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Background Paper on the Dogma of the Immaculate Conception
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A. Motives for the Definition of the Dogma

1. To respond to the petitions of the Catholic faithful and express devotion
2. To respond to threats to the faith posed by "modern errors"
3. To respond to threats to the temporal and spiritual authority of the Church
4. To prepare for the dogmatic definition of papal infallibility

Conclusions

B. *Ineffabilis Deus*: Exegesis of the Dogmatic Definition Proper

1. Its object: original sin, "all stain"[of original sin]
2. Its subject: the Virgin Mary, from the "first moment" of her conception
3. Its mode: "preserved," singular grace and privilege, in view of Christ's merits; the *debitum peccati*.
4. Its certitude: revealed by God

Conclusions

C. The Consequences for "Those who think Otherwise"

1. The historical context
2. Proposals favorable to dropping DS 2804 for ecumenical purposes
3. Critical responses to the proposals

Conclusions

We have conducted an extended review of the historical evidence, theological opinion, and current Catholic teaching on the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Our discussion revealed that it would also be helpful to establish as clearly as possible *why* Pope Pius IX decided to define this as a dogma, and *what* the exact content of the definition is. What Catholics are bound to believe is limited to what has been defined; theologians remain free to speculate on whatever has not been decided.¹ We also discovered the need to give more sustained attention to the anthropological issues attending the doctrine. Finally, we need to determine the meaning, and possible application, of the passage immediately following the definition that describes the consequences of dissent from this teaching.

A. Motives for the Definition of the Dogma

Why did Pope Pius IX (1846-78) want to define the dogma of the Immaculate Conception? There was no threat of heresy regarding this issue; on the contrary, after literally centuries of wrangling,² a great groundswell of devotion to the Blessed Virgin under this title swept over the Catholic world as Pius assumed the pontificate. If internal strife did not present a challenge to the unity of the Church, what prompted the Pope to take action? My research persuades me that he acted first of all to respond to the insistent petitions of the Catholic people and to express his and their filial devotion to the Blessed Virgin; second, to announce revealed truth in the face of “modern errors” that denied the supernatural and the very concept of revelation; and third, to exercise the papal office decisively in the face of external threats to the spiritual as well as the temporal authority of the Church. It has been suggested that he acted in a calculated way to advance his agenda for the subsequent (1870) definition of papal infallibility; this theory concerning his motive also deserves consideration, though the evidence does not seem to bear it out.

1. To respond to petitions and express devotion. According to the Bull *Ineffabilis Deus*, arts. 17-19,³ the motives for the definition are the desire of the faithful, made known through their bishops, and the pope’s own deep devotion to the Blessed Virgin. Devout Catholics—laity, secular and religious clergy, bishops, and rulers—have spontaneously petitioned the Holy See to define Mary’s privilege as a dogma from ancient times, he writes, but more insistently “in our own times.” In response to these petitions, and prompted by his personal devotion to the Mother of God, he wishes “to show forth her prerogatives in resplendent light.” (17) He has tested his intuition about the possibility and opportuneness of such a definition by means of an encyclical letter,⁴ and found that the bishops confirmed his piety and “with one voice . . . entreated us to define with our supreme judgment and authority the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin.” The

¹ A Thomist, for example, will propose a different theological account of the meaning of the dogma than a Scotist, as Liam Walsh’s ARCIC paper 456.00 demonstrates. Walsh prefers a “physical” to a “moral” interpretation of the mode of Mary’s preservation from the stain of original sin.

² Differences over this doctrine “occasioned what was perhaps the most prolonged and passionate debate that has ever been carried on in Catholic theology,” according to Edward Dennis O’Connor, *The Dogma of the Immaculate Conception: History and Significance* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1958), vi. An overview of the historical development of this doctrine may be found in Frederick M. Jelly, “The Roman Catholic Dogma of Mary’s Immaculate Conception” in *The One Mediator, the Saints, and Mary*, ed. H. George Anderson, et al. Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue VIII (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1992): 263-78.

³ See www.ewtn.com/ewtn/library/ (search) for an English text of *IneffabilisDeus*. I have assigned a number to each section (sub-heading).

⁴ In *Ubi primum* (February 2, 1849), the Pope says he is motivated by the insistent petitions of the faithful, his own devotion, and the “violent hurricane of evils” that afflicts the Church. For the text, see *Papal Documents on Mary*, ed. William J. Doherty and Joseph P. Kelly (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1954): 1-5.

Pope proceeds with the definition, then, to "satisfy the most holy desire of the Catholic world as well as [his] own devotion toward the most holy Virgin, and at the same time honor more and more the only begotten Son, Jesus Christ our Lord through his holy Mother." (18) The definition itself is declared "for the honor of the Holy and Undivided Trinity, for the glory and adornment of the Virgin Mother of God, for the exaltation of the Catholic faith, and for the furtherance of the Catholic religion." (19) These three articles express what has been called the "doxological" character of this Marian definition. The papal Bull does not refute a heresy or heal a schism; rather, it celebrates the living faith and devotion of the Catholic people — admittedly, at a time of great stress and trial in the life of the Church and particularly in the experience of the Holy See. It gives formal expression and sanction to the profound intuition of the faithful regarding Mary's holiness.

There is ample historical evidence of renewed and widespread fervor in the liturgical celebration of this doctrine from the time of Pius VII (1800-23) forward, that is, throughout the lifetime of Pius IX. Petitions poured in to the Holy See for permission to insert "Immaculate" before "Conception" in the Preface of the Mass for the feast,⁵ and to add a petition to Mary under this title in the Litany of Loreto. Many claimed "the Immaculate Conception" as patron of their churches, religious congregations, confraternities, and countries.⁶ Pius' predecessors, especially his immediate predecessor Gregory XVI, had prepared the way for this surge of devotion by encouraging "immaculist" formulas; in addition, the Marian apparition to St. Catherine Labouré in Paris (November, 1830) had stirred up great popular enthusiasm.⁷ Response to these demonstrations of piety — of the *sensus fidelium* — surely represent a powerful motive for proceeding to a definition; in fact, this practical tradition can be said to provide the ultimate warrant for the definition.⁸

2. To respond to threats to the faith posed by "modern errors." It is certain, not from the text of the Bull but from the circumstances of its composition and from several papal discourses given at the time, that Pius IX was also motivated by the desire to confront certain errors of the day.⁹ He charged a "Special Commission" appointed in May,

⁵ The Holy See had, since 1644, employed the expression "the Conception of the Immaculate Mary," in order to avoid a definitive judgment on the question. In view of the mounting consensus, Pope Gregory XVI (1831-46) surely "invited" the petition of the Dominican Master General that arrived in 1843 and signaled the end of their resistance to the doctrine, but the other requests were spontaneous. See René Laurentin, "The Role of the Papal Magisterium in the Development of the Dogma," in O'Connor, ed. *The Dogma of the Immaculate Conception*, 271-324 at 291.

⁶ The sixth provincial council of Baltimore, for example, requested these permissions in 1846. See James Hennessey, "Prelude to Vatican I: American Bishops and the Definition of the Immaculate Conception," *Theological Studies* 25 (1964): 409-19, at 411.

⁷ The papal Bull makes no mention of the apparition, but devotion to Mary under this title spread far and wide as a result of this vision and the favors connected with the Miraculous Medal, which was inscribed with the prayer, "O Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to you." See X.-M. Le Bachelet, "Immaculée Conception," in *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique*, t. 7, pt. 1, cols 1189-91.

⁸ See Jean-Marie Tillard, "*Sensus Fidelium*," *One in Christ* 11 (1975): 2-29, at 5-7, and Francis A. Sullivan, *Magisterium: Teaching Authority in the Catholic Church* (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1983), 105.

⁹ See Gustave Thils, "La Définition de l'Immaculée Conception et l'Idée de Révélation," in *Études sur l'Immaculée Conception: Sources et sens de la Doctrine* (Gembloux: J. Duculot, 1955): 34-45, at 37, n.11 and Hennessey, "Prelude to Vatican I," 410.

1852 with the twofold task of establishing the theological arguments for the dogma and drawing up a syllabus of modern errors—in the hopes that both topics could be treated together. The initial drafts of the Bull, in fact, reveal the effort to combine the two tasks, but by January, 1853 this approach was abandoned. The nexus Pius continued to see between the two is apparent, however, in his allocution to the cardinals assembled the day following the solemn definition. In an address largely devoted to identifying the errors of the day, he warns that those who take “reason” for “an infallible mistress” have forgotten the terrible injury caused to human nature by the Fall—the intellect was darkened and the will inclined to evil. Who, then, can rely on reason alone, unaided by religion and divine grace? He expresses his hope that the “greatness of [Mary’s] privilege will be a powerful means of confuting those who deny that human nature was corrupted by the first sin and who exaggerate the forces of reason in order to deny or lessen the benefit of Revelation.” Recalling that the Blessed Virgin is the conqueror of heresies, he prays that she may “up-root and destroy this dangerous error of Rationalism” which afflicts not only civil society but also the Church.¹⁰ From his inaugural encyclical, *Qui pluribus* (1846), it is already evident that Pius was alert to the “enemies of Christianity” and of “divine revelation” who were bent on destroying the Catholic religion and even civil society, and that he grasped his responsibility for combating them.¹¹

3. To respond to threats to the temporal and spiritual authority of the Church. In the 19th century, popular devotion to Our Lady increased under the twofold impetus of a widespread apostasy among the intellectual elite and the persecution of the Church at the hands of revolutionaries and newly established secular governments. They begged the Blessed Virgin to intercede for them—for the conversion of sinners and peace in the Church and the State.¹² At the time of the definition, the freedom of the Church was severely curtailed and the Pope’s authority—both temporal and spiritual—was publicly challenged. Pius IX, forced to flee Rome after the assassination of his prime minister and threats on his own life, set the process in motion from his exile in Gaeta. His public humiliation as ruler of the Papal States favored the clear assertion of his spiritual authority as head of the Church. In the same address in which he links the dogma to his battle against the philosophical errors of the day, the Pope mentions external, political threats as well: the secret societies committed to the destruction of both Church and State; the statesmen who trample the rights of the Church, rob her of her prerogatives, and defy her authority.¹³ It is likely that Pius IX had sufficient reason to proclaim the Marian dogma apart from these adverse circumstances, but the external challenges certainly gave him an added incentive to exercise his spiritual authority as head of the universal Church, and by this means to strengthen and encourage the bishops and the faithful.ⁱ

¹⁰ The text (English) is in *Papal Documents*, Doheny and Kelly, 6-8. For the Latin, of this and other texts, see *Official Documents connected with the Definition of the Dogma of the Immaculate Conception* (Baltimore: John Murphy, 1855): 101-21. George Tavard calls the definition “a piece in the papal arsenal against modernity,” for it emphasized God’s sovereign power in the face of modern claims to autonomy. See *The Thousand Faces of the Virgin Mary* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1996): 190-201, at 191.

¹¹ DS 2782. See www.ewtn.com/ewtn/library/ for an English text of this encyclical.

¹² See Georges Tavard, *La Vierge Marie en France aux XVIII^e et XIX^e siècles* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1998).

¹³ “Allocutio,” 125-28.

4. To prepare for the dogmatic definition of papal infallibility. Did Pius IX, as some authors suggest, contrive to define this Marian dogma in a calculated move to prepare the way — as a kind of “test case” — for the dogmatic definition of papal infallibility? This is sometimes suggested, and the sentiments the Pope expressed in *Qui pluribus* lend some credibility to the theory.¹⁴ The insinuation that he engaged in a devious plot to usurp the power of the bishops, however, must be rejected. Many 19th century Catholics believed that the firm exercise of spiritual authority by the Holy See was the best bulwark against “the errors of the day.”¹⁵ Pius, in fact, did not act in isolation from the bishops, but diligently consulted them. In the encyclical of February 2, 1849, *Ubi primum* — “le concile par écrit”¹⁶ — he asked them to report both the faith of their people and their own considered opinion on the matter. The response was overwhelmingly in favor of the doctrine.¹⁷ He appointed cardinals and bishops to serve with theologians on the ante-preparatory commission and the Special Commission. He invited two bishops from each country to attend a *congressus* for the purpose of reviewing the draft-schema and advising him. This they did in four meetings (November 20-24) immediately preceding December 8, the day of the solemn definition. When certain bishops suggested that the consent of the episcopate be mentioned in the Bull, Bishop Malou of Bruges countered with this argument: “Just as the matter in question is eminently Catholic, so its proclamation will be conspicuously Catholic if it is done by the supreme pontiff alone... it will demonstrate both the supreme authority of the teaching church and the gift of inerrancy with which Christ has endowed his vicar on earth.”¹⁸ The bishops accepted Malou’s proposal. On December 1, the Pope gathered the 54 cardinals in secret consistory for a final review of the eighth draft-schema, and also took their advice on many points. He reserved the final version to himself, and the complete Bull was not published until January.

Conclusion. From the evidence, it appears that the Pope’s major concern was the “definability” and the most effective argumentation and formulation of the doctrine, not the mode of its definition. In fact, the papal Magisterium had assumed responsibility for this doctrine for over 400 years, and those who pressed for its dogmatic definition had always addressed their petitions to the Holy See. It probably seemed quite natural to Pius IX to continue to act as guardian and teacher of the faith under these circumstances.¹⁹ In

¹⁴ Ignaz von Döllinger thought this was the case. See Eamon Carroll “Papal Infallibility and the Marian Definitions, Some Considerations,” *Carmelus* 26/2 (1979): 213-50, at 219. Frederick Jelly notes the suggestion (“The Roman Catholic Dogma of Mary’s Immaculate Conception,” 269-70), but finds sufficient reasons for the definition apart from this.

¹⁵ Francis A. Sullivan, *Magisterium: Teaching Authority in the Catholic Church* (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1983) 94, cites pertinent literature on this theme.

¹⁶ Thils, “La Définition,” 37.

¹⁷ The letter reached 603 bishops. Of these, 546 answered favorably. Of those who had reservations, only 4 or 5 thought the matter could not be defined; the others were undecided or viewed it as inopportune. See Eamon Carroll, “Papal Infallibility,” 216.

¹⁸ Ibid., 218-19. Another bishop pointed out that since they were not assembled in council, they could not offer their official consent. For the full story, including the tensions with bishops of a moderately Gallican position on papal infallibility, see Roger Aubert, “L’épiscopat belge et la proclamation du dogme de l’Immaculée Conception en 1854,” in *Virgo Immaculata*, 276-309.

¹⁹ These two matters — the “definability” of the doctrine and the exercise of papal teaching authority with respect to it — will be considered briefly in an appendix to this paper.

any event, his act hardly constitutes a usurpation of episcopal prerogatives, for it is the bishops, acting on behalf of the faithful, who requested the definition in the first place.²⁰

B. *Ineffabilis Deus*: exegesis of the dogmatic definition proper

What the Catholic Church teaches infallibly about the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary is limited to the paragraph containing the definition. This statement is what calls for an act of faith. The remainder of *Ineffabilis Deus* is an authentic proclamation of the papal Magisterium, but it does not require the same consent. The historical-doctrinal exposition found there provides a context of interpretation for the definition, but it is not infallibly taught. The first task, then, must be to investigate the precise meaning of the definition proper.²¹

We declare, pronounce, and define: the doctrine which holds that the most Blessed Virgin Mary was, from the first moment of her conception, by a singular grace and privilege of almighty God and in view of the merits of Christ Jesus the Saviour of the human race, preserved immune from all stain of original sin, is revealed by God and, therefore, firmly and constantly to be believed by all the faithful. (DS 2803)

[Declaramus, pronuntiamus et definimus doctrinam quae tenet beatissimam Virginem Mariam in primo instanti suae conceptionis fuisse singulari Omnipotentis Dei gratia et privilegio, intuitu meritorum Christi Iesu Salvatoris humani generis, ab omni originalis culpae labe praeservatam immunem, esse a Deo revelatam, atque idcirco ab omnibus fidelibus firmiter constanterque credendam.]

The meaning of Mary's "privilege" may be examined from four angles: (1) its nature or object, (2) its recipient or subject, (3) its source and mode of conferral, and (4) the kind of certitude which can be had with respect to it.²²

1. Its Object. The object of the privilege is that the Virgin Mary "was preserved immune from all stain of original sin—*fuisse ab omni originalis culpae labe praeservatam immunem.*" This is a negative formulation: Mary was not tainted by original sin. The formula does not define the essential nature of "original sin"; it does not say what Mary's immunity from its "stain" (*labe*) meant for her. These questions are neither raised nor answered by the definition, but several elements can be investigated further,

²⁰ Tillard, "Sensus Fidelium," 9-10.

²¹ This analysis draws chiefly on the work of Juan Alfaro, "La fórmula definitoria de la Inmaculada Concepción," in *Virgo Immaculata: Acta Congressus Mariologici-Mariani*, vol. II: *Acta Magisterii Ecclesiastici de Immaculata B.V.M. Conceptione* (Rome: Academia Mariana Internationalis, 1956): 201-75, especially 262-75. Alfaro sets out to establish the precise limits of the definition (201-203), consulting the preliminary studies and V. Sardi, *La solenne definizione del dogma dell'immacolato concepimento di Maria Santissima. Atti e documenti* (Roma, 184-55). I use here the (Neuner-Dupuis) translation: ARCIC 470/00.

²² This scheme is taken from X.-M. Le Bachelet, "Immaculée Conception," cols 845-93; see also Allan B. Wolter, O.F.M., "The Theology of the Immaculate Conception in the Light of '*Ineffabilis Deus*,'" *Marian Studies* V (1954) 19-72. I have used both sources to supplement Alfaro.

with the help of other dogmatic definitions and with some historical information about the context and composition of the definition.

Original Sin. The Tridentine *Decree on Original Sin* remains the most authoritative Catholic dogmatic statement on the question.²³ It consists of five canons pertaining to original sin, plus a declaration of the Council's intention to exclude from their consideration the case of "the Blessed and Immaculate Virgin Mary."²⁴ The Fathers of the Council declined, in fact, to identify the essential nature of original sin, either as Adam's personal sin (*peccatum originans*) or as it exists in his descendants (*peccatum originatum*), but confined themselves to identifying and rejecting errors. The first two canons are directed against the Humanist "Neo-Pelagians" (and the second, also against Zwingli); they repeat the teaching of II Orange concerning the consequences of original sin for Adam and his descendants. The third canon, the proper work of Trent, affirms the universal need of Christ, the one Mediator, and of baptism for the remission of Adam's sin.²⁵ The fourth, borrowed from XVI Carthage and directed against Zwingli and the Anabaptists, affirms that infants truly incur original sin and must be baptized, even though they are not guilty of personal sin. Canon five, also the proper work of Trent, is directed against Luther's theory that original sin is not removed but only forgiven and not imputed to the baptized. It teaches that the concupiscence that remains in the baptized is not identical with original sin, and is not "sin" in the proper sense. According to Trent, original sin is not to be confused with concupiscence, an inclination towards evil that remains in the baptized as a kind of test, nor does it involve an intrinsic corruption of human nature.²⁶

Trent also names the negative consequences of original sin and the positive consequences of baptismal regeneration, thus it identifies what Mary was immune from and, by implication, the grace she received. Adam's descendants lost holiness and justice, and they incurred the divine wrath and death—both bodily death and "the death of the soul," which is sin (*peccatum*). (DS 1511) By the grace of Christ given in baptism they are freed from the guilt of original sin and reborn as God's beloved children—"innocent, unstained, pure and guiltless." (DS 1515)²⁷ Because of her immunity from original sin, Mary does not suffer the negative consequences of sin, especially the "death of the soul." By implication, then, she must enjoy a fullness of grace and holiness. This abundance of grace is lavishly set forth in the historical-doctrinal section of the Bull. Mary's "all-

²³ DS 1510-16. The text may be found in Liam Walsh, ARCIC paper, 456.00.

²⁴ According to Le Bachelet (cols. 1167-68), the Council actually advanced the doctrine. The debate revealed that most of the Fathers held the doctrine; their eagerness to include a disclaimer for Mary, and to renew the Constitutions of Pope Sixtus IV (1471-84), *Cum praeexcelsa* (DS 1400) and *Grave nimis* (DS 1425-26) did not reflect neutrality, but only their unwillingness to spend time debating a question not posed by the Reformation. See also Hubert Jedin, *A History of the Council of Trent*, vol. II (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1961): 132-63.

²⁵ N.B.: while this canon mentions in passing that original sin is passed on "by propagation and not by imitation" (DS 1512), this does not constitute a doctrinal affirmation—formal or otherwise—of the Augustinian theologoumenon linking the transmission of sin to the concupiscence associated with conjugal intercourse. Since the Catholic Church does not propose that Augustinian theory for belief, it is clearly not a necessary element of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception.

²⁶ DS 1515; free will is not lost: DS 1521, 1525, 1554-55.

²⁷ Trent's *Decree on Justification* spells out more fully the grace, holiness, and interior transformation brought about by justification (DS 1528-31).

holiness" had for centuries been thought to be interchangeable with her freedom from original sin, and it surely is contained in the definition by implication. It is a testimony to the Pope's "conservative" approach—defining only what is certain and necessary—that he confined himself to this negative formulation.²⁸

All "Stain" [of original sin]. What is the "stain"(*labe*) of original sin from which Mary was preserved? Does the definition's reference to "all stain" mean that Mary was immune from concupiscence (*fomes peccati*)? As noted above, Trent clearly distinguished between original sin and concupiscence, so it would seem immunity from one would not require immunity from the other. It is not necessary to speculate. The proceedings of the Special Commission indicate that the expression *omni originalis culpae labe* was used in a global way to refer simply to all that is truly sin. In the remainder of the Bull, the expression often appears, in fact, without the adjective "all." It was a way of speaking that had been in use since Pope Sixtus IV had approved the celebration of the feast, along with the text of a Mass and a liturgical Office, in 1477.²⁹ The Office written by Leonardo de Nogarolis used "*ab omni labe*" and "*ab omni labe peccati*," but "there is not the least indication that Nogarolis thought of immunity from concupiscence as a constitutive element of the Immaculate Conception."³⁰ In 1480 the same Pope approved a second Office for the feast, by Bernardino de Bustis; this author used the same expression but explicitly distinguished the privilege of immunity from original sin from that of immunity from concupiscence. Clearly, the expression did not include, to their minds, immunity from concupiscence.

The Acts of the Special Commission indicate that this question was intentionally left open. An affirmation of Mary's bodily immunity from concupiscence that appeared in the 4th draft was deliberately omitted in subsequent drafts. A request to add her immunity from concupiscence, made by one of the bishops at the Congressus of 1854, was turned down. There was, moreover, no consensus on this among the bishops and cardinals who met in to contribute to the formulation of doctrine. This represents an example of how a widely held belief was prudently excluded from the dogmatic definition.

2. Its Subject. The subject of the privilege is the Blessed Virgin Mary from the first moment of her conception. It would seem self-evident that the subject of the definition is the Blessed Virgin, but consultation of the process shows that a decision had to be made—between her soul, her body, and her "self." The well-known question—at what "moment," the first or the second, of her conception was Mary "preserved immune"?—was decided by the promulgation of the Bull and is at the heart of its meaning.

²⁸ By means of a negative formulation of Mary's privilege, however, the definition leaves open the disputed question of the "degree" of grace she possessed at conception. The "singular grace" (or privilege) mentioned in the definition refers to the divine initiative, and not to Mary's interior holiness.

²⁹ The drafters made an exhaustive study of the previous acts of the papal Magisterium in support of this doctrine, and quite deliberately modeled this definition on them. They were particularly impressed with the significance of the contributions made by Pope Sixtus IV (1471-84) and Pope Alexander VII (1655-67). In the Bull *Cum praeexcelsa* (1477) Sixtus IV approved a liturgical Office which embodied the doctrine of William of Ware and Duns Scotus and used readings from the Council of Basel. In the Bull *Sollicitudo omnium Ecclesiarum* (1661), Alexander VII gave precise expression to the doctrinal content of the feast. See Juan Alfaro, "La Formula Definitoria," 203-216.

³⁰ Alfaro, 204.

The Blessed Virgin Mary. The Commission charged with drafting the Bull was, as noted above, very conscientious about bringing forward for definition only what the Church already believed; in particular, it took as reference points the decrees of Sixtus IV and Alexander VII. The papal Bull of Alexander VII, *Sollicitudo omnium ecclesiarum* (December 8, 1661) supplied the first official specification of the object of the feast that had been celebrated so long in the West as the Feast of the “Conception.” At one point he describes it as “the doctrine asserting that the soul of the Blessed Virgin, in its creation and infusion into the body [*anima beatissimae Virginis cum primum fuit creata et in suum corpus infusa*], was endowed with the grace of the Holy Spirit and preserved from original sin.”³¹ Up until a few days before the definition, the draft-schema followed this doctrine, identifying Mary’s *soul* as the subject of the privilege. At the Congressus, one of the bishops, seconded by a cardinal, proposed that it be changed, to avoid the scholastic distinctions and disputes over whether her soul or her body was the subject. The Pope made the correction in his final version: it is not simply her soul, but Mary—the person herself—who is the subject.

From the first moment of her conception. Pius IX’s formulation again introduces a change. Alexander’s distinction between the creation of Mary’s soul and its infusion into her body is omitted. The scholastic distinctions concerning active, passive, and consummated conception are likewise omitted. All is simplified to say clearly that Mary was preserved immune from the stain of original sin from first moment of her personal existence. The long debate, begun when St. Bernard objected to the celebration of the feast in 1153, had focused largely on the question of when Mary was freed from sin. The defined the difference between the “maculists” (after her animation—to safeguard Christ’s role as universal Redeemer) and the “immaculists” (at the very first instant of her conception—to credit Christ with a more perfect mediation by way of preservation).³² The Bull recounts the gradual clarification of the question, and testifies that the Roman Church honors her conception, not her sanctification, citing Pope Alexander VII to the effect that “the true object of this veneration was her conception considered in its first instant.”³³ In the long process of clarification, it had been taught that Mary was sanctified at the Annunciation, then before her birth; now the debate was about a matter of seconds: Was Mary affected by sin for an instant and then sanctified, or was she from the very first instant of her existence preserved from all stain of original sin? The judgment of Pope Pius IX confirmed the *sensus fidelium* that had so long been expressed in the celebration of the feast: he solemnly defined that the Blessed Virgin Mary was free from all stain of original sin from the first moment of her conception.

3. Its Mode. The mode of the privilege is that Mary was preserved immune, by a singular grace of Almighty God, in view of the merits of Christ Jesus, Savior of the human race. Each element of this is necessary to the definition and its ultimate coherence with the other truths of the faith. It is noteworthy that the early but inauthentic definition

³¹ DS 2017. Four paragraphs of *Sollicitudo* are included verbatim in *Ineffabilis Deus*, art. 7. The more complete formulation of doctrine (DS 2015, which forms the structural basis for Pius IX’s own definition, is supplied in art. 6. See Alfaro, 257 for a comparison of the two.

³² Rozanne Elder has reviewed this controversy for us: ARCIC paper 457c/00.

³³ *Ineffabilis Deus*, art. 7. The definition makes no commitment to any particular theory of animation—mediate or immediate. See Wolter, “The Theology,” 25-27.

of the 38th Session of the Council of Basel (1438) included only one of these qualifications—viz., that Mary's freedom from original sin was due to "a singular prevenient and operative grace." There is no mention of "preservation," and God's grace is not tied to the merits of Christ as a cause.³⁴ By hindsight, it is clear that the doctrine of Basel was not yet mature. By contrast, the definition of Pius IX, drawing on and correcting the teaching of Sixtus IV and Alexander VII, coordinates the many facets into a single, coherent whole.

Preserved immune. The drafters of the 1854 definition had a thorough discussion of the word "*praeservatam*." Could the word indicate simply the absence of original sin, or does the "non-contraction" of original sin indicate preservation in the proper sense of the word. Several members of the Commission wished to affirm only the fact of the absolute "non-contraction" of sin, and to drop "*praeservatam*." The 1st and 4th schemas in fact omit the term. But it was restored, demonstrating that the inclusion of the word was deliberate. The word, then, must be taken in its proper sense—as it was in the Offices of Nogarolis and Bustis and in the Bull *Sollicitudo*, and later in the liturgical Office approved by Pius IX. Most of the consultors agreed that Mary's authentic preservation from sin was in fact a mode of redemption by Christ. The connection between the preservation and the redemption of Mary is expressed in *Ineffabilis Deus*, art. 8, which contains another formulation (but not a definition) of the mystery and concludes with words reminiscent of Scotus: "and hence she was redeemed in a manner more sublime" [*et idcirco sublimiori modo redemptam*]. The antecedent possibility that Mary would have contracted original sin apart from this preservation is thus admitted as a dogmatic element in the analysis of the text—a point to be considered below.

By a singular grace and privilege. Mary's grace was "singular" in the sense of unique: in her case, the merits of Christ were applied not only by anticipation of Christ's merits (as in the case of the "just ones" of the Old Covenant), and not only "earlier" than other Christians (for example, than the grace of baptism received by an infant),³⁵ but in a unique way—by "preservation" rather than "redemption" or "reparation." Her grace was also different, then, from that of the angels, Adam and Eve, and the Lord himself in his human soul.

Should the expression "singular grace and privilege"—especially "privilege"—be interpreted in a narrow sense, namely, that the Immaculate Conception was an exception to the rule, a rule by which Mary ought to have inherited original sin? Or might it be taken in a broad sense to express the special prerogative accorded to Mary, and denied to the rest of us? In other words, does this phrase imply (the strict sense) that Mary had an "indebtedness to sin" [*debitum peccati*]? The previous affirmations (e.g., *Sollicitudo*), the minutes of the Commission, the usage in the rest of the Bull (where "privilege" and "prerogative" are interchangeable), and the fact that the formula of the definition pre-

³⁴ See Wenceslaus Sebastian, "The Controversy over the Immaculate Conception from after Scotus to the End of the Eighteenth Century," O'Connor, ed., *The Dogma of the Immaculate Conception*, 213-70, at 232. See also Tavard, *The Thousand Faces*, 196-97. Tavard favors the Basel formulation, because it does not appear to "distance" Mary from "our common humanity." The basis for his judgment is its openness to the possibility that Mary was subject to concupiscence. Alfaro finds this same openness in *Ineffabilis Deus*.

³⁵ Karl Rahner discusses and rejects this possibility in his important essay, "The Immaculate Conception," in *Theological Investigations I* (Baltimore: Helicon, 1961)

scinds completely from the question of a *debitum* all argue in favor of the broad interpretation. It appears that the definition “does not affirm the existence of a law or an antecedent necessity according to which Mary had to contract sin,”³⁶ and from which she would have been exempted by a special “privilege.” The Pope, in explaining the dogma, also employed the word in the broad sense.

In view of the merits of Christ Jesus the Savior of the human race. In this phrase, the definition supercedes the formula of Basel and the Bull of Sixtus IV — both of which, curiously, omit mention of Christ — and follows that of Alexander VII. His formula was *intuitu meritorum Iesu Christi, humani generis Redemptoris*. This phrase in the definition raises two questions: (1) What function is attributed to the merits of Christ? (2) Is it defined that Mary was redeemed by Christ? As for the first, the Commission entertained the alternative *intuitu divinae maternitas*, but dropped it in favor of Alexander’s formula. Throughout the process, the phrase kept the strong clear meaning that the merits of Christ exercised a causal influence in Mary’s preservation from sin. In fact, the phrase keeps the meaning it has in the Tridentine *Decree on Justification*, chap. 7, namely, that Christ is the meritorious cause of justification.³⁷ That he is the meritorious cause of the Immaculate Conception, then, is beyond doubt a conceptual element that belongs to the dogmatic formula. As for the second: although almost all the consultors admitted that Mary was redeemed by Christ, it seems this is not included in the definition — except as a conclusion (*idcirco*) from the fact of her preservation, not as conceptually identical with it. The substitution (in Pius IX’s formulation as compared with that of Alexander VII) of the more general term *Salvatoris* for *Redemptoris* also favors the view that the definition does not implicitly proclaim Mary’s redemption. That doctrine might certainly have the note *proxima fidei*, for it is clearly affirmed in the liturgical texts approved by Pius IX and in subsequent Church teaching. It is not taught infallibly, however, in the dogmatic definition.

The *debitum peccati*. These considerations raise once again the question of Mary’s antecedent necessity of contracting original sin, a question closely linked with the problem of the nature and transmission of original sin. Does the definition take a position on this vexed question of the *debitum*? The proceedings of the Commission show conclusively that the definition intends to prescind from this question, i.e., to leave it intact. Whereas the 1st and 2nd schemas favored including it, it was eventually dropped. The omission does not, however, constitute a judgment against the *debitum peccati*, but only a decision not to settle the question. The expression “*ab omni originalis culpae labe*” was in common use at the time, and cannot be understood to imply anything about the *debitum*. At most, the definition implies the possibility — not the necessity! — of an antecedent necessity.

4. **Its Certitude.** The Pope defined that Mary’s Immaculate Conception is a doctrine “revealed by God,” therefore, an object of divine faith “to be believed by all the faithful.” Its certitude, then, is that of a divinely revealed truth. As such, it belongs to the deposit of the faith. This introduces the serious question of how it has been revealed,

³⁶ Alfaro, “La fórmula Definitoria,” 274. See pp. 270-71 for the important discussion that follows.

³⁷ DS 1529. The council teaches that “our Lord Jesus Christ . . . merited for us justification by His most holy passion on the wood of the Cross” (ND 1932). See also DS 1523.

given that it is not clearly proposed in the Scriptures, its appearance in the monuments of Tradition is late, and it was subject to considerable controversy.

Revealed by God. The 1st draft of the Bull did not make this claim, but was content to say "*catholicae ecclesiae doctrinam cum sacrum litteris et divina et apostolica traditione cohaerentem.*"³⁸ Clearly, the process itself convinced the Commission that it had sufficient grounds to make the bolder claim, *a Deo revelatam*. The doctrine is not simply a certain theological conclusion drawn from revealed premises, or from arguments from fittingness: it is revealed, and can therefore be defined. Pius IX quite deliberately avoided scholastic distinctions, e.g., whether the revelation was made explicitly or implicitly, whether it is contained in the deposit of revelation explicitly or implicitly. He simply affirms the fact that it was revealed, without saying how, where, or when. None of this, in fact, can be determined *a priori*, but only by an examination of the witnesses or "monuments" of revelation.³⁹ These evidences are supplied in the body of the Bull, but no appeal is made to them as "proofs" in the definition itself. They remain a concern of the theologian, but the Pope has—ultimately—made a judgment of fact: God has revealed this doctrine. The certitude, in the last analysis, comes from the act of the Magisterium.

Criteria for judgment of the evidence. It is a matter of historical interest, at least, to discover that the Special Commission spent time dealing directly with the "definability" of the Immaculate Conception. The members ultimately identified five criteria for determining this.⁴⁰ They assigned the greatest weight to the fifth, ecclesial *praxis*.

1. Not all revealed doctrine is found in written testimonies, either in Sacred Scripture or in Tradition. There is also an "unwritten revelation" to be taken into consideration. A certain number of authorized witnesses must be produced, but they can be discovered by a kind of historical induction. Conciliar definitions and pontifical dogmatic bulls have always proceeded in this way.
2. One or more revealed principles (not necessarily written) containing the doctrine must be identified. E.g., the doctrine that Christ has two wills is contained in the revealed principle that he is perfect God and perfect man. When a doctrine is discovered in its revealed principles, it is called "immediate virtual revelation."

³⁸ Cited by Wolter, "The Theology," 31. Alfaro does not treat this question, so I am following the lead of Wolter and Le Bachelet. For the discussion of criteria, I have used Gustave Thils, "La Définition de l'Immaculée Conception et l'Idée de Révélation," in *Études sur l'Immaculée Conception: Sources et sens de la Doctrine* (Gembloux: J. Duculot, 1955), 34-45, at 41-44.

³⁹ Wolter sums it up ("The Theology," p. 61): "The whole is presented as a single argument from tradition with the official acts of the living Magisterium as the decisive factor. Taught by the Holy Spirit, the Church propagated the cult, protected and approved of it, gradually clarified the precise meaning and object of the feast of the Conception, proscribed the interpretation which equated Conception with sanctification after the infusion of the soul, forbade the contrary doctrine to be defended publicly and eventually to be held even privately, and so on."

⁴⁰ These may be found in their *Breve esposizione degli Atti della Commissione speciale*, in Sardi, t. I, 791-838. Certainly, there has been considerable development since 1852; one thinks of the Second Vatican Council's dogmatic constitution, *Dei Verbum*, arts. 7-10.

3. There is a necessary connection — or analogy — between the doctrines of the faith. E.g., Christ is the first minister of the sacraments, and the sacraments are effective *ex opere operato*, therefore the effect of the sacraments does not depend on the moral character of the secondary minister. A doctrine belongs to the deposit of revelation if its negation has the necessary and immediate consequence of regarding other articles of faith as errors.
4. If the Catholic bishops preach the doctrine unanimously, it can be defined; this was the decisive argument by which the Fathers put an end to controversy.
5. A final criterion is the *praxis Ecclesiae*. The question, however, is: Under what conditions can religious practices of the Church constitute an argument capable of demonstrating that a doctrine belongs to revelation? In the judgment of the Commission, the practice must belong to the external work of the cult and of religion; it must be geographically universal and solemnly manifested—i.e., as a matter of precept or obligation. They acknowledged that all such practice is linked somehow to a theoretical proposition. (For example, if one adores the Blessed Sacrament, one admits the doctrine of transubstantiation.) And they agreed that all practice hands on a doctrine. The question finally comes down to this: What criterion permits one to say that a doctrine bound to an ecclesial practice is a revealed doctrine? Clearly, this is not so in every case, but on the other hand, “certain revealed truths are bound to some ecclesiastical practices.”⁴¹ *Lex orandi, lex credendi*: II Nicaea sanctioned the cult of images because of tradition; Trent sanctioned indulgences because of tradition; St. Basil argued for the divinity of the Holy Spirit on the basis of the doxology, and St. Jerome did the same for the cult of relics; St. Augustine reasoned to original sin on the basis of the practice of exorcisms. Even theologians cite such practices as “*loci theologici*.” How, then, is such a possibility recognized? “What is the criterion which permits one to say that a proposition bound to a practice is revealed or not?”⁴² One must examine the nature of the “truth” involved. Can it be known without any divine revelation (the martyrdom of SS. Peter and Paul), or does it require revelation (the sanctification of S. John the Baptist)? Is there proof that the truth is revealed (the evangelists bear witness to the crucifixion and to the circumstances of the Resurrection)? This was as far as the Commission could go.⁴³ What was evident from their work, however, was their sense of the normative value of “unwritten revelation.”

The Special Commission judged that this doctrine fulfilled the criteria, especially the fifth. It was, in fact, the practice of celebrating the Feast of Mary's Conception that precipitated the doctrinal development. For this reason the “liturgical argument” holds pride of place in the papal Bull: “this very doctrine . . . was made very clear by the Church when she did not hesitate to present for the public devotion and veneration of the

⁴¹ Ibid., 42.

⁴² Ibid., 43.

⁴³ The work of the Special Commission — the *Breve Esposizione* — received critical reviews from many who found it ambiguous and incomplete. Ibid., p. 44.

faithful the Feast of the Conception. By this most significant fact, the Church made it clear indeed that the conception of Mary is to be venerated as something extraordinary, wonderful, eminently holy, and different from the conception of all other human beings.” (3) Early drafts of the Bull attempted to prove this doctrine with documentary evidence, but this approach was eventually abandoned. In its place, the Pope simply asserts that “this doctrine always existed in the church as a doctrine received from our ancestors, and that has been stamped with the character of revelation.” (10)

Conclusions. This investigation of the exact meaning and limits of the definition leads to some rather surprising conclusions—surprising because they seem quite sober and conservative when compared to the rest of the Bull and to the sometimes-extravagant piety of the faithful. The sources I have consulted lead me to the following conclusions.

1. The definition specifies the object of Mary’s privilege as her preservation from all stain of original sin. This is a negative formulation; nothing is explicitly affirmed concerning her fullness of grace.
2. The interpretation of this privilege depends on an understanding of original sin. Catholic teaching does not identify the essence of original sin, but affirms only that all children of Adam enter the world with a real sin—the “death of the soul”—that can only be remitted by Christ. Original sin in the children of Adam is distinct from concupiscence, which is not properly sin. Original sin is commonly understood (but not defined) to be the privation of divine life, or sanctifying grace.
3. The definition deliberately leaves open the question of Mary’s immunity from concupiscence.
4. The definition specifies the subject of the privilege as the Blessed Virgin Mary from the first moment of her conception. Nothing further is affirmed, e.g., regarding the situation of her soul as compared with her body, the meaning of “conception,” or the process of creation, conception, and animation of the human person.
5. The decision in favor of the “first moment of her conception” settles the long debate between the maculists and the immaculists, and calls for some explanation of how this can be reconciled with the universality of salvation in Christ.
6. The mode of the privilege is that Mary was preserved immune, by a singular grace of Almighty God, in view of the merits of Christ Jesus, Savior of the human race.
7. The definition uses the word “preserved” [immune from original sin] in its proper sense; it is not simply a matter of Mary’s “non-contraction” of sin, but a true “preservation.”
8. The definition specifies that Mary was preserved by a “singular grace and privilege,” meaning that her situation is unique.

9. The definition refuses to settle the question (raised by the word "privilege") of whether or not Mary had an indebtedness to sin—from which she had to be exempted.
10. The definition specifies that Mary was preserved from sin "in view of the merits of Christ" the Savior—not apart from him. He is the "meritorious cause" of her preservation.
11. The definition, nonetheless, does not specify that Mary was redeemed by Christ.
12. The definition asserts that Mary's Immaculate Conception is a doctrine "revealed by God," therefore, an object of divine faith.
13. The definition does not specify the grounds for its judgment; as a consequence, its truth does not depend simply on the probative force of the evidence presented in the Bull.

These conclusions, of set purpose, identify the limits of the dogma. Its drafters adhered very closely to the earlier formulations of the Popes, especially Sixtus IV and Alexander VII. This dependence on documents forged in the heat of controversy appears to explain why the definition is formulated so cautiously. The Bull is much less reticent, of course, and recent teaching is also much more confident and firm, for example, in speaking about Mary's redemption.⁴⁴ The more typical doxological, and devotional dimension of this dogma is evident when one consults the historical-dogmatic section of the Bull. In its pages the purpose of Mary's Immaculate Conception—her office as Theotokos—is announced. (1) The argument from fittingness is developed: it is only fitting that the Mother of God be "free from all taint of original sin" in order that she "triumph utterly over the ancient serpent" (Gen 3:15). That her "victory"⁴⁵ be complete, she should never—even for an instant—be prey to the devil. (2) Her predestination "by one and the same decree" with her Son is proclaimed (3), and her all-holiness—expressed in her spotless virginity—is celebrated. She is compared to Eve and exalted above Eve, for she triumphed where Eve failed. (13) Her dignity and holiness is extolled in rich biblical imagery. She was a worthy dwelling place for the Lord because "she was always united with God and joined to him by an eternal covenant." (15) Telling of her surpassing holiness, the Pope explains that "it was certainly not fitting that this vessel of election should be wounded by the common injuries, since she, differing so much from the others, had only nature in common with them, not sin." (16) With these and similar sentiments, the Bull expresses a fully "Christotypical" doctrine of Mary. She is ranked above the cherubim and seraphim, far above other mortals, more excellent than all, God excepted. (16)

⁴⁴ See Sara Butler, ARCIC paper 458/00 for references, e.g., LG 53.

⁴⁵ The Pope can speak of "her" victory, but he clearly understands that Mary does not achieve this on her own but shares Christ's triumph over the enemy. (11)

C. The Consequences for “Those who think Otherwise”

1. Historical context. Throughout the controversy over the feast of Mary’s Conception, and its doctrinal content, the Popes had kept careful watch: at first they did not take sides, but permitted the celebration of the feast, while urging the disputants to mutual respect. The Holy See began to promote the feast in 1476 with the publication of *Cum Praeexcelsa* by Sixtus IV approving a Mass and Office of the Immaculate Conception for the entire Latin Church. Seven years later Sixtus was obliged to issue a disciplinary decree, *Grave nimis*, to quell the disturbances that had arisen against those who kept the feast. He excommunicated persons who claimed the celebration and the doctrine it served were heretical, and placed their books under a ban for the scandal they gave. These two decrees were repeatedly confirmed by the Popes and Councils that followed. Subsequently, papal decrees forbade public teaching against the Immaculate Conception (1617), and then speaking in private against it (1622). The Bull *Sollicitudo* of Alexander VII, cited in *Ineffabilis Deus* (7), contains similar warnings, censures, and penalties against those who opposed the doctrine or its cult. In addition to the sanctions provided by Sixtus IV, he proscribed that offenders be stripped of the authority to preach, teach and interpret in public, and vote. Books, too, were declared subject to censure if they frustrated the intent of the decree. Given this tradition of papal oversight and regulation of the doctrine and its cult, the paragraph from *Ineffabilis Deus* that follow the definition is not unexpected. Now that a final judgment had been delivered, the Pope expected compliance. Specific penalties were omitted, thanks to the intervention of one of the bishops, but the warning is solemn and the consequences are dire.

If, therefore, any persons shall dare to think—which God forbid—otherwise than has been defined by us, let them clearly know that they stand condemned by their own judgment, that they have made shipwreck of their faith and fallen from the unity of the Church. Furthermore, they subject themselves *ipso facto* to the penalties provided by law if by speech or writing or in any other exterior way they shall dare to express their views. (DS 2804)

[Quapropter si qui secus ac a Nobis definitum est, quod Deus avertat, praesumpserint corde sentire, ii noverint ac porro sciant, se proprio iudicio condemnatos, naufragium circa fidem passos esse et ab unitate Ecclesiae defecisse, ac praeterea facto ipso suo semet poenis a iure statutes subicere, si, quod corde sentiunt, verbo aut scripto vel alio quovis externo modo significare ausi fuerint.]

2. Proposals for dropping the “anathemas” attached to the Marian dogmas. Harry McSorley called attention to some resources for addressing the question raised in the section on the Marian dogmas in *The Final Report*.⁴⁶ The question is whether Anglicans would have to give consent to these dogmas as a condition for the restoration of organic

⁴⁶ ARCIC II 433/99, 6-8. He reports on the “Dombes” statement and on the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogue in the United States.

unity. Other proposals of this kind have been made and evaluated in the past.⁴⁷ In 1966 Heribert Mühlen proposed that the Marian dogmas are certain but not central, in the “hierarchy of truths.” He thought the excommunications attached to the dogmas could be repealed without challenging their truth. In 1971, E. J. Yarnold proposed that the symbolic meaning of the dogmas could be distinguished from their deeper theological meaning; an affirmation of the theological meaning, he suggested, would suffice to the reunion of Christians. That same year Avery Dulles asked whether the anathemas attached to the two Marian dogmas might not be removed so as to avoid the “ecumenical embarrassment” of appearing to apply their penalties to other Christians. He reasoned that the truth of the dogmas might be distinguished from their necessity. He regarded difference of opinion over these “relatively minor and highly subtle doctrinal differences” something that could be tolerated, and proposed that the Catholic Church ask for “free assent from those who are personally convinced of their truth.” Others have made similar proposals on the grounds that the Catholic Church should not impose on separated Christians — as a condition for restoring unity — any dogma defined during the time of the separation, or on the grounds that these dogmas do not rank high in the “hierarchy of doctrines.”

3. Critical responses to the proposals. Such proposals have drawn criticism from Frederick Jelly and Bertrand de Margerie. Jelly believes that once the Church has determined that a doctrine is revealed, the alternative is no longer an option. In his opinion, the Marian dogmas cannot so easily be detached from the foundational truths. They may be “peripheral,” but they have a vital connection to the rest and can hardly be called obscure and remote. In any case, if something is proposed as true, it must be believed regardless of its rank in the “hierarchy of truths.”

Bertrand de Margerie also objects to proposals that would advocate the restoration of full communion without real unity of faith; to his mind, dogmas proposed as revealed must be accepted as true as a condition for full communion. To Yarnold, he replies that the symbolic and the real cannot be divided so simply; to Dulles, he objects that a dogma cannot be demoted to a theologoumenon without serious implications. De Margerie holds that the “anathemas” do not apply to separated Christians, but only to persons in full communion with the Catholic Church. They are part of an “intra-Catholic” discipline, and have a “medicinal” purpose. He cannot imagine, however, that one could reject the Marian dogmas and still profess the whole of the Catholic faith. He proposes that these truths might be redefined at a “unity Council.”⁴⁸

Carroll and Henn review the debates, offering further clarifications and refinements. Carroll notes that the Marian dogmas reflect a lived tradition, and it is unrealistic to expect persons who have not shared that experience to accept the conclusions of those

⁴⁷For proposals, see E.J. Yarnold, “Marian Dogmas and Reunion,” *Month* 131 (1971) 177-79; Avery Dulles, “A Proposal to Lift Anathemas,” *Origins* 4: 27 (Dec. 26, 1974): 417-21; for evaluations, see Frederick M. Jelly, “Marian Dogmas within Vatican II’s Hierarchy of Truths” (17-40) and Bertrand de Margerie, “Dogmatic Development by Abridgement or by Concentration?” (64-98) in *Marian Studies* 27 (1976); Eamon Carroll, “Papal Infallibility and the Marian Definitions, Some Considerations,” *Carmelus* 26/2 (1979): 213-50; and William Henn, “Interpreting Marian Doctrine,” *Gregorianum* 70:3 (1989): 413-37. Henn points out (p. 427, n. 41) that the word “anathema” is not found in either papal definition.

⁴⁸ I read the suggestion, for example, that Mary’s redemption by Christ be defined as revealed.

who have. Henn has much the same observation: these dogmas confirm what the Catholic community already believed. Asking a community that has not had the experience to accept them would not be what Popes Pius IX and XII did in defining the dogmas. Henn points out that the Marian dogmas did not lead to division; divisions occurred over the doctrine of grace. He sees the need to reach convergence on the issue of grace and authority, but he is open to the idea that a reunited Church could sustain some diversity of explicit belief.

Conclusions. The review of this literature persuades me that the bi-lateral approach to this question holds more promise than a solution on general principles. In particular, the significant degree of shared liturgical tradition on these questions should put ARCIC ahead. It is quite possible that many Catholics today are in rather the same position as Anglicans with respect to experience. Is this something we might want to recover together?

One explicit difficulty that represents a barrier, with respect to the Immaculate Conception, is Article XV: Of Christ alone without sin. The Catholic Church formally condemned a proposition of Baius to that effect (though with a slightly different focus), in 1567.⁴⁹ As it stands, the Article cannot be reconciled with the dogma.

⁴⁹ DS 1973.