

The Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary

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The official and “infallible” doctrine of the immaculate conception as solemnly defined as an article of faith by Pope Pius IX, speaking ex cathedra, on the 8th day of December, 1854, is as follows:— ICM 1.1

“By the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ, of the blessed apostles Peter and Paul, and by our own authority, we declare, pronounce, and define, that the doctrine which holds that the most blessed Virgin Mary, in the first instant of her conception, by a special grace and privilege of Almighty God, in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, the Saviour of mankind, was preserved free from all stain of original sin, has been revealed by God, and, therefore, is to be firmly and steadfastly believed by all the faithful. ICM 1.2

“Wherefore, if any shall presume, which may God avert, to think in their heart otherwise than has been defined by us, let them know, and moreover understand, that they are condemned by their own judgment, that they have made shipwreck as regards the faith, and have fallen away from the unity of the church.”—“Catholic Belief,” p. 2141 ICM 1.3

It may be well to remark in beginning that there is a large number of Protestants as well as other non-Catholics who entertain the mistaken view that the doctrine of the immaculate conception refers to the conception of Jesus by the Virgin Mary. The truth is that it refers not to the conception of Christ by Mary, but to the conception of Mary herself by her mother. ICM 1.4

It is true that in the dogma the words are “at the first instant of her conception;” and in strictness of idea perhaps, this form of expression ought to refer to conception on her own part, and therefore to her conception of Jesus. But this is not the idea of the dogma. In the dogma, the sole idea and purport, of the words “her conception” is the conception of her by her own mother. Accordingly, to English readers it would more clearly express the thought to put it in the words,

“at the first instant of the conception of her,” etc. For in all the controversy and literature on the subject, there is no thought of applying the phrase “immaculate conception” to anything but to the conception of Mary herself by her mother, whom “tradition” says was Anne. ICM 1.5

In these days of the general acceptance of Catholicism as Christianity; and of compromises with the Catholic Church, and apologies for her on the part of “Protestants,” it is well that we should study such things as this that we may know for ourselves what is their real effect upon the doctrine of Christ, and what their consequences, in those who accept the dogma. ICM 1.6

The first consequence of it to him who believes this doctrine is to make the Virgin Mary, if not actually divine, then the nearest to it, of any creature in the universe; and this, too, in her human nature. In proof of this we have the following statements of Catholic fathers and saints:— ICM 1.7

“The ancient writer of ‘De Nativitate Christi’ found in St. Cyprian’s works, says: Because [Mary] being ‘very different from the rest of mankind, human nature, but not sin, communicated itself to her’ ICM 1.8

“Theodoret, a father that lived in the fifth century, says that Mary ‘surpassed by far the cherubim and the seraphim in purity.’ “ ICM 1.9

“In the Greek Liturgy of St. Chrysostom, a father of the fourth century.... the following words are directed to be chanted by the choir during the canon of the mass” ‘It is truly meet that we should praise thee, O mother of God, ... thou art the mother of our God, to be venerated in preference to the cherubim; thou art beyond comparison more glorious than the seraphim.’ ICM 1.10

“Theodore, patriarch of Jerusalem, said in the second council of Nice, that Mary ‘is truly the mother of God, and virgin before and after childbirth; and she was created in a condition more sublime and glorious than that of all natures, whether intellectual or corporeal.’” — Id. pp. 216, 217. ICM 1.11

Lest these statements should seem too ancient for “Protestants” we present a passage from our own times. In the “Manual of Devotion to Good St. Anne De Beaupre [pronounced boo-per], in the province of Quebec, and bearing the imprimatur of E. A. Cardinal

Taschereau, present Archbishop of Quebec, it is said of Mary, that she— ICM 1.12

“Is purer than angels, holier than the Archangels, higher than the Thrones, more powerful than the Dominations, more enlightened than the cherubim, more inflamed with the divine love than the seraphim.”—p. 72 ICM 1.13

These statements show that in the view of the Catholic Church and of the dogma of the immaculate conception, the nature of Mary was so “very different from the rest of mankind,” so much “more sublime and glorious than that of all natures” and “surpassed by [so] far the cherubim and seraphim” as to be “beyond comparison more glorious than” they, and therefore to be venerated “in preference” to them. This, then, puts the nature of Mary infinitely beyond any real likeness or relationship to mankind. ICM 1.14

Having this clearly in mind, let us follow to the next step. And here it is in the words of Cardinal Gibbons:— ICM 1.15

“We affirm that the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, the Word of God, who, in his divine nature is, from all eternity, begotten of the Father, con substantial

with him, was in the fullness of time again begotten, by being born of the virgin, thus taking to himself from her maternal womb, a human nature of the same substance with hers. ICM 1.16

“As far as the sublime mystery of the incarnation can be reflected in the natural order, the blessed virgin, under the overshadowing of the Holy Ghost, by communicating to the Second Person of the adorable Trinity, as mothers do, a true human nature’ of the same substance with her own, is thereby really and truly his mother.”—“Faith of Our Fathers, Ó pp. 198, 199. ICM 1.17

Now put these two things together, First, we have the nature of Mary defined as being not only “very different from the rest of mankind,” but “more sublime and glorious than all natures;” thus putting her infinitely beyond any real likeness or relationship to mankind as we really are. ICM 1.18

Next, we have Jesus described as taking from her a human nature of the same substance as hers. ICM 1.19

It therefore follows as certainly as that two and two make four, that in his human nature the Lord Jesus is

“very different” from mankind, is in a condition more sublime and glorious than all natures, is beyond comparison farther from us than are the cherubim and the seraphim, and is therefore infinitely beyond any real likeness or relationship to us as we really are in this world. ICM 1.20

We know the answer that “the Church” makes to this—that Mary and Anne and Joseph and Joachim especially, and all the other eleven hundred and fifty saints, intercede with Him for those who have his help, and that through these he is enabled to reach mankind though he himself is so far beyond us. Even as the “Manual of Devotion to Good St. Anne” says further of Mary, that she— ICM 1.21

“Is the ladder to heaven, the anchor of the shipwrecked, the star of the mariner, the bridge whereby God crossed the abyss which separated us from him,”—p.73. ICM 1.22

But this is as great a fraud as is all the rest of the scheme. For the Virgin Mary, and Anne, Joseph, and Joachim and all the rest of the Catholic saints are dead, and cannot intercede for anybody. For the word of God says plainly that “the dead know not anything.” Ecclesiastes 9:5. And “in death there is no

remembrance of thee.” Psalm 6:5. And Jesus said to his disciples all, “Whither I go ye cannot come.” John 13:33. ICM 1.23

The situation then as presented by the dogma of the “Immaculate Conception” is this: By it Jesus, even in his “human” nature, is put so far from sinful men that we cannot reach him nor approach him except through the intercessions of Mary, and Anne, and the other Catholic saints. But Mary, and Anne, and the other saints are dead and so know nothing at all about anybody, and therefore can do nothing whatever for anybody. Therefore with Jesus so far away that we cannot find him without the intercessions of these saints, and with Mary and Joseph and the other Catholic saint all dead, and consequently unable to intercede for anybody, it is certain that the dogma of the immaculate conception puts Jesus Christ infinitely beyond the reach of mankind; as far from us indeed, as though he had never offered himself at all, and robs the world of the Saviour to the extent that that dogma is received. ICM 1.24

But it is true that the Lord Jesus, in his human nature, was made lower than the angels, and took our nature of flesh and blood just as it is, with all its infirmities. The Scriptures are plain as anything can be on this point,

and are worthy to be set down here against this papal invention of the immaculate conception. Having found that the papacy puts Christ as far away from men as possible, it will be well to know how near to men he really is. ICM 1.25

In the first chapter of Hebrews, Jesus the Son of God is presented in his divine nature as equal with God and as God and as God indeed, the Creator and Upholder of all things, as “so much better than the angels,” that he has “a more excellent name than they,” and as so much higher than the angels that “all the angels of God worship him.” ICM 1.26

In the second chapter of the same book, he is presented in his human nature as “lower than the angels,” even as man himself. Thus it is written: “One in a certain place testified, saying, What is man that thou art mindful of him? or the Son of man that thou visitest him!. Thou madest him a little lower than the angels; thou crownedst him with glory and honor, and didst set him over the works of thy hands: thou hast put all things in subjection under him, he left nothing that is not put under him. But now we see not yet all things put under him. But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels.” ICM 1.27

Thus, instead of his human nature being “beyond comparison” higher than angels, cherubim, and seraphim, it was made as much lower than they as man himself was made lower. ICM 1.28

Nor is it only as man was lower than the angels before he sinned. It was not as man was lower than the angels in his sinless nature, that Jesus was made lower than the angels in his human nature; but as man is lower than the angels in his sinful nature, as he is since he by sin became subject to suffering and death. For so it is written: “We see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, ... that he, by the grace of God, should taste death for every man. For it became him, for whom are all things, and by all things, in bringing many sons unto glory to make the captain of their salvation perfect through suffering.” ICM 1.29

Thus, as man in his sinless human nature was made a little lower than the angels, and then by sin stepped still lower to suffering and death; even so Jesus, that he might bring man back to the glory of God, in his love followed him down even here, partakes of his nature as it is, suffers with him, and even dies with him as well as for him in his sinful human nature. For “he was numbered with the transgressors”—he died as a

malefactor between two malefactors. This is love. This is Jesus our Saviour, for he comes to us where we are, that he may reach us and lift us up from ourselves unto God. ICM 1.30

Yet this blessed saving truth is even more plainly stated, thus: "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of the flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same." Hebrews 2:14. He, in his human nature, took the same flesh and blood that we have. All the words that could be used to make this plain and positive are here put together in a single sentence. See: The children are partakers of flesh and blood. Because of this he took part of the same flesh and blood as the children have. Nor is this all: he also himself took part of the same flesh and blood as we. Nor yet is this all: he also himself likewise took part of the same flesh and blood as man. ICM 1.31

The spirit of inspiration so much desires that this truth shall be made plain and emphatic that he is not content to use any fewer than all the words that could be used in the telling of it. And therefore it is declared that just as, and just as certainly as the children of men are partakers of flesh and blood, he also, himself, likewise took part of the same flesh and blood as we have in the bondage of sin and the fear of death. For he took this

same flesh and blood that we have, in order “that through death he might deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.” ICM 1.32

Therefore, instead of its being true that Jesus in his human nature is so far away from men, as they really are, that he has no real likeness nor relationship to us, it is true that he is in very deed our kin in flesh and blood relation—even our Brother in blood relationship. For it is written: “Both he which sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one; for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying, I will declare thy name unto my brethren.” Hebrews 2:11 ICM 1.33

This great truth of the blood-relationship between our Redeemer and ourselves is clearly taught also in the gospel in Leviticus. There was the law of redemption of men and their inheritance, or himself had been brought into bondage, there was redemption provided. If he was able of himself to redeem himself or his inheritance, he could do it. But if he was not able of himself to redeem, then the right of redemption fell to his nearest of kin in blood-relationship. It fell not merely to one who was near of kin among his brethren, but to the one who was nearest of kin who was

able. Leviticus 25:24-28, 46-47; Ruth 2:20; 3:12, 13, 4:1-12. ICM 1.34

Thus there has been taught through these ages the very truth which we have found taught here in the second chapter of Hebrews: the truth that man has lost his inheritance and is himself also in bondage. And as he himself cannot redeem himself nor his inheritance, the right of redemption falls to the nearest or kin who is able. And Jesus Christ is the only one in all the universe who is able. He must also be not only near of kin, but the nearest of kin. And the nearest of kin by blood relationship. And therefore he took our very flesh and blood, and so became our nearest of kin. And so also, instead of being farther away from us than are the angels and cherubim and seraphim, he is the very nearest to us of all persons in the universe. ICM 1.35

He is so near to us that he is actually one of us. For so it is written: "Both he which sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one." Hebrews 2:11. And he and we being one, he being one with mankind, it is impossible to have a mediator between him and men, because he and mankind are one and "a mediator is not a mediator of one." Galatians 3:20. And as certainly as Jesus Christ is one with mankind and "a mediator is not a mediator of one," so certainly this truth at once

annihilates the “intercessions” of all the Catholic saints in the calendar, even though they were all alive and in heaven instead of being all dead. He is so near to us that there is no room for anybody and much less for from one to eleven hundred and fifty people to come between him and us. He is so entirely one with us and of us—of our very selves, our very flesh and blood—that it would be impossible to get the Virgin or a single one of the other saints between us, even though they were alive. No, he is one of us; and as a mediator is not a mediator of one, it is impossible that there could be a mediator between Christ and men—even sinful men. ICM 1.36

But the Scripture does not stop even yet with the statement of this all-important truth. It says further: “For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham. Wherefore in all things it behooved him to be made like unto his brethren’ that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in the things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succor them that are tempted.” “For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.” Hebrews 4:15. Being made in his

human nature, in all things like as we are, he could be, and was, tempted in all points like as we are. ICM 1.37

As in his human nature he is one with us, and as “himself took our infirmities” [Matthew 8:17], so he could be “touched with the feeling of our infirmities.” And so also, he can help and save to the uttermost all who will receive him. As in his flesh, and as in himself in the flesh, he was as weak as we are, and of himself could “do nothing” [John 5:30], when he bore our griefs and carried our sorrows” [Isaiah 53:4], and was tempted as we are, by his divine faith he conquered all by the power of God which that faith brought to him and which in our flesh he has brought to us. “For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.” Hebrews 2:10. ICM 1.38

And thus “what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own son in the likeness of sinful flesh” did. The law could not bring us to God, nor could it find in the flesh the righteousness which it must have, because the flesh had fallen away from God and could not reach him again. But though the sinful flesh could not reach God, yet God in his

eternal power and infinite mercy could reach sinful flesh. And so “the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us full of grace and truth.” [John 1:14], even “sinful flesh, and for sin condemned sin in the flesh : that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.” Romans 8:3, 4. ICM 1.39

This is Christianity. To deny this, to deny that Jesus Christ came not simply in flesh, but in the flesh, the only flesh that there is in this world, sinful flesh,—to deny this is to deny Christ. For “every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh, is not of God.” the Catholic Church does not confess this; but on the contrary declares it to be “shocking to Christian minds” and the “revolting consequences” of denying the immaculate conception.—“Catholic Belief,” pp. 217, 218. Therefore this is the spirit of antichrist, “where of ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world.” But, “every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God.” “Hereby know ye the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.” 1 John 4:2, 3, 6. ICM 1.40

O, his name is called Immanuel, which is “God with us.” Not God with him in eternity, and could have been with him even though he had not given himself for us.

But man through sin became without God, and God wanted to be again with us. Therefore Jesus became us, that God with him might be God with us. And that is his name because that is what he is. ICM 1.41

Therefore and finally, as certainly as in his human nature Jesus Christ is one with us. and as certainly as God with him is God with us, so certainly the nature of the Virgin Mary was just like that of all the rest of us, and so certainly the dogma of the immaculate conception is an absolute fraud; and the doctrine a ruinous deception. ICM 1.42

O! then, receive Him. He stands at the door and knocks; let him in. No ladder is required to reach him, for he himself is the Ladder which reaches from the earth where we are, to the highest heaven; and by which alone we can reach the presence of God. No bridge is needed. There is no abyss between us and him, for he is of ourselves as we are on the earth. And “with his divine arm he grasps the throne of God and with his long human arm he gathers the sinful, suffering human race to his great heart of love,” that we may be one with God. ICM 1.43

Confess to him your sins: he will never take advantage of you. Tell him your grief's: he has felt the same and

can relieve you. Pour out to him your sorrows: “he hath carried our sorrows,” he was “a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief,” he will comfort you with the comfort of God. A. T. J. ICM 1.44

1. “Catholic Belief,” is “a short and simple exposition of Catholic doctrine,” by the Very Rev. Joseph Faa Di Bruno, Rector-General of the pious Society of Missions: Church of S S mo Salvatore in Ouda, Ponte Sisto, Rome, and St. Peter’s Italian Church, Hatton Garden, London, E. C. Author’s American Edition, ideated by Rev. Louis A. Lambert, author of “Notes on Ingersoll,” etc., etc. One Hundreth Thousand. Benziger Brothers, printers to the Holy Apostolic See, New York, Cincinnati, and Chicago.” Imprimatur, John Cardinal McCloskey, Archbishop of New York, June 5, 1884; and Imprimatur, Heuticus Eduardus, Carn. Archiep, Westmonast, Die 19 Julii 1983.