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Epistemological bases of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception of Mary

The dogma of the Immaculate Conception of Virgin Mary refers to the ontological condition of God's Son's Mother Who was preserved from the effects of the original sin. The direct action of God incarnated into a human is not limited of the categories of the natural order and it does not exclude the possibility of the rational cognition and conceptualisation of them. The article directs into the epistemological bases of the defined truth of faith which regards Virgin Mary as to the true information which matches the criteria of the assured faith.

Key words: faith, reason, cognition, epistemology, Immaculate Conception.

Introduction

Epistemology (from Greek *episteme* – knowledge, skill, understanding) presumes getting to know the reality which is prior to cognition, but about which can be known only to the extent which is available on the way of cognition¹. Kant indicated that any philosophy which does not begin its reflection with the consideration on cognition and on the exploring subject, but which straightforwardly reveals the explored reality, is dogmatic². And although the lecture concerns the reality which is independent from the exploring subject, and which therefore is dogmatic – according to Kant, at the very beginning I want to ask about the value of cognition.

¹ J. Galarowicz, *Na ścieżkach prawdy. Wprowadzenie do filozofii* (Kraków: 1992), 151.

² I. Kant, *Krytyka czystego rozumu*, vol. I, (Warszawa: 1986), 11.

What makes people seek the truth? What is the role of faith and of knowledge in the cognition? Which method in recognising and defining the truth is more effective: *credo ut intelligam* or *intelligo ut credam*³? Is personal experience, empiria of faith in life, the best way to recognize the truth? And what is the role of knowledge in justifying the empiria of faith?

The answers to these questions will constitute the contents of the discussed topic: epistemological bases of the dogma **of the** Immaculate Conception of Mary, and according to the Lexicon of analytical philosophy concepts, it will be an attempt to justify the foundation based on three conditions. Firstly, it is a statement formulated as the true knowledge. Secondly, the edited truth convinces a person to accept it on the basis of the defined arguments. Thirdly, the basis for convincing does not result from the ability of speculative reflection of the cognitive subject but it is constituted in the cognitive object due to the epistemic modalities of the truth contained in it⁴.

All sciences tend to discover the truth. They do it fragmentarily, according to the assumptions of methodology, to the given object and to the research methods. The scientist's authority is an important reference point in acknowledging the defined information which appears as a partial truth about reality. Like in any other field of science, also in theology, seeking of the truth and the ability to provide rational arguments are helpful in the acceptance of it. In case of theology we reach for God's authority as He reveals this particle to the man. The man's task is to properly define it.

Mariology constitutes a part of the variety of theological enquiries. Which possibilities of argumentative justification of the truth about the Immaculate Conception of Mary can Mariology use? Saint Thomas Aquinas (+ 1274) did not manage to prove the Immaculate Conception of Mary. Today this truth has a particular place in the life of the Church. Does that mean that Saint Thomas Aquinas in his way of thinking was not orthodox? Not really, he simply lived in the times when the lively discussion on the subject did not cope with the evidence at that stage. XIII century recognised as the golden age of scholasticism, on the one hand, turned out to be the period of debates which led to negation of

³ The philosophical statement, the motto of Saint Anselm of Canterbury, formulated by Saint Augustine from of Hippo, I believe in order to understand. It expresses the primacy of faith over reason and it means that the doctrine of catholic faith can be understood only after granting the act of faith. The second question can be explained – I understand therefore I can believe.

⁴ P. Prechtl, *Epistemologia*, in: P. Prechtl, *Leksykon pojęć filozofii analitycznej* (Kraków: 2009), 86.

the privilege of the Immaculate Conception of Mary, but, on the other hand, according to Królikowski, “without any exaggeration 12th and 13th centuries can be called the centuries of Virgin Mary⁵.

Throughout many centuries the Church debated on the Immaculate Conception which did not result in turning it into a dogma. Only in the half of XIX century the situation was ready to be solved and the concept on the Immaculate Conception of Mary in the dogmatic formula was finally defined. Pope Pius IX with his bull *Ineffabilis Deus* from December 8th 1854 announced the dogma:

We declare, pronounce, and define that the doctrine which holds that the most Blessed Virgin Mary, in the first instance of her conception, by a singular grace and privilege granted by Almighty God, in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the human race, was preserved free from all stain of original sin, is a doctrine revealed by God and therefore to be believed firmly and constantly by all the faithful⁶.

The three lexical conditions of the epistemological structure of knowledge and convictions contributed to composing the three points for presentation

Guiding intuition: faith and knowledge expressed in the dogma

From the beginning the dogma provoked various associations. In some people's awareness there still exists the abstract expression which departs from the existential language. It evokes reminiscences of the inquisition and the persecution as the consequence of not adjusting to respect and realize the dogmatic truth. It evokes associations about the Church which doctrinally guards the revealed truth, which is expressed in the dogma as a calcified and conservative institution, strict and far away from today's progressive life conditions.

Perceiving reality which the faith tries to conduct and theology tries to put under discussion from the epistemological point of view, requires argumentative and discursive certainty: whether religious truths interpreted by the man from God's Revelation are convincingly defined? What is the role of expressing them at the stage of dogmatic definitions?

The history of the Church's announcement of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception of Mary poses questions and doubts: how should

⁵ J. Królikowski, *Maryja w pamięci Kościoła* (Tarnów: 1999), 42.

⁶ Pius IX, *Bulla “Ineffabilis Deus”*, *Dogmat o Niepokalanym Poczęciu NMP*, sanctus.pl (access from December 2nd 2020).

we understand that only in 19th century of the Church's existence a proper conviction was assumed on the basis of the arguments of faith and reason that the reality of Mary's grace revealed by God is the truth which is supposed to be dogmatized? Has the Church manipulated the truth in Her own interest? Pius IX *ex cathedra*, formally announced this dogma as one of the truths of faith⁷. The knowledge of faith is the knowledge discursively verified and it is not identical with empirical knowledge⁸. Therefore, it required time to justify it properly and to announce it to the public in proper time. How was the epistemological attitude towards dogma developed?

According to the Catholic Encyclopaedia, the word *dogma* comes from Greek and it means opinion, teaching, judgement⁹. Dogma as a concept is prior to Christianity and the Church. It means an established and specified doctrinal opinion which specifically enforces its observance. It was used in statutes and decrees of the state authorities. In the dictionary of the basic theological concepts abp Edward Ozorowski adds: dogma means what happened to be true¹⁰. In the Bible the most common means to determine something are a decree and an edict. In the New Testament Saint Luke in the Gospel calls the emperor's edict a dogma (Lk 2, 1; Acts 17, 7), the decision of the ecclesial authority (Acts 16, 4); Saint Paul: God's Word and the commandments addressed at people (Eph 2, 15; Col 2, 14). With the development of the Church, the concept is used in the preaching of Apostolic Fathers (*Didache*, Saint Ignatius Antioch). In the ancient Christianity the interpretation of the truths of faith was acknowledged as the highest degree of knowledge. Therefore, the apologists of the first centuries such as Tatian the Syrian (born in 120) or Tertullian (155-230) had a negative attitude towards the pagan philosophical thought, and rejected the possibility of rational argumentation of faith. Pope Gregory IX, in his official letter to the theologians from the University of Paris on July 7th 1228, forbade to use philosophical systems in interpreting the Holy Scripture and the truths of faith. However, he emphasised the value of all sciences but only if they were of use for theology¹¹. Then the concept for these sciences in relation to theology as *ancillae theologiae* (the handmaiden of theology) was born. This definition was

⁷ Niepokalanie Poczęta, pch24.pl, (access from December 2nd 2020).

⁸ J. Werbick, *Wprowadzenie do epistemologii teologicznej* (Kraków: 2014), 72.

⁹ B. Pylak, *Dogmat*, in: *Encyklopedia Katolicka*, vol. IV, (Lublin: 1983), 6.

¹⁰ E. Ozorowski, *Słownik podstawowych pojęć teologicznych*, (Warszawa: 2007), 62.

¹¹ See E. Gilson, *Etudes de Philosophie medievale*, (Strasbourg: 1921), 44-46.

particularly assigned to philosophy which should have been subjected to theology. The meaning of this relation with regard to the Middle Ages is a perfunctory way of dealing with the problem because we must remember that the history of the relation of philosophy as *ancilla theologiae* is older than the Middle Ages. It reminds the time of the flourishing of the spiritual culture of Europe when theology was considered the highest science. The times of Charles the Great from VIII/IX centuries connected with foundation of schools and introducing the two-stage teaching, confirm that. The lower stage was the so called liberal arts (*artes liberales-trivium*) that is: grammar, rhetoric and dialectic as well as quadrivium- arithmetic, astronomy, geometry and music while theology constituted the higher stage. The school in Chartres (between X and XII centuries) developed this category of thinking focusing the great philosophers, naturalists and humanists.

Schools lost their meaning when they were replaced by Universities from 1200s in Paris until the end of XIV century in Bologne, Oxford, Cambridge, Padua, Naples, Toulouse, Montpellier, Siena, Salamanca, Rome etc. Theologians, since that period, using the logic of philosophical knowledge, used the proper method to interpret God's mysteries revealed to the man. Human reason supported by grace, with the power of words and sentences, maintains the revealed truths. Reading God's Revelation in a rational way, using philosophical terms and concepts, an attempt to explain it due to the possibility of getting to know, drawing conclusions by means of reasoning – constitute the scientific method which a theologian tries to use while interpreting God's truths.

At the starting point the dogma referred to all the truths contained in God's Word. It was connected with the teaching of faith. While clarifying the deposit of faith, dogma started to be used to determine the speeches *ex cathedra* of the Pope and of the Magisterium of the Church, the unmistakable and unchanging in its essence, as obliging to believe¹².

Dogma is the result of faith as the straightforward way of discovering through reason. It remained the truth from the Revelation and inspired for scientific research which contributed to the development of theology.

The scientific theology based on the data of tradition, on the Bible and on the Magisterium of the Church, establishes and justifies the contents of dogmas. Good knowledge of the historical and philosophical background in which the dogma was created, allows for the

¹² E. Ozorowski, *Słownik podstawowych pojęć teologicznych*, 62.

speculative intrusion into reality which it concerns. Theories of positive and speculative theology do not remove the dimension of mystery from the Revealed Truth but they make it more obvious and understandable, enriching our knowledge.

Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches that revelation which was done in Jesus Christ is full and definite – there will be no other revelation which could add something to the one. Therefore, we cannot imagine that there is some new dogma announced as a new revelation appeared from somewhere. The Catechism adds that although “ Yet even if Revelation is already complete, it has not been made completely explicit” (CCC 66)¹³. And as it is so “it remains for Christian faith gradually to grasp its full significance over the course of the centuries. (CCC 66). The dogma **of** the Immaculate Conception of Mary is the result of such gradual penetration, supported by God’s grace, into the meaning of what was given to us at the beginning in the person and history of Jesus Christ’s Mother. And for example it took time to understand better the words of Angel Gabriel to Mary: “Hail, favoured one ...” (Lk 1,28), that is “the favoured one” also meant that she was free from the effects of the original sin. The Catechism indicates this process of attempting to learn the truth: “ Through the centuries the Church has become ever more aware that Mary, “full of grace” through God, was redeemed from the moment of her conception” (CCC 491).

Faith and theological reflection were attempting to get to know the truth which in its contents was beyond the earthly human existence¹⁴, in this case it concerned Mary.

Theological cognition as a process of confrontation with its object: locus theologicus

It is obvious that the concept of cognition of the truth is well-known to theology. The dogma **of** the Immaculate Conception of Mary, although it has not been a space for competing and rivalry with arguments which would justify its object, it was the focusing point of various views of theologians who confronted it. Scholastics of XIII century were convinced of the particular holiness of Mary. Many of them repeated after Anselm that “it was proper that the Virgin beams

¹³ *Katechizm Kościoła Katolickiego* (Poznań: 1994).

¹⁴ A. Proniewski, *Współczesne spojrzenie teologa na dogmat*, in: J. Zabielski (ed.), *W tym, który umacnia* (Białystok: 2004), 256.

with the purity which is the greatest apart from God's one”¹⁵, and after Bernard they believed in the limitless holiness of Mary but only from the moment of her birth. The debate on the Immaculate Conception of Mary was conducted with the opposition of such greatest 13th century theologians as: Saint Thomas Aquinas, Saint Bonaventura, Alexander from Hales, Saint Albert the Great. Two trends were created at that time: the followers and opponents of the Immaculate Conception of Mary¹⁶. The dominating trend was against the Immaculate Conception. It was represented by Dominican theologians and the University of Paris. Their opponents in the theological debates were Franciscan theologians and the Oxford University which were in favour of the Immaculate Conception. Such a distribution of power was confirmed by the studies on the subject which present the attitudes of both Convents¹⁷.

Saint Bonaventura († 1274) – who delivered 24 sermons on the Mother of God¹⁸, claimed that God Who had absolute power over sin, could have liberated Mary from its power also at the moment of her conception. He claimed so because he could not cope with, on the one hand, redemption of people and on the other, with the sanctification of Mary. He claimed that the fullness of sanctifying grace was bestowed on Mary at the moment of Incarnation and not of Conception. He emphasised Her complete dependence on the coming of Her Son, thus showing that She was the first among the redeemed. This way of thinking will later be developed in further academic studies.

¹⁵ *Decens erat ut ea puritate qua maior sub Deo nequit intelligi, Virgo illa niteret*, Saint Anselm, *De conceptione Virginis*, in: J. Domański, *Niepokalane Poczęcie*, in: B. Przybylski (ed.), *Gratia Plena. Studia Teologiczne o Bogurodzicy* (Poznań – Warszawa – Lublin: 1965), 213.

¹⁶ The concepts “the supporters of the Immaculate Conception of Mary” [imakuliści] and “the opponents” [makuliści], come from the Latin name macula (spot, stain) and mean the opponents (makuliści) and supporters (imakuliści) of the science on the Immaculate Conception of Virgin Mary. They appeared just after Duns Scotus, in the literature on the subject, however, they are used anachronistically, also to determine the previous attitudes of various authors, similarly to the name “Immaculate Conception”, which is assigned to the authors who claimed the corresponding contents although they did not use the proper name. See P. W. Sotowski, *Wkład świętych i teologów zakonów franciszkańskich w ogłoszenie dogmatu o Niepokalanym Poczęciu*, 57 in: bm08_07sotowski.pdf (access from December 4th 2020).

¹⁷ See B. Kochaniewicz, “Średniowieczni dominikanie a niepokalane poczęcie Matki Bożej”, *Salvatoris Mater* 6,1 (2004): 199.

¹⁸ T. Słotwiński, “Niepokalanie Poczęta Maryja w tradycji franciszkańskiej”, *Salvatoris Mater* 6,1 (2004): 65-66.

Doctor Seraficki paved the way for Duns Scotus claiming that Mary in a particular way was taken away from sin. “Others are risen from the fall, and Virgin Mary in Her fall was upheld in order not to fall”¹⁹.

Saint Thomas Aquinas († 1274) did not present his teaching on Jesus’ Mother in his sermons or ascetic works but he contained them in his scientific works. He did not change Mariology a new treaty. He mentioned the issues concerning Mary as a side note of Christology. And although Thomas did not explain the aspects concerning the acceptance of the Immaculate Conception, he had a great contribution into the proper directing and understanding of this truth, as was emphasised by Pietkun (a lecturer of the Seminary in Białystok in Słonimska Street, a professor of the Faculty of Theology). Talking about two alternative directions: liberated from the sin or preserved from, redeemed or Immaculate, **the Angelic Doctor** made the greatest synthesis of these concepts: “She was Immaculate in such a way that She was particularly redeemed”²⁰.

In the academic textbook on Mariology Elżbieta Adamiak hypotheses as follows: “Thomas did not solve the problem which concerned agreement on the study on the Immaculate Conception of Mary with proclaiming the universal need for salvation. If he had done it, he would have probably closed the way to dogmatizing this science. He was rather convinced to confirm that Mary was cleared of the results of the original sin which was done after Her conception but before She was born”²¹.

Szymon Drzyzdłyk²² considers Elżbieta Adamiak’s opinion as too bold and while painstakingly studying the issue of sanctification of Mary in theological Summa in the third part in issue 27, art. 1-6²³, he emphasises that Thomas’s view is the following:

Original sin is transmitted through the origin, inasmuch as through the origin the human nature is transmitted, and original sin, properly

¹⁹ Saint Bonaventura, *In III Sent.*, d. 3, 1, a. 1, q. 2, in: E. Chiettini, *La prima santificazione di Maria S. ma nella scuola francescana del sec XIII*, in: *Virgo Immaculata*, vol. VII (Roma: 1957), 36; quoted after: P. Sotowski, *Wkład świętych i teologów zakonów franciszkańskich w ogłoszenie dogmatu o Niepokalanym Poczęciu* (Częstochowa – Niepokalanów: 2005), 64.

²⁰ W. Pietkun, *Maryja Matka Chrystusa. Rozwój dogmatu maryjnego* (Warsaw: 1954), 96.

²¹ E. Adamiak, *Mariologia* (Poznań: 2003), 75.

²² S. Drzyzdłyk, “Niepokalane Poczęcie Maryi jako problem teologiczny w okresie scholastyki”, *Teologia w Polsce* 3,1 (2009): 72-73.

²³ Saint Thomas, *Summa theologiae*, vol. 25, *Bóg – Człowiek, Syn Maryi*, III, q. 16-37 (London: 1964).

speaking, affects the nature. And this takes place when the off-spring conceived is animated. Wherefore nothing hinders the offspring conceived from being sanctified after animation: for after this it remains in the mother's womb not for the purpose of receiving human nature, but for a certain perfecting of that which it has already received²⁴.

Mary could not be as holy as Christ, but none of the Saints could be as holy as Mary was. The effects of grace in Mary are wider. Saints committed sins, Mary was free from the least evil. "The result of the grace, apart from being cleared from the sin, was also the sanctification of the Blessed Virgin"²⁵. The fullness of grace bestowed on Mary is strictly connected with the mystery of incarnation. Aquinas referring to Saint John: "grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (J 1, 17) wrote that the Holy Virgin Mary became the closest of all people to Christ because He assumed the human nature from Her. Therefore, this particular bond caused that Mary became "full of grace" (Lk 1, 28), exceeding angels²⁶. We notice some graduality on Thomas's work. "God choosing someone gives him the grace which is proportional to the tasks. As Christ, as a man, was chosen and predestined, "but established as Son of God in power according to the spirit of holiness through resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord." (R 1, 4), it was proper for Him to receive the abundance of grace which was then bestowed on all other people (see J 1, 16).

Whereas the Blessed Virgin Mary received such a fulness of grace that she was nearest of all to the Author of grace; so that she received within her Him Who is full of all grace; and by bringing Him forth, she, in a manner, dispensed grace to all²⁷.

As we can see in such an approach Mary takes the role of the intermediary between Christ and other people. We can see the same graduality also in the concept of sanctification. Christ as the only one did not need to be cleared from the sin. The other people needed sanctification. However, there is a difference in the holiness of Mary and of Jeremiah and John the Baptist. In her sanctification Mary received double grace – being cleared from the original sin and the performance of *fomes peccati* (the tinder for sin), that is disorder of the senses of the soul to the powers of the reason was neutralized but not removed.

²⁴ Saint Thomas, *Summa theologiae*, III, q. 27, a. 1, ad. 4.

²⁵ Saint Thomas, *Comment. ad Ps. 45*, in: B. Kochaniewicz, "Średniowieczni dominikanie a niepokalane poczęcie Matki Bożej", *Salvatoris Mater* 6,1 (2004): 214.

²⁶ See Saint Thomas, *Summa theologiae*, III, q. 27, a. 5.

²⁷ Ibidem, III, q. 27, a. 5, ad. 1.

Therefore, Mary was not submitted to any desire, as a result of which She remained sinless. In case of other saints the grace did not cause the cease of *fomes peccati*, therefore, in many cases they did not avoid sins. The whole theological system of Saint Thomas Aquinas is built in such a way that nothing diminishes Christ's dignity and His saving mission. This allowed for reconciliation of the universality of the original sin with the universality of redemption done by Christ the only Saviour of all people.

For Thomas the recognition of the Immaculate Conception would result in anthropological and Christological consequences. It would mean placing at the same position the two perfect humanities: of Christ and Mary. Such an attitude would not be accepted by Saint Thomas²⁸.

William of Ware († 1305) initiated the trend of the defenders of the Immaculate Conception of Mary at Oxford University²⁹. He posed the thesis that was later thoroughly developed by Duns Scotus (†1308), that Mary was preserved from the original sin by the power of the Passion of Christ. William of Ware opened the path of separating the obligation of sin – *debitum* from *factum* getting under control of the original sin. According to some authors he was the creator of the principle: *potuit, decuit, ergo fecit*, which stated that God could do it, it would be appropriate that God granted this privilege to Mary.

Duns Scotus prepared the crucial arguments which allowed to overcome the difficulties in the development of the dogma **of** the Immaculate Conception of Mary³⁰. He referred to the concept of the preventient grace. He wrote:

The common statement is, yes [that Mary was conceived in original sin], because of the authorities taken up, and because of arguments from two middle terms: One of these is the excellence of the Son himself; for, as universal redeemer, he opened the door for everyone; but if blessed Mary had not contracted original sin she would not have needed a redeemer and her Son would not have opened the door for her, because it would not have been closed to her (for it is only closed because of sin, and especially original sin)³¹.

²⁸ B. Kochaniewicz, *Średniowieczni dominikanie a niepokalane poczęcie Matki Bożej*, 216.

²⁹ See T. Słotwiński, *Niepokalanie Poczęta Maryja w tradycji franciszkańskiej*, 67; K. Kowalik, *Virgo immaculata – historia dogmatu* (Lublin – Częstochowa: 2004), 18.

³⁰ Duns Scotus, *Ordinatio* (aka *Opus Oxoniense*) III, d. 4, q. un, n. 12.

³¹ Duns Scotus, *Ordinatio* (aka *Opus Oxoniense*), 124.

Duns Scotus, as opposed to the followers of the Immaculate Conception, did not determine Mary's position as excluded from the redeemed, but as a person redeemed in the perfect way. Placing God's Mother in the centre of the saving act of Her Son, he introduced the concept of prior redemption – *praeredemptio*. In this way he solved the greatest difficulty which the scholastics could not cope with³². Duns Scotus, claiming that the Mother of the Son of God, despite that she was deprived of the original sin, still was redeemed in a perfect way, and thus he reconciled the truth of the universality of redemption done by Christ with the truth about the Immaculate Conception³³.

Epistemological status: dogma in the selected treaties³⁴

Francis Suárez (1548-1617) was the first to raise the lecture on Jesus' Mother to the dignity of the theological science. In the years 1584-1585, teaching in the Roman College, he broke the scholastic custom of talking about Mary in a short way and, on the one hand, remaining faithful to Thomism, he combined the lecture on Mary with the mysteries of Christ in a more organic and complete way, therefore, he raised such questions as: the immaculate conception, Assumption and the cult of Mary³⁵.

Placido Nigido (around 1570 – around 1640) is the first theologian who *ex professo* dealt with the epistemological status of Mariology" already in the first chapter of his book: *Summae sacrae Mariologiae pars prima* [Sacred Mariology: what it is and what it includes?]³⁶. Beginning with the Bible, and in particular, with the truth about Mary as the Mother of God-human, which contains all the other truths, Placido Nigido shaped Mariology in a systematic way, according to the four causes of Plato/Aristotle: efficient, material, formal and the goal of an object³⁷.

In more than 120 treatises on Mariology published in the last four centuries, we can notice, with few exceptions, the same methodology

³² Sz. Drzydzyk, *Niepokalane Poczęcie Maryi jako problem teologiczny w okresie scholastyki*, 83.

³³ Sz. Drzydzyk, *Niepokalane Poczęcie Maryi jako problem teologiczny w okresie scholastyki*, 87.

³⁴ S. de Fiores, "Status epistemologiczny mariologii", *Salvatoris Mater* 3, 1 (2001): 281-310.

³⁵ S. de Fiores, *Status epistemologiczny mariologii*, 282-283.

³⁶ P. Nigido, *Summae sacrae Mariologiae pars prima* (Panormi: 1602), 3.

³⁷ S. de Fiores, *Status epistemologiczny mariologii*, 285.

of textbook theology: symbiotic with scholastic philosophy, adapting the deductive process in the way of internal logic and drawing conclusions from the obvious assumptions, the primacy of objectivism and the basic categories. Generally speaking, Mariology also uses the method of reasoning which consists in posing theses and proving them: the clearly formulated claims and the given arguments based on the Holy Scripture, on the tradition of the Church and on the human reasoning³⁸.

The Second Vatican Council, opting for the historic-redemptive principle, introduced Mariology theologians into the mandatory path of the Bible³⁹. The post conciliar Mariology theologians use the historic-redemptive key to understand the mystery of Mary, that is they put the Mother in Her position inside God's plan. According to the directions set by the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council, Mariology theologians do it presenting Mary in Her relation with Christ and the Church. Sometimes the very title of the Mariology treaty presents the relation between its contents and the history of salvation⁴⁰.

The independent treaty on Mary as a New Dictionary of Mariology⁴¹ or the dictionary-like latest version of Mariology edited by Stefano de Fiores, Valeria Ferrari Schiefer, Salvatore M. Perella entitled Mariology⁴² (2009) assumes the internal structure which refers to the global context of Revelation.

The authors of the post conciliar theological treaties, commenting on the issues from the field of Mariology, use the historic-redemptive key, referring to the Biblical circle, to the relation of Mary and Christ, the Holy Spirit, the Church or the eschatological perspective. Many of those who deal with solving the Mariology problems were able to present their research in the series *Mysterium Salutis*, published since 1965 as a new lecture of dogmatic theology based on the theology of the history of salvation. Johannes Feiner and Magnus Löhrer extensively

³⁸ Ibidem.

³⁹ Ibidem, 288.

⁴⁰ S. de Fiores, *Status epistemologiczny mariologii*, 289. Also: G. M. Roschini, *Maria Santissima nella storia della salvezza. Trattato completo di mariologia alla luce del concilio vaticano II* (Isola del Liri: 1969); R. Laurentin, *Maria nella storia della salvezza* (Torino: 1972); C. Pozo, *Maria en la obra de la salvación* (Madrid: 1974); J. Auer, *Maria, Christi Mutter in Heisplan Gottes* (Regensburg: 1988).

⁴¹ S. de Fiores, S. Meo (ed.), *Nuovo dizionario di mariologia* (Cinisello Balsamo: 1986).

⁴² S. de Fiores, V. Ferrari Schiefer, S. M. Perella (ed.), *Mariologia* (Cinisello Balsamo: 2009).

explain the meaning of the history of salvation⁴³. Its Mariology section attains maturity thanks to which it withstands the comparison with other disciplines⁴⁴. The Conciliar “novum”, which concerns methodology and the Mariology contents, was assumed internationally e.g. in the works of René Laurentin (1917-2017), Alois Müller (1924-1991), Xabier Pikaz Ibarrondo (born 1941), Johann Auer (1910-1987), Bruno Forte (born 1949), Stefano De Fiore (1933-2012), Stanisław Celestyn Napiórkowski (born in 1933)⁴⁵, in some works about Mary the more or less broad appreciation of God’s word and opening to the contemporary culture are manifested.

After the conciliar decision to withdraw from the independent document on Mary and introducing the issues concerning Mary as a part of the Constitution on the Church, some theological treaties qualified Mariology as a chapter of ecclesiology, Christology or anthropology. Thus Mariology was to be redirected to the general theological treaty from which it was taken by Suárez – Nigido due to the need for the organic overview of it. It was more in accordance with the spirit of the Second Vatican Council and with the interdisciplinary principle, replacing the independent Mariology treaty with the introduction of the necessary Mariology references to some other treaties⁴⁶. One of the typical examples of this option was the previously quoted monumental course on dogmatic Mysterium salutis, which contains Mariology elaborations of A. Müller and R. Laurentin, placed respectively in Christology and ecclesiology⁴⁷. This solution is not a perfect one because both authors do not preserve the regard with the issues and perspective of the disciplines in which Virgin Mary was supposed to be placed. Another example, which is partially successful, is *Synthèse*

⁴³ J. Feiner, M. Löhrer, *Introduzione*, in: *Mysterium salutis* I/1 (Brescia: 1967), 13-14.

⁴⁴ S. de Fiore, *Status epistemologiczny mariologii*, 297.

⁴⁵ R. Laurentin, *Breve mariologia* (Brescia: 1988); A. Müller, *Discorso di fede sulla madre di Gesù. Un tentativo di mariologia in prospettiva contemporanea* (Brescia: 1983); X. Pikaza, *La Madre de Jesus. Introducción a la mariología* (Salamanca: 1989); J. Auer, *Jesus Christus – Heiland der Welt. Maria – Christi Mutter in Heilsplan Gottes* (Regensburg: 1988); B. Forte, *Maria, la donna icona del mistero. Saggio di mariologia simbolico-narrativa* (Cinisello Balsamo: 1988); S. De Fiore, *Mariologia nella teologia contemporanea* (Roma: 1991); S. C. Napiórkowski, *Matka Pana* (Niepokalanów: 1998).

⁴⁶ S. de Fiore, *Status epistemologiczny mariologii*, 297-298.

⁴⁷ A. Müller, *La posizione e la cooperazione di Maria nell’evento di Cristo*, in: *Mysterium salutis*, vol. VI (Brescia: 1973), 510 ; R. Laurentin, *Maria prototipo e modello della Chiesa*, in: *Mysterium salutis*, vol. VIII (Brescia: 1973), 390-415.

dogmatique of J.-H. Nicolas⁴⁸, a homogeneous work which elaborated on the Divine maternity, holiness, the immaculate conception and Mary's intercession in Christology and the spiritual maternity in ecclesiology. Generally speaking, the post conciliar Christology and ecclesiology do not raise Virgin Mary to the proper dignity even though She is the Mother of Christ and neither is the type of the Church raised⁴⁹.

In the post conciliar period, particularly on the occasion of the Marian year 1987-1988, there was a noticeable development of the independent Mariology treaty, which was rarely introduced into the systematic course of theology⁵⁰.

⁴⁸ J.H. Nicolas, *Synthèse dogmatique. De la Trinité à la Trinité* (Fribourg – Paris: 1985).

⁴⁹ See S. de Fiores, *Maria nella teologia contemporanea* (Roma: 1991), 159-200.

⁵⁰ This is an index of selected Mariology treatises: E. Adamiak, *Traktat o Maryi*, in: *Dogmatyka* vol. 2 (Warszawa: 2006); J. Auer, *Gesù il Salvatore. Soteriologia-Mariologia. Piccola dogmatica cattolica*, 4/2, (Assisi: 1993) (the original edition: *Jesus Christus – Heiland der Welt. Maria – Christi Mutter im Heisplan Gottes*, Regensburg: 1988); J.L. Blastero de Elizalde, *Maria, Madre del Redentor* (Pamplona: 1995); W. Beinert (ed.), *Glaubenszugänge. Lehrbuch der Katholischen Dogmatik*, Band 2 (Paderborn – München – Wien – Zürich: 1995); D. Bertetto, *Maria la serva del Signore. Trattato di mariologia* (Napoli: 1988); A.M. Calerò, *Maria en el misterio de Cristo y de la Iglesia* (Madrid: 1990); U. Casale, *Benedetta fra le donne. Saggio teologico sulla mariologia e la questione femminile* (Leumann: 1989); G. Colzani, *Maria. Mistero di grazia e di fede* (Cinisello Balsamo: 1996); F. Courth, *Mariologie* (Graz – Wien – Köln: 1991); F. Courth, *Maria, die Mutter des Herrn* (Vallendar: 1991); S. de Fiores, *Maria Madre di Gesù. Sintesi storico-salvifica* (Bologna: 1992); J. Esquerda Bifet, *Mariologia per una Chiesa missionaria* (Roma: 1988); B. Forte, *Maria, la donna icona del mistero. Saggio di mariologia simbolico-narrativa* (Cinisello B.: 1988); J. Galot, *Maria. La donna nell'opera della salvezza* (Roma: 1984); J.C.R. Garcia Paredes, *Maria en la comunidad del Reino. Síntesis de mariología* (Madrid: 1988); J.C.R. García Paredes, *Mariología* (Madrid: 1995); I. Gebara, M.C. Bingemer, *Maria madre di Dio e Madre dei poveri. Un saggio a partire dalla donna e dall'America latina* (Assisi: 1989); B. Gherardini, *La madre. Maria in una sintesi storico-teologica* (Frigento: 1989); G. Girones, *La Humanidad salvada y salvadora. Tratado dogmático de la Madre de Cristo* (Valencia: 1987); C.I. Gonzalez, *Mariología. María madre e discípula* (Casale Monferrato: 1988) (original edition: *Maria evangelizada y evangelizadora*, Bogota: 1988); A. Gonzalez Dorado, *De María conquistadora a María liberadora. Mariología popular latino-americana* (Santander: 1988); M. Hauke, *Introduzione alla mariologia* (Lugano: 2008); J. Ibanez, F. Mendoza, *La Madre del Redentor* (Madrid: 1988); A. Kniazeff, *La Madre di Dio nella Chiesa ortodossa* (Cinisello Balsamo: 1993); R. Laurentin, *Breve mariología* (Brescia: 1988); R. Laurentin, *Marie, eie' du mystère chrétien* (Paris: 1994); A. Martinez Sierra, *Mariología* (Burgos: 1988); L. Melotti, *Maria, la madre dei viventi, Compendio di mariologia* (Torino – Leumann: 1989); A. Müller, *Discorso di fede sulla Madre di Gesù. Un tentativo di mariologia in prospettiva*

In the post conciliar Mariology, the question of the epistemological status remains unnoticed (it is not enlisted in the contents of volume VIII of *Bibliografia mariana* of G.M. Besutti, neither in volume IX edited by E.M. Toniolo in 1998), with a few praiseworthy exceptions. One of the exceptions is the excellent book of A. Müller, *Discorso di fede sulla Madre di Gesù. Un tentativo di mariologia in prospettiva contemporanea*. In this book Mariology is open to the new ways of thinking: linguistic-analytical, sociocratic, hermeneutic⁵¹. A similar style is represented by the book of A.A. Napiórkowski, *Maryja jest piękna. Zarys mariologii i maryjności*⁵².

In the range of the contemporary epistemological status of Mariology, we can notice some similarities. On the theoretical level there are two poles of this status: historic-redemptive and hermeneutic. It regards the irreversible methodological breakthrough which implies the rejection of deductive method which was popularised in the systematic Mariology since the time of Suárez-Nigido until the Second Vatican Council. It is the return to the way of presenting Jesus' Mother by the New Testament:

It is easy to indicate [...] the apparent convergence between the beginning and the current moment of discussion about Mary. It can be stated that after many various experiences through centuries, the cycle is now closed, reaching the starting point again. Mary Who is the origin of the history of salvation with Christ in the centre, is being contemplated once more in the mystery of Christ and the Church, that is in the view of the history of salvation⁵³.

contemporanea (Brescia: 1983); A.A. Napiórkowski, *Maryja jest piękna. Zarys mariologii i maryjności* (Kraków: 2016); X. Pikaza, *La Madre de Jesus. Introducción a la mariología* (Salamanca: 1989); M. Ponce Cuellar, *Maria, Madre del Redentor y Madre de la Iglesia* (Barcelona: 1996); C. Pozo, *Maria en la Escrittura y en la fe de la Iglesia* (Madrid: 1985); L. Scheffczyk, *Maryja Matka i Towarzyszka Chrystusa. Podręcznik mariologii* (Kraków: 2004) (the original edition: *Maria. Mutter und Gefährtin Christi*, Augsburg: 2003); J.P. Torrell, *Dziewica Maryja w wierze katolickiej* (Poznań: 2013) (the original edition: *La virge Marie dans la foi catholique*, Paris: 2010); V. Zoccali, *Maria di Nazaret la Vergine Madre. Saggio sistematico di mariologia*, (Reggio Calabria: 1990); S. Vergés, *Maria en el misterio de Cristo* (Salamanca: 1972); W. Wołyniec, *Maryja w pełni objawienia* (Wrocław: 2007).

⁵¹ A. Müller, *Discorso di fede sulla Madre di Gesù. Un tentativo di mariologia in prospettiva contemporanea* (Brescia: 1983), 27.

⁵² A.A. Napiórkowski, *Maryja jest piękna. Zarys mariologii i maryjności* (Kraków: 2016), 5-40.

⁵³ S. de Fiores, *Il discorso mariologico nella storia della teologia*, 7.

At the same time, the contemporary epistemology assumes using the actual hermeneutic methods which are necessary for Mariology. They concern the hermeneutics of the language, the connection with philosophy and humanities, narrative theology, using symbolism, the aesthetic approach. These instruments help to adapt the lecture of Marian truths to the contemporary times, raising Virgin Mary to a higher theological and life position.

At the level of practice, the dissonance is highly noticeable. And as it seems that while Mariology assumed the history of salvation perspective of chapter VIII of *Lumen gentium* and it preceded other theological disciplines in this scope, however, it does not concern the use of the present hermeneutic instruments in Mariology. Therefore there is still a lot to do in this field. The stage of contemporary Mariology is the stage *status nascendi* of the lecture on the Lord's Mother⁵⁴, the vocation of Whom in the Church is to serve the mystagogical role which consists in introducing into deeper cognition of the transcendent mystery of God and influencing the better quality of the evangelical life of the Church⁵⁵.

Conclusion

The dogma of the Immaculate Conception of Mary, although it implies the attitude of faith full of grace which Mary possessed due to the contribution of Her Son, it does not deprive of the assumed scientific reflection which allows to understand the logic of the content included in it. The epistemological bases, that is on the rational path in the orderly way and with justified principles, the lectured contents reveal that requiring the truth provides the man with cognition which is true as it is contained in the learned conceptual object.

The history of salvation key used to read the presence of Mary in the relation with Christ and the Church seems to be the most helpful in the rational consideration and expressing its acting in the mystery of God's Revelation. However, it requires humbleness and courage in confrontation with the Mystery which will never be fully reached by the powers of reason or the ability of performing the act of cognition. And although the basis axiom of the contemporary epistemology is comes down to emphasising that the definitely objective cognition

⁵⁴ S. de Fiores, "Palingenesi della mariologia", *Marianum* 55 (1990): 201-209.

⁵⁵ *Polska bibliografia mariologiczna*, collected by Stanisław Gręs can be helpful in discovering new directions of Mariology in Poland. See S. Gręs, *Polska bibliografia mariologiczna (1945-2003)* (Niepokalanów: 2004).

can be attained only in the field of mathematical and life science and religion as such and theology as a scientific branch belong to the subjective category of emotions, as was indicated by Ratzinger against the position of Schleiermacher, faith is not an emotion for eternity but it is “entering the common ground where one side can easily understand the other, where they can interpret life and build a community”⁵⁶ that is something which goes far beyond the subjective boundaries of an individual.

The Immaculate Conception of Mary drawn from faith, with its rational cognition, brings the man closer to the truth about him and directs to the mystery of the life in relations with God. The used argumentation cannot be only of scientific nature as in the theological scope, according to Hans Urs von Balthasar, the “pure science” will never be the foundation of theology because only faith can guarantee the full, objective cognition of things the way they are⁵⁷, as the whole truth constitutes the essence of God’s identity: I am the way, and the truth, and the life (J 14,6) therefore the truth is a person.

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