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## 023 - Ineffabilis Deus

Pius IX

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# *Ineffabilis Deus*

Apostolic Letter of PIUS IX defining  
the Immaculate Conception

Number 23

## ABOUT THE DOCUMENT . . .

On February 2, 1849, Pope Pius IX issued an encyclical letter to the patriarchs, primates, archbishops, and bishops of the world in order to gather from every land the tradition of the Universal Church on the dogma of the Immaculate Conception. As a result of this encyclical letter ("Ubi Primum"), the Pope received 603 letters in return from the Bishops of the world. Only four or five were directly against a definition, and all expressed a willingness to concur in the Pope's decision.

A special congregation of theologians was then appointed by the Pope to draft the Bull. This group worked more than a year, and there followed a lengthy discussion of the Bull in the presence of twenty-one cardinals. From November 20 to 24, 1854, cardinals, archbishops, and theologians from all over the world held sessions to discuss the final form of the document, **Ineffabilis Deus**, which solemnly defined the dogma of the Immaculate Conception.

The present translation has been made from the original Latin by Rev. Philip C. Hoelle, S.M.

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# THE BULL INEFFABILIS DEUS

of POPE PIUS IX

## INTRODUCTION

### **The Redemption In the Divine Mind**

The ineffable God from all eternity foresaw the dire disaster that Adam's fall would inflict upon the whole human race. Now God's ways are mercy and truth; His will is all-powerful; and His wisdom easily spans all space and gently disposes all things. In a plan hidden for ages in the divine mind, He determined to complete the first work of His goodness by the still greater mystery of the Incarnation. Thus mankind, led into sin by the wiles of the devil, would not perish and thus nullify God's merciful design. In this manner what would be lost in the first Adam would be restored more abundantly in the Second Adam.

### **A Human Mother Is Chosen**

From the beginning then and before all ages God selected and set aside a mother for His Only-Begotten Son. From her this Son would take flesh and be born in the fullness of time. He loved her in preference to all other creatures to such an extent that in her alone He took the greatest delight.

With the fullness of every heavenly favor drawn from the divine treasury, God so wonderfully endowed her far beyond the angels and saints, that in her perpetual freedom from every stain of sin, in her fullness of beauty and perfection, she showed forth such a full measure of innocence and holiness that under God none greater can be imagined and God alone can understand greatness.

### **A Mother Worthy of the Redeemer**

It is very fitting that the brilliance of her perfect holiness should shine forth at all times. She would be free even from the stain of original sin and thus completely triumphant over the ancient serpent, for she is the specially honored Mother to whom God the Father willed to give His only Son, equal to Himself in all things. This Only-Begotten Son, Whom God loves as Himself, the Father gave in such a way that by nature He would be one and the same Son of God the Father and of the Virgin. The Son Himself also chose to make her His true Mother and the Holy Spirit, Who

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proceeds from the Son, willed and accomplished Christ's conception and birth from Mary.

### **A — PROOFS USED FOR THE DEFINITION**

The Catholic Church has ever explained, promoted, and fostered the belief that this original innocence of the exalted Virgin is in perfect accord with her wonderful holiness and the pre-eminent dignity of her divine maternity. From day to day this belief continues to grow, thanks to additional evidence and prominent acts. It must be recalled that the Church, the pillar and foundation of truth, has always been taught by the Holy Spirit. She possesses the divinely received teaching contained in the deposit of heavenly revelation.

#### **1. The Law of Prayer**

Now this teaching which flourished from the earliest times, was firmly planted in the minds of the faithful and wonderfully promoted by the zealous efforts of the Popes. The Church very clearly pointed this out by proposing the Blessed Virgin's Conception for the public devotion and veneration of the faithful.

By this noted act the Church indicated that the conception of the Virgin was exceptional and astonishing and very far removed from the origins of the rest of men. Moreover, the Church made clear that this conception should be venerated as entirely holy, since festivals of the Saints alone are observed.

Hence, too, these same words used by the Sacred Scriptures, in speaking of the Uncreated Wisdom and in representing His eternal origin, have long been applied to this Virgin's origin by the Church in the ecclesiastical Offices and in the Sacred Liturgy. Her origin was preordained in the same decree with the Incarnation of Divine Wisdom.

#### **The Roman Church Gives Testimony**

The ready acceptance of these truths by nearly all the faithful shows the interest which the Roman Church, the mother and teacher of all churches, has taken in promoting the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception; still the outstanding achievements of the Roman Church clearly merit individual attention, since the dignity and the authority of this Church is fully deserved. She is the center of Catholic truth and unity; she alone has preserved religion intact, and she is the source from which all the other churches are to receive the traditions of the faith.

The Roman Church, then, had nothing more at heart than to declare, protect, promote, and justify in the most persuasive ways the devotion and doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin. Numerous important acts of the Roman Pontiffs very clearly and plainly bear witness

to this fact. To them in the person of the Prince of the Apostles, Christ, our Lord, divinely entrusted the supreme care and ultimate authority of feeding the lambs and sheep, of strengthening the brethren and of ruling and governing the entire Church.

### **Special Marks of Favor By the Popes**

Our predecessors gladly made use of their apostolic authority to establish in the Roman Church the Feast of the Conception and to enhance and ennoble it with a proper Office and Mass, in which the privilege of immunity from the hereditary stain was most clearly affirmed. They were most happy to encourage and promote in every way the cult already in practice, either by granting indulgences, or by giving permission to cities, provinces, and kingdoms to choose as their Patroness the Mother of God, under the title of the Immaculate Conception, or by approving sodalities, congregations, and religious families founded in honor of the Immaculate Conception, or by bestowing praise on the piety of those who under the title of Immaculate Conception erected monasteries, hospitals, altars, or churches, or who bound themselves by a religious vow to defend with ardor the Immaculate Conception of God's Mother.

### **Solemnity Is Added to the Feast**

Above all, they were especially happy to decree that the Feast of the Conception should be celebrated in the universal Church with the same class and rank as that of Mary's Nativity, and that it should be celebrated with an octave in the universal Church and be kept as a holyday of obligation and that a Pontifical service should be held in our Patriarchal Liberian Basilica annually on the day dedicated to the Conception of the Virgin.

In their desire to foster more and more each day in the minds of the faithful this doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of God and to stimulate their piety to honor and venerate the Virgin conceived without sin, they most willingly and gladly permitted the mention of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin to be made in the Litany of Loreto and in the Preface of the Mass, and thus they permitted the law of faith to be built on the law of prayer. Following in the footsteps of so many predecessors We not only approved and accepted what they have devoutly and wisely ordained, but recalling the instruction of Sixtus IV, We confirmed by Our authority a proper Office of the Immaculate Conception, and with a very happy heart granted the observance of it to the entire Church.

## **2. The Popes Defend the Immaculate Conception**

Since there is a very close connection between the object of the cult and matters referring to the cult, these latter cannot remain defined and

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determined if the object is doubtful and unsettled. For this reason Our predecessors, the Roman Pontiffs, in their special efforts to promote the devotion of the Conception, made use of every opportunity to insist on its object and doctrine. They clearly explained that the feast dealt with the Conception of the Virgin and they denounced as false and opposed to the mind of the Church the opinion of those who maintained that the Church was venerating her sanctification and not her Conception. They were just as unyielding toward those who attempted to undermine the Immaculate Conception by distinguishing between the first and second instant and moment of the Conception and then asserting that the Conception was indeed venerated, but not that of the first instant and moment. Our predecessors felt obliged in duty to protect and defend vigorously as the true object of the cult, both the feast of the Conception of the Most Blessed Virgin and the Conception from the first instant.

### **Alexander VII Quoted**

The true mind of the Church is very decisively stated in these words of Alexander VII: "Ancient, indeed, is that devotion of the faithful Christians towards Mary, the Most Blessed Virgin Mother, in which they believe that her soul in the first instant of its creation and its infusion into her body, was preserved free from the stain of original sin, in virtue of the merits of Jesus Christ her Son, the Redeemer of the human race. In this sense the faithful honored and celebrated with solemn rites the feast of her Conception."

### **The Papacy Preserves the Doctrine Intact**

A special sacred sense of duty led Our predecessors to make every effort to preserve intact the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of God. They did not tolerate any adverse criticism or controversy in regard to this doctrine; they went much further and frequently they clearly stated that what we teach about the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin is on its own merits completely in accord with the ecclesiastical cult; that it is ancient and almost universal and is identical with that which the Roman Church has undertaken to promote and protect, and that it deserves to have a place in the Sacred Liturgy and solemn prayers.

Even this did not satisfy them. To preserve intact the teaching of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin they strictly forbade the public or private defense of any contrary position. It was their intention to wear out the opposition by repeated blows. To make these unmistakable statements effective they added a sanction to them.

### **Long Quotation From Alexander VII**

All this can be summed up in these words of Alexander VII:

"We are mindful of the fact that the Holy Roman Church solemnly

celebrates the feast of the undefiled Ever-Virgin Mary's Conception and that long ago she appointed a special Office proper to this festival, in accordance with the pious, devout, and commendable instruction of Our predecessor, Sixtus IV. Following the example of Our predecessors, the Roman Pontiffs, We desire to favor this commendable piety, devotion, and feast, as well as the cult, as it has been practiced unchanged since its origin in the Roman Church. We also desire to protect this pious practice of venerating and honoring the Most Blessed Virgin preserved from original sin by the anticipating grace of the Holy Spirit. Moreover We had in mind to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace in Christ's flock by settling hateful quarrels and removing scandals. At the request of the previously mentioned bishops, together with the Chapters of their churches, and of King Philip and his kingdoms, We renew the constitutions and decrees issued by the Roman Pontiffs, Our predecessors, especially Sixtus IV, Paul V, and Gregory XV, in favor of the belief which holds that the soul of the Blessed Virgin Mary at its creation and infusion into the body, was endowed with the grace of the Holy Spirit and preserved from original sin. We renew these same constitutions and decrees also in favor of the feast and the cult of the Conception of the Virgin Mother of God, which, as is clear, was established in accordance with this pious belief. We command this feast to be observed under the censures and penalties mentioned in these same constitutions.

"To the penalties and censures listed in the constitutions of Sixtus IV, We desire to add and by this letter do add the following: the offenders mentioned below should be deprived automatically without any other declaration, of the faculty of preaching and lecturing in public, and of teaching and interpreting. Moreover they are to be deprived of active and passive voice in elections. Absolution or dispensation from these censures is reserved to Us or Our successors, the Roman Pontiffs. Likewise We wish to make the same persons liable and We do hereby make them liable to other penalties to be imposed by Us or the same Roman Pontiffs, Our successors, as We renew the previous cited constitutions or decrees of Paul V and Gregory XV.

"The penalties and censures listed in the constitutions of Sixtus IV are to be applied against each and every one who shall persist in interpreting the above mentioned constitutions or decrees in such a way as to undo the favor which they show towards this belief and festival and the cult observed in its regard. These same penalties apply to those who dare to question this same belief, festival or cult in any manner, either directly or indirectly, and under any pretext even that of examining the grounds for its definition, or even for explaining or interpreting the Sacred Scriptures or the Holy Fathers or Doctors. Finally under the same ban fall those



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who dare under any pretext or on any occasion at all to use either voice or pen to preach or discuss or dispute, whether by asserting or by bringing forth the arguments against them and leaving these unfavorable arguments unanswered, or by expressing dissent in any other possible manner.

“And We make this prohibition under the penalties and censures contained in the Index of Forbidden Books, and We will and declare that by the very fact those books be regarded as expressly forbidden in which the above mentioned belief and festival or devotion is called into question and in which anything is written or read in lectures, sermons, treatises and disputations against these and published after the previously mentioned decree of Paul V, or to be published in the future.”

### **The Doctrine Was Accepted Everywhere**

Everyone knows with what devotedness this doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of God has been handed down, proclaimed, and defended by the most prominent religious orders, by the better-known theological academies, and by very eminent theologians. Everyone knows, too, how interested the bishops have been in declaring publicly in the ecclesiastical assemblies, that the Most Holy Virgin Mary, Mother of God, in view of the merits of Christ, our Lord, the Redeemer, was never subject to original sin, but was preserved entirely immune from the primal stain and was therefore redeemed in a nobler way.

### **The Council of Trent Declares Mary Sinless**

We must add to these a most impressive and important testimony. In its dogmatic decree on original sin, the Council of Trent, following the testimonies of the Sacred Scriptures, of the Holy Fathers, and of the Councils, decreed and defined that all men are born with the stain of original sin; yet it solemnly declared that it had no intention of including in this decree itself and in the broad extent of its definition, the Blessed and Immaculate Virgin Mary, Mother of God. Considering the times and circumstances, the Fathers of Trent in this definition made it clear enough that the Blessed Virgin Mary was free from the original stain. Thus they pointed out that nothing could be fairly cited from the Sacred Scriptures, or from Tradition, or from the authority of the Fathers which would in any way militate against this special privilege of the Virgin.

### **3. Ancient Tradition**

In fact, this doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of the Most Blessed Virgin has always existed in the Church as a doctrine received fully from our ancestors and stamped with the impress of revealed teaching. This is attested by excellent documents of venerable antiquity of both the Eastern and Western Church. This doctrine was daily more and more clearly explained, stated and confirmed by the highest authority, by the zealous

teaching and by the knowledge and wisdom of the Church, and was marvelously spread among all peoples and nations of the Catholic world. For the Church of Christ is the vigilant guardian and defender of the doctrines entrusted to her keeping; she never changes anything; she never diminishes anything; she never makes any addition. With special attention she faithfully and wisely draws from the ancient documents. If they are really of ancient origin and if the Fathers have written them, she takes pains to probe them and explain them in such a way that the ancient doctrines brought down from heaven will take on clearness and distinctness while retaining their full, integral, and distinctive nature. Thus each one will grow only in its own order; that is, in the same sense within the same dogma.

### **Evidence From The Fathers of the Church**

The Fathers and Writers of the Church, thoroughly schooled in the writings from heaven, had most at heart to vie with one another in preaching and teaching in many wonderful ways the Virgin's sublime holiness, dignity, and immunity from all stain of sin and her splendid victory over the most hateful foe of mankind. They did this in their books which explain the Scriptures, vindicate the dogmas, and instruct the faithful.

### **Chapter Three of Genesis**

They quote the words by which the Almighty, in the beginning of the world, announced His merciful remedies prepared for the renewal of men, and by which He crushed the brazen, deceitful Serpent and wonderfully lifted up the hope of our race, saying, "I will put enmities between thee and the woman, between thy seed and her seed." When citing this text they taught that by this divine oracle, the merciful Redeemer of the human race, the Only-Begotten Son of God, Jesus Christ, was very clearly pointed out beforehand and that His Most Blessed Mother, the Virgin Mary, was designated and that at the same time the enmity of both against the devil was emphatically stated.

Hence, just as Christ, the Mediator between God and man, took on human nature, wiped out the handwriting of the decree that stood against us, and fastened it triumphantly to the Cross, so the Most Holy Virgin, linked with Him by a most intimate and unbreakable bond, was with Him and through Him, eternally hostile to that poisonous serpent, and she most decisively triumphed over him by crushing his head with her immaculate heel.

### **Types of the Immaculate Mary in the Old Testament**

This renowned and singular victory of the Virgin, and her most exalted innocence, her pure holiness, and her immunity from every stain of sin, as well as the inexpressible abundance and grandeur of all her heavenly

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graces, virtues, and privileges, are all found in figure in the Old Testament. The Fathers saw these in Noah's ark, which was built by divine command and which escaped unharmed from the common shipwreck of the whole world. They also saw these in that ladder which Jacob noticed reaching from earth to heaven, with the angels of God ascending and descending on its rungs, and with the Lord Himself leaning from its top. Again, she was typified in that bush which Moses saw in the holy place, though it was blazing all around, still it was not consumed or harmed in any way, but it grew green and blossomed beautifully. They saw her in that unassailable tower before the enemy, from which hung a thousand bucklers and all the armor of the mighty ones. She was prefigured in the garden closed in on all sides, which deceitful plots could not violate or corrupt, as well as in that most sublime temple of God, radiant with divine brilliance and filled with divine glory, and in very many other types of this kind. By means of these figures the Fathers have passed on to us the tradition that sublime things have been remarkably foretold about the Mother of God and about her unstained innocence and holiness which was never subject to any blemish.

The Fathers also made use of the words of the Prophets to express the perfection, as it were, of the divine gifts and the primal integrity of the Virgin of whom Jesus was born. They extolled the peerless Virgin as the unspotted dove, as the holy Jerusalem, as the exalted throne of God, as the ark and the shrine of holiness, which eternal wisdom built for herself, and as that Queen, who beaming with joy and leaning on her Beloved, came forth from the mouth of the Most High, wholly perfect, beautiful, most dear to God, never in the least tainted or tarnished.

### **The Archangel Gabriel's Greeting**

The Fathers and Writers loved to recall in their minds that the angel Gabriel, in announcing to Mary the sublime dignity of Mother of God, proclaimed her full of grace, in the name of God Himself and by His command. They held that this exceptional, solemn, and even unique greeting shows that the Mother of God is the abode of all divine graces and is adorned with all the gifts of the Holy Spirit. They claim it shows why she is an almost unlimited treasury, and an undiminishing abyss of these gifts, so much so that she was never subject to the curse and is along with her Son the only sharer of perpetual blessing. Thus she deserved to hear the words of Elizabeth inspired by the Holy Spirit: "Blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb."

Hence the Fathers are clear and unanimous in affirming that the most glorious Virgin, for whom "He who is mighty has done great things," was radiant with such a brilliancy of all heavenly gifts, with such a fullness of grace and with such innocence that she is an indescribable miracle of God.

Indeed they call her the crown of all miracles and the worthy Mother of God and say that she comes as near as possible to God Himself and though she has merely a created nature, she is above all human and angelic praise.

### **Mary is the Second Eve**

Therefore, to uphold the primal innocence and holiness of the Mother of God, they not only frequently compared her to Eve, when she was still a virgin, when she was still innocent and incorrupt and not yet deceived by the fatal snares of the most wily serpent. In an astounding variety of expressions they have preferred her to Eve, for Eve with tragic consequences obeyed the serpent, thus falling from primal innocence and becoming his slave. The Most Blessed Virgin, on the other hand, ever increased her original gift and not only steadfastly rejected the serpent's treachery, but with the aid of divine grace, she completely crushed the devil's strength and power.

Thus the Fathers are forever calling the Mother of God the lily among thorns, or the earth completely untouched, virginal, undefiled, unsullied, ever-blessed and immune from all sinful corruption, the one from whom the New Adam was formed. Again they call her the flawless, brightest and most pleasing paradise of innocence, immortality and delights planted by God Himself and protected against all snares of the poisonous serpent. Or they call her the incorruptible wood which the worm of sin had never corrupted, or the perpetually clear fountain, sealed by the power of the Holy Spirit; or they call her the most divine temple, or the treasure of immortality, or the one and only daughter not of death but of life, the child not of enmity but of grace, who by a singular providence of God, an exception contrary to ordinary fixed laws, has always flourished, though it sprang from a corrupt and infected root.

### **The Fathers Add More Praises**

Now as if these most glowing expressions of praise did not do her justice, the Fathers declared with special and precise statements that when there is mention of sin, the holy Virgin Mary is out of the question; for she received more grace than was needed for the complete conquest of sin. Moreover, they proclaimed that the most glorious Virgin was the one who repaired the damage caused by her First Parents, the one who gave life to posterity; that she was singled out before time, prepared for Himself by the Most High, foretold by God when He said to the serpent, "I will put enmities between thee and the woman," the one who without doubt crushed the poisonous head of the serpent.

Then, too, they stated that the Blessed Virgin was through grace entirely immune from every sinful stain and from all corruption of body, mind,



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and soul. They said that she was always united with God and allied to Him in an eternal covenant. According to them, she was always in light and never in darkness, and that she was in consequence a fitting shrine for Christ, not because of the condition of her body, but because of her original grace.

They have even added to these praises. In dealing with the Conception of the Virgin they give testimony that nature yielded to grace and being unable to go on it stood trembling. Indeed, the Virgin Mother of God would not be conceived by Anne before grace would bear fruit, since it was fitting for her to be conceived as the firstborn, from whom "the First-born of every creature" would be conceived. They maintain, too, that the Virgin's flesh, taken from Adam, did not contract Adam's stains and that for this reason the Most Blessed Virgin was the tabernacle created by God Himself, and formed by the Holy Spirit, indeed a work enriched in purple, adorned and woven with gold, which the new Beseleel made. It was their claim that this Virgin is, and is deservedly, extolled as the first, the special work of God, which eluded the fiery darts of the devil. They tell us that she is beautiful by nature and wholly free from every stain and that she was immaculately conceived, that she came into the world all radiant like the dawn. Indeed this vessel of election should not be assailed by the common injuries since she was so different from the others, in that she had in common with them only human nature and not the fault.

### **Mary's Dignity Demanded the Highest Sanctity**

Moreover, it was right that as the Only-Begotten had in heaven a Father, extolled by the Seraphim as thrice holy, so on earth He should have a Mother who would never be without the radiance of holiness. This doctrine was so much in the minds of our ancestors that an exceptional and quite astonishing form of expression became popular among them. Very often they addressed the Mother of God as immaculate, even wholly immaculate, innocent, even most innocent, untainted and unsullied and even wholly unsullied; holy and farthest removed from every stain of sin; all pure, all perfect, the very model of purity and innocence, more beautiful than beauty; more lovely than loveliness, holier than holiness, alone holy and most pure in soul and body; surpassing all integrity and virginity, the only one who has completely become the dwelling of all graces of the Holy Spirit and who is more excellent than all, with the sole exception of God; fair beautiful by nature and holier even than the Cherubim and Seraphim; and finally they say that all the tongues of heaven and earth are not numerous enough to give her adequate praise.

Everyone realizes that expressions like these have passed very naturally into the ancient writings of the Sacred Liturgy and the Offices of the Church, where they are frequently found. In these, the Mother of God

is invoked and praised as the one undefiled and most beautiful dove, as an ever-blooming rose, as perfectly pure, ever immaculate, and ever blessed. She is honored as innocence always free from violation and as the second Eve who brought forth the Emmanuel.

### **The Church Is Influenced by the Fathers**

Should we be surprised, then, that the pastors and the faithful of the Church daily took more and more delight in proclaiming with such devotion and fervor this doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mother of God? Was it not recorded in the divine Scriptures according to the judgment of the Fathers? Was it not handed down by many very important testimonies of the Fathers? Was it not stated and honored in very many prominent writings of venerable antiquity? Was it not proposed and confirmed by the weighty and deliberate judgment of the Church? For these reasons, nothing was dearer, nothing was more appealing to these pastors than to honor and venerate, to invoke and proclaim everywhere with the most ardent devotion, the Virgin Mother of God conceived without original stain.

### **Interest In the Dogmatic Definition**

From ancient times, then, the bishops of the Church, the ecclesiastics, the religious orders, and even emperors and kings themselves, have earnestly requested this Apostolic See to define as a dogma of the Catholic Faith the Immaculate Conception of the Most Holy Mother of God. These petitions were renewed in our own days; especially were they brought to the attention of Gregory XVI, Our predecessor of happy memory, and to Ourselves, not only by bishops but by the secular clergy and the religious families, but also by the sovereign rulers, and by the faithful.

## **B — IMMEDIATE PREPARATION FOR THE DEFINITION**

Since We were well aware of all these things and had given them serious consideration, as soon as We, though unworthy, had been raised by a mysterious design of Providence to the exalted Chair of Peter and had assumed the burden of governing the Church, We set our heart on carrying out all the wishes of the Church in order to enhance the honor of the Most Blessed Virgin and to make her privilege shine with a more brilliant light. This was a special spiritual joy for us and was in keeping with the deepest veneration, devotion, and love which We, even as a tender child, had toward the Virgin Mary, the Holy Mother of God.

### **1. Special Congregation Appointed**

In our desire to move ahead with great prudence, We set up a special congregation of our Venerable Brethren, the Cardinals of the Holy Roman Church, outstanding for their devotion, their wisdom, and their knowledge of the sacred sciences. We also invited secular and regular priests, well-

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trained in the theological sciences, to weigh carefully all matters dealing with the Immaculate Conception and to report to Us their opinion.

### **2. Answers of the Bishops**

Although the petitions which We had already received from the bishops indicated that they were in favor of the defining of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin, still on February 2, 1849, We addressed an encyclical letter from Gaeta to all Our Venerable Brethren, the Bishops of the Catholic world, asking them to offer prayers to God and then to tell us in writing what the people thought and felt about the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of God, and, in particular, what the bishops themselves thought about defining the doctrine and what they considered the best manner of proclaiming our supreme decision as solemnly as possible.

The replies of Our Venerable Brethren brought us no slight consolation. The incredible joy, gladness, and ardor of their replies confirmed not only their own singular piety toward the Immaculate Conception of the Most Blessed Virgin and that of the secular and religious clergy and of the faithful, but they also were unanimous in entreating Us to define with Our supreme decision and authority the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin.

Meanwhile, a similar joy filled our heart when Our Venerable Brethren, the previously mentioned Cardinals of the special congregation and the theologians whom We selected as counsellors, eagerly and ardently begged us, after their careful study, to define the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of God.

### **3. The Consistory of Cardinals**

In Our desire to follow the proper procedure set down by Our predecessors, We announced a consistory and when in that assembly We addressed Our Brethren, the Cardinals of the Holy Roman Church, an intense spiritual joy came over us as We heard them ask Us to proclaim officially the dogmatic definition of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mother of God.

At this stage We had the fullest divine assurance that the opportune time had come for defining the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God. This was abundantly clear from the Sacred Scriptures, the venerable tradition, the permanent mind of the Church, the extraordinary harmony of the Catholic bishops and of the faithful and the special acts and constitutions of Our predecessors. Now that We had very carefully considered everything and had fervently invoked divine guidance, We decided that We should no longer delay in approving and defining by Our supreme authority the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin. We should thus satisfy the very devout wishes of the Catholic world and Our own devotion toward the Most Holy Virgin. At the same

time in honoring the Virgin, We would pay increasing honor to the Only-Begotten Son, Jesus Christ, Our Lord, since any honor and praise bestowed on the Mother finds its way back to the Son.

#### 4. The Infallible Definition

We humbly offered up our fasting and private prayers along with the public prayers of the Church, entreating God the Father through His Son to deign to direct and strengthen Our mind by the power of the Holy Spirit. We also asked the help of the whole heavenly court. We earnestly called upon the Paraclete, and by His inspiration, 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 promotion of the Catholic religion, by the authority of Our Lord Jesus Christ, of the Blessed Apostles Peter and Paul, and by Our own,

**We declare, pronounce and define that the Most Blessed Virgin Mary, at the first instant of her Conception was preserved Immaculate from all stain of original sin, by the singular grace and privilege of the Omnipotent God, in virtue of the merits of Jesus Christ, the Savior of the human race, and that this doctrine was revealed by God, and therefore must be believed firmly and constantly by all the faithful.**

Hence, if any one shall dare — and may God forbid it — to hold a view different from Our definition, let him know and understand that his own decision condemns him and that he has suffered shipwreck in the faith and has fallen away from the unity of the Church. Moreover, by his own action he incurs the penalties imposed by law if he should make bold to express in words or writing or by any other outward means, what he thinks in his mind.

#### Benefits Expected from Mary's Mediation

Joy everflows in our speech and gladdens Our tongue as We very humbly keep on giving fullest thanks to Our Lord Jesus Christ, because through His exceptional favor He has permitted Us in spite of Our unworthiness, to decree and offer this honor and glory and praise to His Most Blessed Mother. All beautiful and Immaculate, she has crushed the poisonous head of the most cruel serpent and brought salvation to the world. She is the glory of the Prophets and Apostles, the honor of the martyrs, the joy and the crown of all the Saints. To all who are in danger she is the most secure refuge and the most reliable helper. With her Only-Begotten Son, she most powerfully mediates and reconciles in behalf of the whole world. She is the most distinguished glory and ornament of Holy Church and its strongest protection. For she has always destroyed all heresies and rescued the faithful people of all nations from all kinds of dire misfortunes. She has freed Us, too, from many threatening dangers.



## INEFFABILIS DEUS

We fully hope and trust that this Most Blessed Virgin Mary, by her most powerful patronage, will effectively banish all errors and remove all difficulties, so that Our Holy Mother, the Catholic Church, may flourish daily more and more in all nations and countries and may reign from sea to sea and from the river to the ends of the earth, and may enjoy true peace, tranquillity and freedom. May she also obtain pardon for the sinner, health for the sick, strength for the weak, sympathy for the afflicted, help for those in danger. May she remove spiritual blindness from all who are in error, and help the erring to return to the path of truth and justice, that thus there may be but one flock and one shepherd.

### **Plea for Increased Devotion to Mary**

Let all Our most dear children of the Catholic Church hear these words of Ours. With a still more ardent zeal for piety, religion and love, may they continue to venerate, invoke, and pray to the Most Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, conceived without original sin. In all dangers and difficulties, in all their needs, doubts, and fears, may they promptly seek this gentle Mother of mercy and grace. Under her guidance and patronage there can be no fear; under her kindness and protection there can be no despair. In the midst of her truly maternal affection for Us and her active interest in Our salvation, she is concerned about the whole human race. Most effectively she presents Our requests, since by God's appointment she is the Queen of heaven and earth and is exalted above all the angelic choirs and all the saints and even stands at the right hand of her Only-Begotten Son, Our Lord Jesus Christ. She obtains what she asks for. Her requests cannot be refused.

### **The Promulgation of the Definition**

Finally, to make known to the entire Church this Our definition of the Immaculate Conception of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary, We desire that this Apostolic Letter of Ours remain a perpetual memorial and We command that the very same credence be given to transcripts and printed copies as to this original, if it were publicly posted or exhibited. However, such transcripts and copies must be undersigned by a notary public and authenticated by the seal of a person of ecclesiastical rank. Let no one, then, interfere with this document of Our declaration, pronouncement, and definition, or oppose and contradict it with temerity and boldness. If anyone should presume to interfere, let him know that he will incur the anger of the all-powerful God and of His Blessed Apostles Peter and Paul.

Given at Rome in St. Peter's on the eighth of December,  
in the year of the Incarnation of Our Lord, 1854, the ninth  
year of Our Pontificate.

Pius IX, Pope