory of Christ in a manner unique and supreme. She is par excellence the beneficiary of the Redemption, preserved from original sin, removed from personal sin and from that law of sin that is called concupiscence, glorified bodily in the Assumption. These are exclusive privileges of Mary and constitute her singular and perfect redemption, that is, her complete participa-

<sup>15</sup> A. Van Hove, *De immunitate Beatae Mariae Virginis a concupiscentia*, in *CM* 29, n.s. 14 (January, 1940) 41.



tion in the victory of Christ over sin and its allies, concupiscence and death. Mary was saved in a unique and privileged manner.<sup>16</sup>

The doctrine and definition of the Immaculate Conception must be said to be at least a manifestation of Our Lady's perfect participation in the victory of Christ over sin and this would exclude from her that which comes from sin and leads to sin, namely concupiscence.

### *Mary's Perfect Sanctity*

In considering the possible implications of the definition of the Immaculate Conception, we find that we are continually being directed to her perfect sanctity and freedom from all actual, personal sin. These perfections in turn are referred to the Divine Motherhood. From all eternity she is in God's plan as the Mother of His Son. She is the worthy Mother of Jesus Christ and His associate in the work of the Redemption.

We recall the words of Pope Pius IX:

Wherefore far above all the angels and all the saints so wondrously did God endow her with the abundance of all heavenly gifts poured from the treasury of His divinity that this Mother ever absolutely free of all stain of sin, all fair and perfect, would possess that fullness of holy innocence and sanctity than which, under God, one cannot even imagine anything greater, and which outside of God, no mind can succeed in comprehending fully.<sup>17</sup>

No Catholic disagrees with these words and their import. The superlative degree of Mary's sanctity must include immunity from concupiscence. Moreover, Adam and Eve in Paradise had this gift of integrity; if Our Blessed Lady did not have it, there would in this instance be something greater which God had not given her.

<sup>16</sup> J. Alfaro, S.J., *Marie sauvée par le Christ*, in *Maria. Etudes sur la Sainte Vierge*, 6 (ed. H. du Manoir; Paris, 1961) 456f. The same thought is found in Pius XII, *Munificentissimus Deus*, in *AAS* 42 (1950) 768.

<sup>17</sup> *Ineffabilis Deus*, *Our Lady*, n. 31, 61.

*Her Sinlessness*

The Church also teaches that Mary is wholly without actual sin, even the slightest. This is clear from the passage just quoted. According to some, it was defined at Trent:

If anyone says that a man once justified cannot sin again, and cannot lose grace, and that therefore the man who falls and sins was never justified, or, conversely, says that a man once justified can avoid all sins, even venial sins, throughout his entire life without a special privilege of God, as the Church holds in regard to the Blessed Virgin: let him be anathema.<sup>18</sup>

Although theologians are not of one mind in determining the theological note for the doctrine of Our Lady's freedom from all actual sin, it would seem to be at least *doctrina catholica*.<sup>19</sup> Absolute sinlessness requires immunity from concupiscence as a *sine qua non*. Concupiscence in itself is not a sin, but will necessarily betray a person into venial faults at least occasionally. If the Virgin Mary was immune from all stain of sin, she had to be immune from concupiscence which incites to sin.

*The Associate Of The Redeemer*

Furthermore, Mary was chosen by God from all eternity to be the associate of Christ in the work of Redemption. With Him and in subordination to Him, she was to be the Co-redemptrix. There is an absolute opposition between Mary and sin. In this opposition the necessity of the Immaculate Conception was indicated from the beginning. However, this opposition was so complete that it must also exclude the "law of sin" which is concupiscence. As Pius IX wrote:

Hence, just as Christ, the Mediator between God and man, assumed human nature, blotted the handwriting of the decree that stood

<sup>18</sup> DB 833. See also Pius XII in *Mystici Corporis*, in *AAS* 35 (1943) 247.

<sup>19</sup> Roschini, *op. cit.*, 110.

against us, and fastened it triumphantly to the cross, so the most holy Virgin, united with Him by a most intimate and indissoluble bond, was, with Him and through Him, eternally at enmity with the evil serpent, and most completely triumphed over him, and thus crushed his head with her immaculate foot.<sup>20</sup>

It was the lot of Mary to be "so completely free from all taint of original sin that she would triumph utterly over the ancient serpent."<sup>21</sup>

The reasons given for Our Lady's immunity from concupiscence are inferred from her position as the worthy Mother of God and His associate in the work of the Redemption. The fact of her holiness is not a matter of inference but is the clear faith of the Church. For the honor of her Son, by reason of her intimate connection with Him in His birth and life and death, sin and all that pertains to sin must be excluded from her person and from her life.

### *Binding or Extinction*

The Catholic consciousness of Mary's dignity has, since the twelfth century, explicitly excluded actual concupiscence from her. Since the definition of the Immaculate Conception there is no reason to continue to speak of the binding of concupiscence in her first sanctification and its extinction in the conception of Christ. What is enshrined in the definition is a much more profound penetration of the nature of the dignity and sanctity of the Mother of God than existed when the distinction between the *ligatio* and *extinctio* of concupiscence was first proposed.

St. Thomas, after explaining how the Blessed Virgin could have been totally free from concupiscence, because of the abundance of grace which would have the force of original justice, then went on to deny that she was free. This freedom would seem to pertain to the dignity of the Blessed Virgin, but it would derogate from

<sup>20</sup> *Ineffabilis Deus, Our Lady*, n. 46, 72.

<sup>21</sup> *Loc. cit.*

the dignity of Christ. The thought of St. Thomas seems to have been that, although some were freed from damnation according to the spirit, no one should have been freed according to the flesh until the Incarnation, in which the immunity from damnation first appeared. It was unfitting that the flesh of anyone, including the Blessed Virgin, be freed from concupiscence before the flesh of Christ.<sup>22</sup> To this we can only answer that there does not seem to be any reason why immunity from concupiscence in His Mother would not redound to the glory of Christ just as much as immunity from original sin, since He was the meritorious cause of both.

All the reasons which have been alleged to demonstrate Mary's immunity from actual concupiscence can be cited with equal force to show that this immunity extended to the existence of habitual concupiscence (or concupiscence *in actu primo*) from the moment of her Immaculate Conception. This will be elucidated further. Pre-eminent sanctity belonged to her from the beginning. Moreover, she was always the enemy of Satan, the associate of her Son, and conformed to His holiness. That which called for the Immaculate Conception, her dignity and her office, also demanded the complete removal of anything that in any way pertains to sin.<sup>23</sup>

### *Some Modern Theories*

According to Prada,<sup>24</sup> the Divine Maternity and the transcendent virginity of Mary are the real foundation for immunity from concupiscence. The Divine Maternity is the foundation of this privilege not only morally, that is, by reason of an exigency of its eminent and unique dignity, but also physically. This hypothesis that began with Saavedra was discussed by Fr. Gerald Van Ack-

<sup>22</sup> *Summa Theologica*, 3, q. 27, a. 3.

<sup>23</sup> The weight of this doctrine was stressed by Pius XII in *Fulgens Corona*, in *AAS* 45 (1953) 580f.

<sup>24</sup> B. Prada, C.M.F., § *La inmunidad de la concupiscencia en la Virgen es una consecuencia del Dogma de la Inmaculada Concepción?*, in *IdC* 47 (1954) 497f.

eren at the 1955 meeting under the title: "Does the Divine Maternity Formally Sanctify Mary's Soul?"<sup>28</sup> Although in favor of the theory, Father Van Ackeren brought out the difficulties of this view; yet those who hold it find the Divine Maternity a special grace which is the basis of all Mary's privileges. The "grace of Divine Maternity" is both spiritual and corporeal, and by it the maternal fecundity or natural generative potency of the Blessed Virgin was supernaturalized and made capable of terminating in the generation of the God-man. This grace as a corporeal grace, that is, in so far as it implies a supernaturalization of a physiological faculty, the maternal fecundity of Mary, involves a physical immunity from concupiscence. The Divine Maternity constitutes a sanctifying grace formally sanctifying the body of the Blessed Virgin. This corporeal grace excludes all concupiscence.

Another reason advanced by Prada as a foundation for the immunity from concupiscence is the transcendent virginity of Mary. This theory, borrowed from Bover, identifies transcendent virginity with the grace of Divine Motherhood and immunity from concupiscence. It finds in the Fathers the teaching that the virginity of Mary is a supreme purity of body and soul which implies two essential elements: namely, a grace of the spiritual order, and a gift of an organic nature which is absolute immunity from concupiscence. The virginity of Mary is a transcendent grace which embraces the threefold virginity of the mind, of the senses, and of the flesh. It is an entitatively supernatural grace which carries with it the preternatural grace of the most perfect integrity which, received in the sensitive part, directly affects the generative potency. The gift of integrity which is attached to the grace of transcendent virginity involves the total extinction of all concupiscence, because the maternal fecundity, in virtue of supernatural grace and of the preternatural gift of transcendent virginity, remains totally virgin-

<sup>28</sup> Gerald Van Ackeren, S.J., *Does the Divine Maternity Formally Sanctify Mary's Soul?* in *MS 6* (1955) 63-101.

ized and orientated only and exclusively to the generation of the God-man.<sup>26</sup>

### *The Problem Of Immunity*

This latter-day attempt to present what are called the authentic foundations of the immunity from concupiscence remains somewhat less convincing. It is attended by the same difficulties which plague all efforts to find the basis for any kind of sanctity in some unclassified type of grace. Although theologians may doubt about the value of these and other arguments to prove Mary's immunity from concupiscence, they do not doubt that she possessed this gift. The fact of Our Lady's immunity from concupiscence is too well established to leave any doubts about its existence. A conceptual grasp of the nature of this immunity is not so easily come by. Experiential knowledge of human nature as we possess it does not help in the process. Moreover, a theological investigation is complicated by a lack of agreement on the nature of the state of original justice and original sin. In these matters, too, the facts are accepted without full agreement about their ultimate explanation. Anyone who has tried to present the doctrine on Our Lady's immunity from concupiscence in class becomes acutely aware of the difficulties of any theological exposition.

The major dilemma is to be found in the truth that Mary had a human nature which was like ours. Theologians take pains to point out that she was capable of suffering, and that her appetites could go out to what was good. At the same time her appetites never went out to what was evil. The absence of movements towards evil is not to be explained by insensitivity or weakness, because the activity of the appetites is even more intense where there is freedom from concupiscence.<sup>27</sup>

We have already seen that there are various uses of the word *concupiscence*. A distinction is made between concupiscence in the

<sup>26</sup> Prada, *loc. cit.*

<sup>27</sup> Saint Thomas, *Summa Theologica* 1, q. 98, a. 2, *ad* 3.

psychological sense and concupiscence in the dogmatic sense. The former designates the indeliberate apprehension of an object by the whole cognitional apparatus and the resulting movement of the appetites. There is no reference in this process to the goodness or badness of the object; rather the appetite spontaneously goes out to the good which is presented to it as pleasing. As St. Thomas says: "The flesh naturally desires [*concupiscit*] that which is pleasing to it by a desire [*concupiscentia*] of the sensitive appetite, but the flesh of man who is a rational animal desires this according to the manner and order of reason."<sup>28</sup> In this passage St. Thomas is speaking about Christ, and although he acknowledges the response of the appetites to their goods and the intrinsic composition of human nature as being spirit-matter in a substantial union, he will not admit that "it follows from this that in Christ there was the *fomes peccati* which implies a desire for the pleasing outside the order of reason."<sup>29</sup>

This re-introduces us to our original dilemma. The gift of integrity in our first parents, or in Our Lord, or in Our Lady, is not an immunity from the natural potency of seeking sensible goods, nor from its acts, but simply from the rebellion of the appetites. When we transfer our inquiry to concupiscence in the dogmatic sense which consists in this rebellion of the appetites, their characteristic spontaneity is brought into sharper focus. According to scholastic psychology there is nothing in the intellect which is not first in the senses; so sensible cognition precedes intellectual cognition. Further, nothing is willed that is not known; so cognition precedes volition. It would seem to follow that the movement of the sensible appetite necessarily anticipates and impedes the deliberation of the intellect and the free acts of the will. It would seem also that intellectual cognition precedes the indeliberate acts of the will, which in turn precede the deliberate and free acts of the will. Therefore, we can conceive of acts of the

<sup>28</sup> *Summa Theologica* 3, 15, a. 2, ad 2.

<sup>29</sup> *Loc. cit.*

spiritual appetites interfering with these same acts of the will.

It is the spontaneity which poses the problem. The appetite moves towards its object with a sort of natural dynamism prior to any advertence to its moral quality. This movement is seen to involve the whole personality in so far as the whole cognitional apparatus is drawn into the act of desire. It also appears closer to the center of the personality when there is an act of what is called spiritual concupiscence. This kind of concupiscence has for its object the sort of temporal good which attracts man as an intellectual being. Honors, fame, status in this case are what blind the mind and impede the will.<sup>30</sup>

It can be argued whether the attraction of these non-material goods is entirely on the spiritual level. Given the composition of man, this is hardly possible. What is more, the senses are the root of all concupiscence. The will is not affected by spiritual goods unless these are first represented by the internal senses and presented to it by the mind. The *conversio ad phantasma* involves both the spiritual and the sensitive faculties, and it may be said to be present in every act of concupiscence. Every act of concupiscence may, then, be considered spiritual-sensitive and only seems to be one or the other by reason of the object.<sup>31</sup>

### *Karl Rahner on Concupiscence*

This mutual action and reaction of the sensitive on the spiritual and the spiritual on the sensitive is what exercises Karl Rahner in his examination of the concept of concupiscence.<sup>32</sup> He further objects to the idea that a person in possession of the gift of integrity, which is immunity from concupiscence in the dogmatic sense, experiences acts of the sensitive appetite only when he ex-

<sup>30</sup> Lercher, *op. cit.*, 2, n. 608, 361f.

<sup>31</sup> J. F. Sagüés, S.J., *Sacrae Theologia Summa*, 2,2: *De Deo Creante et Elevante* (3rd ed., Madrid, 1958) n. 728, 775.

<sup>32</sup> K. Rahner, S.J., *The Theological Concept of Concupiscence, Theological Investigation 1*, A Translation of *Schriften zur Theologie 1* by Cornelius Ernst, O.P. (London-Baltimore, 1961) 347-382.



pressly commands them by a resolution of his spiritual will. Since this is the usual explanation of freedom from concupiscence in Our Lady, he has highlighted our problem.

Whether Rahner also supplies the key to the understanding of the problem might be debated. At his clearest he is difficult to understand and must always be judged against the background of his phenomenological and existential approach to reality. A few tentative efforts will be made to discover what he may be able to contribute to a better grasp of the question, but these efforts will always be subject to correction by those who have penetrated his thought more completely.

As already implied, a cardinal point for him is that concupiscence in the theological sense must mean the character of spontaneity proper to the appetite, so that freedom from concupiscence must be conceived of as total dominion over the appetite with respect to its character of spontaneity.<sup>33</sup> How this freedom is realized is a different question, but in any case it cannot be a freedom from every spontaneous act of the appetite prior to the free decision. The explanation of concupiscence in the theological sense and freedom from it must proceed from the idea that "concupiscence is man's spontaneous desire, in so far as it precedes his free decision *and resists it*."<sup>34</sup>

Another point essential to his study of concupiscence is Rahner's insistence that it must not be confined to the lower (sensitive) appetites as opposed to the higher (spiritual) appetites. There are involuntary spiritual conative acts prior to man's free decision. I think that all of us would agree with him that it is contrary to scholastic metaphysical psychology to restrict the resistance to good which we find in ourselves to the material and sensible in our composition. There is no reason why man's inner division against himself should coincide with the metaphysical line which separates the ontologically lower from the higher.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.* 351.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.* 360.

What is involved is the resistance of the whole finite nature to the free decision of the person. The freely operative stands, as it were, before God. His free decision is made not so much in regard to the object but in relation to God. Every decision proceeds from the inmost core of his being and tends to dispose him before God. Because of the resistance of his nature, the human person never succeeds completely in thus disposing the whole extent of his being.

While insisting that this resistance comes from the higher as well as the lower appetites in man, Rahner recognizes that its sharpest expression is in the resistance of the sensitive to the spiritual part of man. This includes also the external influences which activate the appetites. The activation of the appetites, however, is not to be considered independently of the subject, for its effect will be just as much an expression of the self-determination of the subject as the impression from without.

Here we have a key solution proposed by Rahner, and if he is to be of any help in our problem it is in this that he will provide it. In his view, the spontaneous acts of the appetite are shaped by the subject, and for one who has habitual dominion over his nature they are not concupiscence. Immunity from concupiscence which may be expressed negatively is conceived positively: "It is not so much a freedom from something as a freedom for something."<sup>85</sup> One with this gift of immunity from concupiscence, or integrity, has nothing within him to resist his determination of himself. His possession of himself is such that he is capable of an exhaustive engagement of his being in a personal decision for God. The activation of his appetite is, then, an intrinsic factor in the decision.

If anyone at this time should confess a certain lack of comprehension, I would be forced to acknowledge that he is not alone. Just how this sovereign self-mastery can so take hold of spontaneous desires that they cannot resist it but are rather the material of its realization, is somewhat obscure. Added to this

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.* 372.

is the difficulty that arises from the whole context of Rahner's analysis of concupiscence. He places concupiscence in the theological sense in the resistance of the whole nature to the self-realization of the person. All the conative acts prior to the free decision are involved. While recognizing that the sharpest expression of the conflict within man is found in the resistance of the sensitive to the spiritual part of man, he seems to emphasize the function of the spiritual appetites in the total picture.

Possibly subjective impressions are playing too large a part in this reaction to Rahner's teaching. Nevertheless, it is clear that the place of the spiritual appetites is given an importance that is far greater than that given in any other similar study. There are, moreover, qualifications which make it clear that the sensitive and spiritual appetites never operate independently of one another. Admitting that the spiritual appetites exist, and admitting that the sensitive appetites are so united to the higher faculties that they form one functional whole, may we not still ask whether concupiscence cannot be limited to the lower, sensitive appetites? In this case we should see the activation of the higher appetites prior to the free decision as concupiscence only in an analogical sense. Then we should be concerned with the fundamental egoism of finite, spiritual beings, a far deeper problem than that of concupiscence in the sensitive appetites.

These incompletely formed reservations are placed to show the difficulty of arriving at a completely satisfactory solution, not to deny that Rahner's insights may be of some help in explaining Our Lady's complete immunity from concupiscence. If we can understand her integrity as complete self-possession and self-determination by which she was absolute master of her nature, we are freed from the dilemma of how she was able to suffer and enjoy morally good things on the one hand, and still not experience an attraction for the morally bad on the other. And this partial penetration of the doctrine will remain valid even though we cannot grasp all of its ramifications.

### Grace As An Explanation

In turning from Rahner to the more traditional theologians, we discover a strong current of opinion which can be fitted without violence into his hypothesis. Within this theological current the explanation of Mary's freedom from concupiscence is found in grace, or in grace and the virtues. Thus, in commenting on St. Thomas' doctrine concerning grace and original justice, Fr. William Van Roo writes:

In his discussion of the defects of soul which Christ assumed in human nature St. Thomas replies as follows to the question whether Christ had the *fomes peccati*:

"As has been said above, Christ had grace and all the virtues most perfectly. Now a moral virtue which is in the irrational part of the soul makes it subject to reason, and so much the more as the virtue is more perfect: as temperance [subjects] the concupiscible, and fortitude and meekness the irascible, as has been said in the Second Part. But reason is of the essence of the tinder. Thus it is evident that the more perfect one's virtue is, the more the power of the tinder is weakened in him. Since, then, in Christ there was virtue in the most perfect degree, it follows that in Him there was no tinder of sin: since that defect too is not capable of being directed to satisfaction, but rather inclines to the opposite of satisfaction."<sup>86</sup>

Obviously, there is question of the same phenomenon which is to be explained in original justice. The complete freedom from the *fomes peccati*, the perfect subjection of the lower powers to reason, is caused by the perfect grace and virtues in the soul of Christ.

In the Blessed Virgin the ligation of the *fomes* was the effect of the grace of sanctification which she received. The matter is obscured by St. Thomas' difficulty concerning the Immaculate Conception. Of the two explanations from which he finally makes his choice, one held that the *fomes* was completely removed by the first grace of sanctification, so that in this respect it had the power of original justice. St. Thomas rejects this as detracting somewhat from the

<sup>86</sup> *Summa Theologica*, 3, q. 15, a. 2.

dignity of Christ: it was not fitting that anyone should have this privilege before Christ Himself had it. Consequently, he explains that before the Incarnation Mary had the *fomes*, but it was bound by the abundant grace of sanctification and especially through Divine Providence. Later, in the very conception of Christ, she shared in His complete freedom from the tinder of sin. Despite the difficulties of the text, it is clear that the intrinsic principle of Mary's freedom from concupiscence was the abundant grace conferred on her.<sup>37</sup>

As Van Roo says in another place,<sup>38</sup> grace is given concretely and historically according to different modes to realize different effects. Thus, grace was given to the Blessed Virgin to exclude all inordinate movements. The doctrine of St. Bonaventure and Duns Scotus on the cause of Mary's immunity from concupiscence is practically the same as that of St. Thomas, even though they did not agree with him in their explanation of original justice. Because of the connection between the senses and the higher faculties, the superabundance of grace in the mind and will redounded to the senses and suppressed concupiscence. Such was the abundance of grace in the Blessed Virgin that her will found much more delight in God and everything pertaining to God than in any created good opposed to God.<sup>39</sup>

A similar explanation of the proximate cause of the gift of integrity can be found in other modern theologians besides Van Roo. Boyer, for example, writes:

It seems that we must insist that [immunity from concupiscence] is in the office of sanctifying grace which must be considered as the proximate cause of the gift of integrity. Everybody knows that the most connatural way of controlling the sensible appetite is that the will in a certain way diffuse itself and impress itself on the lower appetite. "For in powers that are ordered to one another and are

<sup>37</sup> W. A. Van Roo, S.J., *Grace and Original Justice according to St. Thomas*, in AG 75 (Rome, 1955) 137-40.

<sup>38</sup> *De Sacramentis in Genere* (Rome, 1957) 211.

<sup>39</sup> Valentinus a Westende, O.F.M. Cap., *art. cit.*, 82f.

connected, it happens that an intense movement in one, particularly in the higher, overflows into the other. So when the motion of the will directs itself to something by choice, the irascible and concupiscible appetite follows the motion of the will: whence we read in the Third Book of *De Anima* that appetite moves appetite, that is, the higher moves the lower, just as among heavenly bodies a sphere moves a sphere."<sup>40</sup> Further, the will of Adam was perfectly subjected to God by sanctifying grace, not only by habitual charity but also by actual charity, and in turn charity was fostered by this subjection. Moreover, if it is supposed that the charity of Adam was as perfect and as actual as it is in the higher degrees of mystical contemplation, and perhaps even greater, then we can understand that from the overflow of this tendency toward God the very sensitive appetite does not find any object pleasing to it except in those sensible objects which are imbued with moral goodness and order.<sup>41</sup>

### *Castro Engler's Synthesis*

In an article devoted to the theological explanation of the immunity from concupiscence in Mary, J. Castro Engler develops in detail the argument put so briefly by Boyer.<sup>42</sup> Castro Engler proceeds by first explaining the words and ideas connected with concupiscence and then giving the teaching of theologians on Our Lady's immunity from concupiscence. Basing his teaching on the doctrine of St. Thomas, he goes on to examine and reject the opinions of Cajetan and Suárez. After that, he develops his own hypothesis that the cause of the perfect immunity from the *fomes peccati* in Mary is to be found in her most perfect sanctity: namely, habitual grace, the virtues, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The argument is developed at length from the principles of St. Thomas as well as from the teaching and experiences of the mystics.

Castro Engler's demonstration of how immunity from concupiscence can be explained by a study of the higher degrees of

<sup>40</sup> St. Thomas, *De Veritate*, q. 25, a. 4.

<sup>41</sup> C. Boyer, S.J., *De Deo Creante et Elevante* (Rome, 1957) 280f. Lercher agrees with Boyer, *op. cit.* 2, n. 625, 378

<sup>42</sup> J. de Castro Engler, *art. cit.*

mystical experience is particularly telling. The transforming union with God known by the mystics reveals how grace can effect a freedom from everything that is not in accord with this union. If this is true in the saints, how much more is it true of the Mother of God, whose grace surpasses that of all the saints together?

In this, I think, we have the best explanation of the immunity of concupiscence in Our Lady. As was shown, the fact of this immunity is a part of Catholic teaching. Since the twelfth century no theologian has seriously called into doubt Mary's actual immunity from the *fomes peccati*. Accepting the fact as beyond question, theologians are still concerned with its explanation. Certainly no explanation has been found which satisfies everyone. The most satisfying, in my opinion, is that which sees in the superabundant grace poured into her soul from the very beginning a transforming power which made it forever impossible for the Mother of God to be attracted, even in the slightest manner, away from God.

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