

Pontificia Università della Santa Croce (PUSC) – Pontificia Università Antonianum (PUA)
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Theory of knowledge by Magister Scoti, i.e. William of Ware

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Nowadays William of Ware is better known for the fact that he was probably the teacher of Blessed John Duns Scotus (*magister Scoti sive praeceptor*), than for his theological and philosophical doctrine. This is the reason why, at the beginning of my talk, I briefly present the discussion on this subject of the last hundred years and embrace Aquilin Emmen's thesis presented in 1965: "Whoever takes into consideration all these indications and evident testimonies that for centuries have not been disputed, will have to think twice before denying or doubting that William of Ware was both the predecessor and teacher of Duns Scotus."

In exposing the problematics of William's theory of knowledge I follow Gedeon Gál's schematic presented in one of his articles in latin in 1954. I consider for my analysis, in Gál's wake, seven issues from the *Commentary on William's Sentences*:

- 1) Prologus q. 2
- 2) lib. I d. 2 q. 6 (q. 19)
- 3) lib. I d. 2 q. 7 (q. 20)
- 4) lib. I d. 3 q. 4 (q. 28)
- 5) lib. I d. 27 q. 2 (q. 84)
- 6) lib. I d. 27 d. 3 (q. 85)
- 7) lib. II d. 3 pars 2 q. 3 (q. 129)

In addition, three questions concerning the knowledge of Christ present in the Eucharist will be analyzed (q. 210-212 i.e. lib. IV q. 19-21) of which Gál does not speak and for this reason they seem to me more interesting for my presentation.

The first of these questions (q. 210) poses the problem of the knowledge of the substance of the body of Christ present in the Eucharist. After a detailed analysis of the problem, William embraces the negative thesis in this regard and states, "I say by reason of such a [great] sacrament and its nobility, that no created and natural [cognitive] faculty can know this [i.e., the substance of Christ's body in the host]."

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The second gnoseological perspective discussed by William, in the context of the knowledge of the Eucharistic Christ, concerns the glorified eye, that is, the blessed in heaven (q. 211). Here, too, the Doctor Fundatus gives a negative answer by arguing that Christ, insofar as he is present in the host on the altar, cannot be seen with any eye or perceived with any sense.

The strangest and perhaps the most bizarre to our mentality is the third question (q. 212) in which he asks whether the Eucharistic Christ can see himself present in the host with his bodily eye. William's answer is negative due to the lack of both the disposition of the active element (the substance of Christ's body) and the passive element (the bodily eye of the Eucharistic Christ). Our author derives three more contrary reasons from the analysis of the organ of sight, in this case from the very eye of the Eucharistic Christ.

All three of William's arguments concerning the possibility of the knowledge of the substance of Christ in the Eucharist therefore conclude negatively.

The issue addressed in questions 210-212 of William of Ware's *Commentary on the Sentences* refers us to two questions in *Ordinatio* IV d. 10 of Blessed John Duns Scotus. In q. 2 of the third part (Ord. IV d. 10) Duns Scotus asks whether any created intellect can naturally see the existence of the body of Christ in the Eucharist and, in q. 3 of the same part of distinction 10, he asks instead whether any sense can perceive the body of Christ as existing in the Eucharist.

Comparing the issues concerning the knowledge of Christ in the Eucharist of the Doctor Fundatus with those of the Doctor Subtilis reveals an affinity of the issues dealt with by these two authors, while noting a greater subtlety of the Scotus argumentation than that of William, but this conclusion can be drawn, in a more general way, with reference to the entire theory of knowledge of the two authors. Both of them start from generic empiricism in sensible perception, but at the same time they attribute a more active role (compared to the Aristotelian system) to the intellect. William speaks of an intuitive mode of knowledge, meaning by it the mode of knowing directly, that is without the mediation of a species, while Duns Scotus in this regard presents us with a real novelty, speaking of the intuitive intellectual knowledge of a thing existing and present in its actual existence. It is possible, therefore, to note a dependence in the problems dealt with by these two Franciscan Masters and, at the same time, a superiority of Duns Scotus in the way he deals with the questions and in articulating his answers. All of this, in conclusion, seems to go to reinforce also the thesis set forth at the beginning of this paper that William of Ware was the *magister seu praeceptor Scoti*.