



## Vox Populi

5 December 2024

One of the high points of the Advent season every year is the celebration of the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

The Solemnity celebrates that from the moment of her Conception, the Blessed Virgin Mary was free from all stain of original sin, not of her own merit, but through the Grace of God.

While only defined as a dogma in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it is a devotion which dates back to the very earliest days of the Church, and features in many works of the early Church Fathers.

Saint Justin Martyr, Saint Irenaeus and Saint Cyril of Jerusalem all discussed the idea of Mary being the New Eve during the first few centuries of the Church, and Saint Ephrem the Syrian wrote about how Mary was as innocent as Eve before the fall during the 4<sup>th</sup> century.

Famously, the Immaculate Conception was a dividing point between the Franciscans and Dominicans during the Middle Ages, as theologians like Saint Thomas Aquinas, Blessed John Duns Scotus and Saint Bernard of Clairvaux all weighed in on the debate.

The Council of Trent spoke about how Mary was exempt from the universality of Original Sin and also affirmed her freedom from all sin during her life.

Through the later centuries, the devotion began to grow until Pope Pius IX, in 1849, wrote an encyclical to the bishops of the world, asking for their opinion on the definition of a dogma on the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary.

Almost all 600 bishops who responded were in favour of the idea and in 1854, the document *Ineffabilis Deus* was published, defining the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary as a dogma.

In it, Pope Pius IX writes: “Let all the children of the Catholic Church, who are so very dear to us, hear these words of ours. With a still more ardent zeal for piety, religion and love, let them continue to venerate, invoke and pray to the most Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, conceived without original sin.

“Let them fly with utter confidence to this most sweet Mother of mercy and grace in all dangers, difficulties, needs, doubts and fears.”