

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF MARY'S VIRGINITY IN THE *LLIBRE DE SANTA MARIA* *

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Abstract

The doctrine of the Incarnation is central to Llull's theology and cosmology: it is the purpose for which the world was made and the means by which humanity finds its proper end in God. As the woman who gave the Son of God, Mary occupies a correspondingly central position in Llull's picture of God and creation. In order to be the Mother of God, Mary must possess all the Principles in the most excellent degree possible—a degree beyond that which is possible for other creatures. In Mary, there is thus a 'trans-finite' dimension. Mary's unbroken virginity is an aspect of this exceptional condition.

In Llull's writing on Mary, he insists on the importance of her virginity before, during, and after childbirth. Mary's childbearing must be free from any kind of corruption in order for her to be worthy to be the Mother of God. Llull implies that Mary's relationship with her son is conformed to the likeness of that same Son's relationship with his eternal Father: as the Son is eternally begotten of the Father without any change taking place in the Persons of the Trinity, so the earthly son is born to a mother who gives birth without any change to her body. This means that Mary is deified—made Godlike. This is the destiny of all creation, and it is accomplished through the Incarnation. Mary's virginity is thus necessary for the world's re-creation—for all things to come to their end in God. The object of the *Llibre de santa Maria* is that the reader should be brought closer to their end in God, and it presents Mary both as the means by which this is made possible in Christ, and also as the exemplar of the deified state to which the reader should aspire.

1. INTRODUCTION

The theology of *deification* or *theosis* (being made divine, or Godlike) has been developed most fully in the Eastern Orthodox churches, where the Mother of God is often seen as the first and most excellent example of this accomplishment. In the West, a certain timidity developed

* Since presenting this paper in Barcelona, I have developed it further into a more detailed presentation in Boss (in press).

around speaking of deification in precisely this way, yet the teaching is implicit in much Catholic thinking, especially in Mariology, and the argument of this paper is that the doctrine of the deification of the whole world is implicit in the Mariology of Ramon Llull. We shall look specifically at his teaching on Mary's virginity.

2. LIKE FATHER, LIKE MOTHER

In the *Llibre dels articles de la fe*, Llull proposes the following proof of the *in partu* virginity, that is, the doctrine that Mary gave birth to Christ without any loss of her physical virginity, or any violence to her body:

Provar volem que nasch Jesús de fembra verge, e provam-ho enaxí: provat havem que fo concebut per Sant Sperit, qui hix sens corrupció del Pare e del Fill, e-ll Fill neix del Pare sens corrupció, e la mare concebé aquell sens parria d'ome. E per açó no hac loch corrupció en la nativitat de Crist, car, axí com fo concebut sens corrupció, dech esser nat sens corrupció, per ço que'l antecedent e-ll consequent fossen en concordança, ço es a saber, lo concebiment e-ll naximent, la qual concordança no y fora si fos concebut sens corrupció e que nasqués ab corrupció. Es donchs nat de fembra verge.¹

The argument as such seems, by applying concepts from logic, to be saying only that the antecedent and the consequent should accord with one another, and hence, since Mary conceived Christ when she was a virgin, so she should likewise give birth to him without losing her virginity. However, the preamble, in which we are reminded that the Persons of the Trinity proceed from one another without corruption of any kind, suggests that Mary's virginal conception and childbearing—her own freedom from corruption—have a Godlike character to them. It is as if her human motherhood is rendered as similar as possible to the Fatherhood of God: she is, as it were, the created image of the First Person of the Trinity.

A parallel is being drawn here between Christ's heavenly origin in his eternal Father, and his earthly origin in his human mother. This theme was common in the Christmas sermons of early Christian writers, and is often referred to as the "double nativity". It is concerned with the paradox by

1. *Llibre dels articles de la fe*, IX.4 (NEORL III: 55).

which God the Son, who is eternally begotten, or “born”, of God the Father, is at the same time the mortal son of Mary, conceived and born of an earthly woman. Mary’s motherhood is, in effect, the created counterpart to the Fatherhood of the First Person of the Trinity. She is the human parent to the Son of whom God the Father is the eternal parent, and the human mother’s relationship to her son is the earthly image of the divine Father’s relationship to that same Son. Christ’s mother is “perfect as her heavenly Father is perfect”, and as Christ enjoins all his followers to be. And this is surely one part of the meaning of Mary’s *in partu* virginity, and, indeed, of her threefold virginity—before, during and after childbirth.

3. MARY’S VIRGINITY AS NECESSARY FOR THE INCARNATION

Blanca Garí, in her introduction to the Latin *Liber de Sancta Maria*, has referred to the “infinite dimension” of the Mother of God in Llull’s thinking.² I am inclined to call it merely the “trans-finite” dimension, since Llull does not anywhere suggest that Mary does not have her origin in God the Creator. Having said that, Llull does make it clear that, in order to be the Mother of God incarnate, Mary has to be raised up above the ordinary natural order. In the *Llibre de santa Maria* and elsewhere, Llull makes it clear that Mary possesses the Principles of creation (goodness, greatness, and so on), especially as moral or spiritual virtues, in the most excellent degree. To be the Mother of God, however, requires that she be raised above this state of what we might call ordinary creaturely perfection. For when describing the Annunciation, Llull writes:

Aquest Sant Esperit ab sa granea engraní la bontat e la granea e les altres parts de que es nostra Dona en esser una fembra qui sia mare de Deu tan solement. Per aquest Sant Esperit fo aumbrada nostra Dona com fo feta mare de Deu, e lo Sant Esperit ab tot sí meteix e ab tota sa granea aombrà la bontat la granea e les altres de nostra Dona, e açò en tant que l aumbració responés a la clarificació de la santedat del Sant Esperit, prenent lo Fill de Deu un cors humà de nostra Dona.³

2. *Liber de Sancta Maria*, Introducción: 6.

3. *Libre de Sancta Maria*, 2, 4 (ORL X: 25-26).

Mary's miraculous virginity is one aspect of this unique elevation. In chapter 15 of the *Llibre de santa Maria*, on the subject of Virtue, Llull says explicitly that Mary's virginity is part and parcel of her elevation to the state in which she can be the Mother of God. It is necessary for the Incarnation.

En Jesu Christ fill de nostra Dona ha .ij.^{es} virtuts, ço es saber, virtut divina e virtut humana. Aquestes dues virtuts nasqueren de la unitat de bonea granea perseverança de nostra Dona en un bo e gran e perseverant, ço es saber, nostre Senyor Jesu Christ qui es ver Deu e ver home. Aquesta virtut qui nasc de la bontat e granea e perseverança de nostra Dona e qui es virtut de Deu home, nasc ab virtut de Deu qui naxent se vestí virtut humana, la qual virtut humana nasc de nostra Dona, ço es saber, que virtut nasqué de virtut, ço es humana virtut de Jesu Christ nasqué de la virtut de nostra Dona, e sís feu de la bontat e les altres de nostra Dona; e per açò la divina bontat e granea e eternitat foren vestides de la virtut humana qui nasqué de nostra Dona, e en axí, que bontat granea e eternitat qui son virtuts infinides e son una matexa virtut, se vestiren virtut humana finida nada de finida virtut. On, en aytant com es lo vestiment que la divina virtut fa de humana virtut e aquella humana virtut es nada de nostra Dona, es la virtut de nostra Dona digna de esser loada en bontat granea e eternitat qui son infinida virtut vestida d aquella virtut nada de nostra Dona; e per açò cové que la virtut de nostra Dona d on covenc néxer tan bona e tan gran et tan perseverant virtut que vestís infinida virtut e infinida bontat e les altres, conservàs en nostra Dona virtut de virginitat, de santedat puritat e unitat, de bontat granea e perseverança; car si la virtut de nostra Dona la qual havia ans del concebiment, se corrupés e no conservàs en nostra Dona virginitat, ja no abastara que n nasqués virtut que pogués vestir infinida virtut en bontat e en les altres, e en axí no pogra néxer home qui fos Déu. On, com la virtut de nostra Dona covenc esser tan noble e tan alta que abastà a néxer d ella home Deu, qual es qui pogués loar complidament la virtut de nostra Dona?⁴

4. THE INCARNATION AS THE DESTINY OF CREATION

Let us look, then, at the purpose of the Incarnation in relation to Llull's doctrine of creation and his eschatology. This will show us the cosmic importance of Mary's unbroken virginity.

4. *Libre de Sancta Maria*, 7, 2 (ORL X: 61-62).

A foundation of Llull's teaching about creation is the doctrine there is the most intimate connection between the divine Dignities in God, and the Principles as they exist in creation. The Dignities, which are infinite, may perhaps be regarded as attributes of the being of God, and as Principles, they exist in a limited, finite way, and in large measure constitute the creation. There is thus a real likeness between creation and Creator.

The doctrine of the correlatives similarly tells us that the being of God and the being of creation correspond to one another in a most fundamental respect.

Llull of course assumes that all things tend towards their own perfection, and he asks what that perfection would consist of for the whole creation. Now, the world's likeness to its perfect Creator suggests that it is in the nature of the world that it should be conformed ever more closely to that Creator, since such conformity would be its tending towards perfection, and the greatest possible conformity to God would come about in an act of union with him. This, indeed, is the greatest perfection that creation could attain, and if it cannot attain that perfection, then it has not been made by the perfect God—something that is impossible, since everything done by the perfect God will itself be perfect. This means that the world was made in order to be perfected by union with God. This is the purpose for which it was created. Finally, then, Llull contends that this union between God and creation is realised in the Incarnation of the Son of God in Jesus Christ. In the *Principles and Questions of Theology*, Llull writes, "The end for which creation was made is the Incarnation of God. This end, the work of the divine Dignities, is so high that it cannot be surpassed. That God should be human and that he should thus commune naturally with all creatures is in fact the end that is most eminent".⁵ It is therefore the end to which God directs all things.⁶

The reason why it is a human being that God chooses as the creature in whom he will become incarnate, is that the human person is a microcosm: all aspects of the created world are present in him or her. Most especially, humanity's nature is both bodily and spiritual. As the former, it is held in common with animals, plants and minerals, and as the latter,

5. *Principes et questions de théologie*, 7.12: 163. (My translation from the French.)

6. This summary draws on a variety of sources; but vid. Domínguez Reboiras (2001), who draws quite heavily on Lohr (1988).

it is held in common with the angels. So by uniting himself with a man, God can draw the whole creation into union with himself through humanity.⁷

In addition to bringing creation to its fulfilment, the Incarnation also accomplishes the world's re-creation, since humanity has fallen into sin and been deflected from its proper end in God, and therefore needs to be restored. Llull proposes arguments as to why we can be certain that this Incarnation has occurred in Jesus Christ; and since Jesus was born of Mary when she was a virgin, the human nature in which God was united to this world was taken entirely from her. She thus stands with Christ at the centre-point of all history. In a striking passage in the *Arbre de sciencia*, Llull writes:

Del començament que l mon fo creat tro que l Fill de Deu fo encarnat e crucificat, no fo null hom qui entràs en paraís. E esperaven, doncs, los prophe-tes e ls sants qui eren en lo lim d infern, lo temps en lo qual nasqués nostra Dona e l temps en lo qual son Fill fos encarnat, per ço que s cullissen los fruyts dels benauyrats en aquell temps, enaxí com se cullen los fruyts de les plantes en l estiu. Per que aquell temps fo molt noble, e enaxí centre e fi de tots los altres, com punt en lo mig loc del cercle al qual s an en unió e ajustament moltes linies. E encara, que a aquell temps savien tots los altres temps dels corses celestials e dels terrenals e tots lurs moviments per ço que fos la recreació, car tots servien a homens desobedients a Deu, en lo qual serviment no atenyien la fi del serviment ni la fi per raó de la qual eren creats, la qual fi perduda havien per l original peccat. Estec, doncs, lo temps en que nasc nostra Dona en molt gran exalsament e granea de bontat, e en gran desiderabilitat de sants e utilitat d aquells, e encara en gran abilitat [Latin variant: *amabilitate*] dels corses celestials e terrenals.⁸

There is no doubt, then, as to Mary's centrality in Llull's theology, cosmology and anthropology. And his understanding of Mary's perpetual virginity is that it is necessary for the Incarnation, and hence, for the world's re-creation and completion. In the *Llibre dels articles de la fe*, he says:

7. *Arbre de sciencia*, II (ORL XII: 88).

8. *Arbre de sciencia*, II (ORL XII: 199-200).

Neguna fembra fora digne a fer fill tant noble e tant alt com Fill Deu Home estant ella corrupta en intenció, ço es saber, en voler fer fill havent paria d'ome. E per açó no pogra esser digne en fer Fill Deu e home, parturient aquell ab corrupció e no ab vergenitat, e encara, que son Fill covenc esser apellat Jesús contra la corrupció del human genre, la qual fo per peccat original, e que ell que salvàs l'uman genre. Es donchs provat que Jesús nasch de fembra verge.⁹

So the man whose birth saved the world from corruption would not have caused corruption in the woman from whom he was born. The Incarnation of God in Jesus Christ is the end for which the world was made, and, following humanity's fall from grace, the Incarnation is the means by which God recreates the world so that it can again achieve its proper end. And Mary's virginity is necessary to the Incarnation, and hence, to the world's recreation and deification.

5. DEIFICATION

Now, I have used the word "deification", and this is a word that Llull himself uses occasionally. Robert Hughes has examined Llull's use of this term, and points out that he uses it primarily in relation to the humanity of Christ himself. But Llull does speak also of the deification of the world, in this passage from the *Arbre de sciencia*:

Deus creà lo mon per raó de bontat, e per açò creà l bo; e creà lo mon per raó de granea, e per açò creà l gran. Es Deus deitat, en axí com es bontat e granea: cové, doncs, que creàs lo mon per raó de deitat. Cové, doncs, que lo mon fos deificat pus que fo bonificat e magnificat, car si no fos deificat foren bonea e granea en la creació, e no deitat qui fora ociosa en la creació, la qual cosa es impossible, com sia ço que ella e bonea e granea sien una metexa cosa en nombre, e ab Deu atretal, qui creà lo mon. Es, doncs, lo mon deificat en un home qui es Deu; car tot lo mon no pot esser deificat, en axí com no es tot bo en unitat de bonea, ni tot gran en unitat de granea, les quals unitats son en l ome deificat qui es part del mon, en lo qual deitat fo raó a Deu que deificàs home en lo qual ell fos encarnat e homenificat.¹⁰

9. *Llibre dels articles de la fe*, IX.5 (NEORL III: 55).

10. *Arbre de sciencia*, II (ORL XII: 89).

So the created world is already deified in part—that is, in Christ—but the fact that created things are limited means that it cannot be wholly deified in the unity of God’s deity, just as it cannot be wholly good in the unity of God’s goodness, because God’s unity is infinite. Nevertheless, the fact God became incarnate in a human being means that the whole world has the possibility of coming into union with him in so far as that is possible for a creature. And as we have seen, Mary’s virginity is necessary for the Incarnation and, hence, for the world’s fuller deification.

The concept of deification is not one that theologians universally agree upon, with regard either to whether it exists or, if it does, what its nature is. However, Frances Yates wrote an important paper in which she suggested that some aspects of Llull’s thought may have been influenced by the work of the ninth-century Irishman, John Scotus Eriugena;¹¹ and Eriugena is an author who certainly did believe in the possibility of deification, and held a theory of what its character is. Eriugena’s theory is taken from the seventh-century Byzantine theologian, Maximus the Confessor. According to both these authors, the end to which all beings are moving, that is, perfect union with God, is the state of being fully deified. Eriugena characterises this state by quoting Maximus: When you see light shining in air, all you see is the light: you do not see the air. Yet the air is fully present and is fully itself.¹² Likewise, when a creature is fully deified, what you perceive in that creature is God alone. You do not notice the creature as such, yet the creature is still wholly present and fully itself. This is the state of the saints in Heaven, and it is what endows them with a special power of intercession.

Llull’s portrayal of Mary’s virginity, as I have already implied, does seem to tell us that she is transparent to the presence of God in the manner that Maximus and Eriugena ascribe to the person who is deified.

6. DEIFICATION IN THE *LLIBRE DE SANTA MARIA*

I suggest that Llull’s writing on Mary also implies not only that Mary herself is deified, but that in and through her, other people can likewise attain creaturely perfection.

11. Yates (1960).

12. Eriugena, *Periphyseon*, I: 52-57; Maximus the Confessor, *On Difficulties*, 7 (26-27): 110-115.

I have argued elsewhere that, in the *Llibre de santa Maria*, Llull takes the reader through a process of transformation which I described as *initiation*. I might equally have said, however, that the epistemic process that I called “initiation” corresponds to an ontic process that could be called “deification”. The *Llibre de santa Maria* was written primarily for women, and it uses a variety of techniques to bring about a change in the reader’s consciousness and spiritual condition. Every chapter includes moral puzzles, for example, which the reader has to work out for herself, or in conversation with others. There is thus an intellectual engagement in which the reader gets into the habit of the right ordering of intentions.

We have seen, in the examples already given, that there is a great deal of repetition in the narration of Mary’s perfections, and this is another device for altering the reader’s consciousness. Specifically, there is repetition of lists of noble qualities: in the case given above, from the chapter on Virtue, these are both Our Lady’s own virtues and those of God; and this repetition serves to reinforce in the reader’s mind the sense of the unity in which these Principles co-exist. Llull’s recommended technique of meditation consists in repeating, and mixing, the divine Dignities: “God’s goodness is eternal, powerful, glorious, etc. God’s eternity is good, powerful, glorious, etc.”, and so on. The repetition of these things is intended to bring the meditator closer to the reality which they enunciate. Similarly, the *Llibre de santa Maria* repeats the Principles over and over again, so that the reader will have this meditative advantage. Furthermore, as we have already seen, the being of creation—specifically, in the Principles—shares something of the character of the being of its maker. Indeed, if it were not for this likeness between God and creation, Mary could not be elevated above the normal human condition in such a way that she could become the bearer of God incarnate. Yet by entering into a certain kind of contemplation, the ordinary Christian can also be raised to a spiritual place that is beyond that of the everyday, and the repetition of the Principles is one of the devices by which this is accomplished.

So as the reader works her way through the volume, she should gradually, through a process of learning, contemplating and puzzle-solving, arrive at a new spiritual condition—one that is, I suggest, a participation in the elevated state that God bestowed upon Mary in order that she could be Mother of the divine Son. This culmination is achieved in the *Llibre*’s

final chapter, on Dawn.¹³ Unlike the earlier chapters, this one is not concerned with a particular virtue, but with the achievement of everlasting life that comes as a consequence of living rightly. Dawn, according to Praise, is the end of shadows and the beginning of splendour,¹⁴ and the Dawn is the Blessed Virgin.¹⁵ The night of human sinners meets the daylight of Christ,¹⁶ as God the Son took human flesh in the Blessed Virgin's womb. If we look back to the *Llibre's* account of the Annunciation from the chapter on Greatness, we see that "the overshadowing [of the Holy Spirit] corresponds to the illumination of the Spirit's holiness, as the Son of God takes a human body from Our Lady". The meeting of night and day at Dawn thus recalls the overshadowing and illumination of the Incarnation. It is as though the Holy Spirit, by enhancing the Principles in Mary, has made her the place where the meeting of God and humanity can take place. She thereby becomes the Dawn who can cast the brilliance of the Son of God upon the benighted human soul. The reader who has worked her way attentively through this text should find herself illuminated by God, even to the point of occupying what is in effect a Marian space, raised above the earthly order to what Llull calls a "transcendent point".¹⁷

Llull presents Mary as embodying the Principles of creation to the most perfect degree possible, and says that God has then elevated her still further, illuminating her to a state that is beyond what is normally possible in the created order. This seems very much like the state that Eriugena calls "deification", and Mary's perpetual virginity, with its trans-finite character, is a striking example of this. Moreover, the object of the *Llibre de santa Maria* is that the reader should also be elevated to a spiritual state that transcends the sinful world of "night", so that she encounters the daylight of Christ in a Marian "dawn". This, too, is surely something approaching the condition of deification.

13. Most of the remainder of this paragraph is taken verbatim from Boss (2011: 46-47).

14. *Libre de Sancta Maria*, 30, 1 (ORL X: 222).

15. *Libre de Sancta Maria*, 30, 2 (ORL X: 222).

16. *Libre de Sancta Maria*, 30, 9 (ORL X: 226).

17. Llull gives a full account of the concept of the "transcendent point" in the *Ars inventiva veritatis*, 3, 8 (ROL XXXVI). Vid. also Bonner & Ripoll Perelló (2002: 257).

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