

**THE DOGMA OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION OF THE  
BLESSED VIRGIN MARY:  
A Theological Study of the Historical Development of the Doctrine.**

Dang Huy Duong

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This is to certify that the thesis prepared

By: (Daniel) Dang Huy Duong

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### Master of Arts (Theological Studies)

Complies with the regulations of the University and meets the accepted standards with respect to originality and quality.

Signed by the Final examining Committee:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Dr. Richard Bernier Chair

\_\_\_\_\_  
Dr. Christine Jamieson Examiner

\_\_\_\_\_  
Dr. Jean-Michel Roessli Examiner

\_\_\_\_\_  
Dr. Lucian Turcescu Supervisor

Approved by \_\_\_\_\_  
Dr. Marie-France Dion, Chair of the Department of Theological Studies

\_\_\_\_\_  
Dr. Pascale Sicotte, Dean of Faculty of Arts and Science

## ABSTRACT

The Dogma of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary – A Theological Study of the Historical Development of the Doctrine.

(Daniel) Dang Huy Duong

On December 8, 1854, under the pontificate of the blessed Pope Pius IX, the Catholic Church declared the dogma of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of God. According to it, because of the merits of Jesus Christ, the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of God was preserved from all stain of original sin from the first moment of her conception.

The pious belief in the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception has constantly existed throughout the Church's history. The Church Fathers from the apostolic and patristic period have shown a remarkable and consistent devotion to this doctrine, especially amongst the early Greek Fathers. In their writings, the patristic Fathers considered the Blessed Virgin as the New Eve (or the Second Eve) whose destiny had been foretold in the Holy Scripture (Genesis 3:15) and who had been preserved from any stain of original sin with supreme holiness and purity.

The theological debate on this doctrine reached a new height in the Medieval period where several prominent doctors and theologians expressed their supporting as well as opposing opinions to the doctrine. During this time, John Duns Scotus (1266-1308) had emerged as the most passionate defender of the doctrine and his bold theological defense was seen as the decisive turning point advancing the Church's gradual acceptance of the doctrine in the subsequent centuries. Scotus' defense is principally based on the doctrine of the Absolute Primacy of Christ which asserts that Jesus Christ is able to mediate for His Mother the fullness of grace by preserving her from contracting the original sin from the first moment of her conception.

After Scotus for almost 5 centuries, the Church continued to navigate in resolving conflicting opinions and to intervene at the essential moments of history which culminates in the official declaration of the dogma in 1854.

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## **DEDICATION**

This thesis is dedicated to:

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## INTRODUCTION

*"In the mystery of Christ she is present even "before the creation of the world," as the one whom the Father "has chosen" as Mother of his Son in the Incarnation. And, what is more, together with the Father, the Son has chosen her, entrusting her eternally to the Spirit of holiness. In an entirely special and exceptional way Mary is united to Christ, and similarly she is eternally loved in this "beloved Son," this Son who is of one being with the Father, in whom is concentrated all the "glory of grace".<sup>1</sup>*

The dogma of the Immaculate Conception (proclaimed in 1854) is one of the four Marian dogmas in the Roman Catholic Church; the other three are the Virgin Mary as the Mother of God (proclaimed in 431 A.D by the Council of Ephesus), the perpetual virginity of Mary (proclaimed in 649 A.D. by the Lateran Council) and the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary (proclaimed as late as 1950 A.D.). Pope Pius IX defines the Immaculate Conception of Mary in the dogma proclaimed in December 8, 1854:

Wherefore, in humility and fasting, we unceasingly offered our private prayers as well as the public prayers of the Church to God the Father through his Son, that he would deign to direct and strengthen our mind by the power of the Holy Spirit. In like manner did we implore the help of the entire heavenly host as we ardently invoked the Paraclete. Accordingly, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, for the honor of the Holy and undivided Trinity, for the glory and adornment of the Virgin Mother of God, for the exaltation of the Catholic Faith, and for the furtherance of the Catholic religion, by the authority of Jesus Christ our Lord, of the Blessed Apostles Peter and Paul, and by our own:

"We declare, pronounce, and define that the doctrine which holds that the most Blessed Virgin Mary was, from the first moment of her conception, by a singular grace and privilege of almighty God and by virtue of the merits of Jesus Christ, Savior of the human race, preserved immune from all stain of original sin is a doctrine revealed by God and therefore to be believed firmly and constantly by all the faithful." <sup>2</sup>

Since then, the dogma has been incorporated into the official Magisterium of the Church. It is now clearly defined in the Catechism of the Catholic Church.

Catechism 490-493: To become the mother of the Savior, Mary "was enriched by God with gifts appropriate to such a role" [Vatican II, LG 56]. The angel Gabriel at the

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<sup>1</sup> Pope John Paul II, "Redemptoris Mater," (25 March, 1987) at [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_25031987\\_redemptoris-mater.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25031987_redemptoris-mater.html) (access on 08-11-2020)

<sup>2</sup> Pope Pie IX, "Ineffabilis Deus-The Immaculate Conception," (8 December 1854) at <https://www.papalencyclicals.net/pius09/p9ineff.htm> (accessed on 08-11-2020)



moment of the annunciation salutes her as "full of grace" [Luke 1:28]. In fact, in order for Mary to be able to give the free assent of her faith to the announcement of her vocation, it was necessary that she be wholly borne by God's grace. Through the centuries the Church has become ever more aware that Mary, "full of grace" through God [Luke 1:28], was redeemed from the moment of her conception. That is what the dogma of the Immaculate Conception confesses, as Pope Pius IX proclaimed in 1854.<sup>3</sup>

Pope John Paul II, in his celebration on the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary affirmed that:

"The victory of the new Adam also includes that of the new Eve, Mother of the redeemed. The Immaculate Virgin is thus a sign of hope for all the living who have triumphed over Satan by the blood of the Lamb (Revelation 12: 11).... To you, Virgin Immaculate, predestined by God above every other creature to be the advocate of grace and model of holiness for his people, today in a special way I renew the entrustment of the whole Church. May you guide your children on their pilgrimage of faith, making them ever more obedient and faithful to the Word of God. May you accompany every Christian on the path of conversion and holiness."<sup>4</sup>

Strengthened and supported by the four Marian dogmas, the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) renewed the theological rigor of Mariology along with increasing piety of Marian devotion spreading in all countries. Mariology today has a central place in the Church. The Council Fathers voted on October 29, 1963 in favor of placing the Blessed Virgin Mary in close relationship with her Son (Christocentric Mariology) and affirming her Divine Motherhood of the Church (Mariology of the Mystical Body). The Council's Marian proclamations are built upon the sacred traditions and the apostolic writings of Church Fathers since the apostolic age to the present day.<sup>5</sup>

In this thesis, I shall provide a theological examination on the historical development of the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary from the perspectives of early patristic Fathers (apostolic age to 8<sup>th</sup> century) to John Duns Scotus (1266-1308). I shall also provide a historical account on the roles of the Church's magisterium during the post-Scotus period spanning almost 4 centuries leading up to the 19<sup>th</sup> century's formal declaration of the dogma.

Before I proceed with how I intend to accomplish this goal, I would like to present a brief overview of how a Church doctrine could become a dogma.

A Church dogma starts first as a Church doctrine and like any doctrine; its development has gone through a historical process. Pope Paul VI, in his "Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation –

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<sup>3</sup> CCC. [https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/\\_INDEX.HTM](https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_INDEX.HTM)

<sup>4</sup> Pope John Paul, " Homily on Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary," (8 December 2004) at [http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/2004/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_hom\\_20041208\\_immaculate-conception.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/2004/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_20041208_immaculate-conception.html) (accessed on 08-11-2020)

<sup>5</sup> New Catholic Encyclopedia, "Marianist Sisters", vol. 9 (Michigan: Thomson & Gale Publisher, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition 2011), p172.

Dei Verbum” (1965), taught about the historical process by which a Divine Revelation could become a Church’s official doctrine.

There exists a close connection and communication between sacred tradition and Sacred Scripture. For both of them, flowing from the same divine wellspring, in a certain way merge into a unity and tend toward the same end. For Sacred Scripture is the word of God in as much as it is consigned to writing under the inspiration of the divine Spirit, while sacred tradition takes the word of God entrusted by Christ the Lord and the Holy Spirit to the Apostles, and hands it on to their successors in its full purity, so that led by the light of the Spirit of truth, they may in proclaiming it preserve this word of God faithfully, explain it, and make it more widely known. Consequently it is not from Sacred Scripture alone that the Church draws her certainty about everything which has been revealed. Therefore, both sacred tradition and Sacred Scripture are to be accepted and venerated with the same sense of loyalty and reverence.

Sacred tradition and Sacred Scripture from one sacred deposit of the word of God, committed to the Church.<sup>6</sup>

Indeed, the dual process of Sacred Scripture and sacred tradition is indispensable in bringing out the divine truth in the fullness of time with the most opportune moment in the history of the Church. The Church recognizes that the work of the Holy Spirit does not stop at the divine revelation recorded in the Sacred Scripture but the Holy Spirit continues Her work to reveal more divine truth for the edification of the Church – “*the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you.* (John 14:26)). The historical time line by which the Church captures the fullness and the divine truth is determined by God who knows the opportune time when the whole Church is ready for this revelation.

Charles Journet, a former professor of Dogmatic Theology at the Grand Seminary, Fribourg, Switzerland wrote about the evolution of dogma: “Scripture, especially towards the time of its completion, appears as containing explicitly, certainly not all revealed truths, but at least the essential ones, the principles, the articles of faith from which the entire deposit of revelation could, with the help of the Holy Spirit, be made explicit later on.”<sup>7</sup> We could deduct what he writes that for certain divine truth, God relies on the wisdom of the Holy Spirit to reveal the insight and the depth of the truth to the primitive Church whose apostolic mission is to plant the solid seeds for the gradual development of the doctrine in subsequent years.

The term “dogma” had not been used often by the earlier scholastic theologians. Thomas Aquinas preferred the expression “Article of Faith.”<sup>8</sup> Cardinal Avery Dulles in his book titled “*The*

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<sup>6</sup> Pope Paul VI, "Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation – Dei Verbum," (18 November 1965. Art. 10, ch. II) at [https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19651118\\_dei-verbum\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651118_dei-verbum_en.html) (accessed on 08-11-2020)

<sup>7</sup> Charles Journet, *Scripture and the Immaculate Conception: A Problem in the Evolution of Dogma*, ed. Edward D. O'Connor (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1958), 12.

<sup>8</sup> New Catholic Encyclopedia vol. 4 (Michigan: Thomson & Gale Publisher, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition 2011), 811.

*Survival of Dogma*” understood “dogma” as “divinely revealed truth, proclaimed by the infallible teaching of the Church, and hence binding on all the faithful without exception, now and forever.”<sup>9</sup>

## **OBJECTIVES, SCOPE AND STATEMENT OF QUESTIONS**

The scope of this thesis is to examine the historical process of the doctrinal development from the theological perspectives for the first three phases: the contributions of the patristic Fathers to the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, the medieval development of the doctrine, which then culminates in the Scotus’ strong and important defense of the doctrine.

The thesis shall not address the theological activities that took place after the time of Scotus. It is not the intention of this thesis to provide a complete theological study on Mariology with all its intrinsic details of theological thought;

More specifically, the objective of the theological study is to address the following 4 questions:

Question 1: How do the early Church Fathers comprehend and appreciate the immensity of Marian privileges and Marian prerogative granted by God as the Mother of God in considerations of the merits of her Son Jesus Christ? And what are their view on Mary’s Immaculate Conception?

Question 2: What are the theological debates amongst the prominent Doctors during the golden age of scholastic theology (11<sup>th</sup> and early 14 century)? How do their work contribute to John Duns Scotus’ solid theological defense of the doctrine ?.

Question 3: How does Scotus defend the doctrine? How have the theological opinions from early patristic Fathers and those from doctors of the medieval period influenced Scotus’ defense.

Question 4: What is the role of the Church’s magisterium and its key events that took place in the post-Scotus period from 15<sup>th</sup> century leading up to the proclamation of the dogma in 1854.

## **METHODOLOGY AND STRUCTURE**

Historical criticism along with both synchronic and diachronic approach shall be the method of my theological studies to examine the theological-historical process of the development of the doctrine and dogma. The investigation is synchronic in the sense that I shall examine the selected theological writings from the perspectives of their own understanding and from the context of their theological hermeneutics of their own time. In other words, I shall analyze the theological meaning derived from the writings understood by the writers’ contemporaries during the period for which the author wrote the treatise. Diachronically, the writings of the Church Fathers shall be analyzed from the perspectives of past theological conclusions and Church history. Indeed, James E. Bradley and Richard A. Mueller, in their work on church historical research methods write about the historical aspect of the development of doctrines:

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<sup>9</sup> Avery Robert Cardinal Dulles, *The Survival of Dogma: Faith, Authority and Dogma in a Changing World* (New York: Crossroad Pub Co, 1982), 153.

The doctrines themselves (and dogmas as a special case of doctrine) can only be understood in their fundamental religious context and in relation to the way Christians were living, thinking, and acting in society, that is, in relation to a broad Christian history of ideas... The doctrinal issues become clear only in the light of the interaction of the church with the surrounding culture and in view of the interrelationship between the doctrinal formulations and the life of the church in its historical and cultural context.<sup>10</sup>

Doctrine as a word which comes from the Latin *doctrina*, it means teaching or instruction. A theological doctrine is defined as a generic term for the theoretical component of religious experience (including intuition or insight). It provides the intellectual systems and processes for communicating, instructing and reflecting of this experience.<sup>11</sup> "It is used both in the active sense of the imparting of knowledge and in the passive sense of what is taught."<sup>12</sup>, whereas dogma on the other hand, "is widely used in a strict sense, for all and only those truths that have been revealed by God and proposed as such by the Church for belief by the faithful".<sup>13</sup>

In his work on the method of theology, Bernard Lonergan points out - "there is not some one manner or even some limited set of manners in which the doctrines develop. In other words, the intelligibility proper to developing doctrines is the intelligibility immanent in historical process. One knows it, not by a priori theorizing, but by a posteriori research, interpretation, history, dialectic and the decision of foundation."<sup>14</sup> Indeed, one cannot intellectually anticipate or select a particular model to describe a particular pattern or hermeneutic process from which the doctrine could emerge. Investigating the historical process of the doctrinal development is a posteriori research, as one must look to the historical context of Church events in sorting through the efforts of different dialectic horizons of theological oppositions, theological hermeneutics, and communities' pious participations in various forms of liturgical devotions. All of these developments bear a strong character of Church history and are subjected to the Papal Magisterium's decisions in order for the fullness of the doctrine and its dogma could finally emerge. Once the doctrine becomes Church dogma, its authenticity and infallibility could be traced back to the Sacred Deposit of Faith as taught in Pius IX's *Dei Filius*:

For the doctrine of faith, which God has revealed, has not been proposed, like a philosophical invention, to be perfected by human ingenuity. Rather, it has been delivered as a Divine Deposit to the Spouse of Christ, to be faithfully kept and infallibly declared.<sup>15</sup>

In order to articulate a research method in a broad context the historical process of the doctrinal development, I intend to refer to a broad and helpful framework described in the *New Catholic Encyclopedia* (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, 2002) about the two phases of the historical process - "first, development of an adequate appreciation of the immensity of Mary's holiness in general; second,

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<sup>10</sup> Bradley, James E. Bradley and Richard A. Muller, *Church History: An Introduction to Research, Reference Works, and Methods*. (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 217.

<sup>11</sup> Britannica, (2021), <https://www.britannica.com/topic/doctrine>.

<sup>12</sup> *New Catholic Encyclopedia* vol. 4 (Michigan: Thomson & Gale Publisher, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition 2011), 802.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 811.

<sup>14</sup> Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (New York: Seabury Press, 1979), 319.

<sup>15</sup> Pope Pie IX : *Dei Filius* 24 Avril 1870. Chapter 4.

<http://www.vatican.va/content/pius-ix/la/documents/constitutio-dogmatica-dei-filius-24-aprilis-1870.html>

realization that this holiness included her initial preservation from all taint of sin." <sup>16</sup> I also rely on the extensive work on Mariology of Father Juniper Carol, O.F.M., who distinguishes the three stages of the historical process of the Immaculate Conception doctrine:

The first stage is implicit acceptance, the period of tranquil possession. The second stage in the development of a dogma is the period of discussion and controversy, during which the precise meaning of the doctrine is clarified, as well as its relationship to Revelation and to other doctrines. In the third stage, the doctrine is received by the entire Church, is the common teaching of the ordinary *magisterium* or finally even solemnly defined. <sup>17</sup>

The early patristic Church Fathers established a strong foundation for Marian privileges and prerogatives that led to decisions of the Council of Ephesus (431) and Lateran Council (649) to officially declare Mary as the Mother of God and her perpetual virginity of Mary respectively. The period from the 8<sup>th</sup> century to the 10<sup>th</sup> century is the period of fruitful development of Marian doctrine with special contributions from Greek Fathers whose theological opinions are in favor of the Immaculate Conception. We then witness the period of Golden Age of scholastic theology spanning the period of 11<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> centuries where the development of Marian doctrines reaches a new level of increasing scholastic maturity, notably with the works of the several prominent scholastic doctors. At the end of this period, the work of John Duns Scotus, provides for the first time in the history of the Church, a decisive argument in favor of the Immaculate Conception. The period between the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries is characterized by intense theological debates, discussions and controversies on the doctrine between Franciscan and Dominican scholars and doctors. The period of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries is characterized by the Church's outpouring of pious devotion to the Mother of God and the increasing acceptance of liturgical celebration of Marian feasts. In the early part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Church proceeds with extensive consultations with prominent theologians in preparation for the official declaration of the dogma.

Therefore, we could argue that there are six (6) phases to the historical process by which the development of the doctrine of Immaculate Conception comes to full fruition: The first phase is the development of an appreciation of the immensity of Mary's fullness of grace and absolute holiness amongst the early Church Fathers. In this first phase, the Fathers laid a solid theological foundation for the dogmas of the Mother of God and her Perpetual Virginity. The second phase is the Church's gradual realization of the fullness of grace and the supreme holiness of the Mother of God included her initial preservation from all taint of sin. <sup>18</sup> The second phase also includes the theological debates with contrary opinions, and discussions in clarifying the doctrine's precise meaning and its relation to sacred scriptures and other doctrines. <sup>19</sup> The third phase is the gradual acceptance of the doctrine by the Catholic Church, especially after the Scotus' forceful defense. Scotus' arguments in supporting the Immaculate Conception had gained great favors amongst

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<sup>16</sup> New Catholic Encyclopedia, "*Immaculate Conception*", vol 7 (Michigan: Thomson & Gale Publisher, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition 2011), 332.

<sup>17</sup> Carol, "Mariology: The Immaculate Conception of the Mother of God," 3.

<sup>18</sup> New Catholic Encyclopedia vol. 7 (Michigan: Thomson & Gale Publisher, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition 2011), 332.

<sup>19</sup> Juniper Carol, "Mariology: The Immaculate Conception of the Mother of God," Mediatrix Press (2018): 3.

<https://www.catholicfidelity.com/apologetics-topics/mary/the-immaculate-conception-of-the-mother-of-God-by-juniper-carol>.

prominent Franciscan theologians which led to several Papal Bulls and Magisterium's Apostolic Constitutions in favor of the doctrine.

The fourth phase is characterized by the post-Scotus' fierce debates between two camps of several prominent theologians: the Franciscans versus the Dominicans. In this phase, there had been several significant Papal decrees issued in supporting the proponents of the doctrine. Pope Sixtus IV (1471-1484) was the first to officially approved the feast of the Conception of the Blessed Virgin and his subsequent successors such as Pope Leo X (1515), Pius IV (1559-1565) and Sixtus V (1585-1590) continued to support Sixtus IV's papal constitutions in favor of the feast. The fifth phase is the period of modernity which is a post Renaissance period spanning from the early 17<sup>th</sup> century to 18<sup>th</sup> century. In this modern period, we witnessed the high degree of Marian devotion characterized by pious work and writings by Saint John Eudes (1601-1680), Saint Louis Grignon de Monfort (1673-1716) and Saint Alphonsus Ligouri (1696-1787). The sixth phase is centered on the early 19<sup>th</sup> century when the Church begins her preparations towards the official and full declaration of the dogma in 1854 by Pope Pius IX.

For the purpose of this thesis, in the First Chapter, I shall delve into the history of the early Church Fathers to examine how they contribute to the fruitful development of the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception in the medieval period. There is a rich sacred tradition of Mariology on these subjects dating back from the Sacred Scripture and the writings of early Church Fathers. I shall limit my studies to only several examples of Church Fathers.

Even though the dogma was declared in the 1854, I shall illustrate that there is an implicit acceptance amongst the Patristic Church Fathers, from the apostolic age to the 8<sup>th</sup> century, about the Mother of God's preservation from the original sin. Indeed, Father Juniper Carol in his work of Mariology asserts:

From the Council of Ephesus (431) until the middle of the 11th century is the epoch of preparation for explicit belief in the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception. The dogma of the Immaculate Conception was during this era in a stage of incipient explicit profession. In the West the development was less rapid than in the East, due perhaps to the incursions of the barbarians as an historical cause...But cogent evidence is available to support the argument that adequate basis for the Immaculate Conception is discoverable in the writings of the noted theologians of this period, even though it be simply incipient belief that is contained therein.<sup>20</sup>

The second Chapter deals with the theological debates concerning the Immaculate Conception during the medieval period (11<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> century). This period is also called the golden age of scholastic theology where Mariology flourishes and evolves into a mature systematic theology because of the important work done by many illustrious theologians and scholars. I shall examine the selected Marian writings by the four (4) great doctors of this period: St. Anselm of Canterbury's (1033-1109); St. Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1160), St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), and St. Bonaventure of Bagnoregio (1217-1274) since their opinions on Marian privileges represent the

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<sup>20</sup> Juniper Carol, "Mariology: The Immaculate Conception of the Mother of God," Mediatrix Press (2018): 10. <https://www.catholicfidelity.com/apologetics-topics/mary/the-immaculate-conception-of-the-mother-of-God-by-juniper-carol>.

prevalent and widely accepted view of their contemporary theologians and supporters. I shall also point out how the writing on the original sin of St Anselm could contribute to the doctrinal defense of the Immaculate Conception even though St Anselm did not teach that Mary was immaculately conceived.<sup>21</sup> Saint Anselm's approach to the doctrine of original sin did prepare the way for the later successful defenses of the doctrine by John Duns Scotus and many of his contemporary supporters.<sup>22</sup>

In the third chapter, I shall focus my theological investigation on the successful and ground-breaking defense of the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception by John Duns Scotus (1266-1308). As agreed by most scholars, Scotus' defense of the Immaculate Conception was the decisive and historical turning point for the victory of the proponents of the doctrine which had later led to the official declaration of the dogma by Pope Pius IX in 1854.

The fourth chapter shall outline the key magisterium decisions and interventions during the most critical moments of the Church history in order to safeguard the justice and the integrity of the theological debates on the doctrine as well as stipulates the key events that occurred during the pontificate of Pope Pius IX who is ultimately responsible for the official definition and declaration of the dogma on December 8, 1854.

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<sup>21</sup>John Janaro, "St Anselm and the Development of the Doctrine of the Immaculate Conception." *The Saint Anselm Journal* 3.2 (Spring 2006):48

<sup>22</sup>J. Isaac Goff, "The Importance of Saint Anselm of Canterbury for Scotus' Defense of the Immaculate Conception," *Missio Immaculatae International* (Sep-Oct 2014):11-19, <https://missiomagazine.com/st-anselm-and-scotus-defense-of-the-immaculate-conception/>

## CHAPTER 1:

### Doctrinal Development from the Apostolic Age to the 8<sup>th</sup> Century

#### Introduction

This chapter addresses the first phase of the doctrinal development of the Immaculate Conception spanning from the apostolic age to the 8<sup>th</sup> century. In this first phase, there were two (2) theological trends which established a solid foundation for the fruitful development of the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception in the medieval period. These two theological trends take place simultaneously and each trend gradually contributes to the development of the other. I shall show that these two trends of theological discourses of the early patristic Fathers demonstrate their profound belief and immense appreciation of Mary's supreme holiness and super eminent sanctity as well as her absolute liberation from any stain of sin

The first trend relates to the doctrines on Mary's supreme holiness and her super eminent sanctity, there is a consensus amongst the early Church Fathers, from both the Greek Fathers as well as the Latin Fathers on Mary's unique privilege and singular grace as the Mother of God in considerations of the merits of her Son Jesus Christ. There has been a popular appreciation of the immensity of Mary's holiness and sanctity amongst all the prominent Church Fathers spanning from apostolic age well into the end of the patristic period (around 9<sup>th</sup> century).<sup>23</sup>

The first trend culminates in decision of the Council of Ephesus (431) on Mary's divine motherhood "*Theotokos*". After the Council Ephesus' decision, Mary's eminent holiness and sanctity continue to grow which results in the decision of Lateran Council (649) where the Church declares the dogma of Mary's Perpetual Virginitly. After the pivotal decisions of these two councils, there has been a steady increase in the level of Marian devotion and Marian doctrines.

The second trend focuses on the typological comparison between Christ and Adam, Mary and Eve. The parallel comparison between Mary with Eve has played an important role in the patristic thought on the Immaculate Conception, Father Francis Dvornik (1893-1975), professor of Byzantine history at Harvard University asserts that:

There are many indications that some theologians of the patristic period, when meditating on the degree of sanctity of the Mother of God, came very near to a belief in her Immaculate Conception. It was the comparison of Mary with Eve which suggested to some of them that Mary- the new Eve – was as immaculate from the beginning of her existence as Eve was when she was created. This, of course, suggests the idea of the Immaculate Conception, because Eve was also without original sin when she was created by God.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Luigi Gambero, *Mary and the Fathers of the Church*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1999, xx

<sup>24</sup> Francis Dvornik, *The Byzantine Church and the Immaculate Conception*, Ed Edward D. O'Connor (IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1958), 89.



Even though the early patristic Fathers did not explicitly proclaim the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, their comparison of Mary with Eve, without original sin when she was first created by God, opens the theological debate on the Immaculate Conception of the second Eve, Mother of God.

### **Holiness and Sanctity of the Blessed Virgin**

It is of significant importance to point out that even though the theological discourse on the Immaculate Conception only began to blossom into a coherent doctrinal framework during the medieval time, the belief of Mary's preservation from the original sin was quite prevalent among the prominent early Church Fathers. Father Juniper Carol observes that "a significant turning point in the Mariological consciousness of the West does not occur until 377, with the publication of St Ambrose of Milan's (339-397) three books "On Virginité"<sup>25</sup>.

St Ambrose asserts that Mary was virgin not in body alone, but in mind as well. "She is the unattainable model of all virtues; she has lived them to perfection. Not the slightest shadow mars his portrait of her, no smallest imperfection."<sup>26</sup> In his book of Psalm Commentary Ambrose almost proclaim the Immaculate Conception by saying "a Virgin not only undefiled but a Virgin whom grace has made inviolate, free of every stain of sin - [*Latin: ut incorrupta sit virgo, sed virgo per gratiam ab omni integra labe peccati*]." <sup>27</sup>

St Augustine of Hippo (354-430), in his writing on the subject of nature of grace, asserts his opinion on the holy Virgin Mary's sinlessness:

"...Having excepted the holy Virgin Mary, concerning whom, on account of the honor of the Lord, I wish to have absolutely no question when treating of sins—for how do we know what abundance of grace for the total overcoming of sin was conferred upon her, who merited to conceive and bear Him in whom there was certainly without any sin."<sup>28</sup>

It is quite reasonable to realize that Augustine simply prefers not to discuss the subject of sin in the case of Mary, it could be attributed to his internal conviction that Mary was exempted from all sins as it is compatible with her divine motherhood. In the above text, Augustine did in fact talk about the actual sin and he asserts without reservation that the Blessed Mother of God is indeed free from all sin because of the merits of her Son, Jesus Christ. <sup>29</sup>

The early Church Fathers were also influenced by the Protoevangelium of James whose original title was "The Nativity of Mary". This work was attributed to the apostle James the Less. It

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<sup>25</sup> Juniper Carol, "Mariology: The Immaculate Conception of the Mother of God," Mediatrix Press (2018):01 <https://www.catholicfidelity.com/apologetics-topics/mary/the-immaculate-conception-of-the-mother-of-god-by-juniper-carol>.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 8, Ambrose, *De virginibus*, lib 2, cap 2, n. 6-18.

<sup>27</sup> Ambrose, commentary on psalm 118. see, William Jurgen, *The Faith of the Early Fathers*. vol 2, Liturgical Press, (Minnesota, 1998).166.

<sup>28</sup> St. Augustine, *Nature and Grace*, 36,42. see Georges Jouassard, *The Fathers of the Church and the Immaculate Conception*, ed. Edward D. O'Connor (Indiana:University of Notre Dame Press, 1958), 70.

<sup>29</sup> Carol, *Mariology*, 02.

provides a comprehensive account on Mary's life from her birth to the birth of Jesus with focuses on her virginity and holiness. Because of its popularity, the Protoevangelium of James had a significant impact of the early Church Fathers' immense appreciation of Mary's purity and holiness. Indeed, as Father Luigi Gambero asserts that the principal objective of the Protoevangelium of James is to demonstrate the virginal conception of Jesus and Mary's virginity and holiness.<sup>30</sup>

Almost two centuries after St Ambrose and St Augustine, the theological development of Marian prerogatives enters a new phase of growth and maturity, the Greek Father, St Sophronius (560-638), the Patriarch of Jerusalem, who is the chief protagonist for Orthodox teaching on Christology, believes Mary's freedom from all sins due to the eminent merits of our Savior.<sup>31</sup>

God the Word, the only Son of the Father...descended into our lowliness...and became incarnate, entering the inviolate womb, resplendent with virginal purity, of the holy and radiant Mary, who was full of divine wisdom, and free from all contamination of body, soul and spirit....He willed to become man in order to purify like by like, to save brother by brother....For this purpose, a holy Virgin is chosen, and is sanctified in soul and body; and thus, because pure chaste and immaculate, she is able to serve in the Incarnation of the Creator.<sup>32</sup>

St Sophronius of Jerusalem puts Mary above all the saints with respect to holiness, sanctity and grace – “Many saints appeared before thee, but none was as filled with grace as thou... No one has been purified in advance as thou hast been. . . Thou dost surpass all that is excellent in man, as well as all the gifts which have been bestowed by God upon all others.<sup>33</sup> Around seven decades later, St Germanus of Constantinople (634-740), St Andrew of Crete (of Jerusalem) (660-740), Patriarch of Constantinople (715-730) and Saint John of Damascus (675-749) are also the prominent Greek Fathers who wrote extensively on these Marian privileges. St Andrew of Crete, the illustrious Archbishop of Gortyna (692), respected as one of the greatest hymn writers of Greek Orthodox Church,<sup>34</sup> is much clearer in affirming Mary's sanctity before her conception.

Today, humanity recovers the gift it had received when first formed by divine hands, and returns immaculate to its original nobility. The shame of sin had cast a shadow upon the splendor and charm of human nature; but when the Mother of Him who is Beauty itself is born, this nature recovers in her person its ancient privileges, and is fashioned according to a perfect model, truly worthy of God.<sup>35</sup>

She is beautiful by nature. There is no stain in her...She was a close garden, inaccessible to sinful thoughts....One could not find in her glorified body the least

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<sup>30</sup> Gambero, *Mary and the Fathers of the Church*, 40.

<sup>31</sup> New Catholic Encyclopedia, "Marianist Sisters", vol. 13 (Michigan: Thomson & Gale Publisher, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition 2011), 324.

<sup>32</sup> Francis Dvornik, *The Byzantine Church and the Immaculate Conception*, Ed Edward D. O'Connor (IN:University of Notre Dame Press, 1958), 94.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

<sup>34</sup> New Catholic Encyclopedia, "Marianist Sisters", vol. 1 (Michigan: Thomson & Gale Publisher, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition 2011), 405.

<sup>35</sup> Dvornik, "The Byzantine Church," 94.

vestige of the corrupt clay...She was purified of all human habits and human passions....and elevated above the requirements of our nature....The heavenly good which the Immaculate Virgin received enriched her with divine grace....but it did not bring about a cleansing from sins in her, because she who partook of it had no sins; she was pure and free from any stain.<sup>36</sup>

Indeed, the significant contribution of the above Greek Fathers to the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception is reasserted by Pius IX, 11 centuries later in his "Ineffabilis Deus":

The Fathers and writers of the Church, well versed in the heavenly Scriptures, had nothing more at heart than to vie with one another in preaching and teaching in many wonderful ways the Virgin's supreme sanctity, dignity, and immunity from all stain of sin, and her renowned victory over the most foul enemy of the human race. This they did in the books they wrote to explain the Scriptures, to vindicate the dogmas, and to instruct the faithful.<sup>37</sup>

### **Patristic Witness to the Virgin Mary as the New Eve**

Patristic Fathers consider the role of the Blessed Virgin as fundamental and indispensable in the economy of Christological salvation. Professor Ross Mackenzie convincingly asserts that "without Mary, the saving significance of her Son's humanity is lost; for, Mary the mother as the bearer of Jesus, makes of the redemptive mystery of Christ as a flesh and blood fact in our lives."<sup>38</sup> Therefore, in their typological work, the parallel between Mary and Eve is an integral part of the theological reflection on the comparison between Christ and Adam. Christ is the new Adam, thus, Mary is the new Eve. In the dogma declaration, Pope Pius IX sees Mary as the second Eve without any original sin.

“the Mother of God is invoked and praised as the one spotless and most beautiful dove, as a rose ever blooming, as perfectly pure, ever immaculate, and ever blessed. She is celebrated as innocence never sullied and as the second Eve who brought forth the Emmanuel.”<sup>39</sup>

The doctrine of Eve-Mary parallel is one of the fundamental aspects that many scholastic doctors have used in their defense of the Immaculate Conception. In the Book of the Genesis (3:20), Eve is called as the mother of the human race, but to the patristic Fathers her role (while Eve was still virgin) by disobeying the Lord was also the cause of their original sin and death. Therefore this old Eve (or the first Eve) is seen by the early Fathers as the prophetic type of a new Eve or the second Eve, with her complete obedience to the will of God, who would come in the person of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of God.<sup>40</sup> From this typological insight, “arose the famous Eve-Mary parallel which led to the formulation of a doctrine that represents the first attempt at the theological reflection about the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of Jesus. By means of this

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<sup>36</sup> Dvornik, "The Byzantine Church," 103.

<sup>37</sup> Pope Pius IX, "Ineffabilis Deus,"

<sup>38</sup> Ross Mackenzie, "The Patristic Witness to the Virgin Mary as the New Eve, *Marian Studies Journal*," vol 29, Article 9 (1978): 69.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> Gambero, *Mary and the Fathers of the Church*, 47.

comparison, the early Fathers achieved an important measure of clarity about the Blessed Virgin's function in the divine plan for our salvation."<sup>41</sup> The first Eve, because of the disobedience, lost her original justice, and as a result, suffered from the stain of the original sin. On the contrary, the new Eve, the Blessed Virgin, because of obedience and full of grace, was preserved from the original sin.

St Justin Martyr (100-165), was the first author to use Eve-Mary typology in his theological writings. In his Dialogue with Trypho, he proposes this doctrine:

The Son of God became man through a Virgin, so that the disobedience caused by the serpent might be destroyed in the same way it had begun. For Eve who was virgin and undefiled, gave birth to disobedience and death after listening to the serpent's words. But the Virgin Mary conceived in faith and joy; for when the angel Gabriel brought her the glad tidings that the Holy Spirit would come upon her and that the power of the Most High would overshadow her, so that the Holy One born of her would be the Son of God, she answer, "Let it be done to me according to your word" (Lk 1:38). Thus was born of her the Son of God... through Him, God crushed the serpent, along with those angels and men who had become like the serpent.<sup>42</sup>

Indeed, Justin sees Mary as the new Eve who came to bring forth her Son, Jesus Christ for the salvation of all the children of the original Eve whose disobedience has caused the original sin. Christ is the Second Adam who came from the Second Eve (Mary) as His Mother and God as His Father, in stating this doctrine, Justin must have had in mind the Pauline passage on Adam-Christ typology:

Thus it is written, "The first man, Adam, became a living being"; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. But it is not the spiritual that is first, but the physical, and then the spiritual. The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. As was the man of dust, so are those who are of the dust; and as is the man of heaven, so are those who are of heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we will also bear the image of the man of heaven. (1 Cor 15:45-49)

## **Eve-Mary Typology**

Justin's typological insight into the Christ's role as the first Adam and Mary as the second Eve was further developed and taught by St Irenaeus of Lyons (120-203), the bishop of Lyons. Irenaeus reinforced and incorporated this typology within the larger context of Christian soteriology which is known as the doctrine of Recapitulations in Christ. According to Irenaeus, there is a perfect parallel between Eve and Mary, while both were still virgin, Eve by disobeying God caused the fall of the human race and Mary by obeying God is the cause of the salvation and eternal life for

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid. 46.

<sup>42</sup> Dialogue with Trypho 100, see Gambero, *Mary and the Fathers of the Church*, 47.

all of us. The first Eve was created without sin, therefore the second Eve was also created without any stain of imperfections. Because of the disobedience, the first Eve lost her original purity, the second Eve is full of grace and obedience to the will of God and her purity is the most supreme and no one under God can be greater.<sup>43</sup> In his “Proof of the Apostolic Preaching”, St Irenaeus restates this doctrine:

Adam had to be recapitulated in Christ, so that death might be swallowed up in immortality, and Eve (had to be recapitulated ) in Mary so that the Virgin, having become another virgin’s advocate, might destroy and abolish one virgin’s disobedience by the obedience of another virgin.<sup>44</sup>

And also in his *Against the Heresies*, Book 3, chapter 22, Irenaeus wrote:

In accordance with this design, Mary the Virgin is found obedient, saying, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word." But Eve was disobedient; for she did not obey when as yet she was a virgin

Irenaeus’ typological interpretation of the Old Testament is to provide not only a Christo-centric Adam-Christ eschatology but also an Eve-Mary typology illustrating the role of Mary and her perpetual virginity in the economy of salvation. Irenaeus not only attributes to Mary a role within the work of redemption and salvation but he specifies her role that is fully incorporated in the mission of the Son which has been pre-ordained from the eternity. The clear typological connection between the first Eve and the new Eve unites the divine mystery of virgin birth as revealed in the New Testament with the entire story of creation and the fall of men as revealed in the Old Testament. Throughout the 5 books in *Against Heresies*, in demonstrating the doctrine of the Recapitulation in Christ, Irenaeus wrote:

He has therefore, in His work of recapitulation, summed up all things, both waging war against our enemy, and crushing him who had at the beginning led us away captives in Adam, and trampled upon his head, as thou canst perceive in Genesis that God said to the serpent, “And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; He shall be on the watch for thy head, and thou on the watch for His heel.” For from that time, He who should be born of a woman, [namely] from the Virgin, after the likeness of Adam, was preached as keeping watch for the head of the serpent. This is the seed of which the apostle says in the Epistle to the Galatians (3:19), “that the law of works was established until the seed should come to whom the promise was made.” (*Against Heresies*, Chapter XXI)

Irenaeus asserts that Christ as the promised seed of a woman, namely the Virgin starts a new mission of salvation after the Fall of the human race. God told the serpent that even though the serpent was able to seduce the tempt the first woman “Eve”, but the serpent shall not have the

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<sup>43</sup> Gambero, *Mary and the Fathers of the Church*, 47. (supplemental source: *De Conc Virg*, c.18; *Patrologiae latinae supplementum*, ed.A.Hamman (Paris, 1957-1971)

<sup>44</sup> Gambero, *Mary and the Fathers of the Church*, 55. (supplemental source: *Proof of the Apostolic Preaching* 33, *Sources Chrétiennes* 62, pp.83-86 (Paris, 1941-).

victory because God shall send his own Son born of the Second Woman, the New Eve, to redeem the first Eve's offspring. The typological insight concerning the enmity between the serpent and the woman (Genesis 3:15) represents the enmity between the first Eve's original sin brought forth by her original disobedience and the second Eve, the Blessed Virgin's freedom from all stain of sin, full of grace and obedience as the "handmaid of the Lord".

Following the lead from Irenaeus, other patristic Fathers such as St Cyprian of Carthage (200-258), the bishop of Carthage and martyr, St Athanasius of Alexandria (296-373) all express their belief with respect to Mary as the Second Eve, her supreme purity and holiness which are in the total contrast and opposition to the sinfulness and corruption of the first Eve.<sup>45</sup>

St Athanasius praised the Blessed Virgin:

If I say that heaven is exalted, yet it does not equal you, for it is written "Heaven is my throne", while you are God's place of repose. If I say that the angels and archangels are great – but you are greater than them all, for the angels and archangels serve with trembling the One who dwells in your womb, and they dare not speak in his presence, while you speak to Him freely.

As for Eve, she is the mother of the dead, "for as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive" (1 Cor 15:22 - In you, instead, O wise Virgin, dwells the Son of God: he, that is, who is the tree of life. Truly he has given us his body, and we have eaten of it. That is how life came to all, and all have come to life by the mercy of God, your beloved Son. That is why your spirit is full of joy in God your savior.<sup>46</sup>

## Conclusion

This chapter addresses the two theological developments that form the first phase of the doctrinal development of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. It shows from the very early age of the primitive Church, the patristic Fathers immensely appreciated the Marian privileges of purity and holiness and this tremendous appreciation has led to the official declarations of the two first important Marian dogmas in 431 and 649 A.D.

The chapter presents that even though the early Church Fathers did not explicitly proclaim the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, they expressed their belief in the sinlessness, immense purity and holiness of the mother of God [Mary]. It also highlights the patristic witness to the Blessed Virgin as the new Eve, full of grace and obedience to God's will. It demonstrates that through the extra-ordinary effort of Justin Martyrs and Irenaeus, the early Church writers understand the unique grandeur and indispensable role of the mother of God [Mary] in the redemptive work of her Son.

The chapter identifies the doctrinal concepts of Recapitulation in Christ, Mary-Eve typology which I believe could greatly influenced the development of the doctrine of Immaculate Conception in the medieval time and beyond. In the next two chapters, I shall outline the theological debates on

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<sup>45</sup> Gambero, *Mary and the Fathers of the Church*, 93;101.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*, p.107.

the doctrine by examining the writings of selected prominent doctors. More specifically, I shall present the key theological opinions that are contrary to the doctrine as well as the important contributions that support and defend the doctrine of Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

## CHAPTER 2

### Doctrinal Development in the Medieval Period

#### Introduction

The golden period of scholastic theology has been characterized by the great scholastic doctors such as Saint Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109), Saint Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1160), Saint Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) and Saint Bonaventure (1217-1274). Many scholars agree that although they are only four doctors, their theological writings have had the most impact in this brilliant period of Catholic theology. They were, moreover, well versed and perfectly familiar with the writings of the early Church Fathers.<sup>47</sup>

Building upon the foundation established by the two Marian dogmas on Mary's Divine Motherhood and Perpetual Virginity, these four doctors provided extensive writing on Marian privileges. Aquinas affirms that:

“consequently we must say that the Blessed Virgin is called the Mother of God, not as though she were the Mother of the Godhead, but because she is the mother, according to His human nature, of the Person who has both the divine and the human nature.”<sup>48</sup>

“Mary is a virgin before His Birth (Birth of Jesus Christ), a virgin in His Birth, and a virgin after His Birth”.<sup>49</sup>

They all share in their steadfast belief in Mary's sublime holiness and eminent sanctity as taught by Saint Anselm: *"It was fitting that the Virgin should be radiant with such purity that under God no other can be greater."*<sup>50</sup> Saint Bonaventure quotes the authority of Saint Anselm when he wrote: “Virgin, who should have been immensely superior in holiness to all the other saints.”<sup>51</sup>. The Angelic doctor joins this commonly held opinion:

"Since Mary would not have been a worthy mother of God if she had ever sinned, we assert without qualification that Mary never committed a sinful act, fatal or non-fatal: You are wholly beautiful, my love, and without blemish. Christ is the source of grace, author of it as God and instrument of it as man, and, since Mary was closest to Christ in giving him his human nature, she rightly received from him fullness of grace (cf. Luke 1:28): grace in such abundance as to bring her closest in grace to its author, receiving into herself the one

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<sup>47</sup> Carlo Balic, O.F.M., *The Medieval Controversy over the Immaculate Conception up to the Death of Scotus*, Ed. Edward D. O'Connor (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1958),188.

<sup>48</sup> Saint Thomas Aquinas. *Summa Theologiae*. 3<sup>rd</sup> part. Q.35 article 4, <https://www.newadvent.org/summa/> (accessed 15 January 2021).

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, Q.28.

<sup>50</sup> Carol, *Mariology*, 27.

<sup>51</sup> Balic, *The Medieval Controversy over the Immaculate Conception up to the Death of Scotus*, 188.



who was full of every grace [for others], and, by giving birth to him, bringing grace to all."<sup>52</sup>

### **Anselm's Contribution to the Immaculate Conception**

Before the time of St Anselm, traditionally, the doctrine of original sin could be traced back to the Ante-Nicene Church Fathers, Irenaeus writes "the Word was made flesh in order to destroy death and restore life to man. For we were in the bonds of sin, and came into the world covered with guilt and subject to death"<sup>53</sup>. Irenaeus asserts that human race came into the world with sin and this sin was first caused by Adam's disobedience to God's laws. Since Adam's sin is passed on to all the subsequent generations, thus Adam's offspring inherits this so-called "original sin". Origen of Alexandria (184-253) clarifies further by stressing that even a new born infant could be born with the original sin "Every soul born in the flesh is stained with sin and iniquity; hence it has been said...no one is pure of stain, not even the child of one day"<sup>54</sup>. St Basil the Great (330-379) also asserts " Adam, eating what was forbidden, transmitted sin to others ."<sup>55</sup>

The doctrine of original sin was then further developed by St Augustine of Hippo (354-430) who asserts that all human sins are originated in Adam as we all share in his seed, however he also stresses the force of carnal concupiscence as the driving element of the propagation of the original sin throughout human generations.<sup>56</sup>

Among the 4 prominent medieval Church Fathers, St Anselm's approach to the doctrine of original sin emerges as a new paradigm shift from the traditional understanding of the original sin from the previous Church Fathers. The Franciscan Father Peter Fehlner writes: "Anselm stands at a juncture in the development in the witness of tradition to this [i.e., the Immaculate Conception] great mystery of faith...is considered the first of the great Western scholastics and that, with him, the systematic discussion of the possibility and fittingness of the Immaculate Conception begins."<sup>57</sup>

Although Anselm himself never affirmed Mary's immaculate conception, his understanding of the original sin provides essential theological insight for the subsequent affirmation of the doctrine, notably by John Duns Scotus. In treating the subject of original sin, Anselm argues that the transmission of the original sin from Adam to the next generations has the objective character which begins in Adam's original disobedience of God's commands. This argument goes against the common attitude of other Church Fathers, especially those who follow the Augustinian thought on the original sin which tend to associate the original sin with the lustful elements in conjugal acts of human procreations.

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<sup>52</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 3<sup>rd</sup> part, Q.25., article 4-5.

<sup>53</sup> Charles Journet, *Scripture and the Immaculate Conception: A Problem in the Evolution of Dogma*, ed. Edward D. O'Connor (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1958), 41.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p.42.

<sup>56</sup> Jesse Couenhoven, "St Augustine's Doctrine of Original Sin". *Augustinian Studies* 36:2 (2005): 359-396. [https://www.academia.edu/1958072/St\\_Augustines\\_Doctrine\\_of\\_Original\\_Sin](https://www.academia.edu/1958072/St_Augustines_Doctrine_of_Original_Sin)

<sup>57</sup> Peter M. Fehlner, *The Predestination of the Virgin Mother and her Immaculate Conception* (California: Queenship Publishing, 2007), 250.

In his treatise titled *Virgin Conception and Original Sin (De Conceptu Originali)*, Anselm explains that original sin consists in nothing more than the loss (or absence) of the state of original justice that God bestows upon Adam from the beginning.

Therefore, if Adam and Eve had kept their original justice, those who were to be born of them would originally have been just even as were Adam and Eve. But because Adam and Eve sinned personally -- sinned even though originally they were strong and uncorrupted and had the ability always easily to keep justice— their whole being became weakened and corrupted...became infected with carnal desires. And because the whole of human nature was in Adam and Eve, none of it being outside of them, human nature as a whole was weakened and corrupted...;

Assuredly, we ought not to doubt that original sin is injustice. For if every sin is injustice and if original sin is a sin, then surely original sin is also injustice.<sup>58</sup>

Anselm sees the original justice as the grace of strength and intimacy between God and Adam and Eve which renders them uncorrupted, soul and body. “The dogmatic way of putting this is that in its original state humanity was deified, or endowed with gifts belonging properly to God alone or Divine Persons”<sup>59</sup>. According to Anselm, the loss of original justice is principally caused by Adam’s disobedience which results in the loss of original freedom (i.e the will to choose the right thing), namely the pure inability to sin. In other words, Adam by disobeying God’s commandments, no longer has an upright will and became impotent to resist the temptations of all kind of inordinate desires.<sup>60</sup>

We must also realize that if justice is uprightness-of-will kept for its own sake, then justice can be present only in a will. Therefore, injustice, too, [can be only in a will]. For the absence of justice is called injustice only where justice ought to be. Thus, besides justice or injustice themselves, nothing is said to be just or unjust except either a will or else on account of a just or an unjust will. On account of the will we call a man or an angel just or unjust, and a soul or an action just or unjust.<sup>61</sup>

We can, therefore, clearly see that Anselm associates the original sin with the corrupted will (or unjust will) of Adam which is passed on to the next human generations. As such, this articulation of the original sin essentially demonstrates its objective character of the unjust will which could be passed on from generations to generations regardless of the lustful elements inherent in the conjugal act of the parents. We could further argue that the objective character of the original sin represents a state in which a person is born, when a person is brought to the world by his parents

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<sup>58</sup> Saint Anselm of Canterbury. *The Virgin Conception and Original Sin - Complete Philosophical and Theological Treatises of St Anselm of Canterbury*. Translated by Jasper Hopkins and Herbert Richardson. Minneapolis: Arthur J. Banning Press Minneapolis, 2000,430-432.

<sup>59</sup> New Catholic Encyclopedia, vol. 10., 663.

<sup>60</sup> Thomas Gwozdz, "St Anselm’s Theory of Freedom," *The Saint Anselm Journal* 7.1 (Fall 2009):01.  
<https://www.anselm.edu/sites/default/files/Documents/Institute%20of%20SA%20Studies/7.1Gwozdz.pdf>

<sup>61</sup> Saint Anselm of Canterbury, *The Virgin Conception and Original Sin*, 433.

at the moment of his conception, the person's soul is in a state devoid of original justice which immediately creates the impetus and the propensity for committing sins.

Anselm's description of the original justice also greatly influenced other prominent Church Fathers of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Aquinas adopts the authority of St Anselm in his writing about the original sin, Aquinas argues that original sin destroys the gift of original justice and diminishes the good of human nature bestowed by God to the human race. He writes in the Summa:

The good of human nature is threefold. First, there are the principles of which nature is constituted, and the properties that flow from them, such as the powers of the soul, and so forth. Secondly, since man has from nature an inclination to virtue...this inclination to virtue is a good of nature. Thirdly, the gift of original justice, conferred on the whole of human nature in the person of the first man, may be called a good of nature. Accordingly, the first-mentioned good of nature is neither destroyed nor diminished by sin. The third good of nature was entirely destroyed through the sin of our first parent. But the second good of nature, viz. the natural inclination to virtue, is diminished by sin.<sup>62</sup>

Anselm's discovery of the objective character of the original sin provides the opportunity for other medieval theologians to argue on behalf of God's decision to preserve Mary from the original sin even though she was conceived through normal conjugal union.<sup>63</sup> Anselm's affirmation on Mary's unsurpassed purity "under God...no other can be greater" and his emphasis on the objective character in the transmission process of the original sin could be interpreted that since Mary's purity is highest under God, therefore in order to maintain such a sublime purity, God would have granted His Blessed Mother the fullness of grace to preserve her from the stain of the original sin. The theology of original sin and its relation to the original justice, first addressed by Anselm and later reinforced by the Angelic doctor, forcefully contribute to the successful defense of the Immaculate Conception by John Duns Scotus which I shall discuss in the next section. To this day, the Church's magisterium has adopted this doctrine as the Catholic Catechism teaches that:

(396) God created man in his image and established him in his friendship. A spiritual creature, man can live this friendship only in free submission to God. The prohibition against eating "of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil" spells this out: "for in the day that you eat of it, you shall die." The "tree of the knowledge of good and evil" symbolically evokes the insurmountable limits that man, being a creature, must freely recognize and respect with trust. Man is dependent on his Creator, and subject to the laws of creation and to the moral norms that govern the use of freedom.

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<sup>62</sup> Aquinas, Summa Theologica, 1<sup>st</sup> part of 2<sup>nd</sup> part, article 1

<sup>63</sup>John Janaro, "St Anselm and the Development of the Doctrine of the Immaculate Conception." The Saint Anselm Journal 3.2 (Spring 2006):48

[https://www.academia.edu/8903175/Saint\\_Anselm\\_and\\_the\\_Development\\_of\\_the\\_Doctrine\\_of\\_Immaculate\\_Conception](https://www.academia.edu/8903175/Saint_Anselm_and_the_Development_of_the_Doctrine_of_Immaculate_Conception)

(397) Man, tempted by the devil, let his trust in his Creator die in his heart and, abusing his freedom, disobeyed God's command. This is what man's first sin consisted of. All subsequent sin would be disobedience toward God and lack of trust in his goodness.

(400) The harmony in which they had found themselves, thanks to original justice, is now destroyed: the control of the soul's spiritual faculties over the body is shattered; the union of man and woman becomes subject to tensions, their relations henceforth marked by lust and domination. Harmony with creation is broken: visible creation has become alien and hostile to man. Because of man, creation is now subject "to its bondage to decay". Finally, the consequence explicitly foretold for this disobedience will come true: man will "return to the ground", for out of it he was taken. Death makes its entrance into human history.

(404) How did the sin of Adam become the sin of all his descendants? The whole human race is in Adam "as one body of one man". By this "unity of the human race" all men are implicated in Adam's sin, as all are implicated in Christ's justice. Still, the transmission of original sin is a mystery that we cannot fully understand. But we do know by Revelation that Adam had received original holiness and justice not for himself alone, but for all human nature. By yielding to the tempter, Adam and Eve committed a personal sin, but this sin affected the human nature that they would then transmit in a fallen state. It is a sin which will be transmitted by propagation to all mankind, that is, by the transmission of a human nature deprived of original holiness and justice. And that is why original sin is called "sin" only in an analogical sense: it is a sin "contracted" and not "committed" - a state and not an act.<sup>64</sup>

## **The Commonly Held Opinions Contrary to the Immaculate Conception**

In this section, I shall present the commonly held opinions contrary to the belief in the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. These contrary opinions are argued and represented by St Bernard of Clairvaux, St Thomas Aquinas and his followers.

### **Bernard of Clairvaux**

St. Bernard of Clairvaux, on the occasion of the institution of the Feast of the Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Lyons, France (1140), argued that the doctrine of Immaculate Conception was an unfounded innovation. Bernard argues that the Feast has no legitimate foundation and that it should not have been instituted without the formal approval from the Church's magisterium to

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<sup>64</sup> Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC), section two, chapter 1, article 1, numbers 396,397;400, 404.  
<https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/INDEX.HTM>

whose opinion he submits.<sup>65</sup> He wrote this opinion in his letter to the canons of the Cathedral of Lyon of France to express his doctrine of the sanctification of Mary and to express his displeasure to the celebration of the Feast:

I consider that the blessing of a fuller sanctification descended upon her, so as not only to sanctify her birth, but also to keep her life pure from all sin; which gift is believed to have been bestowed upon none other born of women. This singular privilege of sanctity, to lead her life without any sin, entirely befitted the Queen of virgins.

If, therefore, before her conception she could not possibly be sanctified, since she did not exist, nor in the conception itself, because of the sin which inhered in it, it remains to be believed that she received sanctification when existing in the womb after conception, which, by excluding sin, made her birth holy, but not her conception.<sup>66</sup>

Bernard believes that Mary's sanctification before conception could not take place since her soul was not yet created by God before her conception (since she did not exist), and because the sin is inherent in the conception, therefore she received sanctification right after her conception. As such, he believes that Mary was conceived with the original sin but she was sanctified by the Holy Spirit for cleansing the original sin before birth.

### **Thomas Aquinas**

Aquinas and his followers are united in their opposition to Mary's preservation from the original sin in the first instance of her conception since they believe that this is incompatible with the universality of the Redemption of Christ. From the Scripture's perspective, their argument could be mainly based on the passages in the Gospel of Matthew (1:21) and Paul's first letter to Timothy which teaches Christ's salvation for all men, therefore if Mary was preserved from sins at the moment of her conception she would not need the redemption of Christ and this is contrary to the teaching of the Apostles. Aquinas argues this opinion:

In whatever manner the Blessed Virgin would have been sanctified before animation, she could never have incurred the stain of original sin: and thus she would not have needed redemption and salvation which is by Christ, of whom it is written (Matthew 1:21): "He shall save His people from their sins." But this is unfitting, through implying that Christ is not the "Savior of all men," as He is called (1 Timothy 4:10). It remains, therefore, that the Blessed Virgin was sanctified after animation.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Steven Rindahl, "*Scripture and Mariology in Bernard of Clairvaux*," San Antonio, Texas (2019): 1-23. [https://www.academia.edu/42692834/SG\\_Rindahl\\_Scriptue\\_and\\_Mariology\\_in\\_Bernard\\_of\\_Clairvaux](https://www.academia.edu/42692834/SG_Rindahl_Scriptue_and_Mariology_in_Bernard_of_Clairvaux) (access 27 June 2021)

<sup>66</sup> Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, "Letter LXV to the Canons of Lyons, on the Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary." (created 2000): sections 4&6. <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/bernard/letters.html>.

<sup>67</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 3<sup>rd</sup> part, Q.27., article 2.

According to Aquinas "anyone conceived without original sin would have no need of the Redemption which came through Christ, and thus Christ would not be the Redeemer of all."<sup>68</sup> Therefore if Mary was preserved from the original sin, she would not need the salvation of Christ which is incompatible with the fact that all men needs (universal) salvation through Christ. Saint Bonaventure also supported this opinion of Aquinas.<sup>69</sup>

Also, since Mary was born through the normal process of human generation, meaning she was the descendant from the seed of Adam who lost the original justice due to disobedience and incurred the penalty of the original sin therefore likewise she should also be contaminated with the same original sin passed down to her from her parents. Aquinas asserts this opinion – "According to Catholic Faith, we must firmly hold that all of Adam's descendants contract original sin from him, except Christ; otherwise all would not need redemption through Christ, which is erroneous."<sup>70</sup>

It was also a common pious opinion to hold that by agreeing the Mother of God's preservation from all sin at the moment of her conception would give her the highest esteem of purity that would normally reserve only for Christ to whom all the highest honor and glory should be given as Saint Bonaventure writes: "It was not becoming for this favor (Immaculate Conception) to be granted to anyone save to Him alone through whom the salvation of all mankind was accomplished, namely, the Lord Jesus Christ, so that no flesh should glory in His sight."<sup>71</sup>

Aquinas also concurs with this opinion:

Although reverence and great devotion are due to the Mother, greater devotion is due to the Son, from whom all her honor and glory comes.

Consequently: Since it pertains to Christ's surpassing dignity that He is the Redeemer and Savior of all, and that he opened the door to all, and that He alone died for all, the Blessed Virgin is not to be left out of this universality (*generalitate*), for fear that, while the Mother's excellence was enhanced, the Son's glory should be lessened.<sup>72</sup>

When Aquinas affirms Mary's sinlessness, he refers to the entire life of the Blessed Virgin starting from the moment after her birth. He argues that Mary's sinless birth was attributed to God's sanctifying grace bestowed on her while she was in the womb of her mother.

She was sanctified in the womb. For it is reasonable to believe that she, who brought forth "the Only-Begotten of the Father full of grace and truth," received greater privileges of grace than all others: hence we read (Luke 1:28) that the angel addressed her in the words: "Hail full of grace!"

Moreover, it is to be observed that it was granted, by way of privilege, to others, to be sanctified in the womb; for instance, to Jeremias, to whom it was said (Jeremiah 1:5):

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<sup>68</sup> Balic, *The Medieval Controversy over the Immaculate Conception up to the Death of Scotus*, 194.

<sup>69</sup> Storff, *The Teaching of St Thomas...*, 195,196.

<sup>70</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 2<sup>nd</sup> part, Q.81., article 3.

<sup>71</sup> Carlo Balic, *The Medieval Controversy over the Immaculate Conception*, 196-197.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid*, p.189.

"Before thou camest forth out of the womb, I sanctified thee"; and again, to John the Baptist, of whom it is written (Luke 1:15) "He shall be filled with the Holy Ghost even from his mother's womb." It is therefore with reason that we believe the Blessed Virgin to have been sanctified before her birth from the womb.<sup>73</sup>

Aquinas points out that Mary's sanctification in the womb before birth is supported by the Holy Scripture's description of sanctification in the womb of saintly men like the prophet Jeremias and John the Baptist. Speaking of sanctification in the womb, Aquinas clearly refers to the cleaning of the original sin and this takes place in the womb before birth, but the Blessed Virgin is still subjected to the original sin at the first moment of her conception, like any other saints before Christ – "The Blessed Virgin was sanctified in the womb from original sin... but she was not freed from the guilt to which the whole nature is subject, so as to enter into Paradise otherwise than through the Sacrifice of Christ."<sup>74</sup> The doctrine of the sanctification of the Blessed Virgin is also supported by Aquinas' great contemporary Franciscan Saint Bonaventure of Bagnoregio, the Seraphic doctor of the Church.<sup>75</sup>

We could define the two (2) principal commonly-held opinions opposing the doctrine of Immaculate Conception from the scholastic doctors of the 13<sup>th</sup> century as follows:

1) The Son of God is universal redeemer for all men, without any exception, but in order to be redeemed by Christ, the person must be a sinner to begin with. Therefore, for the case of the Mother of God, even though she is sinless after her birth and maintains her sinlessness throughout her life by the grace of the Holy Spirit, she, however, contracted the original sin at the moment of her conception in order to be redeemed by Christ because if she would not have contracted the original sin she would not need Christ's redemption which is contrary to the Holy Scripture's teaching on the truth of universal redemption.

2) The original sin is the privation of the original justice which passes down to the human race from the first Adam and Eve, the Blessed Virgin's conception is generated by the normal conjugal acts therefore she had also contracted the original sin like any other descendants of Adam. Therefore, the soul of the Blessed Virgin Mary was not sanctified at the first moment of her conception but she was sanctified immediately after the contraction of the original sin. In other words, the process of sanctification by the Holy Spirit took place probably soon after the infusion of the soul by God, but certainly before her birth.<sup>76</sup>

## Conclusion

This chapter outlines key opinions that are contrary to the belief of the Immaculate Conception based on the commonly held opinions by Thomas Aquinas, Bernard of Clairvaux and Bonaventure of Bagnoregio. Basically, these three saint doctors believe that the mother of God was sanctified in the womb by the power of the Holy Spirit and this was accomplished certainly before her birth.

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<sup>73</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 3<sup>rd</sup> part, Q.27., article 1.

<sup>74</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 3<sup>rd</sup> part, Q.27., article 1.

<sup>75</sup> Storff, *The Teaching of St Thomas...*, 195,196.

<sup>76</sup> Storff, *The Teaching of St Thomas...*, 33.

According to their opinions, Mary was sanctified right after her conception, in other words, she contracted the original sin at the first moment of her conception before she was sanctified throughout her conception.

The chapter highlights the significant contribution of Anselm of Canterbury to the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception even though Anselm did not teach that the Blessed Virgin was preserved from the original sin.

In the next chapter, I shall present the theological opinions of John Duns Scotus which greatly contribute to the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of God.



## CHAPTER 3

### John Duns Scotus, the Doctor of Mary Immaculate

#### Introduction

As most scholars agreed that around the late 13<sup>th</sup> century, John Duns Scotus (1266-1308), a Franciscan priest and theologian emerged as one of the most important defenders of the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of God. Scotus is considered “the first of the great theologians to defend efficaciously what the Church has believed about the conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary.”<sup>77</sup> He is known by the scholastic title “Doctor Subtilis” (Subtle Doctor), he was also the first to have given a complete “scientific presentation of the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception.”<sup>78</sup>

Pope Jean Paul II agrees that Scotus’ efficacious defense of the Marian privilege has earned him the title of the Doctor of Mary Immaculate.<sup>79</sup> Scotus’s unique contribution to the defense of this Marian privilege is historically decisive and a turning point in the favor of the doctrine and serves as a principal foundation upon which the subsequent Church Fathers and Roman Pontiffs continue their work towards the successful finalization and official declaration of the dogma. It was Scotus’ teaching on the Immaculate Conception that paved the way to the dogmatic declaration by Pope Pius IX in 1854 after seven centuries of intense theological debates.

The primary and secondary sources of Scotus scholarship reveal a special, unique and bold character of his thought on the defense of the doctrine. Scotus defends Mary’s preservation from the original sin from a higher viewpoint of Christological soteriology where the role of Mary is explained within the context of the doctrine of the primacy of Christ and the supreme mediation of Christ. Indeed, Pope John Paul II, in his address to the members of the Scotus Commission had this to say about the Blessed Scotus:

John Duns Scotus, with his splendid doctrine on the primacy of Christ, on the Immaculate Conception, on the primary value of the Revelation and of the Magisterium of the Church, on the authority of the Pope, on the capability of human reason to make the great truths of faith accessible, at least in part, and to show their non-contradictory nature, is even today

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<sup>77</sup> Raymond Leo Cardinal Burke, “*Lecture on the Unveiling and Blessing of the Status of Blessed John Duns Scotus – Friary Shrine of our Lady of Guadalupe*”, La Crosse Wisconsin (December 2012): 1  
[http://s3.amazonaws.com/airmaria/finews/cardinal\\_burke\\_scotus.pdf](http://s3.amazonaws.com/airmaria/finews/cardinal_burke_scotus.pdf)

<sup>78</sup> Carlo Balic, O.F.M., *The Medieval Controversy over the Immaculate Conception up to the Death of Scotus*, Ed. Edward D. O’Connor (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1958), 161.

<sup>79</sup> Pope John Paul II: Address to the Members of Scotus Commission 16 February 2002  
[https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/2002/february/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_spe\\_20020216\\_fрати-minori.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/2002/february/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_20020216_fрати-minori.html)

a pillar of Catholic theology, an original Teacher, full of ideas and incentives for an ever more complete knowledge of the truth of the faith.<sup>80</sup>

In order to better understand Scotus' Mariology, especially his doctrine on Christ's perfect mediation for His Mother, it is necessary to examine his doctrine on the absolute primacy of Christ as Father Peter Mary Fehlner of the Franciscans' Institute of Ecclesiastical Studies convincingly said:

While translating a treatise on the Mariology of Blessed John Duns Scotus, it became evident to me that no one would understand Scotus' Mariology well without first understanding his doctrine on the absolute primacy of Christ. And it is this doctrine that answers the most fundamental question, 'Why does Christ exist?' Indeed, Blessed John's doctrine of Christ's primacy is the basis for understanding all Mariology and also, without exaggeration, the ultimate explanation for all of creation, everything that exists outside of God the most Holy Trinity.<sup>81</sup>

There is an inter-relationship between the mystery of the Immaculate Conception and the doctrine of the primacy of Christ as Arthur Calkins asserts: "meditating on these mysteries of faith over the years, I have become a convinced Scotist with regard to the motive of the Incarnation, the Immaculate Conception and the absolute primacy of Christ from which Mary's "subordinate primacy" cannot be separated."<sup>82</sup>

## **The Absolute Primacy of Christ**

Scotus' doctrine of the primacy of Christ is entirely based on his writing on the predestination of Jesus Christ which is not conditioned by any created things much less the conditions of the created things. From eternity and before the creation of universe, God predestined Christ for His greatest glory with absolute primacy over the entire creation as Jesus Christ is at the absolute center of the created universe and His Mother as next to him in the hierarchy of created being. The key to Scotus' theological system on primacy is his doctrine of predestination and for Scotus the origin of all things (the creation) outside God joints and depends entirely on this doctrine.

Scotus defines predestination as an "act of divine will which destines an intellectual creatures to grace and glory."<sup>83</sup> According to him, predestination takes place in two main activities. The first one is eternal and exists outside of time and space, it is the intention of God from eternity in determining the end, the goal and the purpose of His creation. The second activity is temporal and

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<sup>80</sup> [Pope John Paul II: Address to the Members of Scotus Commission, 16 February 2002.](#)

<sup>81</sup> Mary Dean, Maximilian, "A Primer on the Absolute Primacy of Christ – Blessed John Duns Scotus and the Franciscan Thesis." Franciscans of the Immaculate (2006):1  
<http://www.absoluteprimacyofchrist.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/A-Primer-on-the-Absolute-Primacy-of-Christ.pdf>

<sup>82</sup> Maximilian Mary Dean, A Primer on the Absolute Primacy of Christ, 3.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid, p.13.

takes place in time for the execution of the gradual realization and accomplishment of His eternal purpose and plan for the creation.<sup>84</sup> In Ordination III, Scotus wrote:

If man had not sinned, there would have been no need for our redemption. But that God predestined the soul of Christ to so great a glory does not seem to be only on account of that [redemption], since the redemption or the glory of the soul to be redeemed is not comparable to the glory of Christ's soul.

Neither is it likely that the highest good in creation is something that was merely occasioned only because of some lesser good; nor is it likely that He predestined Adam to such good before He predestined Christ; and yet this would follow [were the Incarnation occasioned by Adam's sin]. In fact, if the predestination of Christ's soul was for the sole purpose of redeeming others, something even more absurd would follow, namely, that in predestining Adam to glory, He would have foreseen him as having fallen into sin before He predestined Christ to glory.

It can be said, therefore, that with a priority of nature God chose for His heavenly court all the angels and men He wished to have with their various degrees of perfection before He foresaw either sin or the punishment for sinners; and no one has been predestined only because somebody else's sin was foreseen, lest anyone have reason to rejoice over the fall of another.<sup>85</sup>

In the above text, Scotus taught that the predestination of Christ for the greatest glory has been preordained and determined by God from and for all eternity regardless whether Adam and Eve sinned or didn't sin. In other words, the supreme predestination of Christ for the greatest glory is not conditioned by the sins of Adam and the need for redemption of the human race. He also writes in *Opus Parisiense*:

It is said that the fall of man is the necessary reason for this predestination of Christ. Since God saw that man would fall, He saw that He would be redeemed in this way, and so He foresaw Christ's human nature to be assumed and to be glorified with so great a glory.

I declare, however, that the fall was not the cause of Christ's predestination. In fact, even if no man or angel had fallen, nor any man but Christ were to be created, Christ would still have been predestined in this way.<sup>86</sup>

From the absolute predestination of Christ, it is clear that Jesus Christ is the King of all creation and the Lord of all the universe. The absolute primacy of Christ is predestined for His greatest

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> John Duns Scotus, *Ordinatio*, III, d.7, q.3, ed. Carlo Balic, *Joannis Duns Scoti, doctoris mariani, theologiae marianae elementa ad fidem codd. Mss., Sebenici, 1933*) 4-7.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid, p.24.

glory as the King of all created spirits, angels and humans regardless their sins. Father Mary Dean asserts:

We speak of an absolute primacy willed by God for its own sake; a primacy not occasioned by a lesser good nor an evil act committed by a creature. “He alone is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end.” (Apoc.21:6). As “the Blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords” (1 Tim. 6:15; cf. Apoc. 17:14).”<sup>87</sup>

Scotus’ teaching on the absolute primacy of Christ points out that Christ is the perfect and only mediator between God and man, in other words, Christ is able to mediate with God for the redemption of all men and He is the only person who can exercise this role of perfect mediation because the purpose of all the creation is for His greatest glory. According to Scotus, Christ mediates between God and Man in two ways: *ex unione* and *ex gratia*. *Ex-unione* means that Christ is the Word, He is the First Born from God the Father. His is fully God and fully man by the virtue of hypostatic union. Scotus points out that “there could never be but one Head in the Church from which there is derived the influx of graces upon members.”<sup>88</sup> *Ex unione* gives rise to *ex gratia* which means Christ provides to all members of His mystical body grace upon grace and in this abundance of graces, Christ mediates for His Mother the fullness of grace by preserving her from contracting the original sin from the first moment of her conception.

Christ is predestined for the greatest glory and Mary is joining in this predestination. In other words, Mary is jointly predestined as the Mother of God. The joint-predestination between Christ and Mary forms the core of Scotus’ doctrine on the Immaculate Conception where merits of Christ’s foreseen passion and His incarnation gains the greatest redemption for Mary’s Immaculate Conception and also, Christ mediates for His Mother the fullness of grace in the first moment of her conception to preserve her from contracting the original sin. The joint-predestination of Jesus and Mary is best affirmed by Pope Francis, in his 1<sup>st</sup> January 2015 homily for the Solemnity of Mary, the Mother of God, the Pope taught: “She is the believer capable of perceiving in the gift of her Son the coming of that “fullness of time” (Gal 4:4) in which God, by choosing the humble path of human existence, entered personally into the history of salvation. That is why Jesus cannot be understood without his Mother.”<sup>89</sup>

Most scholars agree that the doctrine of Christ’s predestination (within the context of an absolute primacy of Christ for all eternity) was initially taught by the apostle Paul as written in the Holy Scriptures. In the letters to the Corinthians, Paul wrote:

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in Him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. He

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid, p.37.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid, p.38

<sup>89</sup> Pope Francis: Holy Mass on the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God, 1s January 2015.

[http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2015/documents/papa-francesco\\_20150101\\_omelia-giornata-mondiale-pace.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2015/documents/papa-francesco_20150101_omelia-giornata-mondiale-pace.html))

himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place (supremacy) in everything. (Col. 1:15-18).

In this text, the apostle Paul reveals the supreme truth of the divine purpose of the creation as all things have been created through Jesus Christ and for Him and that this creation and its entire universe shall be also recapitulated in Christ - "he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth" (Ephesians 1:9-10).

Scotus's contribution to the doctrine of the primacy of Christ provides a unique hermeneutic approach to Pauline theology of predestination and supremacy of Christ by pointing out that this supremacy is absolute and unconditional and no created things shall have any bearing on this supremacy. Therefore, whether man sins or did not sin, God has decreed from eternity that "all things have been created through Jesus Christ and for Him and its entire universe shall be also recapitulated in Christ." (Ephesians 1:9-10). The good news is that each created human being shall join and partake in the eternal glory of his or her creator who is Christ our Lord.

There is a direct theological correlation between the doctrines of Primacy of Christ and that of Recapitulation in Christ which was first articulated and developed by St Irenaeus of Lyons as I have illustrated in the previous chapter. I argue that even though Irenaeus does not employ the exact terminology of "primacy", his doctrine on the Recapitulation is fully within the context of Primacy of Christ as the pre-ordained King of the creation and the second Adam with full divine authority and power to redeem the human race and to recapitulate all in the second person of the Blessed Trinity. Indeed, Pope Benedict understands the correlation between the Primacy of Christ and the Recapitulation in Christ:

the Pope cites the theory of recirculation and recapitulation recap, first articulated by St. Irenaeus, an early Father of the Church. The sense here is not merely a restoration of what was lost by original sin, but also, and more importantly, a realization of what these gifts of grace before the fall prefigured, the final restoration of the universe in Christ, who is first willed by the Father before the foundation of the world, the structural support of all things [who] attracts to himself the entire reality in order to overcome dispersion and limitation and lead all things to the fullness desired by God.<sup>90</sup>

## **Scotus' Defense of the Immaculate Conception**

As I have indicated in the previous chapter, there are two (2) commonly held opinions of the scholastic doctors of the 13<sup>th</sup> century who opposed the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of God:

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<sup>90</sup> Peter Fehlner, "The Franciscan Thesis and Pope Benedict XVI." *Missio Immacolatae Magazine*: part I, (2013):4. <https://missiomagazine.com/franciscan-thesis-and-pope-benedict-part-1/>

First, Mary's preservation from the original sin would render her not needing the Redemption from Christ and this would be in contradiction with the teaching from the Holy Scriptures that Christ is the redeemer for all humans without any exception.

Second, Mary as the descendant from the first parents Adam and Eve, she was born through the normal conjugal union therefore she would contract the original sin from Adam. Therefore, the soul of the Blessed Virgin Mary was not sanctified at the first moment of her conception but she was sanctified immediately after the contraction of the original sin. In other words, the process of sanctification by the Holy Spirit took place immediately after the infusion of the soul by God, but certainly before her birth.

### **Scotus' Solution to the First Opinion**

Scotus counters the first opinion:

(if she had been without sin) Mary would have had the greatest need of Christ as Redeemer; for by reason of her procreation, which followed the common mode, she would have contracted original sin had she not been kept from it by the grace of the Mediator, and just as others are in need of Christ for the remission, by His merit, of sin which they have already contracted, so Mary would have been in still greater need of a Mediator preventing her from contracting sin.<sup>91</sup>

Scotus argues that Mary's preservation from the original sin does not contradict with the biblical truth that Christ is the redeemer of all humans, but as a matter of fact, Mary is in greater needs of Christ's redemption, because Mary's Immaculate Conception is granted by God's singular grace based entirely on the merits of the foreseen passion and the glory of Christ, Her Son. Since without Christ's redemptive power, Mary would have contracted the original sin which followed the same path like other human beings. As such, Mary with her Immaculate Conception is in greatest need of her Son's redemption in the sense that Christ is not only the redeemer but also the mediator between God and men and he has used the power and the glory of the mediator's role to the most perfect manner to obtain for His most beloved Mother the unique privilege of the Immaculate Conception.

Christ was the most perfect mediator. Therefore he exercised the highest degree of mediation in favor of another person. Now he could not be a most perfect mediator and could not repair the effects of sin to the highest degree if he did not preserve his Mother from original sin. Therefore, since he was the most perfect mediator regarding the person of his Mother, from this it follows that he preserved her from original sin. It is more noble to forgive one's guilt by preserving that person from it, than by permitting that same person to fall into guilt, and then to remit that person's guilt....since the passion of Christ was immediately and principally ordered to delete original guilt as well as actual guilt, in such

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<sup>91</sup> Carlo Balic, *The Medieval Controversy over the Immaculate Conception up to the Death of Scotus*, 207.

a way that all the Trinity, since it had the foresight of the merits of the passion of Christ, applied them to the Virgin and preserved her from all actual sin, and also from all original sin.<sup>92</sup>

Scotus asserts that Christ is the most perfect mediator between God and men, Christ could not be the most perfect mediator if he was not able to preserve His Blessed Mother from the penalty of the original sin, thus the preservation of the Mother of God from the stain of the original sin requires the perfect mediation from Christ as the Son of God, Christ is able to provide the most perfect mediation, which is also the highest act of mediation, to obtain His Mother's perfect innocence in preserving her from contracting the original sin at the first moment of her conception. Furthermore, the Blessed Trinity had the foresight of the merits of the passion of Christ with the purpose to remove sins which can be applied to the Mother of God in the most perfect manner in preserving her from any stain of the original sin.

### **Scotus' Solution to the Second Opinion**

The theologians who argues for the second opinion believe that since Mary was conceived through the normal channel of human generation she would have contracted the original sin like any other offsprings of Adam and Eve. Scotus approach to rebuk this second opinion is two fold: first, he refers to the book of Genesis where the story of creation of the human race was recorded; second, Scotus points out the objective character of the original sin as the privation of the original justice.

From Genesis (3:15), after the serpent was able to deceive Eve, God said to the serpent that:

And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strikes his heel. (Gen 3:15)<sup>93</sup>

As I have indicated earlier, apostolic Fathers such as Justin Martyr and Irenaeus who were known as being close to the apostles, typologically interpreted the above passage by attributing the Blessed Virgin to the woman mentioned, that God has ordained the Virgin who shall be forever at enmity with the power of darkness. Influenced by the patristic tradition, Scotus argues that if the Blessed Virgin was in any way affected by the original sin, she would not be at enmity with the serpent:

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<sup>92</sup> Juniper Carol, *Mariology: The Immaculate Conception of the Mother of God*, 3. (Blessed John Duns Scotus, *Lectura III Sent* 123,126,138)

<sup>93</sup> New Revised Standard Version Catholic Edition 1989 (NRSVCE), <https://www.biblegateway.com/quicksearch/?quicksearch=Genesis&version=NRSVCE>

The Blessed Mother of God...was never at enmity (with God) either actually – on account of actual sin, or originally – because of original sin. She would have been (at enmity with God) had she not been preserved (from original sin).<sup>94</sup>

This line of Scotus' argument is essential as it has been proclaimed in the dogma:

Hence, just as Christ, the Mediator between God and man, assumed human nature, blotted the handwriting of the decree that stood 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>95</sup>

In the previous chapter, I have shown that theologians supporting Aquina's Marian opinions unanimously agreed that as an offspring of Adam and Eve, the Blessed Virgin was affected by the original sin at the first moment of her conception, however by the power of God she is free from actual sin as she was sanctified and purified in the womb like any other holy persons such as Jeremias and John the Baptist.<sup>96</sup> Scotus disagrees with this line of argument in pointing out that the cause of the original sin has an objective character in the sense that it can be transmitted through the generations of the human race but its cause does not come from this transmission. The real and only cause of the original sin is the privation of the original justice (or grace) in the soul of our first parents. Scotus wrote:

Original sin enters through two well-known sources; the first is that Adam had received the gift of original justice for this child but willfully lost it through his sin; and therefore original justice will not be given to this child by God when He creates the soul; and the second cause is the natural propagation from Adam which makes this child a real natural descendant of Adam. There are then two causes for the privation of original justice in the will of this child; the first is a negative cause; namely, God, who does not bestow the gift of original justice when creating the soul; the second is the demeriting or culpable cause, the sin of Adam which lost the gift.<sup>97</sup>

In this text, Scotus describes that Adam lost his God-given original justice when his willfully disobeyed God's commandments. The privation of this original justice in the soul of Adam is the original sin which is the main cause of Adam's fall from grace and that of his offspring in the subsequent generations of the human race. In other words, God removes the gift (or grace) of the original justice for Adam's offspring due to Adam's corrupted will which in turns allow the entry of the original sin in the soul of the newborn child. The original sin is the tendency in the will of the child to sin.

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<sup>94</sup> Balic, *The Medieval Controversy over the Immaculate Conception*, 209.

<sup>95</sup> Pope Pie IX, *Ineffabilis Deus*.

<sup>96</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 3<sup>rd</sup> part, Q.27., article 1.

<sup>97</sup> Storff, "The Teaching of St Thomas, St Bonaventure and Bl. J. Duns Scotus on the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary," 40.



As I have pointed out in the previous section, St Anselm's opinion on the original sin greatly influenced Scotus' opinion on the original sin in the sense that they both share a common understanding about the two essential aspects of the original sin – its cause and its objective character. The cause of the original sin is the privation of the original justice in the soul of Adam because of his original disobedience to God and this transmission of the original injustice (original sin) bears an objective character in such a way that it can pass from Adam to the next generations regardless the condition of the soul of the parents when they perform the normal conjugal act. This understanding of the objective character of the original sin transmission "went against the attitude that the immediate sinful lust of the parents in the conjugal act was the cause of original sin."<sup>98</sup> This shows the original sin is the loss of the original justice in the soul of the child because the first parents' disobedience, thus God withdrew the original justice from them. Therefore all the subsequent offspring share in the same fate with Adam and Eve regardless the lustful aspects of the conjugal acts.

Scotus argues that even though the Blessed Virgin was born by normal conjugal union, the objective character of the original sin allows for the complete and absolute absence of the original sin in the soul of the Mother of God. God could ensure that the soul of the Blessed Virgin is preserved from contracting the original sin by infusing the fullness of grace in her soul at the first moment of her conception. Scotus writes:

...grace is equivalent to original justice, so far as God's approval of the soul is concerned; for by reason of this approval, original sin does not reside in a soul that has grace. God could have conferred as much grace on her in the first moment of her soul's existence as He does on another soul at circumcision or baptism; in that moment, then the soul would not have had original sin, as it would not have it afterwards when the person was baptized.<sup>99</sup>

Her soul is created in sanctifying grace, she was never without grace and justice and therefore never in sin...original sin is destroyed in the soul by the grace conferred; thus could God, in the first instance of the Conception of the Virgin by then giving grace destroy it (the original sin)...on account of the merits of Jesus Christ. Christ merited this singular grace for Mary by offering His merits in a most singular manner to God for His Mother that she should receive the highest share of His merits and graces from the beginning of her existence, and thus become most worthy in body and soul of being His Mother.<sup>100</sup>

### **The Absolute Primacy of Christ and Franciscan Christology**

The prominent scholars of Franciscan tradition agree that Scotus' defense of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin reflects the core principles of Franciscan Christology on the absolute primacy of Christ, or the universal kingship of Christ and joint predestination of Our Lady with Christ. Pope John Paul II asserts this:

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<sup>98</sup> Janaro, "St Anselm and the Development of the Doctrine of the Immaculate Conception," 48.

<sup>99</sup> Balic, *The Medieval Controversy over the Immaculate Conception*, 205.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid*, p.102.

Bl. John Duns Scotus is a well-known person in Catholic philosophy and theology, whom my Predecessor Pope Paul VI described in his Apostolic Letter *Alma Parens*, of 14 July 1966, as "the perfecter" of St Bonaventure, "the most distinguished representative" of the Franciscan School.<sup>101</sup>

The view of the Franciscan thesis is that the truth of the Immaculate Conception can be illustrated in the perfect mediation of Christ in obtaining the supreme grace of preservation from the original sin for his much beloved Mother. It is Christ's perfect mediation which forms the basis for perfect redemption for His Mother for preserving her from any stain of original sin. This Franciscan doctrine rests solidly on the doctrine of the absolute primacy of Jesus Christ and His eternal kingship over the entire creation. The absolute primacy and the predestination of Christ which was antecedently ordained before the creation of the world; the recapitulation of all the elect in Christ and the joint predestination of Our Lady with her Son forms the basis for Scotus' defense of the Immaculate Conception.<sup>102</sup>

## **Conclusion**

This chapter outlines Scotus' key theological doctrines in the defense and the promotion of the belief in the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of God. It shows Scotus' defense of Mary's preservation from the original sin from a higher viewpoint of Christological soteriology where the role of Mary is explained within the doctrinal concept of the Absolute Primacy of Christ which entails the supreme mediation of Christ. In other words, Scotus points out that the truth concerning the Blessed Virgin's Immaculate Conception is a decision from God who has ordained this truth before the creation of universe, that His Son's messianic mission is fully predestined along with His Mother's Immaculate Conception.

This chapter also illustrates Scotus' arguments that Mary's preservation from the original sin is in full harmony with the Holy Scriptures and the Church's doctrine of universal redemption and the salvific mission of Jesus Christ. It identifies key theological arguments that Scotus use to address the fact the even though Mary was born through the normal conjugal union, she was however preserved from contracting the original sin because God bestowed the fullness of grace of original justice to the soul of the Blessed Virgin at the first moment of her conception.

I think it is of significant noteworthiness to highlight the essence of Scotus' defense which is entirely based on the Holy Scripture and Divine Revelation with special emphasis on the Apostle Paul's Christological higher viewpoint under which the Apostle affirms the absolute supremacy of Jesus Christ (Col. 1:15-18) and His incarnation through the Mother of God in the fullness of time (Ephesians 1:9-10).

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<sup>101</sup> Pope John Paul II: Address to the Members of Scotus Commission, 16 February 2002.

<sup>102</sup> Peter Fehlner, "The Franciscan Mariological School and the Coredemptive Movement." *Marian Studies*: Vol. 59, Article 8, (2008): 63. [https://ecommons.udayton.edu/marian\\_studies/vol59/iss1/8](https://ecommons.udayton.edu/marian_studies/vol59/iss1/8)

## CHAPTER 4

### The Role of the Church's Magisterium

#### Introduction

The journey to the formal declaration of the Dogma of the Immaculate Conception begins with the pious belief of the early Church Fathers of apostolic age, almost 2000 years ago. The Church has been actively involved in clarifications and approving various Marian doctrines throughout her history. The role of the Church's magisterium is indispensable in clarifying, approving and advancing various pious Marian beliefs towards their general acceptance in the Universal Church. From the apostolic time to the 7th centuries, the Church pre-occupies with the doctrinal development and the definitions of the first two Marian dogmas. Starting from the medieval period until the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Church starts to get involved and intervene more actively in the theological debates of the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception.

Each pontificate intervenes by issuing the apostolic constitutions and decrees at the most opportune moments to preserve the integrity of the doctrinal debates while at the same time to allow for continuing dialectic discourses of different theological horizons. The Roman Pontiff occupies the most important function in the formation and the development of the doctrine, especially in making sure that the sound doctrine contains no errors and represents the divine truth as handed down from the Apostles and clarified through the Sacred Tradition. Therefore it is the primacy of the Pope, the successor of Peter the Apostle, to guarantee and ensure that the sound doctrine and the formal declaration of its dogma reflect the will of God. Indeed, Pope Benedict XVI said about this primacy:

The Roman Pontiff - like all the faithful - is subject to the Word of God, to the Catholic faith, and is the guarantor of the Church's obedience; in this sense he is *servus servorum Dei*. He does not make arbitrary decisions, but is spokesman for the will of the Lord, who speaks to man in the Scriptures lived and interpreted by Tradition."<sup>103</sup>

#### From Scotus to 18<sup>th</sup> Century

Before proceeding with the description of the historical events that led to Pope Pius IX's official declaration of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, I would like to briefly outline the key events that took place in the post-Scotus period from 15<sup>th</sup> century to the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

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<sup>103</sup> Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger: *The Primacy of the Successor of Peter in the Mystery of the Church*, 18 November 1998. [https://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_19981031\\_primato-successore-pietro\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19981031_primato-successore-pietro_en.html)

During the period from Scotus to Pope Sixtus IV (1414-1484), there had been a fierce theological debate on the doctrine between the Order of Preachers (Dominican) and the Order of Franciscans. In following the Thomist tradition and the strong influence of Scotus and his followers, the theologians in the Dominican camp take their stand against the doctrine whereas those in Franciscan order were all united in supporting the doctrine respectively. The Council of Basel was the first Church Council to support the declaration of the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception with the formulation of the decree published in September 17, 1438.

.....We define and declare that the doctrine according to which the glorious Virgin Mary, Mother of God, by a special effect of divine preventing and operating grace, was never stained with original sin, but has always been holy and immaculate, is a pious doctrine, conformable to the cult of the Church, to Catholic Faith, to right reason and Sacred Scripture; it must be approved, held and professed by all Catholics; furthermore, it is no longer allowed to preach or teach anything contrary to it.<sup>104</sup>

Even though the declaration of the Council of Basel in 1483 was not official due to its lack of ecumenical status, it had great significance in contributing to the development of pious belief of the doctrine in a number of European countries such as Switzerland, Germany and France. Pope Sixtus IV, a Franciscan, was the first to officially encourage the doctrine. In his constitution titled "*Cum praeclsa*" (1477), the pope exhorts devotion to the Feast of the Conception.

When, with that deep insight that comes of devout contemplation, we search and discover the sublime proofs of those merits which cause the Queen of heaven, the glorious Virgin Mother of God, raised upon her heavenly throne, to outshine like the morning star all other constellations...We deem it fitting, and even our duty, to invite by means of indulgences and the remission of sins all the faithful of Christ to offer thanks and praise to God...for the wondrous Conception of his same Immaculate Virgin, and to celebrate or to be present at Masses and at other divine functions which have been instituted for this purpose.<sup>105</sup>

By giving the apostolic blessings to the feast of conception, Sixtus IV moves the church closer to the recognition of the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception. There had been a theological debate on the title of the Feast during the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The theologians who follow the Marian tradition of Aquinas and Bonaventure suggest the designation, "sanctification" as a more appropriate title for the Feast whereas the Franciscan theologians of Scotus tradition pushes for the designation, "conception". Under Sixtus IV, Pius V (1504-1572), a Dominican, and Clement VIII (1536-1605), the Church retained the title of Conception for the feast.<sup>106</sup>

With the purpose to enforce the validity of the feast, the Church Council of Trent in 1546 deliberately decided not to include the Blessed Virgin in the council's discussion and the decree

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<sup>104</sup>Wenceslaus Sebastian, *The Controversy over the Immaculate Conception from after Scotus to the End of the 18<sup>th</sup> century*, ed. Edward D. O'Connor (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1958), 232.

<sup>105</sup> Heinrich Denzinger, *Enchiridion symbolorum* - Compendium of Creeds, Definitions, and Declarations of the Catholic Church on Matters of Faith and Morals, ed. Peter Hunermann, 43<sup>rd</sup> ed. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2012), 374.

<sup>106</sup> Rene Laurentin, O.F.M., *The Role of the Papal Magisterium in the Development of the Dogma of the Immaculate Conception*, ed. Edward D. O'Connor (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1958), 280.

of the original sin. In other words, the Fathers of Trent council wanted to uphold the intention of Pope Sixtus IV as defined in his “Cum praeclsa” by referring to the Blessed Virgin’s freedom from original sin as an exception to the general rule. The Trent council asserts that:

This same holy council declares that it is not its intention to include in this decree dealing with original sin the Blessed and Immaculate Virgin Mary, Mother of God, but that the constitutions of Pope Sixtus IV of blessed memory are to be observed under the penalties contained in those constitutions, which it renews.<sup>107</sup>

The decision of the Fathers of Trent Council on the excluding the Mother of God from the clarifications of the doctrine of the original sin has the great significance in the advancement of the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception. It sent a strong message to all the theologians of different schools that the Blessed Virgin has absolutely nothing to do with the original sin as she was free from any stain of sin. Pope Pius IX (1846-1878) interprets the decisions of Trent as follows:

Even the Council of Trent itself, when it promulgated the dogmatic decree concerning original sin, following the testimonies of the Sacred Scriptures, of the Holy Fathers and of the renowned Council, decreed and defined that all men are born infected by original sin; nevertheless, it solemnly declared that it had no intention of including the blessed and immaculate Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, in this decree and in the general extension of its definition. Indeed, considering the times and circumstances, the Fathers of Trent sufficiently intimated by this declaration that the Blessed Virgin Mary was free from the original stain; and thus they clearly signified that nothing could be reasonably cited from the Sacred Scriptures, from Tradition, or from the authority of the Fathers, which would in any way be opposed to so great a prerogative of the Blessed Virgin.<sup>108</sup>

In 1622 Gregory XV (1554-1623) forbade any writings or sermons against the Immaculate Conception and against any attempt to replace the word “Conception” with any other word (such as “Sanctification”).<sup>109</sup> In December 8, 1661, Pope Alexander VII (1655-1657) issued his constitution, *Sollicitudo*, to support the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception and the feast of conception.

The devotion of the faithful of Christ toward His most blessed mother, the Virgin Mary, is ancient, according to which they believe that her soul, from the first instant of its creation and infusion into the body was, by a special grace and privilege of God, preserved immune from the stain of original sin in view of the merits of her Son Jesus Christ, the Redeemer of the human race, and in this sense, honor and celebrate, in a solemn manner, the feast of

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<sup>107</sup> Heinrich Denzinger, *Enchiridion symbolorum* - Compendium of Creeds, Definitions, and Declarations of the Catholic Church on Matters of Faith and Morals, ed. Peter Hunermann, 43<sup>rd</sup> ed. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2012), 374.

<sup>108</sup> Pope Pius IX, "Ineffabilis Deus,"

<sup>109</sup> Carol, "Mariology: The Immaculate Conception of the Mother of God," 4.

her conception...to the point that, with most of the more illustrious academies also coming to this view, almost all Catholics already embrace it. <sup>110</sup>

On December 6, 1708, Pope Clement XI (1649-1721) inscribed December 8 among the feasts of obligation for the Universal Church and on December 5, 1879. Pope Leo XIII (1810-1903) again extends the Feast of Conception to the Universal Church and established the observance of vigil during the feast. <sup>111</sup>

### **The 19<sup>th</sup> Century and the Official Declaration of the Dogma**

At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the campaign for petitions gained a new strength from bishops and religious orders around the world. In 1847, the new Pope Pius IX openly encouraged the steps that should be taken to prepare for the official declaration of the dogma. On July 17, 1847 Pius IX approved a rescript of the Congregation of Rites to add the word “Immaculate” to the Dominican Preface of the formula of prayers and liturgy. On October 28 of that same year, Pius gave his support to the Jesuit Father J. Perrone’s book titled *De Immaculato B.V. Conceptu*. On June 1, 1848 the Pope proposed the question of the dogma’s definition to a group of twenty prominent theologians, after consultations and debates, seventeen favored it. <sup>112</sup>

On December 6, 1848, the Pope established a preliminary congregation to review the definition of the dogma which required the consultation from all the Bishops of the Universal Catholic Church. For this purpose, on February 3, 1849, Pius issued the encyclical *Ubi Primum* to all the 603 Bishops and 546 supported the definition. In this encyclical, Pius asserts that the increasing petitions from the people of God for the Church’s official recognition of the doctrine has been consistent throughout different periods of the Church history and that, the time has now come for the Church to solemnly consider the official declaration of this dogma.

Venerable Brethren, many of you have sent letters to our Predecessor and to US begging with repeated insistence and redoubled enthusiasm, that We define as a dogma of the Catholic Church that the most blessed Virgin Mary was conceived immaculate and free in every way of all taint of original sin.

Nor do we lack today eminent theologians – men of intellectual brilliance, of virtue, of holiness and sound doctrine – who have so effectively explained this doctrine and so impressively expounded this proposition that many persons are now wondering why this honor has not already been accorded to the Blessed Virgin by the Church and the Apostolic See – an honor which the widespread piety of the Christian people so fervently desires to have accorded to the Most Holy Virgin by a solemn decree and by the authority of the Church and Holy See. <sup>113</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Heinrich Denzinger, *Enchiridion symbolorum*, 458

<sup>111</sup> Rene Laurentin, *The Role of the Papal Magisterium*. 277.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., pxxx.

<sup>113</sup> Pope Pie IX : *Ubi Primum- On The Immaculate Conception* 1849.  
<https://www.papalencyclicals.net/pius09/p9ineff.htm>

From May of 1852 to August of 1853, Pius appointed a special commission to review the entire definition theologically and analytically. In 1852, the Sixth Provincial Council of Baltimore attended by American Archbishops and Bishops made the Immaculate Conception the patronal feast of the United States<sup>114</sup>. On March 22, 1854 the Pope appointed a consultative assembly consisting of twenty-one cardinals and numerous prominent theologians to review the definition.

Pius then decided the December 8 as the date of official definition of the dogma. In his papal bull “Ineffabilis Deus”, Pope Pius IX define the Sacred Tradition as the living spirit of the Church which includes the desire of all the bishops, the apostolic tradition and affirmations of the Church Fathers, the Church’s official constitutions and decrees and the pious aspirations of all the faithful. Therefore, in order for a Church doctrine to become a dogma which is a “Sacred Deposit of Faith to the Church”, we must take into account the divine truth taught and revealed by both the Sacred Scripture and sacred tradition which accomplishes, through the Holy Spirit, through the sayings of Church holy Fathers as the living witness to the Tradition along with the Church’s life, worship and devotional practices which perpetuates and transmit to every generations.<sup>115</sup>

On December 8, 1854, the doctrine of “Immaculate Conception” was officially proclaimed as the Church dogma by the Holy Father Pope Pius IX (in office, 1846-78). The Pope promulgated this dogma in an apostolic constitution “Ineffabilis Deus”, eight years after his papal election and 15 years before he convened the First Vatican Council (1869-70), which decreed the doctrine of papal infallibility. The pope proclaimed:

By the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, for the honor of the Holy and undivided Trinity, for the glory and adornment of the Virgin Mother of God, for the exaltation of the Catholic Faith, and for the furtherance of the Catholic religion, by the authority of Jesus Christ our Lord, of the Blessed Apostles Peter and Paul, and by our own: 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 Savior 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 faithful.<sup>116</sup>

In the First Vatican Council’s Dogmatic Constitution on the Catholic Faith “Dei Filius”, Pius IX defines the dogma as a sacred doctrine of faith revealed by God and infallibly delivered as a “Divine Deposit” in the Church, which shall be perpetually retained and faithfully kept.<sup>117</sup> The dogma of the Immaculate Conception proclaims that from eternity, God the Father had prepared the Blessed Virgin Mary as the Mother of His only and unique Son, and “in the blessed fullness of

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<sup>114</sup> New Catholic Encyclopedia, vol. 7., 334.

<sup>115</sup> Pope Pius IX, "Ineffabilis Deus-The Immaculate Conception," (8 December 1854) at <https://www.papalencyclicals.net/pius09/p9ineff.htm> (accessed on 08-11-2020)

<sup>116</sup> Pope Pie IX, "Ineffabilis Deus-The Immaculate Conception," (8 December 1854) at <https://www.papalencyclicals.net/pius09/p9ineff.htm> (accessed on 08-11-2020)

<sup>117</sup> Pope Pie IX, "Dei Filius," (24 Avril 1870, Chapter 4) at <http://www.vatican.va/content/pius-ix/la/documents/constitutio-dogmatica-dei-filius-24-aprilis-1870.html> (accessed on 08-11-2020)

time, he would be born into this world". God had bestowed the Blessed Virgin Mary the fullness of grace, of holy innocence and supreme sanctity with absolute free of all stain of sin from the first instance of her conception. This Marian privilege is the truth "which under God, one cannot even imagine anything greater, and which, outside God, no mind can succeed in comprehending fully".<sup>118</sup>

In defining the doctrine of Immaculate Conception as "the dogma of faith", Pius IX acknowledges the favorable and critical contributions of his predecessors - Sixtus IV (1414-1484), Paul V (1550-1621) and Gregory XV (1554-1623), who in their apostolic constitutions and decrees, affirmed their belief that God had bestowed on the Blessed Virgin Mary the most sublime holiness and preserved her from the original sin. Pius IX decreed that just as Christ is the New and the Second Adam, the Virgin Mary was chosen by God from eternity as the woman who "would triumph utterly over the ancient serpent... foretold by God when he said to the serpent: I will put enmity between you and the woman (Gen 3.15)". The Pope exalted the Virgin Mary above Eve as the New Eve who is "the Virgin undefiled, immaculate, ever blessed, and free from all contagion of sin, she from whom was formed the new Adam, the flawless, brightest, and most beautiful paradise of innocence, immortality and delights planted by God himself and protected against all the snares of the poisonous serpent."<sup>119</sup>

Pius IX affirms that the doctrine of Immaculate Conception is rooted in divine revelation and Holy Scriptures and this doctrine has constantly been in the heart and mind of the Church. From the moment of Annunciation, the most Blessed Virgin was, "in the name and by order of God himself, proclaimed full of grace". Historical evidences of the pious and faithful testimonies of almost all the earlier Church Fathers affirm the Mother of God is "the seat of all divine graces and she is adorned with all the gifts of the Holy Spirit...and she was never subject to the curse and was, together with her Son, the only partaker of perpetual benediction."<sup>120</sup>

Throughout the history of the Church, the Holy Spirit of God has never ceased to teach the Church and its faithful about the divine character of this revealed doctrine. In other words, even though, the dogma was officially proclaimed in 1854, the Church and its faithful communities have believed and venerated the blessed event of the Immaculate Conception through different forms of liturgical devotions, pious opinions and supporting theological discourses by the scholastic doctors and illustrious theologians. This has resulted in successful Church Councils with apostolic constitutions and papal decrees in different stages of the Church history from both the Western and Eastern Catholic traditions.

It takes many centuries throughout different historical periods of the Church for fierce theological debates, deep theological reflections on this marvelous mystery, ecclesiastical-apostolic constitutions, papal decrees and proclamations in order for the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mother of God to come to perfect clarity and fruition. Father

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<sup>118</sup> Pope Pie IX, "Ineffabilis Deus-The Immaculate Conception," (8 December 1854) at <https://www.papalencyclicals.net/pius09/p9ineff.htm> (accessed on 08-11-2020)

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.



Peter Fehlner (O.F.M), Professor of Theology in the Franciscans' Institute of Ecclesiastical Studies in Frigento Italy asserts that

The development or process culminating in the dogmatic definition of 1854, rather than creating a new truth, clarified one always believed because always included in the deposit of faith formed by our Lord. It is by first studying this Tradition as it is proclaimed by the living Magisterium of the Church that we come to master the theological (and not merely philological-historical) exegesis of the Scriptures.<sup>121</sup>

There are two (2) official Marian apparitions that took place in the 19<sup>th</sup> century that are related to the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The first was the blessed event of Marian apparition, which took place in December 1830, just twenty four (24) years before the official declaration of the dogma. In this apparition, the Blessed Virgin is said to have revealed to Saint Catherine Labouré about her Immaculate Conception and the powerful role of her intercessions to the Blessed Trinity. The Mother of God asked the saint, a daughter of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul, at the Paris motherhouse to make a miraculous medal with a simple prayer "O Mary conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to you". The Mother of God stood upon a globe, crushing a serpent beneath her foot (Gn 3:15). In 1894, Pope Leo XIII approved the crowning of the status of Immaculate Conception and Miraculous Medal. In 1947, after the process of the inquiry on the Marian apparition, Pope Pie XII canonized Saint Catherine Labouré.<sup>122</sup>

The second Marian apparition took place at Lourdes, France in 1858. In 1858, at the foot of the Pyrenees, southwest France, Diocese of Tarbes and Lourdes, the Blessed Virgin Mary appeared to Saint Bernadette Soubirous 18 times between February 11 and July 16. The Virgin Mary told Bernadette, in the dialect of Lourdes "I am the Immaculate Conception". In 1862, Bishop Bertrand-Sévère Laurence, Bishop of Tarbes, declared: "The Virgin Mary did appear indeed to Bernadette Soubirous". On 3 July 1876, Pope Pius IX officially granted the Canonical Coronation to the image of our Lady of Lourdes.<sup>123</sup>

In the official papa bull of the dogma, Pope Pius IX illustrated the importance of piety and devotion of the faithful towards the Blessed Mother of God as an indispensable-integral part of the Church worship along with the fervent prayers and praises of the whole Church in honoring the extraordinary and supreme holiness of Mary:

Our predecessors, the Roman Pontiffs, therefore, while directing all their efforts toward an increase of the devotion to the conception, made it their aim not only to emphasize the object with the utmost zeal, but also to enunciate the exact doctrine. Definitely and clearly

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<sup>121</sup> Peter M. Fehlner, *The Predestination of the Virgin Mother and her Immaculate Conception* (California: Queenship Publishing, 2007), 230.

<sup>122</sup> New Catholic Encyclopedia vol. 9 (Michigan: Thomson & Gale Publisher, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition 2011), 670

<sup>123</sup> Ibid. vol 8, page 819

they taught that the feast (of Immaculate Conception) was held in honor of the conception of the Virgin.<sup>124</sup>

From this teaching expressed in the Papal Bull of the dogma, it is fitting to see that as a loving response to the Church's fervent prayers and devotion, the Blessed Mother of God appeared in a public manner through Saint Catherine Labouré in 1830. And she appeared again to Saint Bernadette Soubirous at Lourdes in 1858, just four (4) years after the formal declaration of the dogma in 1854. I recall the observation made by Professor Jaroslav Pelikan of Yale University on our Blessed Virgin Lady's apparition at Lourdes:

There is good reason to believe that neither the intellectual defense of Christian revelation by the apologetic enterprise in nineteenth-century Roman Catholic theology, including the revival of Thomistic philosophical apologetics, nor the political defense of the institutional church and its prerogatives against the anticlericalism of that time was as effective a campaign, particularly among the common people, as the one that the Virgin Mary waged. For it has been well said that "Rome is the head of the Church but Lourdes is its heart".<sup>125</sup>

## Conclusion

Sixteen years (16) after the declaration of the dogma, in 1870, Pope Pius IX, in his Dogmatic Constitution, *Dei Filius* asserts that "no man can assent to the Gospel teaching, as is necessary to obtain salvation, without the illumination and inspiration of the Holy Spirit, who gives to all men sweetness in assenting to and believing in the truth."<sup>126</sup> Indeed, in looking back the roles of the Church's magisterium in the development of the doctrine and the definition of the dogma we have seen the Church's extra-ordinary resilience and perseverance in the defense and promotion of the doctrine throughout centuries.

Since the apostolic age to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception has survived through fierce theological debates and controversies, but under the guiding light of the Church, it has gradually blossomed in its maturity and perfection. In this chapter, I have illustrated how different Pontiffs from Sixtus IV to Pius IX have providentially intervened at key moments of history to preserve the integrity and the truth of the doctrine and how Pope Pius IX had diligently prepared for the definition of the dogma. I have also illustrated how the blessed events of the apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary support the truth of the dogma

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<sup>124</sup> Pope Pie IX, "Ineffabilis Deus-The Immaculate Conception," (8 December 1854) at <https://www.papalencyclicals.net/pius09/p9ineff.htm> (accessed on 08-11-2020)

<sup>125</sup> Jaroslav Pelikan, *Mary through the Centuries: Her Place in the History of Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 284

<sup>126</sup> Pope Pie IX : *Dei Filius* 24 Avril 1870.  
<https://www.catholicplanet.org/councils/20-Dei-Filius.htm>

## CONCLUSION

Pope Paul VI, in his "Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation – Dei Verbum" (1965), asserts that "there exists a close connection and communication between sacred tradition and Sacred Scripture. For both of them, flowing from the same divine wellspring, in a certain way merge into a unity and tend toward the same end." Indeed, in looking back the historical development of the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, we have seen how the Church's sacred tradition spanning almost 19 centuries have shaped the maturing progress of the doctrine.

Even though the New Testament does not proclaim explicitly that the Mother of God was preserved from the original sin, the pious belief on Mary's sinlessness and supreme holiness had begun in the early period of the primitive Church. The lack of the explicit mentioning of the Blessed Virgin's Immaculate Conception had not prevented the outpouring pious conviction and steadfast belief on the doctrine throughout centuries. In this thesis, we have seen the wonderful working of the Holy Spirit throughout the different periods of the Church spanning almost 19 centuries where He has enlightened and illuminated the minds and the hearts of the Church's brilliant scholastic doctors and theologians towards the profound insight and the acceptance of the divine truth of this dogma.

In chapter 1, I have shown that earlier Church Fathers had consistently been the pioneers in explaining their immense appreciation of the doctrines of Marian privileges. Even though they did not explicitly proclaim the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, the Greek Fathers in the 7<sup>th</sup> and early 8<sup>th</sup> centuries expressed their belief in the high degree of purity of the Mother of God. Since then, the pious belief on the doctrine had spread throughout the Western and Eastern Church. This chapter identifies the doctrinal concepts of Recapitulation in Christ, Mary-Eve typology which I believe could greatly influenced the development of the doctrine of Immaculate Conception in the medieval time and beyond.

Chapter 2 outlines key opinions that are contrary to the belief in the Immaculate Conception based on the writings of selected prominent doctors of the medieval era whose opinions have greatly influenced the opponents of the doctrines during the post-medieval time. The common contrary positions have been based on the theological understanding of the doctrine of universal salvation under which with the exception of Jesus Christ, all men were born with original sin. I have also presented how St Anselm's doctrine of original sin and original justice could have influenced Scotus' defense of the doctrine

Chapter 3 outlines Scotus' higher viewpoint on Christian soteriology. I have shown how Scotus theologially defends the doctrine against the contrary opinions of other prominent doctors. Scotus' bold and forceful scholastic defense of the doctrine is based entirely on his doctrine on the Absolute Primacy of Jesus Christ who is the Alpha and Omega of the Universe (Revelation 1:8) and "through Him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made" (John 1:3). The brilliance of Scotus' defense rests on the primacy and predestination of Christ which explains the supreme mediation of Christ for His mother in granting her the preservation from original sin, fullness of divine grace with all sublime Marian privileges. Scotus affirms the truth of the predestination of Christ as this was pre-ordained from eternity by the Blessed and the Most

Holy Trinity before the foundation of this world and the Blessed Virgin was also jointly predestined along with her Son in order to fulfil Christ's universal redemption of the human race.

Chapter 4 presents a historical culmination of the Church's decrees and declarations with respect to the defense of the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of God. It shows that in the middle of theological debates and controversies, the Church has remained steadfast to her pious belief in the doctrine. At the most opportune moment in history, the Supreme Pontiff has intervened decisively and forcefully to uphold the integrity of this important Marian devotion. The history of the Catholic Church has clearly shown that even though from times to times there had been strong opinions and beliefs contrary to the doctrine raised by certain prominent theologians and doctors, the Holy Spirit patiently guides and enlighten the minds of other prominent doctors in their successful defense of this special privilege of the Mother of God.

Father René Laurentin, professor of theology at the Catholic Institute of Paris concluded:

In the light of history, therefore, the definition of 1854 appears, not as one man's achievement, or the result of a few years' labor, but as the work of the Holy See, slowly matured over the course of centuries. And the ultimate explanation of the continuity of this work is the Holy Spirit. He is the reason for the order and harmony among the papal decisions which no individual pope could have envisioned and which still less could have been expected from the tumultuous course of events in which it was realized.<sup>127</sup>

In preparing for the definition of the dogma, Pope Pius IX has shown his perseverance and sound judgement, especially in the matter of consultations with the Universal Church's Bishops. The Pope was keenly aware that even after the successful and bold defense of the doctrine by the Blessed Scotus and his followers in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries, it takes almost 4 centuries later for the Church to arrive at this important decision of declaring the dogma of the Immaculate Conception.

In contemplating this great mystery and the challenging steps that he needs to finalize the wording of his "Ineffabilis Deus", the Pope must have been heartened by the blessed event of the Marian apparition which took place in France on December 1830 where the Mother of God, stood upon a globe, crushing a serpent beneath her food (Gn 3.15) and instructed a prayer to the world "O Mary conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to you."

The official declaration of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception in 1854 is the most important undertaking and accomplishment of Pius IX's pontificate. This dogma opens the heart and the mind of all Catholics to witness again the great love of God for all mankind that God so loves the world that he sent his own Son, our Lord Jesus Christ who came through his blessed Mother, the Virgin Mary who from the first instance of her conception was preserved by the power of the Holy Spirit from any stain of the original sin and has remained to this day, full of grace with supreme

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<sup>127</sup> Rene Laurentin, *The Role of the Papal Magisterium in the Development of the Dogma of the Immaculate Conception*, 321.

sanctity and holiness that under God there is no one greater than her. She is also our Mother, the Queen of Heaven and Earth, the Queen of Universe, the Queen of all the Apostles and Martyrs, the Queen of all the holy archangels and angels and most importantly of all, she is the Mother of God our Lord Jesus Christ.

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