

## **DEFENSE OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION DOCTRINE**

By Daniel Joseph Barton

“THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY WAS PRESERVED PURE FROM EVERY STAIN OF ORIGINAL SIN IN THE FIRST INSTANCE OF HER CONCEPTION THROUGH A SINGULAR GIFT OF GRACE AND PRIVILEGE OF ALMIGHTY GOD WITH A VIEW TO THE MERITS OF CHRIST, THE REDEEMER OF THE HUMAN RACE.”

(Proclaimed as dogma of the Catholic Church by Pope Pius IX in 1854)

1. Eastern Catholics are urged by Rome to return to authentic Eastern customs and tradition. As a Byzantine Catholic, I defend this doctrine to Eastern Orthodoxy (the majority of Eastern Christianity). If the Orthodox are asked about this doctrine, multiple answers are received. One well-known theologian, Greek Orthodox Bishop Kallistos Ware, states: "The Orthodox Church calls Mary all-holy, immaculate, free from actual sin. The Orthodox Church has never made any formal and definitive pronouncement on the matter of the Immaculate Conception. In the past, individual Orthodox theologians have made statements that, if not definitively affirming the Doctrine of Immaculate Conception, at any rate closely approach it. But since 1854, the great majority of Orthodox reject it as necessary; as implying a false understanding of original sin; as suspecting the doctrine because it seems to separate Mary from the rest of the descendants of Adam and Eve, putting her in a different class. However, if an individual Orthodox today felt impelled to believe it, he could not be termed a heretic for doing so." Bishop Kallistos Ware, Spaulding Lecturer of Eastern Christianity at Oxford University of England, has not been "corrected" by any Patriarch of Constantinople for his words, although other Orthodox bishops have termed the doctrine a heresy.

I address Bishop Kallistos' reasons for non-belief, as well as some others I have encountered.

a. "..reject it as necessary.." Certainly it is not as necessary as in believing Jesus Christ is Lord & Savior. Eastern Orthodox claim that "dogma must be Christ-centered", but one might claim that the dogma of perpetual-virginity of Mary is not "Christ-centered". (Mary's perpetual-virginity is defined dogmatically for the Catholic Church at the Third Ecumenical Council of Constantinople of AD 681, when Eastern Orthodox Christians were still in union to the Pope, due to voices within the Church questioning if she had other children besides Jesus).

b. "...implying a false understanding of original sin.." While the West explains original sin more often as an inherited "taint" or "stain", Eastern tradition often explains it as an "inheritance of consequences/effects & death". Both accept the result of death, and the need of God's sanctifying grace to overcome it. However, the terms "taint" or "stain" are not foreign terms to Eastern Christians. St Cyprian of Carthage (d.258 AD) wrote about the "contagion of original sin passed to us from Adam". St Maximos the Confessor (AD 580-662) wrote about "the mark of original sin on all".

Orthodox say that Mary would not have had need of Jesus' redemption if she was not tainted by original sin. However, the Catholic Church has never claimed that Mary did not need the sanctifying grace of God. Mary herself stated, "My spirit rejoices in God my savior" (Luke 1:47). However, let's examine an analogy: While walking on a jungle path, you approach a covered & camouflaged pit right in front of you. You fall in, and after awhile a stranger comes by, reaches in, and pulls you out. You have mud all over you due to mud in the pit. But the stranger had a bucket of water to wash you. On an-other path also with a hidden pit, a woman is walking. Just at the verge of tumbling over the edge of the pit, the same stranger grabs her and pulls her back from the edge. She too is saved from the pit and the mud, but in anticipation instead of after the fact. Both of you were saved from the pit and the mud (original sin) and both of you had a savior

(God). But in the woman's case, she was saved before being tainted. Hence Mary has every right to proclaim "God my savior".

The usual listed consequences of original sin includes an inheritance of "death", because God said "You are made from dirt and will return to dirt" (Gen 3:19). Orthodox claim that if Mary was not tainted by original sin, she would not have died. They point to the Council of Carthage (AD 419) which rejected the thought of Adam's "created mortality" (ie Adam would have died even if not committing original sin). However, as this council was a local one, not ecumenical, it cannot be claimed that the council's decisions are without mistake. Also, it's important that we differentiate between physical death and spiritual death. Certainly God's statement to Adam did not mean spiritual death (eternal separation from God). The Father knows the future, and knew His Son would atone for Adam & Eve's sins, thereby defeating spiritual death for them and us. Easterners even have an icon (images of theology) showing Jesus trampling down the doors of death and giving a hand to Adam & Eve. Mary had total conformity to her Divine Son, even to physical death. Why? Adam and Eve died, so Jesus (the NEW Adam - 1 Cor 15:45) and Mary (the NEW Eve by tradition of the Church) died, and so we die the physical death. Jesus died, came back and later ascended, and Mary died and was assumed, into life in Heaven, so that we may know that we can have spiritual life in Heaven after physical death. Mary died the "physical death" because she was fully part of the human race as per God's plan, but not the "spiritual death" (something we can also overcome by Baptism & Chrismation, regular partaking of Confession and the Eucharist, and perseverance in obeying God's Commandments).

Some people believe the Catholic Church teaches that Mary did not die. Rome teaches that all human beings are subject to death, but for those justified by grace (ie Baptism) death loses its penal character and becomes a mere consequence of the first sin. However, in the cases of Jesus and Mary, because of their freedom from sin, physical death was an ending *based on the will of God*. The Catholic Vatican II Council (1964) document, Lumen Gentium, refers to the Eastern Fathers' tradition of calling Mary the All-Holy and celebrate her as free from any stain of sin, and textually states: "For these reasons, Mary is immaculate, all-holy, spotless, most highly blessed and ever virgin from her conception, through all her earthly life, **death** and Assumption into Heaven and for all eternity." Pope John Paul II reiterated in 1997 that Mary's ending of her time on earth was a peaceful death, a falling asleep (ie. Dormition) free of any pain, an act of love by God so she could enter into immortality body & soul with her Son. The Catholic Church often uses the phrase "when her time ended" to differentiate between "normal death" and "death without a penal character based on an ending by God's will". We note that the Catholic Church has a large Roman Catholic Basilica in Jerusalem, named after the Dormition, Latin for "the falling asleep", a euphemism for death. It's no coincidence that only the Blessed Mother has a calendar day for Dormition, commemorating this special "falling asleep" by Eastern Catholics and Orthodox!

Would Jesus have died a natural physical death (if not crucified), since He was not imbued with original sin? Easterners believe that Jesus (God the Son) made Himself die (in unity with the Father's will) by His words of "I entrust my soul to you, Father...it is done". If we can accept that Jesus died based on God the Father's will, then why is it so hard to accept the Blessed Virgin Mary died based on God's will?

We proclaim in the Nicene Creed, "one Baptism for the remission of sin". We baptize infants, who cannot have sinned (ie actual sin). Therefore, it's logical to accept that those babies being Baptized are having the taint/mark of original sin washed away, as well as restoring God's grace to our soul. Baptism remising sin is already pro-claimed by St Peter (Acts 2:38). St Cyril of Jerusalem (AD 315-386) writes in his Lectures of the Holy Mysteries (2d Lecture on Baptism) that "Baptism is...the remission of sin and gives us the grace of the Holy Spirit..."; Cyril did not differentiate between actual sin and original sin. And as he did not claim that babies do not have sin washed away, it's logical to accept that babies being Baptized do have sin washed away, that sin being the taint of original sin, since they have not as of yet any actual sins.

c. "...seems to separate Mary from the rest of the descendants of Adam/Eve.." Mary led a sin-less life by her own God-fearing strong free-will. She was chosen by God to be the Mother because He knew even before she was born that she would be totally faithful. She was raised body and soul into Heaven after her time on earth ended. St Anselm of Canterbury (AD 1033 - 1109) points out her uniqueness when he stated: "O woman marvelously unique and uniquely marvelous." While her female nature was no different from any other woman's, her Immaculate Conception and sin-less life (via her own free will) made her perfectly human in the way Eve was intended to be perfectly human. The Ecumenical Council of Ephesus (431 AD) declared her to be, "All-holy, all pure, higher than the Cherubim and more glorious beyond compare than the Seraphim." The Byzantine Orthodox Liturgies of 9 December state, "the unique all-immaculate is today made manifest to the just by the angel," and "the prelude of God's grace falls today on humanity in the conception of the all-immaculate," and "Mary's conception is the joy of the world, because the curse has come to an end, and the blessing has begun," and "on this day, from saintly parents begins to take being the spotless lamb, the most pure tabernacle, Mary." These phrases about the Theotokos identify her as unique, but not separate from the rest of humanity, and one wonders how anyone can sing these phrases while thinking that at the first moment of her human existence she suffered the taint of original sin. She was as pure as Eve was, and it's significant how the Latin phrase "Ave Maria" shows the significance of Mary as the New Eve. "Ave" backwards is "Eva", Latin for "Eve"!

d. "No one can be saved before Christ's actual Resurrection." According to the Bible, both Enoch and Elijah were apparently taken up to God, presumably not even dying a physical death, long before Christ Jesus was even born! See Gen 5:24, Hebrews 11:5, and 2 Kings 2:11.

Then also, Moses, who did die a physical death (see Joshua 1) met Jesus on the Mount Tabor during Jesus' Transfiguration. Surely one cannot deny that these men were "saved" before Jesus' redemption of mankind. Nothing is impossible to God.

e. "St Thomas Aquinas (AD 1224-1274), was against it." Saints are canonized for the *totality* of their teachings; leeway is given for mistakes. Aquinas accepted St Bernard's (of Clairvaux - d.1153 AD) arguments during the doctrine's Western controversy, that Mary could only have been sanctified after her conception, not at the very moment of. Both were mistaken for not understanding the fertilized egg as a separate entity & soul from the mother *at very conception*. Ironically, Orthodox conveniently forget that St. Aquinas also taught the necessity of being united to the Pope! And let us not forget that two of Aquinas most ardent students among the Greeks strongly disagreed with Aquinas in his views on Immaculate Conception. They were Demetrios Kydonios, 14<sup>th</sup> century translator of Aquinas works into Greek (and he eventually entered the Catholic Church), and Georgios Scholarios, 15<sup>th</sup> century Greek defender of the doctrine, who voted for union at the Council of Florence and later became Patriarch Gennadios of Constantinople.

f. "Acceptance of this doctrine means she is exalted as God's equal." Not at all! Pre-lapsarian Adam and Eve in Paradise were not considered equal to God. The good angels, absolutely untainted by sin, have never been considered equal-to-God.

g. "No one can be conceived in sanctity." The Lord said to Jeremiah, "I have sanctified thee before thou didst leave the womb of thy mother" (Jer 1:5). St John the Forerunner was sanctified while still in the womb of St Elizabeth (Luke 1:15 & 41) confirmed by the Church Fathers. Can God eliminate this taint of original sin whenever He chooses? Luke 1:37, and Genesis 18:14 tells us that nothing is impossible to God. Would the Ever-Virgin Mother of God be granted *less* a privilege than St John? It makes more sense that she was granted more of a privilege, sanctified

and free of original sin at her very conception!

To claim one is not really human without original sin would mean that original sin is essential to human nature. If our nature cannot do without that what is essential to it, then Baptism cannot wash away original sin. If inherited original sin is essential for human nature, then Jesus (who had NO sin) could not be fully human. Yet, no Orthodox would deny Jesus' full humanity.

**h.** "The doctrine is not from Tradition." St Paul said "hold onto oral teachings" (2 Thes 15) which are the Church Traditions. Jesus said He would be with His Church until the ends of time, and the gates of hell would never prevail against her. But it took the Church awhile to understand the ideas of the "Holy Trinity" and the "two natures within Christ (Divine and human)". The Catholic Church shows the roots of Immaculate Conception being understood as early as the 4<sup>th</sup> century when St Ephraim the Syrian (AD 306-373) wrote: "Thou and Thine mother are the only ones who are utterly beautiful in every way. For in Thee, O Lord, there is no stain, and in Your mother no stain" (ie. implying no actual sins or original sin). St Ephraim continues with, "Mary and Eve were two people without guilt. Later one became the cause of our death, the other cause of our life." ("Guilt" must mean the inherited taint of original sin on the soul, as well as actual sins. And Eve later did sin, thus obtaining guilt.)

Also, St Gregory of Nyssa (AD 335-395) wrote about the Blessed Mother as "Mary without stain" (of sin). St Ambrose (c. AD 430) wrote of Mary as, "...a virgin not only undefiled, but whom grace has made inviolate, free of every stain." St Severus (d.538), Early Church Father and bishop of Antioch taught: "She (Mary) formed part of the human race and was of the same essence as we, although she was pure from all taint and immaculate." St Sophronius (AD 556-638), Patriarch of Jerusalem, wrote "Many saints appeared before you, but none has been filled with grace as you, no one has been purified in advance as you have been." St John Damascene (c.675-c.749 AD) wrote "Your immaculate body, which was preserved from all stain of sin, did not remain on the earth." St John's key words of "all sin" must include original sin.

**i.** "The doctrine is contrary to the Holy Scriptures." Orthodox and Protestants who reject Immaculate Conception often point to "all have sinned" (Romans 3:23 & 5:12). And yet we must admit that infants and very small children do not sin, and if they die at that tender age, then they have never sinned. Since the Bible does not lie, one must search for proper interpretation. Some Biblical translations lists the phrase as "both Jew and pagan have sinned" which puts this into a corporate sense, and that St Paul means that both Jews and Gentiles can be saved by Christ's death. Paul understood the corporate sense. Further, he states in Romans 5:14, "death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those that had not sinned.." Clearly, therefore, St. Paul believed that some persons had not sinned.

Some Orthodox believe that Mary, before her Annunciation, was a woman who sinned just as all other humans, but that after the Annunciation she was without personal sin. These Orthodox point to the Catholic statement of: "Mary was not conceived like others, at a distance from God, but was wholly encompassed from the beginning by God's love and grace, a grace which helped her in her *later life* to live without personal sin. However, "later life" here should be interpreted to mean "life after being born". But again, the traditional thought by both Orthodox and Catholic alike is that she led a sin-less life even before the Annunciation due to her own strong and God-fearing free-will. She was chosen by God to be the Mother of God (recognizing that Jesus is God the Son, part of the Trinity) because God knew that she would be totally faithful, even before she was born!

**j.** "If God purified her at her conception, then mankind didn't offer her up, because God arranged it ahead of time." This argument contains many mistaken ideas. God knows the future, so He knew Mary would accept. God chose Mary, mankind did not offer her up. And, there's the underlying thought in the argument that God's grace took away her freedom or free will.

We should remember that St Augustine taught that grace *enables* freedom (wherein one can better battle the temptations of sin, using our own free will, and that grace enables us to choose the infinite end, which is God), and hence enabled Mary to better use her own free will to never sin.

2. Marian apparitions, not foreign to Easterners, convinced me. (An Eastern apparition would be the one at Constantinople in 911 AD, celebrated in Slavic Byzantine Churches as "Protection of the Mother of God"). Please consider:

- Paris, 1830: Mary appeared to young St Catherine Laboure, informing her to have a medal created with words stating: "O Mary conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee." Many miracles have happened, attributed to prayer to Mary while holding this Immaculate Conception Medal, later renamed the Miraculous Medal.

- Lourdes, 1858: Mary appeared to young St Bernadette, and identified herself as "I am the Immaculate Conception". There's been many miracles at the waters of the spring there.

- Mexico, 9-12 Dec 1531: This apparition has significance as to the Immaculate Conception. December 9th had long been held as the Feast of the Conception of St Ann (Mary in the womb of Ann) among Eastern Christians, considered as a miraculous event due to Joachim and Ann being elderly and barren. The underlying concept of this Feast spread from the East to Spain in the 700's, as did other practices, which was not uncommon. For instance, the East had integrated the proclamation of the Nicene Creed into the Byzantine Divine Liturgy by the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> century. Spanish Roman Catholics followed the East, the first among Westerners to do so, by their decision to incorporate the Creed into the Holy Mass at the Council of Toledo of 589 AD. The Feast also spread into Naples Italy in the 800's (then part of the Byzantine Empire), having already spread throughout the East during the 700's. Byzantine Emperor Manuel Comnenus even made it a holyday for the entire Byzantine Empire in 1166. Our Lady of Guadalupe, therefore, gave a sign to the West as to the importance of this holyday.

3. Other Eastern thoughts:

a. Fr Casimir Kucharek, in his book, says that even the great St. Gregory Palamas (d. 1359 AD) accepted that Mary had been purified at her very beginning (is not conception the very beginning?). He claims that the Greek Orthodox Church totally believed in the Immaculate Conception until the 15<sup>th</sup> century, when some Greek theologians began proposing the idea that Mary was made immaculate at her Annunciation. But such a view was considered a *novel doctrine* by Eastern Slavs, until the *Skirzhal* (*Book of Laws*) appeared in Russia in late 1667, which was branded blasphemous by the Russian Orthodox Old-Believers, who maintained the ancient customs/traditions however small. Paradoxically, the Russian Orthodox Church Synod of 1666 had approved Simeon Polatski's *Zezl Pravlenia* (*Rod of Direction*), wherein it states textually, "Mary was exempt from original sin beginning with her conception." But in 1667, the same Synod approved the *Skirzhal*, which was a Slavic translation of *The Divine Liturgy with Explanations of Different Customs*. The later, by John Nathanael (then-secretary to Patriarch Jeremia II of Constantinople) had been written by him after his studies in England and Germany, and he included this book in a shipment to the Russians who had asked the Patriarchate for books on liturgical matters before convening the 1666 Synod. One cannot dismiss that this man was influenced by the Protestant thought of "Mary being purified at her Annunciation." The Russian Orthodox Old-Believers became terribly persecuted by the Russian Czar and official Church for refusing to accept the reforms established by the Synod of Bishops of 1666-1667, and many fled Russia to establish a separate episcopal see in Bukovina at Bela Krinitza (Ukraine). Professor Soubbotine, who wrote a history of this diocese in 1874, cites a passage from the profession of faith by the Old Believers which reads, "The Mother of the Creator of the whole universe, not only has in no way participated in the original stain, but she remained as pure as the heavens and all beautiful." (The above two sentences are from Reference 10.)

b. The Orthodox people of Ukraine, with religious center being Kiev, continued in their belief of the Immaculate Conception up through the mid-1700's. St. Peter Moghila, Metropolitan Archbishop of Kiev (AD 1596-1647), although not embracing the Unia of western Ukraine (1596 and 1646), was a strong defender of Byzantine theology, but in none of his writings can one find a denunciation of the Immaculate Conception, which was known to him. He founded the Academy of Kiev, an Orthodox school of theology, in which all the rectors and theologians taught Mary's exemption from original sin, and continued to do so at least until Father Stephan Javorski became the rector (1721). However, it appears that the Ukrainian Orthodox of mid-1700's began to embrace the writings of Kiev's theologian Theophane Prokopovich, whose writings rejected the Immaculate Conception in favor of Protestant Lutheranism's claims of Mary purified at the Annunciation. When one considers that the Kievan Church was split between pro-Rome and pro-Moscow wings, and with the Czar's Russian Church's having turned away from the Immaculate Conception, and its slow absorption and "russification" of eastern Ukraine, one cannot be surprised at this change of thought.

The Byzantine "Uniate" Catholic Metropolitan Archbishop Cyprian Zokovsky of Polotsk (from 1646 to 1693), a devout defender of the Byzantine rite/theology, worked fervently on deepening the piety and spirit among the clergy and laity. He absolutely rejected latinizations, but believed in the Immaculate Conception due to it being deeply rooted among the masses as well as the Basilian monasteries. He wrote a letter to the Apostolic Nuncio representing Rome that the devotion to the Immaculate Conception was very strong, and the Zerovytsky Monastery even had a special prayer in its daily divine service in honor of the Immaculate Conception. Some Orthodox today claim that the Polish Latin Catholic Jesuits had influenced the Byzantine Eastern Christians of Russia and Ukraine to accept the doctrine, but such cannot be realistically accepted. The Slavic Byzantines, particularly in Ukraine, were in spiritual war against latinizations, but accepted the Immaculate Conception (or at least as until mid-1700's) as they already held it within their own theology, judging it to be in conformity to their own traditions, and finding testimony of it in their own liturgical books.

c. As to the Greeks, Fr Casimir also points out that when the Greek Patriarch Anthimos VII wrote his reply to Pope Leo XIII's letter in 1895, listing what he believed to be the errors of the Latins, the Patriarch found no fault with the Latin belief of the Immaculate Conception, but objected to the Pope (ie without an ecumenical council) defining it as a required dogma. A Greek Orthodox acquaintance informed me the following: "St. Luke writes that an angel greeted Mary with the words 'Hail O favored one (in Greek, 'Rejoice, full of grace'), the Lord is with you.' We call Mary 'full of grace.' The Greek word *kecharitomene* is a perfect passive participle of *charitoo* (from *charis*, literally meaning grace), which means that Mary has been from a long time past endowed with grace. Thus she is in the very state of 'full of grace' and all that she has been is lasting and permanent, denoting what she is before God. It is perfectly permissible, on Greek grammatical and linguistic grounds, to paraphrase *kecharitomene* as 'perfectly, completely and enduringly endowed with grace.' These words show that Mary could not have been purified at the Annunciation; it must have happened earlier." His words are backed up by the renowned Protestant Greek scholar Archibald T. Robertson, who verifies that *kecharitomene* is a perfect passive participle of *charitoo*, and therefore Mary has been from a very long time past endowed with grace. He says the Latin *gratiae plena* is correct, as it means "full of grace which thou hast received" versus the Protestant oft-argument that it means "full of grace which thou hast to bestow."

d. Islam, a religion from the East, is often claimed to simply be a heresy of Christianity. One cannot discount the heavy influence of Judaism and Eastern Christianity on Islam. Hence, it's not surprising that in the Quran (Surah 3:42), written around AD 650-700, one finds, "O Mary, indeed God has favored you and made you immaculate." Notice *made*, not *changed you to be*.

4. The Franciscans and Blessed John Duns Scotus (AD 1266-1308) were the first Western champions of the doctrine, soon joined by the Benedictines, Cistercians and Carmelites. The doctrine of the Immaculate Conception was first approved in the West by the Catholic Synod of Basel in 1439, but was not binding upon the whole Catholic Church since the Pope had not signed it (he was more interested in the on-going Council of Florence with ends to schism). The Feast of Immaculate Conception was approved for Rome in 1476 by Pope Sixtus IV, and in 1568 this Feast was extended to the whole Catholic Church by Pope St Pius V. Receiving petitions, Pope Pius IX launched a commission of twenty theologians in 1848 to study the doctrine, and the following year he asked for opinions of Catholic bishops from around the world. Opinions were practically unanimous, convincing him to proclaim this as dogmatic Truth (a "must-believe" to be Catholic) on 8 December 1854. I believe that Rome established the Feast-day on 8 Dec so that there is a precise nine-month time frame from 8 Dec to 8 Sep (her Nativity). This signifies her perfect *humanity*, perfect in sinless humanity just as Christ Jesus, who had a precise nine-month time frame in the womb also (25 March to 25 December). Thus Rome also gave a response to those Protestants who were claiming that Catholics had deified Mary.

5. One should note that announcements of God usually designate a new nature/new function. Hence, Abram became Abraham, Simon became Cephas (Peter), and even Saul became Paul. But not so with Mary, because she was not chosen to have a new nature or function in life. Rather, she was chosen from all eternity by God. Also, the unusual greeting "Rejoice" is never found otherwise in Scripture (the usual Semitic greeting is "Shalom" – "Peace"). The word "Rejoice" is found in the prophetic oracles of Zephaniah 3:14-17: "Sing aloud, O daughter of Zion; Rejoice, O daughter of Jerusalem." The angel's Annunciation is saying that Mary is the new daughter of Zion. Logically, Mary is this "new daughter" at her very conception in the womb of St. Ann since there was no name change given to her as happened with Abram and Simon. One must examine the parallels within the Old & New Testaments. Adam, by his "yes" to Eve and Satan, helped lead to mankind's downfall; St. Joseph by his "yes" to Mary and God, helped lead mankind back to salvation. The product of a tree (the fruit) led to mankind's downfall; the product of a tree (the wooden cross of crucifixion) led to mankind's salvation. The act of eating something (the fruit) led to mankind's downfall; the act of eating something (the Body of Christ – John 6) brings us to salvation. It can be no different for Mary. Eve, untainted by original sin used free will to do actual sin; Mary, untainted by original sin, used free will to never do actual sin. Mary, by her "yes" making possible the fullness of grace (her Son), must have been herself beforehand "full of grace." Mary became the "New Eve." "Thus was the knot of Eve's disobedience untied through the obedience of Mary...Mary was made the cause of salvation for the whole human race." (St Irenaeus of Lyons, c. 130 – c. 200 AD).

In Hebrew, Mary is Miriam, and the Proto-Evangelium of St. James claims an angel of God appeared to Sts Joachim and Ann, giving them the order to name their child "Miriam". Only one other time in this name used in the Old Testament, that being the sister of Moses and Aaron (Ex 15:20-21). The name means "hope", hope of the liberation that God promised to His people. Miriam saved Moses by floating him down the river to the Pharaoh's daughter, so that he could become the savior of the people of Israel in captivity. New Testament Miriam is one of many "Miriams," showing her common-ness just as the name of Jesus was common. Christ's Mother Mary is the New Testament "Miriam" parallel of the Old Testament "hope" in that she cooperated with God in bringing us a liberator, a savior, and even saving Him by fleeing into the desert with St. Joseph

There exists the parallel of Mary to the Temple. Mary, as a young girl, was taken to the Temple in Jerusalem (Feast of the Presentation of the Virgin) and escorted by the High Priest Zacharias into the Temple (even though it had always been closed to females!). Mary's womb thus became the New Temple, surpassing the "old" Temple, as the dwelling place of God (the Holy of Holies). It's also interesting to note that when King David brought the Ark of the

Covenant through Israel back to Jerusalem to be enthroned in the Temple, he “danced” a holy dance of joy, and the same Greek word for this holy dance is used to describe the leaping of St. John the Baptizer (in the womb of St. Elizabeth) when in the presence of the “Ark of the New Covenant” (St. Mary with Christ Jesus within her womb). Since Jesus is the New Covenant, it stands to reason the Ark for this New Covenant, Mary’s womb, was never tainted by original sin.

6. Catholicism teaches that those of us who die with minor sins upon our soul must be purged of those sins before entering the Kingdom of God. This purging is “The Purgation” (Cleansing) which has been changed over time to the word "Purgatory". This has roots in the Jewish/Hebrew custom as listed in 2 Maccabees wherein monetary gifts were given for prayers for the souls of the dead. Those souls in Purgatory, neither defined as a place nor time, but as a dimension, receive benefits by our prayers to God, and our prayers to the Blessed Virgin Mary and all the Saints asking for their prayers submitted to God, help those souls to be cleansed of the sins. I repeat, the prayers to Mary and the Saints are with the intent of asking them to beseech God to forgive and purge the souls of their minor sins. Eastern Orthodoxy rejects this by claiming that since God is timeless, He hears our prayers for our loved ones in the future, and applies them to our loved ones upon their passing away in the present (for the souls’ benefits). Hence, in Eastern Orthodox eyes, there is no purgation, as each soul is cleansed immediately. (But what if no one has prayed for those persons' souls?). However, following this Orthodox train of thought, then there should be no problem with God the Father applying the future merits of salvation by Christ Jesus’ sacrifice, and people's prayers from all history (including the distant future) to Mary's **very point of conception** in the womb of St Ann, for her soul's benefit!

Other Orthodox have claimed that we are born into the effects of original sin, and original sin is only the consequences of this world...hence all of us are immaculately conceived in the womb before entering this world. But this seems to be a scholastic rationalization not fitting history, and not fully explaining then why Orthodox Baptize babies for the remission of sin.

And even other Orthodox claim the Immaculate Conception doctrine must be false because the democratic majority of Orthodox reject it. Yet this argument is self-referential: “The teaching is false because we reject it, and we reject it because the teaching is false.” One merely has to point to the Eastern Christian “democratic majorities” who embraced Arianism, to see that the Church cannot be a democracy when it comes to doctrines.

7. The seven original Ecumenical Councils (accepted by the Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Churches, before the schisms) never declared the doctrine of Immaculate Conception a heresy. The more I studied the situation, the more I became convinced of the Truth of this doctrine. I am proud to be united to the Catholic Church, which finally defined this Truth as dogma that all Catholics must believe. I do not forget that the great Eastern Orthodox Christian, St. Nicholas Cabasilas (14<sup>th</sup> cen.) wrote, “Earth she is because she is from earth. But she is a new earth, since she derives in no way from her ancestors and has not inherited the old leaven. She is a new dough.” Papal decrees aside, the doctrine is meaningful to me on a personal level as to God’s great power. The image of the Miraculous Medal of Mary, depicted in two-dimensional flat icon style, is one of the images I have of the Blessed Mother in my prayer life. God protected Mary from original sin not because of a necessity to do so, but because it was fitting to do so.

Rejoice, O Mother of Christ, Lord God!

Rejoice, O joy of God the Father!

Rejoice, O immaculate one, the hope of us all!

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**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** Dan Barton officially is a member of a Byzantine Catholic parish in North Carolina. He is a military retiree, having served 22+ years active duty with the U.S. Army, including over 8 years in military intelligence within Special Operations Forces at Fort Bragg NC, and over 9 years in Germany with NATO during the Cold War.

**HIS OWN WORDS:** "After much study, I found myself eventually becoming a defender of the Immaculate Conception doctrine on an Eastern Orthodox e-mail chat-list. Unfortunately on such lists, when some persons cannot win by logic or reasoning, they tend to get angry and belittle the other. I was called an apostate for believing/defending the doctrine, by a Russian Orthodox priest! I then prayed, in front of a crucifix, for the Virgin Mother to lead us all to unity. At that moment, I had a wonderful smell of roses come to me, source unknown. After discovering that some devout Roman Catholics have had this happen to them at Marian apparition sites, I decided to join the Catholic Church, and write this document, and share as widely as possible, asking Our Lady of Guadalupe (Our Lady of the Mystical Roses) to pray for all of us. I pray for a return of communion and unity between all Catholics and Orthodox."