



Ruiz Ibáñez, José Javier, y Sabatini, Gaetano (eds.), *La Inmaculada Concepción y la Monarquía Hispánica*, Madrid, FCE y Red Columnaria, 2019, 334 págs. ISBN: 9788437507989.

The essays in *La Inmaculada Concepción y la Monarquía Hispánica*, edited by José Javier Ruiz Ibáñez and Gaetano Sabatini, together offer a detailed historical account of the import and expanse of the devotion to the sacred mystery of the Immaculate Conception of Mary in the early modern Hispanic world. In my opinion, the most significant contribution of the volume is the structuring premise offered by the editors and clearly demonstrated in the essays for how to think anew about the often singular and unconventional sites of production and manifestations of the religious imaginary that promulgated the defense of the *Tota Pulchra*. Going against the widespread assumption among many scholars of a top-down, homogeneous, imposed, and politically-driven belief in the immaculacy of Mary, the editors and contributors demonstrate that the feverish devotion to and use of the image of the Immaculate Conception found eager creative practitioners across the Spanish empire and beyond; and, more importantly, that the faithful expanded upon and deployed in unexpected ways the theological premises and symbolic catalog associated with Mary's exceptionality. This is a proposition that I have also advanced in my own recent book, and that I believe allows both historians and cultural critics to think of the doctrine and image of the Immaculate Conception as a vehicle for an expansive religious, political, artistic, and social imagination that cuts across cultures, race, class, gender, and position of power in the Spanish early modern period.

The introductory chapter, “La Inmaculada Concepción y la Monarquía Hispánica. Definir un mundo, definirse en el Mundo”, written by the volume editors, clearly establishes this analytical landscape with great aplomb. I found this to be the most suggestive chapter. It offers a well-researched and detailed set of coordinates for exploring what the editors describe as a religious, political, social and cultural phenomenon that found its most fascinating manifestations across the diverse societies that comprised the Spanish Monarchy and its local cultural traditions [“tradición cultural local”] (p. 14). While presenting an overview of the historical touchstones that concern all studies of the Immaculate Conception in the Spanish empire—the defense of the doctrine from the 15<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, the conflict between Franciscans and Jesuits on the one hand and Dominicans on the other, the monarchical affirmation of Spanish Catholicism in a Counter-Reformation context, the ebb and flow of victories and defeats in seeking the elevation to dogma from a succession of popes, and the very public and often defiant manifestations of faith in Seville and across many other cities—, Sabatini and Ruiz Ibáñez provide new entryways to the logic of immaculacy in the early modern Habsburg sphere of influence. For example, moving away from a one-dimensional connection between blood purity (*limpieza de sangre*) and immaculacy as a set standard for distinction and stalwart hierarchies, the authors point to a

creative positioning towards Mary's exceptionality and her power as Spain's patron saint to intercede on behalf and cleanse the faithful, regardless of their station, parentage, or location: "Esto no se podía sostener con éxito en este momento ni teológicamente ni jurídicamente, pero sí en la práctica, en la redefinición de la jerarquía que construía el paradigma de la religiosidad y de la articulación cultural de la sociedad" (p. 22). I would argue that fundamentally the theology of immaculacy always already provided varied and unique exegesis on the mystery and potentiality of purity, and that it was often produced from the margins; the writings of Isabel Villena, Valentina Pinelo, and María de Ágreda offer some rather particular instances. Nevertheless, it is important and refreshing to see Sabatini and Ruiz Ibáñez establish such a clear trajectory for innovative inquiry in their own reflections and the volume in total. If by the 17<sup>th</sup> century the defense of the doctrine was a lynchpin to the Catholic political imaginary of the Monarchy, it is also true that, "La urgencia de la Monarquía por movilizar las adhesiones locales hizo que, para las primeras décadas del siglo XVII, se pueda contar con la posibilidad de comprobar hasta qué punto dentro de los dominios pluricontinentales del rey católico un elemento genérico tan importante daba lugar a especificidades locales, al ser leído desde la propia singularidad de cada realidad local" (p. 23). The chapters that follow trace this local singularity across numerous sites and with varying degrees of specificity and levels of interpretation.

In Chapter 1, "Componentes teológicos y contextos devocionales de la Inmaculada," Francisco Javier Martínez Medina focuses on the emergence of the doctrine, particularly Spanish theological interventions and popular religiosity: "Frente al silencio conciliar sobre el tema, la religiosidad popular, en varios momentos y de formas singulares [...] reaccionaría sobre todo generando significativas invenciones de la tradición que con el tiempo se convertirían en verdaderos impulsores de la definición del dogma de la Concepción Inmaculada" (pp. 38-39). The bulk of this chapter is dedicated to accounting for the influence of the infamous *Libros Pumbleos*—apocryphal apostolic writings found in Granada at the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century—in which Mary's immaculate purity was declared as a matter of revelation and of decree by the apostles. Additional theological contributions are noted with sections on P. Francisco Suárez's *Quaestio Theologica* and numerous other religious writers and pastors whose works and sermons are understood to have propelled popular devotion across Spain. Interestingly, Martínez Medina implies that these writers were to a large extent influenced by propaganda and prohibition of the *Libros Plumbeos*, and thus places a great deal of emphasis on the importance of Granada and Muslim-Christian connection. This focus, although meritorious in many regards, does not account for other fertile ground in the development and defense of the doctrine in Spain; for example, there is no mention of Beatriz da Silva's founding of the first Order of the Immaculate Conception under the sponsorship of Queen Isabel La Católica in Toledo in 1484, whose story captured the imagination of numerous writers throughout the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. And, no less, the many women who after da Silva relentlessly advocated monarchical, papal, and local authorities for the elevation of the doctrine to dogma, and who produced from the margins some of the most interesting theological discourses on the mystery of Mary's exceptionality.

In the following chapter, "La mácula como recurso político en las sociedades ibéricas de la época moderna", Jean-Frédéric Schaub traces the political use of the word stain or *mácula* in a variety of lexical, ideological, and social contexts. Most of the attention is placed on how the concept of the stain was used and manipulated to

route all sorts of social and political promotions and advantages (p. 69). Emphasis is placed on *limpieza de sangre* or blood purity statutes, the different fates of *conversos* dependent on a variety of social, political, and geographic conditions, and the incongruence in the discourses that circulated on universal sin, conversion, redemption, and sacred immaculacy. At the end of the chapter, Schaub posits that the political culture held two opposing mirrors up to Spanish society: blood purity *versus* Mary's immaculacy. I would argue that his analysis in fact suggests a third way: a sometimes fluid and often tricky relationship between the Virgin's role as redemptive intercessor for *all* sinners countered by the insistence on an originary stain that is figured to persist in *all* those with Jewish, Muslim, or otherwise suspect blood.

In Chapter 3, "Pagar el puerto sin pagar la marca. Perspectivas políticas del immaculismo en Valencia, siglos XV-XVI", Juan Francisco Pardo Molero presents a fascinating set of symbolic and political correlations between the imaginary status of the Virgin in her submissive relationship to God with the simultaneous liberty and power afforded to her by her immaculacy linked to the relationship of the kingdom of Aragon to the Crown. These correspondences are traced by Pardo Molero from the 14<sup>th</sup> to the 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, from the association of the Immaculate Virgin to John of Patmos's Apocalyptic Revelations (a woman dressed by the sun carrying a child and being pursued by a seven headed dragon) and the Trastámaras own millenarist symbology, to local fiscal policies, and Monarchical legal impositions and exemptions: "La creación de un cuerpo doctrinal, hecho de razonamientos, silogismos, metáforas y símbolos, hacía posible que un ideal religioso tan abstracto como la Inmaculada Concepción se asociara a diferentes posiciones políticas, llegando a identificar a instituciones de variada índole" (pp. 100-101).

In the equally illuminating Chapter 4, "«...ruega por nosotros, pecadores...». La concepción inmaculada de María en la integración de los tarascos a la Monarquía Hispánica", Juan Carlos Ruiz Guadalajara offers a detailed account of the introduction and adoption of immaculist devotion to the New World from Columbus to Cortés and beyond. The focus of the chapter is on the Tarascan people in Michoacán, Mexico, where the assimilation and adapting of Christian beliefs found a, "fuerte elemento de orientación y cohesión social en el símbolo de la Concepción de María, base sobre la cual los tarascos asimilaron el nuevo orden cristiano, reconfiguraron con ello su identidad como nación y consolidaron una región cultural con rasgos bien definidos" (p. 110). Anchored in the religious and social work of the Franciscan hospitals, the formation of local practices, attitudes towards charity, health, and salvation, and loyalty to the Crown are shown to be deeply imbricated with the devotion to the Immaculate Conception.

Gibrán Bautista y Lugo's Chapter 5, "La difusión de la Inmaculada Concepción de María en la Monarquía Hispánica. Metáfora y metonimia en su historiografía", treads in similar ground. Compiling the work of numerous historians whose analysis together reinforces the overriding thesis of the volume, the authors argue that the immaculate conception of Mary was adopted and adapted in a myriad of unexpected and even contradictory ways in order to preserve, "una identidad particular basada en la etnia, el género, la patria o los intereses corporativos" (p. 172). Chapter 6, "La proyección imperial de la Monarquía y la recepción exterior del immaculismo", authored by Serge Brunet, offers once again a similar account of monarchical influence in France, where Spanish immaculist devotion was codified as a defense against the encroachment of Protestantism.

Victoria Bosch Moreno and Víctor Mínguez Cornelles present in Chapter 7, “El immaculismo en el arte”, a careful and wide-ranging overview of the development of the *Tota Pulchra* image across the Monarchy and its spheres of influence. Although the material presented is for the most part not new, the authors successfully support the impetus of the rest of the volume, underlining how the defense of the doctrine through images is often weaved in and made specific to local devotional practices, incidents, and political circumstances.

Chapter 7 ends with an epilogue on the modern use of the image which leads to the final Chapter 8, “Libertad religiosa y participación de las administraciones en actos y manifestaciones de carácter histórico-religioso. Un análisis a la luz de las sentencias del Tribunal Superior de Justicia de Castilla-La Mancha de 10 de enero de 2011 y 26 de enero de 2015”, by Antonio González Valverde. The author relates two recent trials that revolved around present-day secularly elected politicians proffering local traditional 17<sup>th</sup> century oaths of loyalty to the Virgin of the Immaculate Conception. Although far removed from the time period covered by the bulk of the volume, González Valverde efficaciously confirms how the symbol of the Immaculate Conception functions as a vessel in which the local and the communal can often supersede the strictly theological, religious, and political.

Bernard Vincent’s “Conclusiones” beautifully wraps up the volume, bringing in a few previously not mentioned figures and sites—Margarita de Austria and Sor Ana Margarita de Austria, and the Monastery of the Conception in Granada, among others—, culminating in the reign of the Bourbons in which devotion to the Immaculate Virgin did not diminish.

In sum, the volume offers those interested in the work of the religious imagination much to think about, especially as it pertains to how the Virgin’s theological and symbolic status as *both* human and immaculate was used, manipulated, and made local across the Monarchy in the early modern period.

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