

The Immaculate Conception

What is the meaning and significance of the Catholic dogma of the Immaculate Conception?

The Catholic Church teaches:

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: 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, Saviour of the human race, preserved immune from all stain of original sin. [Pius IX, *Ineffabilis Deus* (1854)] (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, paragraph 491).

A great debate raged for centuries before the Immaculate Conception was proclaimed dogma in 1854. Catholic scholars admit that this doctrine is not explicitly revealed in Scripture. The Catechism refers to Luke 1:28 for evidence. But 'full of grace' could not possibly mean conceived without sin for the very same word is used in Ephesians 1:6 where it refers to *all* believers. Certainly no one would argue that all Christians were conceived without sin!

There is no mention of the Immaculate Conception in the first centuries of the Christian church. "The first real advocacy of the dogma comes in the twelfth century in the writing of a British monk Eadmer. But ranged against him in their denial of the dogma are names which are revered in the Church of Rome - Bernard Clairvaux, Peter Lombard, Bonaventura, Thomas Aquinas. It was not until the fourteenth century that Duns Scotus elaborated the theory which was ultimately to win the day for the Franciscan advocates of the dogma in their debate with the Dominicans who had fiercely opposed it" (H.M. Carson, *Roman Catholicism Today*).

Contrary to the Roman Catholic teaching, the Scripture plainly teaches that "*all have sinned*, and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). All Adam's descendents share his sinful nature: "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that *all have sinned*" (Romans 5:12). Therefore all need to be saved. Mary herself calls God "my saviour" (Luke 1:47). Evidently she did not know the Roman Catholic doctrine of the Immaculate Conception!

Of Christ alone it is ever expressly stated that He was 'without sin' (Hebrews 4:15). *Christ alone is immaculate from conception*. Thus Christ, who knew no sin, "bare our sins in his own body on the tree" (1 Peter 2:24).

The implications of this dogma are very serious. The Pope warns:

Hence, if anyone shall dare - which God forbid! - to think otherwise than as has been defined by us, let him know and understand that he is condemned by his own judgment; that he has suffered shipwreck in the faith; that he has separated from the unity of the Church; and that, furthermore, by his own action he incurs the penalties established by law if he should express in words or writing or by any other outward means the errors he thinks in his heart (Pius IX, *Ineffabilis Deus*, 1854).

The Roman Catholic magisterium would have us believe a doctrine that is neither taught in Scripture nor in the writings of the early church fathers. But the Scriptures are able to make us wise unto salvation which is by faith in Christ Jesus (II Tim 3:15). We don't need any extra-biblical doctrines for our salvation. In fact, it is the Roman church that suffered 'shipwreck in the faith' by embracing a doctrine that is contrary to the Bible and 'separated from the unity of the Church' which for centuries knew nothing of the theological inventions of Rome.

Think about *what* you believe, and *why* you believe it.