

Immaculate Conception

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The Doctrine

In the [Constitution](#) *Ineffabilis Deus* of 8 December, 1854, [Pius IX](#) pronounced and [defined](#) that the [Blessed Virgin Mary](#) "in the first instance of her conception, by a singular privilege and [grace](#) granted by [God](#), in view of the [merits](#) of [Jesus Christ](#), the Saviour of the [human race](#), was preserved exempt from all stain of [original sin](#)."

"The Blessed Virgin Mary..."

The subject of this immunity from [original sin](#) is the [person](#) of [Mary](#) at the moment of the [creation](#) of her [soul](#) and its infusion into her body.

"...in the first instance of her conception..."

The term *conception* does not mean the [active](#) or *generative* conception by her [parents](#). Her body was formed in the womb of the [mother](#), and the [father](#) had the usual share in its formation. The question does not concern the immaculateness of the generative activity of her [parents](#). Neither does it concern the passive conception absolutely and simply (*conceptio seminis carnis, inchoata*), which, according to the order of [nature](#), precedes the infusion of the rational [soul](#). The [person](#) is truly [conceived](#) when the [soul](#) is [created](#) and infused into the body. [Mary](#) was preserved exempt from all stain of [original sin](#) at the first moment of her animation, and [sanctifying grace](#) was given to her before [sin](#) could have taken effect in her [soul](#).

"...was preserved exempt from all stain of original sin..."

The formal active [essence](#) of [original sin](#) was not removed from her [soul](#), as it is *removed* from others by [baptism](#); it was *excluded*, it never was in her [soul](#). Simultaneously with the exclusion of [sin](#). The state of original [sanctity](#), innocence, and justice, as opposed to [original sin](#), was conferred upon her, by which [gift](#) every stain and fault, all depraved emotions, [passions](#), and debilities, essentially pertaining to [original sin](#), were excluded. But she was not made exempt from the temporal penalties of [Adam](#) — from sorrow, bodily infirmities, and death.

"...by a singular privilege and grace granted by God, in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the human race."

The immunity from [original sin](#) was given to [Mary](#) by a singular exemption from a universal [law](#) through the same [merits](#) of [Christ](#), by which other [men](#) are cleansed from [sin](#) by [baptism](#). [Mary](#) needed the [redeeming Saviour](#) to obtain this exemption, and to be delivered from the universal [necessity](#) and [debt](#) (*debitum*) of being subject to [original sin](#). The [person](#) of [Mary](#), in

consequence of her origin from [Adam](#), should have been subject to [sin](#), but, being the new [Eve](#) who was to be the mother of the new [Adam](#), she was, by the [eternal](#) counsel of [God](#) and by the [merits](#) of [Christ](#), withdrawn from [the general](#) law of [original sin](#). Her [redemption](#) was the very masterpiece of [Christ's](#) redeeming wisdom. He is a greater redeemer who pays the [debt](#) that it may not be incurred than he who pays after it has fallen on the [debtor](#).

Such is the meaning of the term "Immaculate Conception."

Proof from Scripture

Genesis 3:15

No direct or categorical and stringent [proof](#) of the [dogma](#) can be brought forward from [Scripture](#). But the first [scriptural](#) passage which contains the [promise](#) of the [redemption](#), mentions also the [Mother of the Redeemer](#). The [sentence](#) against the first [parents](#) was accompanied by the Earliest Gospel (*Proto-evangelium*), which put enmity between the [serpent](#) and the [woman](#): "and I will put enmity between thee and the [woman](#) and her seed; she (he) shall crush thy head and thou shalt lie in wait for her (his) heel" ([Genesis 3:15](#)). The translation "she" of the [Vulgate](#) is interpretative; it originated after the fourth century, and cannot be defended critically. The conqueror from the seed of the [woman](#), who should crush the serpent's head, is [Christ](#); the [woman](#) at enmity with the [serpent](#) is [Mary](#). [God](#) puts enmity between her and [Satan](#) in the same manner and measure, as there is enmity between [Christ](#) and the seed of the serpent. [Mary](#) was ever to be in that exalted state of [soul](#) which the serpent had destroyed in [man](#), i.e. in [sanctifying grace](#). Only the continual union of [Mary](#) with [grace](#) explains sufficiently the enmity between her and [Satan](#). The Proto-evangelium, therefore, in the original text contains a direct promise of the [Redeemer](#), and in conjunction therewith the manifestation of the masterpiece of His [Redemption](#), the perfect preservation of His [virginal Mother](#) from [original sin](#).

Luke 1:28

The salutation of the [angel Gabriel](#) — *chaire kecharitomene*, Hail, full of [grace](#) ([Luke 1:28](#)) indicates a unique abundance of [grace](#), a [supernatural](#), godlike state of [soul](#), which finds its explanation only in the Immaculate Conception of [Mary](#). But the term *kecharitomene* (full of [grace](#)) serves only as an illustration, not as a [proof](#) of the [dogma](#).

Other texts

From the texts [Proverbs 8](#) and [Ecclesiasticus 24](#) (which exalt the Wisdom of [God](#) and which in the [liturgy](#) are applied to [Mary](#), the most beautiful work of [God's](#) Wisdom), or from the [Canticle of Canticles](#) (4:7, "Thou art all fair, O my love, and there is not a spot in thee"), no [theological](#) conclusion can be drawn. These passages, applied to the [Mother of God](#), may be readily understood by those who [know](#) the [privilege](#) of [Mary](#), but do not avail to [prove](#) the [doctrinedogmatically](#), and are therefore omitted from the Constitution "Ineffabilis Deus". For the theologian it is a matter of [conscience](#) not to take an extreme position by applying to a creature texts which might imply the prerogatives of [God](#).

Proof from Tradition

In regard to the sinlessness of [Mary](#) the older [Fathers](#) are very cautious: some of them even seem to have been in [error](#) on this matter.

- [Origen](#), although he ascribed to [Mary](#) high spiritual prerogatives, thought that, at the [time](#) of [Christ's passion](#), the sword of disbelief pierced Mary's [soul](#); that she was struck by the poniard of [doubt](#); and that for her [sins](#) also [Christ](#) died ([Origen](#), "In Luc. hom. xvii").
- In the same manner [St. Basil](#) writes in the fourth century: he sees in the sword, of which [Simeon](#) speaks, the [doubt](#) which pierced [Mary's soul](#) ([Epistle 259](#)).
- [St. Chrysostom](#) accuses her of [ambition](#), and of putting herself forward unduly when she sought to speak to [Jesus](#) at [Capharnaum](#) ([Matthew 12:46](#); [Chrysostom](#), *Homily 44 on Matthew*).

But these stray private opinions merely serve to show that [theology](#) is a progressive [science](#). If we were to attempt to set forth the full [doctrine](#) of the [Fathers](#) on the [sanctity](#) of the [Blessed Virgin](#), which includes particularly the implicit [belief](#) in the immaculateness of her conception, we should be forced to transcribe a multitude of passages. In the testimony of the [Fathers](#) two points are insisted upon: her absolute purity and her position as the second [Eve](#) (cf. [1 Corinthians 15:22](#)).

Mary as the second Eve

This celebrated comparison between [Eve](#), while yet immaculate and incorrupt — that is to say, not subject to [original sin](#) — and the [Blessed Virgin](#) is developed by:

- [Justin](#) (*Dialogue with Trypho* 100),
- [Irenaeus](#) (*Against Heresies* III.22.4),
- [Tertullian](#) (*On the Flesh of Christ* 17),
- [Julius Firmicus Maternus](#) (De errore profan. relig xxvi),
- [Cyril of Jerusalem](#) (*Catecheses* 12.29),
- [Epiphanius](#) (Hæres., lxxviii, 18),
- [Theodotus of Ancyra](#) (Or. in S. Deip n. 11), and
- [Sedulius](#) (Carmen paschale, II, 28).

The absolute purity of Mary

Patristic writings on Mary's purity abound.

- The Fathers call [Mary](#) the tabernacle exempt from defilement and corruption ([Hippolytus](#), "Ontt. in illud, Dominus pascit me");
- [Origen](#) calls her worthy of [God](#), immaculate of the immaculate, most complete [sanctity](#), perfect [justice](#), neither deceived by the persuasion of the [serpent](#), nor infected with his poisonous breathings ("Hom. i in diversa");
- Ambrose says she is incorrupt, a [virgin](#) immune through [grace](#) from every stain of [sin](#) ("Sermo xxii in Ps. cxviii);

- [Maximus of Turin](#) calls her a dwelling fit for [Christ](#), not because of her habit of body, but because of original [grace](#) ("Nom. viii de Natali Domini");
- [Theodotus of Ancyra](#) terms her a [virgin](#) innocent, without spot, void of culpability, [holy](#) in body and in [soul](#), a lily springing among thorns, untaught the ills of [Eve](#), nor was there any communion in her of light with darkness, and, when not yet born, she was [consecrated](#) to [God](#) ("Orat. in S. Dei Genitr.");
- In refuting [Pelagius](#) [St. Augustine](#) declares that all the just have truly [known](#) of [sin](#) "except the [Holy Virgin Mary](#), of whom, for the [honour](#) of the [Lord](#), I will have no question whatever where [sin](#) is concerned" (*On Nature and Grace* 36).
- [Mary](#) was pledged to [Christ](#) ([Peter Chrysologus](#), "Sermo cxl de Annunt. B.M.V.");
- it is evident and [notorious](#) that she was pure from [eternity](#), exempt from every defect (Typicon S. Sabae);
- she was formed without any stain ([St. Proclus](#), "Laudatio in S. Dei Gen. ort.", I, 3);
- she was [created](#) in a [condition](#) more sublime and [glorious](#) than all other [natures](#) (Theodorus of Jerusalem in [Mansi](#), XII, 1140);
- when the [Virgin Mother of God](#) was to be born of [Anne](#), nature did not dare to anticipate the germ of [grace](#), but remained devoid of fruit ([John Damascene](#), "Hom. i in B. V. Nativ.", ii).
- The [Syrian](#) Fathers never tire of extolling the sinlessness of [Mary](#). [St. Ephraem](#) considers no terms of eulogy too high to describe the excellence of [Mary's grace](#) and [sanctity](#): "Most [holy](#) Lady, Mother of God, alone most pure in [soul](#) and body, alone exceeding all perfection of purity, alone made in thy entirety the home of all the [graces](#) of the [Most Holy Spirit](#), and hence exceeding beyond all compare even the [angelic virtues](#) in purity and [sanctity](#) of [soul](#) and body . . . my Lady most [holy](#), all-pure, all-immaculate, all-stainless, all-undefiled, all-incorrupt, all-inviolable spotless robe of Him Who clothes Himself with light as with a garment . . . flower unfading, purple woven by [God](#), alone most immaculate" ("Precationes ad Deiparam" in Opp. Graec. Lat., III, 524-37).
- To [St. Ephraem](#) she was as innocent as [Eve](#) before her fall, a [virgin](#) most estranged from every stain of [sin](#), more [holy](#) than the [Seraphim](#), the sealed fountain of the [Holy Ghost](#), the pure seed of [God](#), ever in body and in [mind](#) intact and immaculate ("[Carmina Nisibena](#)").
- [Jacob of Sarug](#) says that "the very fact that [God](#) has elected her [proves](#) that none was ever holier than [Mary](#); if any stain had disfigured her [soul](#), if any other [virgin](#) had been purer and holier, [God](#) would have selected her and rejected [Mary](#)". It seems, however, that [Jacob of Sarug](#), if he had any clear [idea](#) of the [doctrine](#) of [sin](#), held that [Mary](#) was perfectly pure from [original sin](#) ("the sentence against [Adam](#) and [Eve](#)") at the [Annunciation](#).

[St. John Damascene](#) (Or. i Nativ. Deip., n. 2) esteems the [supernatural](#) influence of [God](#) at the generation of [Mary](#) to be so comprehensive that he extends it also to her [parents](#). He says of them that, during the generation, they were filled and purified by the [Holy Ghost](#), and freed from sexual [concupiscence](#). Consequently according to the [Damascene](#), even the human element of her origin, the material of which she was formed, was pure and [holy](#). This opinion of an immaculate active generation and the [sanctity](#) of the "conceptio carnis" was taken up by some [Western](#) authors; it was put forward by [Petrus Comestor](#) in his treatise against [St. Bernard](#) and by others. Some writers even taught that [Mary](#) was born of a [virgin](#) and that she was conceived in a

[miraculous](#) manner when Joachim and [Anne](#) met at the golden gate of the temple (Trombelli, "Mari SS. Vita", [Sect. V, ii, 8](#); Summa aurea, II, 948. Cf. also the "Revelations" of [Catherine Emmerich](#) which contain the entire [apocryphal](#) legend of the [miraculous](#) conception of [Mary](#).

From this summary it appears that the [belief](#) in [Mary's](#) immunity from [sin](#) in her conception was prevalent amongst the Fathers, especially those of the [Greek Church](#). The rhetorical character, however, of many of these and similar passages prevents us from laying too much stress on them, and interpreting them in a strictly literal sense. The [GreekFathers](#) never formally or explicitly discussed the question of the Immaculate Conception.

The conception of St. John the Baptist

A comparison with the conception of [Christ](#) and that of St. John may serve to light both on the [dogma](#) and on the reasons which led the Greeks to celebrate at an early [date](#) the [Feast](#) of the Conception of Mary.

- The conception of the [Mother of God](#) was beyond all comparison more noble than that of [St. John the Baptist](#), whilst it was immeasurably beneath that of her [Divine Son](#).
- The [soul](#) of the [precursor](#) was not preserved immaculate at its union with the body, but was sanctified either shortly after conception from a previous state of [sin](#), or through the presence of [Jesus](#) at the Visitation.
- [Our Lord](#), being conceived by the [Holy Ghost](#), was, by virtue of his [miraculous conception](#), *ipso facto* free from the taint of [original sin](#).

Of these three conceptions the [Church](#) celebrates [feasts](#). The [Orientals](#) have a Feast of the Conception of St. John the Baptist (23 September), which [dates](#) back to the fifth century; it is thus older than the Feast of the Conception of Mary, and, during the [Middle Ages](#), was kept also by many [Westerndioceses](#) on 24 September. The Conception of Mary is celebrated by the [Latins](#) on 8 December; by the [Orientals](#) on 9 December; the Conception of Christ has its [feast](#) in the universal [calendar](#) on 25 March. In celebrating the [feast](#) of Mary's Conception the Greeks of old did not consider the [theological](#) distinction of the active and the passive conceptions, which was indeed unknown to them. They did not think it absurd to celebrate a conception which was not immaculate, as we see from the Feast of the Conception of St. John. They solemnized the Conception of Mary, perhaps because, according to the "[Proto-evangelium](#)" of [St. James](#), it was preceded by [miraculous](#) events (the [apparition](#) of an [angel](#) to Joachim, etc.), similar to those which preceded the conception of [St. John](#), and that of [our Lord](#) Himself. Their object was less the purity of the conception than the [holiness](#) and [heavenly](#) mission of the [person](#) conceived. In the Office of 9 December, however, [Mary](#), from the [time](#) of her conception, is called beautiful, pure, [holy](#), just, etc., terms never used in the Office of 23 September (sc. of [St. John the Baptist](#)). The [analogy](#) of [St. John's](#) sanctification may have given rise to the Feast of the Conception of Mary. If it was [necessary](#) that the [precursor of the Lord](#) should be so pure and "filled with the [Holy Ghost](#)" even from his [mother's](#) womb, such a purity was assuredly not less befitting [His Mother](#). The moment of [St. John's](#) sanctification is by later writers thought to be the Visitation ("the infant leaped in her womb"), but the [angel's](#) words ([Luke 1:15](#)) seem to indicate a sanctification at the conception. This would render the origin of [Mary](#) more similar to that of [John](#). And if the Conception of [John](#) had its [feast](#), why not that of [Mary](#)?

Proof from reason

There is an incongruity in the supposition that the flesh, from which the flesh of the [Son of God](#) was to be formed, should ever have belonged to one who was the slave of that [arch-enemy](#), whose power He came on earth to destroy. Hence the axiom of Pseudo-Anselmus ([Eadmer](#)) developed by [Duns Scotus](#), *Decuit, potuit, ergo fecit*, it was becoming that the [Mother of the Redeemer](#) should have been free from the power of [sin](#) and from the first moment of her [existence](#); [God](#) could give her this [privilege](#), therefore He gave it to her. Again it is remarked that a peculiar [privilege](#) was granted to the [prophet Jeremiah](#) and to [St. John the Baptist](#). They were sanctified in their mother's womb, because by their preaching they had a special share in the work of preparing the way for [Christ](#). Consequently some much higher prerogative is due to [Mary](#). (A treatise of [P. Marchant](#), claiming for St. Joseph also the [privilege](#) of [St. John](#), was placed on the [Index](#) in 1833.) [Scotus](#) says that "the perfect [Mediator](#) must, in some one case, have done the work of mediation most perfectly, which would not be unless there was some one [person](#) at least, in whose regard the wrath of [God](#) was anticipated and not merely appeased."

The feast of the Immaculate Conception

The older [feast](#) of the Conception of Mary (Conception of St. Anne), which originated in the [monasteries](#) of Palestine at least as early as the seventh century, and the modern [feast](#) of the Immaculate Conception are not identical in their object.

Originally the [Church](#) celebrated only the Feast of the Conception of Mary, as she kept the Feast of [St. John's](#) conception, not discussing the sinlessness. This [feast](#) in the course of centuries became the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, as dogmatical argumentation brought about precise and correct [ideas](#), and as the thesis of the [theological](#) schools regarding the preservation of [Mary](#) from all stain of [original sin](#) gained strength. Even after the [dogma](#) had been universally accepted in the [Latin Church](#), and had gained authoritative support through [diocesandecrees](#) and [papal](#) decisions, the old term remained, and before 1854 the term "Immaculata Conceptio" is nowhere found in the [liturgical books](#), except in the [invitatorium](#) of the [Votive Office](#) of the Conception. The Greeks, [Syrians](#), etc. call it the Conception of St. Anne (*Eullepsis tes hagian kai theoprometoros Annas*, "the Conception of St. Anne, the ancestress of God").

[Passaglia](#) in his "De Immaculato Deiparae Conceptu," basing his opinion upon the "Typicon" of St. Sabas: which was substantially composed in the fifth century, [believes](#) that the reference to the [feast](#) forms part of the [authentic](#) original, and that consequently it was celebrated in the [Patriarchate](#) of [Jerusalem](#) in the fifth century (III, n. 1604). But the Typicon was interpolated by the [Damascene](#), [Sophronius](#), and others, and, from the ninth to the twelfth centuries, many new [feasts](#) and [offices](#) were added.

To determine the origin of this [feast](#) we must take into account the [genuine](#) documents we possess, the oldest of which is the canon of the [feast](#), composed by [St. Andrew of Crete](#), who wrote his [liturgicalhymns](#) in the second half of the seventh century, when a [monk](#) at the [monastery](#) of St. Sabas near [Jerusalem](#) (d. [Archbishop](#) of Crete about 720). But the [solemnity](#) cannot then have been generally accepted throughout the [Orient](#), for John, first [monk](#) and later [bishop](#) in the Isle of Euboea, about 750 in a [sermon](#), speaking in favour of the propagation of this

[feast](#), says that it was not yet [known](#) to all the [faithful](#) (*ei kai me para tois pasi gnoizetai*; P.G., XCVI, 1499). But a century later George of Nicomedia, made [metropolitan](#) by [Photius](#) in 860, could say that the [solemnity](#) was not of recent origin (P.G., C, 1335). It is therefore, safe to [affirm](#) that the [feast](#) of the Conception of St. Anne appears in the Orient not earlier than the end of the seventh or the beginning of the eighth century.

As in other cases of the same kind the [feast](#) originated in the [monastic](#) communities. The [monks](#), who arranged the psalmody and composed the various poetical pieces for the office, also selected the [date](#), 9 December, which was always retained in the Oriental [calendars](#). Gradually the [solemnity](#) emerged from the [cloister](#), entered into the [cathedrals](#), was glorified by preachers and poets, and eventually became a fixed [feast](#) of the [calendar](#), approved by [Church and State](#).

It is registered in the [calendar](#) of Basil II (976-1025) and by the Constitution of Emperor Manuel I Comnenus on the days of the year which are half or entire [holidays](#), [promulgated](#) in 1166, it is numbered among the days which have full [sabbath](#) rest. Up to the [time](#) of Basil II, Lower [Italy](#), [Sicily](#), and [Sardinia](#) still belonged to the [Byzantine Empire](#); the city of [Naples](#) was not lost to the Greeks until 1127, when Roger II conquered the city. The influence of [Constantinople](#) was consequently strong in the [Neapolitan Church](#), and, as early as the ninth century, the Feast of the Conception was doubtlessly kept there, as elsewhere in Lower [Italy](#) on 9 December, as indeed appears from the marble calendar found in 1742 in the Church of S. Giorgio Maggiore at [Naples](#).

Today the Conception of St. Anne is in the [Greek Church](#) one of the minor [feasts](#) of the year. The [lesson](#) in [Matins](#) contains allusions to the [apocryphal](#) "Proto-evangelium" of St. James, which [dates](#) from the second half of the second century (see [SAINT ANNE](#)). To the Greek Orthodox of our days, however, the [feast](#) means very little; they continue to call it "Conception of St. Anne", indicating unintentionally, perhaps, the active conception which was certainly not immaculate. In the [Menaea](#) of 9 December this [feast](#) holds only the second place, the first canon being sung in commemoration of the [dedication](#) of the Church of the Resurrection at [Constantinople](#). The Russian [hagiographer](#) Muraviev and several other Orthodox authors even loudly declaimed against the [dogma](#) after its [promulgation](#), although their own preachers formerly taught the Immaculate Conception in their writings long before the [definition](#) of 1854.

In the [Western Church](#) the [feast](#) appeared (8 December), when in the [Orient](#) its development had come to a standstill. The timid beginnings of the new [feast](#) in some [Anglo-Saxon monasteries](#) in the eleventh century, partly smothered by the Norman conquest, were followed by its reception in some chapters and [dioceses](#) by the Anglo-Norman [clergy](#). But the attempts to introduce it officially provoked contradiction and theoretical discussion, bearing upon its legitimacy and its meaning, which were continued for centuries and were not definitively settled before 1854. The "Martyrology of Tallaght" compiled about 790 and the "Feilire" of St. Aengus (800) register the Conception of Mary on 3 May. It is [doubtful](#), however, if an actual [feast](#) corresponded to this [rubric](#) of the learned [monk](#) St. Aengus. This [Irish feast](#) certainly stands alone and outside the line of [liturgical](#) development. It is a mere isolated appearance, not a living germ. The Scholiast adds, in the lower margin of the "Feilire", that the conception (Inceptio) took place in February, since [Mary](#) was born after seven months — a singular notion found also in some Greek authors. The first definite and reliable [knowledge](#) of the [feast](#) in the [West](#) comes from [England](#); it is found in a [calendar](#) of Old Minster, [Winchester](#) (Conceptio S'ce Dei Genetricis Mari), dating from about

1030, and in another [calendar](#) of New Minster, [Winchester](#), written between 1035 and 1056; a [pontifical](#) of [Exeter](#) of the eleventh century (assigned to 1046-1072) contains a "benedictio in Conceptione S. Mariae"; a similar [benediction](#) is found in a [Canterburypontifical](#) written probably in the first half of the eleventh century, certainly before the Conquest. These episcopal benedictions show that the [feast](#) not only commended itself to the devotion of individuals, but that it was recognized by authority and was observed by the [Saxonmonks](#) with considerable [solemnity](#). The existing evidence goes to show that the establishment of the [feast](#) in [England](#) was due to the [monks](#) of [Winchester](#) before the Conquest (1066).

The Normans on their arrival in [England](#) were disposed to treat in a contemptuous fashion English [liturgical](#) observances; to them this [feast](#) must have appeared specifically English, a product of insular simplicity and [ignorance](#). Doubtless its public celebration was abolished at [Winchester](#) and [Canterbury](#), but it did not die out of the hearts of individuals, and on the first favorable opportunity the [feast](#) was restored in the [monasteries](#). At [Canterbury](#) however, it was not re-established before 1328. Several documents state that in Norman times it began at [Ramsey](#), pursuant to a vision vouchsafed to Helsin or Æthelsige, [Abbot](#) of [Ramsey](#) on his journey back from [Denmark](#), whither he had been sent by William I about 1070. An [angel](#) appeared to him during a severe gale and saved the ship after the [abbot](#) had promised to establish the Feast of the Conception in his [monastery](#). However we may consider the [supernatural](#) feature of the legend, it must be admitted that the sending of Helsin to [Denmark](#) is an historical fact. The account of the vision has found its way into many [breviaries](#), even into the [Roman Breviary](#) of 1473. The Council of [Canterbury](#) (1325) attributes the re-establishment of the [feast](#) in [England](#) to [St. Anselm](#), [Archbishop](#) of [Canterbury](#) (d. 1109). But although this great [doctor](#) wrote a special treatise "De Conceptu virginali et originali peccato", by which he laid down the principles of the Immaculate Conception, it is [certain](#) that he did not introduce the [feast](#) anywhere. The letter ascribed to him, which contains the Helsin narrative, is spurious. The principal propagator of the [feast](#) after the Conquest was Anselm, the nephew of [St. Anselm](#). He was [educated](#) at [Canterbury](#) where he may have [known](#) some [Saxonmonks](#) who [remembered](#) the [solemnity](#) in former days; after 1109 he was for a time [Abbot](#) of St. Sabas at [Rome](#), where the [Divine Offices](#) were celebrated according to the Greek [calendar](#). When in 1121 he was appointed [Abbot](#) of [Bury St. Edmund's](#) he established the [feast](#) there; partly at least through his efforts other [monasteries](#) also adopted it, like [Reading](#), [St. Albans](#), [Worcester](#), Gloucester, and Winchcombe.

But a number of others decried its observance as hitherto unheard of and absurd, the old Oriental [feast](#) being unknown to them. Two [bishops](#), Roger of Salisbury and Bernard of St. Davids, declared that the [festival](#) was forbidden by a council, and that the observance must be stopped. And when, during the [vacancy](#) of the [See of London](#), Osbert de Clare, [Prior](#) of [Westminster](#), undertook to introduce the [feast](#) at [Westminster](#) (8 December, 1127), a number of [monks](#) arose against him in the choir and said that the [feast](#) must not be kept, for its establishment had not the authority of [Rome](#) (cf. Osbert's letter to Anselm in [Bishop](#), p. 24). Whereupon the matter was brought before the Council of [London](#) in 1129. The [synod](#) decided in favour of the [feast](#), and [Bishop Gilbert of London](#) adopted it for his [diocese](#). Thereafter the [feast](#) spread in [England](#), but for a time retained its private [character](#), the [Synod](#) of Oxford (1222) having refused to raise it to the rank of a [holiday](#) of [obligation](#).

In [Normandy](#) at the time of Bishop Rotric (1165-83) the Conception of Mary, in the [Archdiocese of Rouen](#) and its six suffragan [dioceses](#), was a [feast](#) of [precept](#) equal in dignity to the [Annunciation](#). At the same time the Norman students at the [University of Paris](#) chose it as their patronal [feast](#). Owing to the close connection of [Normandy](#) with [England](#), it may have been imported from the latter country into [Normandy](#), or the Norman barons and [clergy](#) may have brought it home from their [wars](#) in Lower [Italy](#), it was universally solemnized by the Greek inhabitants. During the [Middle Ages](#) the Feast of the Conception of Mary was commonly called the "Feast of the Norman nation", which shows that it was celebrated in [Normandy](#) with great splendour and that it spread from there over [Western Europe](#). [Passaglia](#) contends (III, 1755) that the [feast](#) was celebrated in [Spain](#) in the seventh century. [Bishop Ullathorne](#) also (p. 161) finds this opinion acceptable. If this be [true](#), it is difficult to understand why it should have entirely disappeared from [Spain](#) later on, for neither does the genuine [MozarabicLiturgy](#) contain it, nor the tenth century calendar of Toledo edited by [Morin](#). The two [proofs](#) given by [Passaglia](#) are futile: the life of [St. Isidore](#), falsely attributed to [St. Ildephonsus](#), which mentions the [feast](#), is interpolated, while, in the [Visigoth](#) lawbook, the expression "Conceptio S. Mariae" is to be understood of the [Annunciation](#).

The controversy

No controversy arose over the Immaculate Conception on the [European](#) continent before the twelfth century. The Norman [clergy](#) abolished the [feast](#) in some [monasteries](#) of [England](#) where it had been established by the [Anglo-Saxonmonks](#). But towards the end of the eleventh century, through the efforts of [Anselm the Younger](#), it was taken up again in several Anglo-Norman establishments. That [St. Anselm the Elder](#) re-established the [feast](#) in [England](#) is highly improbable, although it was not new to him. He had been made familiar with it as well by the [Saxonmonks](#) of [Canterbury](#), as by the Greeks with whom he came in contact during exile in Campania and Apulin (1098-9). The treatise "De Conceptu virginali" usually ascribed to him, was composed by his friend and [disciple](#), the [SaxonmonkEadmer of Canterbury](#). When the canons of the [cathedral](#) of [Lyons](#), who no [doubtknew](#) Anselm the Younger [Abbot](#) of [Bury St. Edmund's](#), personally introduced the [feast](#) into their choir after the death of their [bishop](#) in 1240, [St. Bernard](#) deemed it his [duty](#) to publish a protest against this new way of honoring [Mary](#). He addressed to the canons a vehement letter (Epist. 174), in which he reproved them for taking the step upon their own authority and before they had consulted the [Holy See](#). Not knowing that the [feast](#) had been celebrated with the rich tradition of the Greek and [SyrianChurches](#) regarding the sinlessness of [Mary](#), he asserted that the [feast](#) was foreign to the old [tradition](#) of the [Church](#). Yet it is evident from the tenor of his language that he had in [mind](#) only the active conception or the formation of the flesh, and that the distinction between the active conception, the formation of the body, and its animation by the [soul](#) had not yet been drawn. No doubt, when the [feast](#) was introduced in [England](#) and [Normandy](#), the axiom "deicit, potuit, ergo fecit", the childlike piety and enthusiasm of the *simplices* building upon [revelations](#) and [apocryphal](#) legends, had the upper hand. The object of the [feast](#) was not clearly determined, no positive [theological](#) reasons had been placed in evidence.

[St. Bernard](#) was perfectly justified when he demanded a careful inquiry into the reasons for observing the [feast](#). Not adverting to the possibility of sanctification at the time of the infusion of the [soul](#), he writes that there can be question only of sanctification after conception, which would

render [holy](#) the nativity, not the conception itself ([Scheeben](#), "Dogmatik", III, p. 550). Hence [Albert the Great](#) observes: "We say that the [Blessed Virgin](#) was not sanctified before animation, and the affirmative contrary to this is the [heresy](#) condemned by [St. Bernard](#) in his [epistle](#) to the canons of [Lyons](#)" (III Sent., dist. iii, p. I, ad 1, Q. i).

[St. Bernard](#) was at once answered in a treatise written by either [Richard of St. Victor](#) or [Peter Comestor](#). In this treatise appeal is made to a [feast](#) which had been established to commemorate an insupportable [tradition](#). It maintained that the flesh of [Mary](#) needed no purification; that it was sanctified before the conception. Some writers of those times entertained the fantastic [idea](#) that before [Adam](#) fell, a portion of his flesh had been reserved by [God](#) and transmitted from generation to generation, and that out of this flesh the body of [Mary](#) was formed ([Scheeben](#), op. cit., III, 551), and this formation they commemorated by a [feast](#). The letter of [St. Bernard](#) did not prevent the extension of the [feast](#), for in 1154 it was observed all over [France](#), until in 1275, through the efforts of the [Paris University](#), it was abolished in [Paris](#) and other [dioceses](#).

After the [saint's](#) death the controversy arose anew between Nicholas of St. Albans, an [Englishmonk](#) who defended the [festival](#) as established in [England](#), and [Peter Cellensis](#), the celebrated [Bishop](#) of [Chartres](#). Nicholas remarks that the [soul](#) of [Mary](#) was pierced twice by the sword, i.e. at the foot of the cross and when [St. Bernard](#) wrote his letter against her [feast](#) ([Scheeben](#), III, 551). The point continued to be debated throughout the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and illustrious names appeared on each side. [St. Peter Damian](#), [Peter the Lombard](#), [Alexander of Hales](#), [St. Bonaventure](#), and [Albert the Great](#) are quoted as opposing it.

St. Thomas at first pronounced in favour of the [doctrine](#) in his treatise on the "Sentences" (in I. Sent. c. 44, q. I ad 3), yet in his "[Summa Theologica](#)" he concluded against it. Much discussion has arisen as to whether St. Thomas did or did not deny that the [Blessed Virgin](#) was immaculate at the instant of her animation, and learned books have been written to vindicate him from having actually drawn the negative conclusion. Yet it is hard to say that St. Thomas did not require an instant at least, after the animation of [Mary](#), before her sanctification. His great difficulty appears to have arisen from the [doubt](#) as to how she could have been [redeemed](#) if she had not [sinned](#). This difficulty he raised in no fewer than ten passages in his writings (see, e.g., [Summa III:27:2, ad 2](#)). But while St. Thomas thus held back from the essential point of the [doctrine](#), he himself laid down the principles which, after they had been drawn together and worked out, enabled other [minds](#) to furnish the [true](#) solution of this difficulty from his own premises.

In the thirteenth century the opposition was largely due to a want of clear insight into the subject in dispute. The word "conception" was used in different senses, which had not been separated by careful [definition](#). If St. Thomas, [St. Bonaventure](#), and other [theologians](#) had [known](#) the [doctrine](#) in the sense of the [definition](#) of 1854, they would have been its strongest defenders instead of being its opponents.

We may formulate the question discussed by them in two propositions, both of which are against the sense of the [dogma](#) of 1854:

- the sanctification of [Mary](#) took place before the infusion of the [soul](#) into the flesh, so that the immunity of the [soul](#) was a consequence of the sanctification of the flesh and there was no liability on the part of the [soul](#) to contract [original sin](#). This would approach the opinion of the [Damascene](#) concerning the [holiness](#) of the active conception.
- The sanctification took place after the infusion of the [soul](#) by [redemption](#) from the servitude of [sin](#), into which the [soul](#) had been drawn by its union with the unsanctified flesh. This form of the thesis excluded an immaculate conception.

The [theologians](#) forgot that between sanctification *before* infusion, and sanctification *after* infusion, there was a medium: sanctification of the [soul](#) at the moment *of* its infusion. To them the [idea](#) seemed strange that what was subsequent in the order of nature could be simultaneous in point of [time](#). Speculatively taken, the [soul](#) must be [created](#) before it can be infused and sanctified but in reality, the [soul](#) is [created](#) and sanctified at the very moment of its infusion into the body. Their principal difficulty was the declaration of [St. Paul](#) ([Romans 5:12](#)) that all men have [sinned](#) in [Adam](#). The purpose of this [Pauline](#) declaration, however, is to insist on the need which all [men](#) have of [redemption](#) by [Christ](#). [Our Lady](#) was no exception to this rule. A second difficulty was the silence of the earlier Fathers. But the divines of those times were distinguished not so much for their [knowledge](#) of the Fathers or of history, as for their exercise of the power of reasoning. They read the [Western](#) Fathers more than those of the [Eastern Church](#), who exhibit in far greater completeness the [tradition](#) of the Immaculate Conception. And many works of the Fathers which had then been lost sight of have since been brought to light.

The famous [Duns Scotus](#) (d. 1308) at last (in III Sent., dist. iii, in both commentaries) laid the foundations of the [truedoctrine](#) so solidly and dispelled the objections in a manner so satisfactory, that from that [time](#) onward the [doctrine](#) prevailed. He showed that the sanctification after animation — *sanctificatio post animationem* — demanded that it should follow in the order of [nature](#) (*naturae*) not of [time](#) (*temporis*); he removed the great difficulty of St. Thomas showing that, so far from being excluded from [redemption](#), the [Blessed Virgin](#) obtained of her [Divine Son](#) the greatest of redemptions through the [mystery](#) of her preservation from all [sin](#). He also brought forward, by way of illustration, the somewhat dangerous and [doubtful](#) argument of [Eadmer](#) (S. Anselm) "deicit, potuit, ergo fecit."

From the [time](#) of [Scotus](#) not only did the [doctrine](#) become the common opinion at the [universities](#), but the [feast](#) spread widely to those countries where it had not been previously adopted. With the exception of the [Dominicans](#), all or nearly all, of the religious orders took it up: The [Franciscans](#) at the [general chapter](#) at [Pisa](#) in 1263 adopted the Feast of the Conception of Mary for the entire order; this, however, does not mean that they professed at that [time](#) the [doctrine](#) of the Immaculate Conception. Following in the footsteps of their own [Duns Scotus](#), the learned [Petrus Aureolus](#) and [Franciscus de Mayronis](#) became the most fervent champions of the [doctrine](#), although their older teachers ([St. Bonaventure](#) included) had been opposed to it. The controversy continued, but the defenders of the opposing opinion were almost entirely confined to the members of the [Dominican Order](#). In 1439 the dispute was brought before the [Council of Basle](#) where the [University of Paris](#), formerly opposed to the [doctrine](#), [proved](#) to be its most ardent advocate, asking for a dogmatical definition. The two referees at the council were [John of Segovia](#) and John Turrecremata (Torquemada). After it had been discussed for the space of two years before that assemblage, the [bishops](#) declared the Immaculate Conception to be a

[doctrine](#) which was pious, consonant with [Catholic worship](#), [Catholic faith](#), right [reason](#), and [Holy Scripture](#); nor, said they, was it henceforth allowable to preach or declare to the contrary ([Mansi](#), XXXIX, 182). The Fathers of the Council say that the [Church](#) of [Rome](#) was celebrating the [feast](#). This is [true](#) only in a certain sense. It was kept in a number of churches of [Rome](#), especially in those of the religious orders, but it was not received in the official [calendar](#). As the council at the [time](#) was not ecumenical, it could not pronounce with authority. The memorandum of the [Dominican Torquemada](#) formed the armoury for all attacks upon the [doctrine](#) made by [St. Antoninus of Florence](#) (d. 1459), and by the [Dominicans](#) Bandelli and [Spina](#).

By a [Decree](#) of 28 February, 1476, [Sixtus IV](#) at last adopted the [feast](#) for the entire [Latin Church](#) and granted an [indulgence](#) to all who would assist at the [Divine Offices](#) of the [solemnity](#) ([Denzinger](#), 734). The Office adopted by [Sixtus IV](#) was composed by Leonard de Nogarolis, whilst the [Franciscans](#), since 1480, used a very beautiful Office from the pen of Bernardine dei Busti (*Sicut Lilium*), which was granted also to others (e.g. to [Spain](#), 1761), and was [chanted](#) by the [Franciscans](#) up to the second half of the nineteenth century. As the public acknowledgment of the [feast](#) of [Sixtus IV](#) did not [prove](#) sufficient to appease the conflict, he published in 1483 a constitution in which he punished with [excommunication](#) all those of either opinion who charged the opposite opinion with [heresy](#) (Grave nimis, 4 Sept., 1483; [Denzinger](#), 735). In 1546 the [Council of Trent](#), when the question was touched upon, declared that "it was not the [intention](#) of this [Holy Synod](#) to include in the [decree](#) which concerns [original sin](#) the [Blessed and Immaculate Virgin Mary Mother of God](#)" (Sess. V, De peccato originali, v, in [Denzinger](#), 792). Since, however, this [decree](#) did not [define](#) the [doctrine](#), the [theological](#) opponents of the [mystery](#), though more and more reduced in numbers, did not yield. [St. Pius V](#) not only condemned proposition 73 of [Baïus](#) that "no one but [Christ](#) was without [original sin](#), and that therefore the [Blessed Virgin](#) had died because of the [sin](#) contracted in [Adam](#), and had endured afflictions in this life, like the rest of the just, as punishment of actual and [original sin](#)" ([Denzinger](#), 1073) but he also issued a constitution in which he forbade all public discussion of the subject. Finally he inserted a new and simplified Office of the Conception in the [liturgical books](#) ("Super speculam", Dec., 1570; "Superni omnipotentis", March, 1571; "Bullarium Marianum", pp. 72, 75).

Whilst these disputes went on, the great [universities](#) and almost all the great orders had become so many bulwarks for the defense of the [dogma](#). In 1497 the [University of Paris](#) decreed that henceforward no one should be admitted a member of the university, who did not swear that he would do the utmost to defend and assert the Immaculate Conception of [Mary](#). [Toulouse](#) followed the example; in [Italy](#), [Bologna](#) and [Naples](#); in the [German Empire](#), [Cologne](#), [Maine](#), and [Vienna](#); in [Belgium](#), [Louvain](#); in [England](#) before the [Reformation](#). [Oxford](#) and [Cambridge](#); in [Spain](#) [Salamanca](#), [Toledo](#), [Seville](#), and [Valencia](#); in [Portugal](#), [Coimbra](#) and [Evora](#); in [America](#), [Mexico](#) and [Lima](#). The [Friars Minor](#) confirmed in 1621 the election of the [Immaculate Mother](#) as [patron](#) of the order, and bound themselves by [oath](#) to teach the [mystery](#) in public and in private. The [Dominicans](#), however, were under special [obligation](#) to follow the [doctrines](#) of [St. Thomas](#), and the common conclusion was that [St. Thomas](#) was opposed to the Immaculate Conception. Therefore the [Dominicans](#) asserted that the [doctrine](#) was an [error](#) against [faith](#) ([John of Montesono](#), 1373); although they adopted the [feast](#), they termed it persistently "Sanctificatio B.M.V." not "Conceptio", until in 1622 [Gregory XV](#) abolished the term "sanctificatio". [Paul V](#) (1617) [decreed](#) that no one should dare to teach publicly that [Mary](#) was conceived in [original sin](#),

and [Gregory XV](#) (1622) imposed absolute [silence](#) (*in scriptis et sermonibus etiam privatis*) upon the adversaries of the [doctrine](#) until the [Holy See](#) should [define](#) the question. To put an end to all further cavilling, [Alexander VII](#) promulgated on 8 December 1661, the famous constitution "Sollicitudo omnium Ecclesiarum", defining the [true](#) sense of the word *conceptio*, and forbidding all further discussion against the common and pious sentiment of the [Church](#). He declared that the immunity of [Mary](#) from [original sin](#) in the first moment of the [creation](#) of her [soul](#) and its infusion into the body was the object of the [feast](#) (Densinger, 1100).

Explicit universal acceptance

Since the time of [Alexander VII](#), long before the final [definition](#), there was no [doubt](#) on the part of [theologians](#) that the privilege was amongst the [truths](#) revealed by [God](#). Wherefore [Pius IX](#), surrounded by a splendid throng of [cardinals](#) and [bishops](#), 8 December 1854, [promulgated](#) the [dogma](#). A new Office was prescribed for the entire [Latin Church](#) by [Pius IX](#) (25 December, 1863), by which [decree](#) all the other [Offices](#) in use were abolished, including the old Office *Sicut lilium* of the [Franciscans](#), and the Office composed by [Passaglia](#) (approved 2 Feb., 1849).

In 1904 the golden [jubilee](#) of the definition of the [dogma](#) was celebrated with great splendour ([Pius X](#), Enc., 2 Feb., 1904). [Clement IX](#) added to the [feast](#) an [octave](#) for the [dioceses](#) within the temporal possessions of the [pope](#) (1667). [Innocent XII](#) (1693) raised it to a double of the second class with an [octave](#) for the universal [Church](#), which rank had been already given to it in 1664 for [Spain](#), in 1665 for [Tuscany](#) and [Savoy](#), in 1667 for the [Society of Jesus](#), the [Hermits of St. Augustine](#), etc., [Clement XI](#) decreed on 6 Dec., 1708, that the [feast](#) should be a [holiday](#) of [obligation](#) throughout the entire [Church](#). At last [Leo XIII](#), 30 Nov 1879, raised the [feast](#) to a double of the first class with a [vigil](#), a dignity which had long before been granted to [Sicily](#) (1739), to [Spain](#) (1760) and to the [United States](#) (1847). A [Votive Office](#) of the Conception of Mary, which is now recited in almost the entire [Latin Church](#) on free Saturdays, was granted first to the [Benedictines](#) of St. Anne at [Rome](#) in 1603, to the [Franciscans](#) in 1609, to the [Conventuals](#) in 1612, etc. The [Syrian](#) and [Chaldean Churches](#) celebrate this [feast](#) with the Greeks on 9 December; in [Armenia](#) it is one of the few immovable [feasts](#) of the year (9 December); the [schismatic Abyssinians](#) and [Copts](#) keep it on 7 August whilst they celebrate the [Nativity of Mary](#) on 1 May; the [Catholic Copts](#), however, have transferred the [feast](#) to 10 December ([Nativity](#), 10 September). The [Eastern Catholics](#) have since 1854 changed the name of the [feast](#) in accordance with the [dogma](#) to the "Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary."

The [Archdiocese of Palermo](#) solemnizes a Commemoration of the Immaculate Conception on 1 September to give thanks for the preservation of the city on occasion of the earthquake, 1 September, 1726. A similar [commemoration](#) is held on 14 January at [Catania](#) (earthquake, 11 Jan., 1693); and by the Oblate Fathers on 17 Feb., because their rule was approved 17 Feb., 1826. Between 20 September 1839, and 7 May 1847, the [privilege](#) of adding to the [Litany of Loretto](#) the invocation, "Queen conceived without [original sin](#)", had been granted to 300 [dioceses](#) and religious communities. The Immaculate Conception was declared on 8 November, 1760, principal [patron](#) of all the possessions of the crown of [Spain](#), including those in America. The [decree](#) of the [First Council of Baltimore](#) (1846) electing [Mary](#) in her Immaculate Conception principal [Patron](#) of the [United States](#), was confirmed on 7 February, 1847.

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