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# The Immaculate Conception in the Eastern Churches

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## **THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN IN THE EASTERN ECCLESIASTICAL TRADITION**

It is common knowledge that since the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary has been solemnly defined by Pope Pius IX on December 8, 1854, the theologians and the official spokesmen of the various autocephalous Churches of the East unanimously and vehemently attacked this doctrine as a Roman innovation. These men contend that not only is the Eastern ecclesiastical tradition silent on this matter, but that in the light of statements made by some of the Fathers, the tradition of the East is actually opposed to it. On the other hand, our own Orientologists maintain that not only does the ecclesiastical tradition of the East favor this great Marian privilege, but that actually long before the debates on this privilege began in the West, the East had formulated the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, and that before the end of the fifteenth century the theologians of the East elaborated a language which is almost identical with that of the dogmatic definition of Pius IX.

The purpose of this paper is briefly to survey the testimony adduced by both sides in order to establish the true stand of the Eastern ecclesiastical tradition with regards to the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Mother. I propose to limit these considerations to the first ten centuries of the tradition of the East, since most of the opposition has to do with this period.

As odd as it may sound, not a few of the modern Dissident theologians and spokesmen evidently did not bother to read the official text of the dogmatic definition of Pope Pius IX. They simply assume that the Catholic doctrine of the Immaculate Conception represents a modern revival of a long con-

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demned heretical doctrine, viz , that the Blessed Mother was conceived in a miraculous way without the intervention of her natural father. Obviously, Pope Pius IX had nothing of the sort in mind. However, for the sake of the record it might be useful to state the question anew in the following manner

I. Summarized in general terms the Bull *Ineffabilis Deus* of Pope Pius IX contains the following points: (1) By virtue of her natural descent from Adam the Blessed Mother would have been affected by the stain of original sin and its immediate consequences, nevertheless, God took special care to preserve her free from the stain of original sin and its direct consequences, (2) God endowed her soul with a measure of grace at the very moment He created her soul just as He had endowed Adam with grace at the time of his creation, (3) that all this was done by anticipating the merits of Jesus Christ and in view of the Divine Motherhood of Mary.

Now the question is this Upon reading the testimony of the Eastern ecclesiastical tradition, is there anything in that testimony that would clearly indicate a constantly held belief that the Blessed Mother, unlike other human beings and notwithstanding her natural origin, not only escaped the stain of original sin and its direct consequences, but that she was actually sanctified at the very moment her soul was created by God?

Before one can attempt to answer this question a number of other questions present themselves. Because of some erroneous views expressed by the Dissidents with regards to the doctrine on original sin, we are specifically interested in these two questions, viz , (1) does the Eastern Church believe that under the present economy beginning with Adam no man is outside the realm of the supernatural order and, consequently, one is either in the state of sanctifying grace or carries with him the stigma of the lapsed, and (2) does the Eastern Church

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believe that the restoration of fallen man was achieved exclusively by the redemptive work of Jesus Christ and that, consequently, sanctification can only result from the merits of Jesus Christ?

Without going into any detailed proof, it can be said that the Catholic doctrine of man's original state and on original sin is abundantly attested to in the Eastern ecclesiastical tradition, although we must not forget that the delicate details of that doctrine are the result of centuries of efforts on the part of the Fathers and of the theologians, and that no one in his right mind would expect the witnesses of the Primitive Church to speak with the same delicate precision and the same technical language used by the Fathers at the Council of Trent. The same is to be said with regards to the universality of the redemption of Christ. The East at all times maintained that the sanctification of all must result from the passion and death of the Son of God made man. However, it took a long time before the Fathers and the theologians found the exact vocabulary to express the "anticipated" redemption. The Greek Fathers used a number of expressions<sup>1</sup> to indicate this special anticipatory intervention of God which might not have the precision of Pope Pius' definition. They usually speak of this by stating that the conception of the Blessed Mother was the fruit of prayer, which some will find most unsatisfactory. In fact, the difficulty to perceive the fine distinction expressed in the term "anticipated redemption" and the even greater difficulty to elaborate on adequate vocabulary to express this idea made it a task for the Fathers both in the East as well as in the West to express adequately the true nature of Mary's "all holiness."

<sup>1</sup> St Sophronius uses the word προκαθαρθείσα Theognostes the monk uses the words τὴν ἐξ ἀρχῆς ἀγιαστικῶς ἐμβρωθεῖσαν, while Photius employs the terms θεολάξευτον ἀγαλμα or θεότευκτον ἑνοπιτρον which, as Father Jugie points out, cannot be restricted to the miraculous cessation of St Ann's sterility only. See Martin Jugie, A A, *L'Immaculée Conception dans l'Écriture Sainte et dans la tradition orientale*, Rome, 1952, p 166, n. 3

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Hence, in all fairness to the truth and to the great witnesses of the traditions of the East one must further specify the question, viz., does the tradition of the Eastern Church offer any proof as to the substance of the doctrine proclaimed in the *Ineffabilis Deus*?

II. Before we enter upon the discussion of our thesis I should like to call attention to a few things which seem to escape the attention of some men of great erudition.

A.—Because of the natural limitations of our reason even under the most ideal circumstances it is possible for our mind to adhere to two truths which seem to exclude each other. For while the truthfulness of each taken separately may be obvious, their mutual relationship of agreement, for the time being at least, may be impervious to the mind. This is particularly true when the mind is preoccupied, as might be the case in a debate. Preoccupied with the purpose of driving one truth home, the human mind, inadvertently as it were, might assume a position which, when carefully analyzed, would seem to indicate that the stressing of one point necessarily involves the denial of the other, yet when this is called to the attention of the mind we try to mend the fences by asserting both truths with equal vigor. This is especially true when our mind is confronted with the mysteries of the supernatural order. Let us take a concrete case closely connected with our discussion.

St. John Chrysostom (died 407) never hesitated to extol the eminent sanctity of the Blessed Mother, referring to her as the admirable Virgin of incomparable virtue or speaking of her as the virgin soil of Eden and the new Eve.<sup>2</sup> Yet, on at least two occasions he accused the Blessed Mother of being guilty

<sup>2</sup>S Joannes Chrysostomus, *In Matth hom 4, 5* Migne, *Patrologia Graeca*, hereinafter to be referred to as PG 57, 45; *Hom II de mutatione nominum*, 3 PG 51, 129; *Hom in Pascha, 2*, PG 52, 768

of ambitious and vain thoughts<sup>3</sup> Now, as the Dissident theologians point out, it is quite obvious that even a venial offense of ambition and vanity is out of place in an all holy Virgin. Consequently, they claim this great Father as a witness against the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception. But the question in my mind is this did St. John really mean to impute even the slightest sinful attachment to the Blessed Mother? If we were to put the question to him squarely, with all the consequences of his reply made clear to him, would he have insisted that she was subject to these sinful thoughts? For reasons I am about to discuss shortly I believe the answer must be an emphatic negative. The point I am trying to make is this when in the writings of the Fathers we come upon two statements that seem to exclude each other, as in the case of Chrysostom, I do not believe it fair to cite him as a witness against the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception unless one can adduce other testimony in which the exceptional sanctity of the Blessed Mother is denied "ex professo," as seems to be the case with Origen But, one might counter, by the same token is it fair to assume that a text which extols the exceptional sanctity of Mary is an adequate testimony for the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception? Such would appear to be the position of Father Jugie<sup>4</sup> and other theologians Here again one must use great circumspection and follow the rules commonly used in such cases However, we must remember that quite often the Fathers use the Biblical expressions *κεχαριτωμένη* or *εὐλογημένη* To the Greek speaking world these expressions may have meant much more than the Latin "gratia plena" or "benedicta" would imply. Already Origen (c 185-254) remarked that the Angelic salutation *Χαῖρε κεχαριτωμένη* was unique in the Scriptures and was a salutation reserved exclusively to the Blessed Mother Analyzing this salutation from

<sup>3</sup> *Id.*, In *Matth hom* 45, 1, PG 57, 464-465, In *Joan hom* 17, PG 59, 129-130.

<sup>4</sup> Martin Jugie, *op cit*, *passim*.

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a grammatical point of view Father Jugie makes the following important observations<sup>5</sup> The perfect participle chosen by St Luke expresses an important nuance that does not appear in any other language It expresses a state fully realized and still persevering in its effects, it expresses the "eternal present." The perfect was employed by the Father to express the procession of the divine Persons Consequently, *κεχαριτωμένη* is equivalent to "all saint" and suggests the idea that the Blessed Mother was "always saint" In the same fashion, in relating the greeting of Elizabeth "Blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb," St. Luke used *εὐλογημένη* and *εὐλογεμένος* to indicate that the Blessed Mother shared in the same "blessedness" her Son had and that it was a blessedness with no limitations of time.

Since this Angelic salutation was looked upon as the exclusive prerogative of the Blessed Mother, it is not inconceivable that for the lack of a better and clearer expression the Fathers used the Biblical *κεχαριτωμένη* and *εὐλογημένη* as the verbal means to express their belief, still obscure and somewhat confused, in the Immaculate Conception of Mary. Perhaps it is not without significance that the most outspoken early advocates of this doctrine were the representatives of the Palestinian tradition The reason for this might be that, in addition to the unusual nature of the Angelic salutation, the Palestinian Fathers were bolstered in their interpretation of this salutation by an oral tradition which was better preserved in Palestine than elsewhere and thus enabled them to be more explicit in their interpretation than representatives in other regions. Whatever the case may be, however, the Biblical *κεχαριτωμένη* admittedly has special connotations and therefore deserves special consideration when it occurs in the writings of the Fathers

B.—We must not lose sight of the great difficulties the

<sup>5</sup> Martin Jugie, *op. cit.*, pp 47-50

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Fathers of the Church had to overcome in expounding the contents of Divine Revelation. They not only had to devise a new vocabulary that would satisfactorily express the mysteries of the Christian faith; they also had to shake off some deeply rooted prejudices that were part and parcel of contemporary Greek civilization. Some times these prejudices went unnoticed, at other times they seem to be aware of the incongruity of these prejudices with the contents of Revelation. Thus the Greeks of the period were firmly convinced that the woman was by nature inferior to the man. It should be noted that one of the basic principles in the theology of the Greek Fathers proclaimed that that which is outside of nature or contrary to nature is sinful or the result of sinfulness,<sup>6</sup> while a weakness which is the natural consequence of a natural limitation is merely a morally harmless imperfection. With these two facts in mind it is easy to understand why some of the Fathers did not hesitate to attribute certain imperfections to the Blessed Mother without challenging her all holiness. On the other hand, some of the Fathers obviously found it rather difficult to reconcile the professed exceptional sanctity and dignity of the Blessed Mother with the current prejudice of the woman's natural inferiority. Thus, when St Cyril of Alexandria (c. 370-444) accepted the origenistic interpretation of the prophecy of Simeon, he did so hesitatingly and hastily added that we should not be surprised that the Blessed Mother was overcome by doubt since the Apostles have submitted to the same temptation.<sup>7</sup> In another place he suggests that this weakness on the part of the Blessed Mother was due to a weakness typical of her sex.<sup>8</sup>

C.—We must not forget the tremendous influence exerted by Origen on the earlier Fathers. Origen is, in fact, responsible for most of the difficult passages we encounter in the

<sup>6</sup> S. Joannes Damascenus, *De fide orthodoxa*, IV, 20, PG 94, 1196 C

<sup>7</sup> S. Cyrillus Alexandrinus, *Homil in occursum Domini*, PG 77, 1049 B

<sup>8</sup> *Id*, *Commentarium in S Joannem*, 19, 25, PG 74, 661 B.



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Fathers quoted by the Dissident theologians in support of their position. Origen had no doubt about the unique dignity of the Blessed Virgin,<sup>9</sup> but his preoccupation to safeguard the universality of the redemption coupled possibly with the prejudice against women forced him to postulate a sin in the Blessed Mother. Commenting upon the prophecy of Simeon concerning the sword that was to pierce the heart of the Blessed Virgin he maintains that at the time of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ Mary had a positive doubt as to His divinity and resurrection.<sup>10</sup> He also maintained that with regard to sanctity and dignity the Apostles were Mary's superiors. These two notions were to reappear time and again in the writings of the Fathers and did cause considerable confusion as to the true nature of Mary's all holiness. In fact, every now and then we find even among those who explicitly spoke of Mary's Immaculate Conception, as for instance, Roman, the great Byzantine ecclesiastical poet of the seventh century, a tendency to follow Origen in some of his views in this matter.<sup>11</sup>

D.—Finally we must remember that during the first four centuries the Fathers of the Church did not have an opportunity to consider and study closely the true and intimate nature of Mary's privileges. On the one hand, they were confronted with the problems arising from the Christological and Trinitarian heresies which occupied all of their attention. On the other hand, the ecclesiastical calendar was not yet fully developed during this period. There was but one feast day honoring the Blessed Mother and, as could be expected, the sermons dwelt more on her divine maternity than on anything else. Following the Council of Ephesus (431), however, where Mary was proclaimed to be the real *Theotókos*, the Fathers began to devote more attention to the meaning of this momen-

<sup>9</sup> Origenes, *In Lucam, hom. 6, PG 13, 1815*

<sup>10</sup> *Id., In Lucam, hom. 6, PG 13, 1845*

<sup>11</sup> Romanus Melodius, *Canticum in occursum Domini*, in Pitra, *Analecta sacra*, vol. 1, Paris, 1876, pp. 28-35

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tous definition and thus were inevitably led to a better understanding of her exceptional sanctity and holy origin. In this connection it is interesting to note that Nestorius, who refused to accept the divine maternity of Mary, did not hesitate to consider her exempt from the special punishment God inflicted upon Eve for her share in the fall of Adam.<sup>12</sup> It is obvious, then, that in the mind of Nestorius Mary must have been exempt from the original sin if she was exempt from its immediate universal consequences

While the Fathers were busy defending the major mysteries of our faith against the attacks of the heretics, the devotion and piety of the faithful, inspired by simple faith and unaware of the theological difficulties, continued to adhere quietly but steadfastly to the primitive revelations concerning the exceptional dignity and sanctity of the Blessed Mother. Did they recognize in this exceptional sanctity the mystery of the Immaculate Conception? Some known facts lead us to believe that they were aware of the extraordinary nature of her conception. Even Origen was compelled to admit that the Angelic salutation was without parallel and we have all the reason to believe that in this instance he was echoing the universal sentiment of the Church. From time to time some faithful were carried away by their zeal and devotion to heretical excesses which had to be curbed, as for instance, those who would pay the Blessed Mother divine worship, or those who contended that she was conceived miraculously without the intervention of man, or that she was born within seven months of her conception. These erroneous excesses, condemned immediately by the authorities, might well indicate the common belief in Mary's unique position among men, a belief in the extraordinary character of her origin and of her exceptional, almost divine, sanctity. Little wonder, then, that when the oppor-

<sup>12</sup> Loofs, *Nestoriana*, Halle, 1905, pp 324-326, also M Jugie, *Nestorius et la controverse nestorienne*, Paris, 1912, pp 285-286.

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tunity did present itself to pay closer attention to her origin, particularly with the institution of a feast honoring her conception, in a relatively short time the smouldering embers of simple faith burst forth in brilliant flames and produced the unopposed exposition of the doctrine in a language almost as precise as the doctrine of Pope Pius IX.<sup>13</sup> Perhaps it is not without significance that Greek theology reached this peak in its Mariology at the time Constantinople was smothered by the Turks and lost its great power and prestige in Christendom

III With these preliminary remarks in mind let us now turn our attention to the burden of our discussion.

We have mentioned that the Dissident theologians of the modern era take the position that the ecclesiastical tradition of the East is definitely opposed to the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception. Father Jugie, whose competence in Oriental theology is beyond dispute, made a thorough study of these claims and demonstrated that up to the sixteenth century at best an exceedingly small percentage of the Fathers and theologians of the East could be lined up as opposing this doctrine.<sup>14</sup> As a matter of fact, he has shown that many of these supposed witnesses favoring the opposition are really not opposed to our doctrine, for when some of these objectionable passages are compared with the totality of the doctrine taught by these Fathers they remain obscure or too ambiguous to be quoted as witnesses. In chronological order the following writers are, or appear to be, opposed to the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception: St Irenaeus, Origen, St Basil the Great, Severianus of Gabala, St John Chrysostom, St Gregory of Nazianzen, St Cyril of Alexandria, Leontius Byzantinus and St John Damascene.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup> See below the doctrine of Georgios Scholarios

<sup>14</sup> Martin Jugie, *L'Immaculée Conception* . . . , Rome, 1952

<sup>15</sup> We list here only the more important names from the patristic past of the East which are most frequently quoted by the Dissidents

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St. Irenaeus (died c. 200) is quoted as an opponent of the Marian privilege because in commenting upon the incident at Cana he regarded Mary's request as untimely and, therefore, as a sign of a simple imperfection.<sup>16</sup>

Origen is more positive in his assertions. Commenting upon Simeon's prophecy "Et tuam ipsius animam pertransibit gladius," he insists that the Blessed Mother submitted to a positive doubt concerning the divinity of Christ during His passion<sup>17</sup> He also states very definitely that under the aspect of sanctity and dignity the Blessed Mother was inferior to the Apostles.

St. Basil the Great (died 379) reaffirms the position of Origen concerning the doubt of the Blessed Mother for the same reason, viz, she had to sin in order to be redeemed.<sup>18</sup>

Severianus of Gabala claims that when Christ performed His miracle at Cana Mary had doubted or at least had forgotten temporarily the divinity of her Son.<sup>19</sup> He further states that she was not purified until the day of the Annunciation.<sup>20</sup>

St. John Chrysostom, as we mentioned above, attributed to Our Lady thoughts of ambition and vanity<sup>21</sup>

St Gregory of Nazianzen (died 390) is said to have put off her purification until the day of the Annunciation.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>16</sup> S Irenaeus, *Haeres*, 3, XVI, 7, PG 7, 926

<sup>17</sup> Origenes, *In Lucam*, hom. 17, PG 13, 1845. "Quid? putamus quod, scandalizatis apostolis, mater Domini a scandalo immunis fuerit? Si scandalum in Domini passione non passa est, non est mortuus Jesus pro peccatis ejus Si autem 'omnes peccaverunt et indigent gloria Dei, justificati gratia ejus et redempti,' utique et Maria illo tempore scandalizata est"

<sup>18</sup> S Basilius, *Epist. classis 11, epist. 260*, 9, PG 32, 965-966

<sup>19</sup> Severianus Gabaliensis, *In sanctum martyrem Acacium*, ed J B Aucher, *Severiani Gabalorum episcopi Emesensis homiliae*, 1827, p 317

<sup>20</sup> *Id*, *Homil. 6 in mundi creatione*, 10, PG 56, 497

<sup>21</sup> See note 3 above

<sup>22</sup> Gregorius Nazianzenus, *Oratio 38. In Theophania*, 13, PG 36, 325 B, also *Oratio 45*, 9, PG 36, 633 CD. Καὶ πάντα γίνεται, πλὴν τῆς ἁμαρτίας, ἀνθρώπου κηθεῖς μὲν ἐκ τῆς παρθένου καὶ ψυχῆν καὶ σώμα προκαθαρείσις τῷ Πνεύματι ἔδει γὰρ καὶ γέννησιν τιμηθῆναι καὶ παρθενίαν προτιμηθῆναι.

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St Cyril of Alexandria (died 444) seems to imply that Mary did not escape the common curse because she, too, was made of flesh "the vehicle of sin,"<sup>23</sup> and because he seems to have adopted Origen's interpretation of the sword, and asserted the inferior dignity and sanctity of the Blessed Mother.<sup>24</sup>

Leontius Byzantinus (died in the sixth century) does admit the superior sanctity of Mary by which she is distinguished from all men,<sup>25</sup> but also states positively that no human soul existed that was entirely free of a voluntary or involuntary sin<sup>26</sup>

And finally, St. John Damascene (died 749) is also classified as an opponent of the Marian privilege because of two passages. One of these appears in his *De fide orthodoxa* and reads as follows: "Having received the message of God delivered by the angel and having expressed her consent, the Holy Spirit descended upon her *to purify her*, to render her capable of receiving the divinity of the Word and to give her fecundity."<sup>27</sup> The other passage is taken from the second

*Oratio* 38, 16, PG 36, 329 B Μικρὸν μὲν οὖν ὕστερον ὄψει καὶ καθαιρόμενον Ἰησοῦν ἐν τῷ Ἰορδάνῃ τὴν ἐμὴν κάθαρσιν μᾶλλον δὲ ἀγνίζοντα τῇ καθάρσει τὰ ὕδατα· οὐ γὰρ δι' αὐτὸς ἐδεῖτο καθάρσεως ὁ αἶρων τὴν ἀμαρτίαν τοῦ κόσμου

<sup>23</sup> S. Cyrillus Alexandrinus, *Adversus Anthropomorphistas*, 26, PG 76, 1129 A Εἰ δε βᾶτος προδιατυποὶ τὸ θεοτόκον σῶμα τῆς παρθένου, μὴ ἐπαισχυνθῆς τῷ αἰνίγματι. Πᾶσα γὰρ σὰρξ διὰ τὴν τῆς ἀμαρτίας παραδοχὴν, κατ' αὐτὸ τοῦτο, ὅτι σὰρξ ἐστὶ μόνον, ἀμαρτία ἐστὶν Ἡ δε ἀμαρτία παρὰ τῆς Γραφῆς τῇ τῆς ἀκάνθης ἐπωνυμία κατονομάζεται.

<sup>24</sup> *Id*, *Homil in occursum Domini*, PG 77, 1049 B Ρομφαίαν τάχα που λέγων τὴν λύπην, ἣν ἔσχεν ἐπὶ τῷ Χριστῷ βλέπουσα σταυρούμενον ὃν γεγέννηκεν καὶ οὐκ εἰδυία παντὸς ὅτι κρείττων ἔσται θανάτου καὶ ἐκ νεκρῶν ἀναστήσεται

<sup>25</sup> Leontius Byzantinus, *Contra Nestorianos et Eutychianos*, 11, PG 86, 1329 A Κατ' οὐδὲν τῆς παρθένου προουχούσης ἡμῶν πλὴν γε μονῆς τῆς ἀγιότητος

<sup>26</sup> *Id*, *Contra Nestorianos et Eutychianos*, 11, PG 86, 1339 C Οὐ γὰρ ἔστιν ἢ γέγονεν ἐκ τοῦ παντὸς αἰῶνος ἀνθρώπου ψυχὴ ἑκουσίου τε ἢ ἀκουσίου ἀμαρτίας καθαρὰ

<sup>27</sup> S. Joannes Damascenus, *De fide orthodoxa*, 3, 11, PG 94, 985 Μετὰ

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homily on the Assumption and reads as follows. "The sanctifying powers of the Holy Spirit having come down upon her, purified her, sanctified her and made her fecund."<sup>28</sup>

A closer study of these objectionable passages studied against the known background of the beliefs of these Fathers and ecclesiastical writers will reveal that not all of them carry the weight the opponents of our dogma would have us believe. There can be little doubt as to the position taken by Origen and Leontius. The sweeping statement of the latter obviously includes the Blessed Mother. Whatever his motives may have been, Origen made it quite clear that he did not exempt Mary from the stain and consequences of sin when he attributed to her a positive doubt with regards to the divinity of Christ and by categorically placing her below the level of the Apostles in sanctity and dignity. One may further add that Origen made his position clear by default. Commenting upon the uniqueness of the Angelic salutation he had an excellent opportunity to declare himself in favor of Mary's Immaculate Conception. This he failed to do and thereby seemed to indicate at least the lack of faith in the Immaculate Conception. On the other hand, one might press a point. Origen postulated the necessity of sin in Mary in order that she might be redeemed. But this supposed lapse on the part of Mary is postponed until the time of Our Lord's passion. Does this postponement mean that up until that time she was sinless? And if sinless, was she in the state of grace? One cannot cite the fact that he considered Mary inferior to the Apostles, for that opinion might be the result of the contemporary prejudice we mentioned before in which case it would be a natural and, therefore, sin-

οὖν τὴν συγκατάθεσιν τῆς ἁγίας παρθένου, Πνεῦμα ἄγιον ἐπέβηεν ἐπ' αὐτήν, κατὰ τὸν Κυρίου λόγον, ὃν εἶπεν ἄγγελος, καθαίρων αὐτήν καὶ δυναμὶν δεκτικὴν τῆς τοῦ λόγου θεότητος παρέχον, ἅμα καὶ γεννητικὴν

<sup>28</sup> *Id., Homil 1 in Dormit., B. Mariae, PG 96, 704 A.* Ἡ δὲ τοῦ Πνεύματος ἁγιαστικὴ δύναμις ἐπεφοίτησεν, ἐκάθηρέ τε καὶ ἡγίασε, καὶ οἶονεὶ προήρδευσε. Καὶ τότε, σὺ, ὁ τοῦ Πατρὸς ὄρος καὶ λογος ἀπεριγράπτως κατώκησας

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less imperfection There is no way in which we can obtain a positive answer to these questions, but perhaps they are indicative of the conflict created by a simple faith in Mary's all holiness and the difficulties created by the gropings of a theologian's mind.

As for St Basil the Great, we can only repeat the attempted justification advanced by Father Jugie Preoccupied as he was with the defense of his faith against the Arians, St. Basil had little opportunity, if any, to consider more closely the privileges of Mary and without too much reflection simply repeated the opinion of Origen.

We already discussed the case of St John Chrysostom, and the same comment might be applied to the objectionable passage taken from St. Irenaeus. Because of the great importance attached to the texts quoted from St. Gregory of Nazianzen, Father Jugie made a very careful analysis of these passages and has shown very definitely that the texts themselves give no definite indication as to the nature and the time of the purification of the Blessed Mother. Consequently, he claims, it is not correct to say that the Saint was of the opinion that Mary was conceived in sin and that her purification was postponed until the day of the Annunciation.<sup>29</sup> The fact of the matter is that with very few exceptions the subsequent Fathers and even theologians up until the sixteenth century interpreted this purification not as a simple purification from sin but as an increase in grace This becomes more evident by a closer examination of the writing of St. John Damascene who is said to follow very closely in the footsteps of St. Gregory. Commenting upon the passage in *De fide orthodoxa*, Father Jugie calls our attention to the fact that, according to his announced purpose, St. John Damascene did not intend to express his own views but merely to report the teachings of his elders Hence, in speaking of the Annunciation he was merely echoing the

<sup>29</sup> M Jugie, *op cit*, p. 121

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views of St. Gregory. Nor did he have to fear that he would be misunderstood, for in his day it was the common opinion of all that the purification which supposedly took place at the time of the Annunciation was to be understood not as a purification but as an increase in grace. As a matter of fact in the same *De fide orthodoxa* the Damascene very definitely states that during her sojourn in the Temple the Blessed Mother constantly grew in sanctity and acquired virtues.<sup>30</sup> In view of this latter passage, which incidentally reflects the common sentiment of the Fathers of this period, it is foolhardy to suppose that the Damascene was of the opinion that Mary's original justification was postponed until the day of the Annunciation. He also stated that the Blessed Mother was inferior to none, including St. John the Baptist who was purified before his birth,<sup>31</sup> implying thereby that she, too, must have been purified before her birth. But was she sanctified at the time of her conception? The Damascene does not say so in so many words, but the totality of his doctrine leads us to believe that he had no doubt about the Immaculate Conception. He speaks of Mary's special predestination,<sup>32</sup> he refers to her as a marvel of marvels in whom nature has been conquered by grace, and after he gives the reasons why Mary was born of a sterile womb he goes on to exclaim: "O blessed loins of Joachim which have emitted a germ wholly immaculate! O, admirable womb of Anna where gradually was developed and formed an 'all holy infant.'" <sup>33</sup> Speaking of her death he rounds out his beliefs. He wonders why she who in birth surpassed the laws of nature should submit to them by dying. And he answers by saying that death, the consequence of sin,

<sup>30</sup> S. Joan. Damasc, *De fide orthodoxa*, 4, 14, PG 94, 1160 A

<sup>31</sup> *Id.*, *De fide orthodoxa*, 4, 14, PG 94, 1153-1162

<sup>32</sup> *Id.*, *In Nativ. B. Mariae*, PG 96, 672 D

<sup>33</sup> *Id.*, *In Nativ. B. Mariae*, PG 96, 664 A, 665 A



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had no hold over her, but that she voluntarily chose to die to imitate more closely her Son.<sup>34</sup>

In view of these statements of St. John Damascene, which reflect the views of St. Gregory as well as those of all the Fathers, it is difficult to see how the Dissidents can claim these two men as witnesses against the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Mother. In fact, if I understand Father Jugie correctly, it was under the influence of the Latin theologians opposed to our doctrine that the Greek theologians came to look upon St. Gregory and St. John Damascene as opponents of the Immaculate Conception.<sup>35</sup> As for St. Cyril of Alexandria, we already pointed out that he, too, succumbed to the influence of Origen and to the prejudices of his time. We also pointed out that, in adopting Origen's interpretation, St. Cyril showed some doubt or even reluctance, and when we further consider that he spoke of the Blessed Mother's sanctity in eloquent terms, his apparent opposition to the Immaculate Conception must be taken with a grain of salt.

All in all, it can be said that the evidence usually quoted by the Dissident theologians, with the possible exception of Origen, Leontius and a few lesser names, is at best doubtful and should, therefore, be disqualified. This is particularly true if we consider that, on the other hand, we have an overwhelming number of favorable witnesses that flows almost uninterrupted until the sixteenth century when the first discordant voices begin to appear.

Prior to the Council of Ephesus the Fathers had little opportunity to study and to dwell upon the true nature of Mary's exceptional sanctity. During this period references are made to her sanctity in laudatory but general terms. The most favored method was to draw a parallel between Adam and Eve on the one hand, and between Christ and Mary on the other.

<sup>34</sup> *Id*, *Homil 2 in Dormit*, PG 96, 741 A.

<sup>35</sup> Jugie, *L'Immaculée Conception dans l'Écriture sainte et dans la tradition orientale*, pp 313-314

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Perhaps the most significant of these is the insistence upon the fact that just as Adam was created of a virgin soil of the earth, it was necessary that the new Adam, Jesus Christ, become flesh of the virgin flesh of the Holy Mother. True, one could insist that such statements do not necessarily imply the necessity of an immaculate conception, but they are indicative of a very high regard for Mary's sanctity and dignity. However, when the Blessed Mother was proclaimed to be the true *Theotókos* the attention of the Fathers was drawn to consider more closely the privileged position of Mary, with the result that we find a gradually broadening interpretation of the real significance of her "all holiness." This is particularly true of the representatives of the Palestinian tradition. Thus St. Sophronius speaks of an advanced purification and very definitely states that no other person was purified in advance in a manner that would compare with Mary's purification.<sup>86</sup> It is clear that St. Sophronius does not have in mind the intensity of purification but the time it occurred. Now Scripture tells us that St. John the Baptist was purified before his birth, and if his purification could not compare with Mary's, this "advance purification" must be advanced to the time of her conception.

St. Epiphanius (died 404) is quoted by some as a witness on behalf of the Immaculate Conception because of the extremely high regard he had for Mary's sanctity. But here again we run into some serious difficulty which would indicate a lack of a clear idea of this doctrine on the part of Epiphanius. The Greek Fathers had no doubt that death was the immediate consequence of sin. To be exempt from death implied an exemption from sin. Yet, when St. Epiphanius raises the question whether or not the Blessed Mother died and whether or not she was buried, he claims not to know the answer to these questions, although he does admit that God, to Whom all

<sup>86</sup> Sophronius Hierosolym, *Homil. in Annunciationem Dei-parae*, 25, PG 87, 3246-3247.

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things are possible, could have preserved her from death.<sup>37</sup> In view of his failure to definitely declare himself on this issue, perhaps one is also justified to doubt whether he did believe in the Immaculate Conception of Mary.

According to the unanimous consent of the theologians, St. Ephraem (died 373) is the most outspoken and most eloquent champion of Mary's privileges in the fourth century. All pure, all immaculate, all worthy of praise, totally devoid of any reproach, all blessed, Mary whose sanctity is above that of the cherubim and the seraphim, these are expressions which in the liturgy and in the writings of the later Fathers became intimately associated with the idea of the Immaculate Conception. But of all the statements made by St. Ephraem, there is one verse in which he explicitly states that *only Jesus Christ and His Mother are free from all sin*.<sup>38</sup>

Theodotus of Ancyra (died before 446) is perhaps the first to express clearly and in positive terms the true nature of Mary's eminent sanctity. In a homily prepared for the feast day of the Blessed Mother,<sup>39</sup> Theodotus first describes the creation and the fall of Adam enumerating the immediate consequences of sin, viz, the loss of original justice, the loss of immortality, the loss of impassibility, the loss of moral rectitude and the consequent subjection to concupiscence, ignorance and servitude of the devil which is of particular importance to Theodotus. He then goes on to say that God prepared a Virgin "who was filled with grace in order to give us life, a virgin who had the feminine nature without the feminine malice, an innocent virgin, without fault, all immaculate, whole, without taint, holy in body and in soul, a lily which grew in the midst of thorns. . . . She was consecrated to God before she was born. . . garbed in divine grace, her soul filled with divine

<sup>37</sup> S. Epiphanius, *Adversus haereses*, 78, 24, PG 42, 737 AB

<sup>38</sup> S. Ephraem Syr, *Carmina Nisibena* (ed G Bickell, Leipzig, 1866, p. 122)

<sup>39</sup> Theodotus Ancyrenus, *In sanctam Deiparam*, 10, PO 19, 327-328

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wisdom, she became the Spouse of God"<sup>40</sup> Theodotus may just as well have recited the dogmatic definition of Pope Pius IX. It should be noted that Theodotus makes a point to single out the fact that Mary was consecrated to God before she was born. If we further consider the fact that even much later, when a distinction was made between her conception and her birth, the two expressions were used promiscuously, as for instance, St. Andrew of Crete, one need not stretch the imagination to see here a consecration at the moment of conception.

We have already mentioned Nestorius (died after 451) as a witness for our dogma because of his insistence on the Blessed Mother's exemption from painful child birth, the special penalty for women. Some, however, might say that this exemption might have resulted from a later sanctification and does not necessarily indicate a freedom from the original sin. It is significant, however, that the Nestorians as well as the Monophysites refused to join the attacks on the Immaculate Conception, although they did not hesitate to join the Dissidents in their attack on other points of Catholic doctrine. A theologian who is a stickler for precision might find it annoying that throughout this period not one of the Fathers will come out with an explicit declaration that the Blessed Mother was immaculately conceived. This, of course, would have been desirable. But, on the other hand, we must not forget that in speaking of Mary the Fathers discuss one or the other of her characteristics which demand the admission of the Marian privilege. Thus Hesychius (died after 451), another witness from Jerusalem, attributes to the Blessed Mother incorruptibility, immortality, immunity from concupiscence, victory over Satan, a quality, incidentally, that the Fathers cannot over-emphasize, and he looks upon her as the Coredemptrix of the human race.<sup>41</sup> Now, it is generally admitted that in the tradi-

<sup>40</sup> *Id*, *In sanctam Deiparam*, 11, PO 19, 329

<sup>41</sup> Hesychius, *Homil 5*. *In sanctam Deiparam*, PG 93, 1464 C

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tion of the East these qualities are in direct opposition to the consequences of original sin and, therefore, to the sin itself. It is interesting to note that despite this implied admission of freedom from original sin and despite the high regard he has for Mary's dignity, he does not find it incongruous, in obvious deference to the prevailing prejudice against women, to admit certain imperfections in Mary. Speaking of the sword, he interprets it to mean the anguish caused by the temptations of uncertainty. However, this anguish is not a moral fault but a weakness resulting from her human nature: "even though Mary was a virgin," he says, "*she was a woman; even though the Mother of God, she was made of our matter.*"<sup>42</sup>

Among the other witnesses of this period we may cite Chrysippus of Jerusalem (died 479), Basil of Seleucia, Antipater of Bostra, Roman whose hymns are widely used in the Byzantine liturgy, and St. Anastasius of Antioch. All of these men have more than hinted at the Marian privilege and if their remarks and observations are studied against the doctrinal background of the period they can be cited as favorable witnesses to our dogma.<sup>43</sup> Perhaps the most important witnesses of the Eastern tradition during the patristic age are to be found during the period between the sixth and the ninth centuries with St. Sophronius and St. Andrew of Crete as the most outspoken advocates of the Marian privilege.

St. Sophronius was Patriarch of Jerusalem and under his leadership a synod was held in that city in the year 643. Following the synodal proceedings he sent a dogmatic letter to Sergius of Constantinople and to the other Patriarchs reporting, as it were, on the faith of his Patriarchate. Subsequently, this letter was read at the eleventh session of the Sixth General Council and approved by the Fathers. Because of this there can be no doubt as to the importance of this letter.

<sup>42</sup> *Id*, *Homil 6. In occursum Domini*, PG 93, 1476 C

<sup>43</sup> For particular passages from these Fathers see Jugie, *L'Immaculée Conception dans l'Écriture sainte et dans la tradition orientale*, p. 92 seq.

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Among other things, this dogmatic declaration contains the following statements: "With regards to the subject of the Incarnation I believe that the Word of God, the only Son of the Father . . . descended to our baseness . . . and having penetrated the womb of Mary radiating with virginal purity, the womb of the holy, radiant virgin who was full of divine wisdom and exempt of all taint of body, soul and spirit, He the incorporeal was incarnate . . . became real man while remaining forever God. . . He willed to become man to purify the same through the means of the same, that as a brother He would save His brethren. . . That is why a Holy Virgin is chosen; she is sanctified in body and in soul, and because she is pure, chaste and immaculate, she became the co-operatrix in the incarnation of the Creator."<sup>44</sup> In this letter there is no mention of the time of Mary's sanctification, but if we take certain facts into consideration there can be no doubt that St Sophronius, as well as the Fathers of the Council, had the Immaculate Conception in mind.

First of all, we must remember that this is not a homily where one might be given to rhetorical excesses or niceties. We have here a dogmatic letter carefully worded by its author, carefully scrutinized by the addressees and subsequently by the Fathers of the General Council. The burden of the letter was a protestation against the monothelitic errors and was carefully screened by friend and foe.<sup>45</sup> We cannot, therefore, brush off lightly such expressions as "a holy resplendent Virgin who was full of divine wisdom." Nor could he have made his thought clearer when he said that this Virgin was "exempt

<sup>44</sup> Sophronius Hierosolym, *Epistola synodica ad Sergium*, PG 87, 3160-3161 For other information on this letter see J Tixeront, *Histoire des Dogmes dans l'antiquité chrétienne*, vol 3, Paris, 1928, p 164 seq

<sup>45</sup> J Tixeront in the above quoted work tells us that this was the first protest against the monothelitic error, a copy of which was sent not only to Sergius but also to Pope Honorius Sergius sympathized with the heretics and would have made an issue of the slightest error in the letter.

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from *all taint* of body, soul and spirit"; nor can we overlook the fact that Sophronius explicitly stated that she became the co-operatrix in the incarnation of the Word because she was, by virtue of choice, pure, chaste and immaculate. From this it is quite obvious that Sophronius and the Fathers of the Sixth Council very definitely considered the Blessed Mother pure, chaste and immaculate, sanctified in body and in soul before the Annunciation.

As for Sophronius himself, he makes his position very clear in the following passage taken from his homily on the Annunciation. Speaking on the Angelic salutation he has this to say: "In the eyes of God you have found an immortal grace; in the eyes of God you have found a grace of sovereign brilliance; in the eyes of God you have found a grace worthy of all desires . . . an unchangeable and eternal grace. Many saints have appeared prior to you but none received as much grace as you have; none have been beautified as you have been; none have received the fullness of sanctification you have received; none have been exalted as you have been exalted. No one has been purified *in advance* in the manner that you have been purified, no one has been overshadowed by the light as you have been . . . for no one has ever been as close to God as you; no one has been so enriched with the divine gifts, no one has received grace in a measure comparable to you. You surpass the most excellent among men. The gifts that God gave to all men are inferior when compared with the gifts you have received."<sup>46</sup> A more eloquent praise of the holiness of Mary one can hardly conceive! Even so, one can almost feel the frustration Sophronius must have felt because of the limitations of human speech. And if we further recall that St. Sophronius rejected the origenistic doubt and substituted for it a transient natural feeling of anxiety and shock,<sup>47</sup> one can

<sup>46</sup> *Id*, *Oratio in S. Dei-parae Annunciationem*, 43, PG 87, 3273

<sup>47</sup> *Id*, *De Hypapante*, PG 87, 3298.

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entertain little doubt as to what the holy Patriarch meant when he claimed that Mary was exempt from all taint of body, soul and spirit.

Approximately a century later we have another witness who is even more specific in the exposition of the Church's belief in the Marian privileges. By this time, in addition to the other feast days,<sup>48</sup> the Church had sanctioned a special holyday commemorating the conception of the Blessed Mother, thus offering the Fathers an opportunity to dwell specifically on the mysteries surrounding her conception. Apparently the original purpose was to copy the purpose of the feast of St John the Baptist's conception. Soon, however, the attention of the Fathers centered on the act of conception as it related to Mary. From then on, the belief of the Eastern Church in the Immaculate Conception is expounded in increasingly clear and unmistakable terms until it reached its climax in the exposition of one of the greatest Byzantine theologians, Georgios Scholarios

Before we examine the doctrine of the witnesses of this period I would like to pause briefly to discuss a rather interesting feature about the institution of the feast of the Immaculate Conception which might not be without significance.

Once the feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Mother was instituted, the institution of the feast of the Immaculate Conception was only a matter of time. As was the case with the other feast days, it is more than likely that this commemoration was originally introduced by the piety and devotion of the faithful and subsequently received the sanction of the Church. In the calendar of the Eastern Church this feast is

<sup>48</sup>The 52 canon of the Quinisex Council (692) speaks of the feast of the Annunciation, the feast of the Presentation of the Bl Mother was probably introduced in Jerusalem in November 543; the placing of the vestments of the Bl Mother in the church of Blakhernos, celebrated July 2, was introduced between 457-478, Emperor Maurice (582-602) fixed the celebration of the Assumption for August 15, while the feast of the Nativity is already known in the seventh century See J Trxeront, *Histoire des Dogmes*, pp 266-267



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set for December 9 and in view of the fact that the Nativity of the Blessed Mother is celebrated on September 8, one is justified in asking what could have prompted the faithful to set this feast for December 9 instead of the 8th. What is more, what could have prompted the Church to sanction this seemingly unique arrangement? The feast of the Annunciation is set for March 25 and that of the Nativity of Christ is set for December 25, an interval of nine full months. The feast commemorating the conception of St. John the Baptist is set for September 23 and that of his nativity is set for June 24, an interval of nine months plus one day. But in the case of the Blessed Mother the interval of time between her conception and her nativity is nine months minus one day. It is hardly possible to believe that this occurred as a result of an oversight. But if it was done intentionally, what was its significance? Unfortunately, we know very little about the circumstances surrounding the institution of this feast day; nevertheless, there are a few facts that are of some importance.

According to Father Jugie,<sup>49</sup> the original purpose behind the institution of this feast is quite evident from the title it received in the *Menologium* edited in the year 984 on orders of Emperor Basil II. According to this *Menologium*, it was on this day (December 9) that God sent an angel to Joachim and Ann informing them that they were to become the parents of the Mother of God. Accordingly, then, the feast of the Immaculate Conception was originally intended to commemorate not the actual conception of the Blessed Mother but the announcement of her forthcoming conception of Christ just as the feast of St. John the Baptist's conception commemorated the vision Zachary had in the Temple. In the case of St. John's feast day the added day is sufficient to indicate the original intent behind the introduction of this commemoration. But in the case of the conception of the Blessed Mother the subtrac-

<sup>49</sup> Jugie, *L'Immaculée Conception*, p. 135 seq.

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tion of one day makes the case all the more difficult. If, as Father Jugie insists, the feast of the Immaculate Conception meant to imitate the feast of the conception of St. John the Baptist, viz., the announcement of a forthcoming conception, why was one day subtracted from the nine month interval? And if we remember that the authorities of the Church repeatedly condemned the claim of certain Christians who in their excessive devotion to the Blessed Mother contended that she was born within seven months of her conception, and insisted that a full term of nine months be recognized between conception and birth, we are justified in asking: why did the authorities sanction the celebration of this feast on December 9? To say that the feast was intended as a commemoration of a *post factum* announcement of the conception does not solve the problem either. I have discussed this problem with many Orientologists and for many years have searched books and studies on matters Oriental; thus far, however, I have been unable to find the answer. One thing seems to be certain, the odd date was meant to serve as a special announcement of an extraordinary event. What was this event? I believe the development of the feast itself tells us. Notwithstanding the fact that the ecclesiastical calendar referred to this feast as the announcement of Mary's conception, the liturgy itself dwells on the holiness of her conception rather than on the miraculous cessation of Ann's sterility. The same is true of the homilies composed for the occasion.

In this connection St. Andrew of Crete (died 740) deserves special consideration. Besides eight homilies wholly devoted to the glories of the Blessed Mother, St. Andrew composed two kanons,<sup>50</sup> one for the feast of St. Ann's conception,

<sup>50</sup> "Kanon" in the Byzantine Divine Office is a rhythmical composition consisting of 2, 3, 4, or 9 odes, divided into troparia having a certain relation to the Scriptural canticles. Most known kanons are acrostic; the initial letters of the troparia make a verse having reference to the feast. Every Sunday and

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the other for the feast of the Nativity of Our Lady.<sup>51</sup> Father Jugie summarizes his doctrine in the following points:

(1) Although the conception and birth of the Blessed Mother followed the general laws of nature, nevertheless her conception and birth were holy.

(2) Mary is especially entitled to be called the "daughter" of God and for this reason God had intervened, in a special manner, at the time of her conception.

(3) She is the beginning of restored humanity and as such she was adorned, from the very beginning, with the original beauty.

(4) She died because of reasons other than those which cause our death.<sup>52</sup> Father Jugie reminds us that special attention should be given to the title θεωπαις, daughter of God. Like the *Theotókos*, or St John Damascene's "all holy infant,"<sup>53</sup> daughter of God is a special title reserved for Mary and to which she is entitled because of her holy origin. This expression which has not been sufficiently explored embraces a world of connotations which only make sense if the Immaculate Conception is admitted. Hence, when St. Andrew speaks of the immaculate conception or immaculate birth he is not using the expression in the vague or exaggerated manner of a poet or preacher carried away by his enthusiasm. Indeed, Mary is God's daughter in a unique way for she is the "clay divinely fashioned by the Divine Architect,"<sup>54</sup> because "she is a holy leaven permeated by divine life,"<sup>55</sup> because her con-

feast has its proper kanon. See Donald Attwater, *A Catholic Dictionary*, New York, 1944, p. 290

<sup>51</sup> These two kanons have been published in *PG* 97.

<sup>52</sup> Jugie, *L'Immaculée Conception* . . . , pp. 105-106

<sup>53</sup> See note 33

<sup>54</sup> S. Andreas Cretensis, *Homil. 1 in Dormitionem S. Mariae*, *PG* 97, 1068 C

Ἡ παναρμόνιος τῆς θεϊκῆς σωματώσεως ὕλη, ὁ θεοτελὴς τοῦ παντοῦργου καὶ ἀριστοτέχνου πηλός

<sup>55</sup> *Id.*, *Homil. in Annunciationem*, *PG* 97, 896 A Χαίροις, ζύμη ἁγία

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ception occurred by virtue of God's special intervention,<sup>56</sup> which intervention cannot be restricted solely to the miraculous cessation of St Ann's sterility.

Speaking of Our Lady's birth, he maintains that on that day humanity was restored to its original beauty, that in her person she had recovered the ancient privileges, that her formation was a perfect restoration and that this restoration was a divinization similar to the state of original justice<sup>57</sup> On another occasion St Andrew raises the following pointed question: "What is the reason for this special attention shown with regards to the Blessed Virgin? Why these royal privileges which make her all beautiful?"<sup>58</sup>

He answers by saying that "it was necessary to prepare the palace before the arrival of the King. It was necessary that the royal swaddling clothes be spun in advance to receive the royal infant at birth. It was necessary that the clay receive advance preparation prior to the arrival of the potter"<sup>59</sup> Finally, speaking on the Assumption of the Blessed Mother he goes to great lengths to show how her death was quite different from that of the ordinary run of men<sup>60</sup>

The cumulative result of these and similar expressions found in the writings of St Andrew of Crete give evident testimony not only to his personal beliefs but also to the widespread belief among the faithful in the Immaculate Conception of Mary. We will find the same testimony in the writings of St. Germain

<sup>56</sup> *Id*, *Canon in B Annae Conceptionem*, PG, 97, 1312 B 'Εορτάζει σημερον ἡ οἰκουμένη τὴν τῆς Ἄννης σύλληψιν γεγεννημένην ἐκ Θεοῦ καὶ γὰρ αὐτὴ ἀπεκύησε τὴν υπερ λόγον τὸν Λόγον κηύσασαν

<sup>57</sup> *Id*, *Homil 1 in Nativitatem B Mariae*, PG 97, 812

<sup>58</sup> *Id*, *Homil 4 in Nativ Deiparae*, PG 97, 864 C Τοῦ γένους βασίλισσα βασιλικοῖς ἐπωραϊζομένη πάντοθεν προτερήμασι

<sup>59</sup> *Id*, *Homil 3 in Nativ B Mariae*, PG 97, 860 B "Ἐδει γὰρ προετοιμασθῆναι τῷ βασιλεῖ τὸ παλάτιον, εἶθ' οὕτω παρεῖναι τὸν βασιλέα Ἐδει προφανθῆναι τὰ βασιλεία σπάργανα, εἶθ' οὕτω γεννηθῆναι τὸ βασιλεῖον βρέφος καὶ τέλος εἶδει προφουραθῆναι τὸν πηλόν, καὶ τότε παρεῖναι τὸν κεραμέα

<sup>60</sup> *Id*, *Homil 1 in Dormitionem B Mariae*, PG 97, 1048

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of Constantinople, St. Tarasius of Constantinople and St. Theodore the Studite,<sup>61</sup> to mention but a few names. And there should be little wonder in this, for by this time the Byzantine liturgy abounded in references to the Immaculate Conception of Mary and daily reminded the faithful of this great Marian privilege. The liturgical tradition can be summed up in this hymn used daily in the Divine Liturgy and in the daily prayers of the faithful and whose use is as widespread as the *Hail Mary* in the West, viz: "It is truly meet and just to glorify thee, ever blessed and most immaculate Mother of God, who art more honorable than the Cherubim and incomparably more glorious than the Seraphim, who hast borne without corruption God the Word, thee, O Mother of God, we do extol." Similarly, in the liturgy of St Basil the Great the faithful are called upon to sing thus of Mary: "In thee, who art full of grace, rejoiceth every creature, the hosts of angels and all mankind. O consecrated Temple, O mystical Paradise, O virginal splendor of whom God was incarnate and became a child, being our ageless God. He made a throne of thy loins, and thy womb He made more boundless than the heavens. In thee, who art full of grace doth all creation rejoice, glory to thee."

In view of the Dissident opposition, it is just that we make brief mention of four men, whose names have been historically associated with the See of Constantinople, before we come to the conclusion of our paper. They are Photius, George of Nicomedia, Theognostes the monk, and Georgios Scholarios, who, under the name of Gennadius II, occupied the patriarchal throne after Constantinople fell to the Turks.

Even though he had but fragmentary information, Hergenrother<sup>62</sup> claimed Photius as a champion of the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of Mary. Since then, however, several

<sup>61</sup> For pertinent passages see Jugie, *L'Immaculée Conception*, p 114 seq

<sup>62</sup> J Hergenrother, *Photius, Patriarch von Konstantinopel*, vol 3, Ratisbonne, pp 555-556

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other works of Photius have been published, among them two homilies on the Annunciation which enable us to reconstruct Photius' thought on this matter.<sup>63</sup> Father Jugie summarized this doctrine in the following five points:

(1) Mary was the object of a special predestination. Before her birth she was chosen from among the generations to be the Spouse of the Creator and the Mother of the Word.

(2) Far from being tainted by original sin, she had embellished with her own beauty the fallen nature of man which was deprived of its divine form and was tainted with the sin of Adam and Eve. She is the immaculate daughter of our race, the chief work wrought by God's own hands.

(3) She was not affected by the inordinate movements of concupiscence, which are one of the consequences of original sin. Completely dominated by divine love, her soul had the same dominance over itself and over its body that the soul had during the state of original justice.

(4) In this well prepared soil the flowers of virtue blossomed forth at a most tender age. The Blessed Mother never was guilty of the slightest actual sin and her progress in sanctity knew no limits.

(5) This absolute purity of body and soul made her worthy to be chosen as the Mother of the Redeemer and the co-operatrix in His work.<sup>64</sup>

To this we may add that Photius emphatically rejects the originistic interpretation of the sword. He sees in it either the sorrow experienced by Our Lady under the cross or the anxiety she felt when she lost her Son during the visit to the Temple. Aside from this, nothing is said about the sanctification that supposedly took place at the Annunciation, a theme so dear to the hearts of the Dissidents, and unless we are ready

<sup>63</sup> S. Aristarkus, *Φωτίου λόγοι και ὁμιλίαι*, vol. 2, Constantinople, 1901, pp. 230-245, 368-380.

<sup>64</sup> Jugie, *op. cit.*, pp. 166-167.

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to admit that Photius did look upon Mary as immaculately conceived, his eulogies simply make no sense.

George of Nicomedia, a most prolific orator, was Photius' intimate friend and most ardent supporter during the dispute with the Holy See. As such, he was well acquainted with the most intimate thoughts of Photius and certainly would not have held any opinion contrary to his friend's belief. Yet, in the three homilies composed for the Presentation, he gives unequivocal testimony favoring the Marian privilege. He speaks of Mary as the magnificent first fruits offered by nature to the Creator.<sup>65</sup> And we must remember that this idea of the first fruits, as they refer to Mary in the writings of the Fathers, presupposes the absence of original sin. For that reason our orator does not hesitate to say that our sanctity cannot in any manner compare with the ineffable and immaculate sanctity of the Blessed Mother. In fact, the self-control gained by the great saints at the height of their sanctity cannot compare with the serene impassibility of the Blessed Mother in her tender infancy.<sup>66</sup> Even the angels declare that she eclipses the privileges of their nature.<sup>67</sup> Her eminent sanctity is as old as she was at the time of her presentation in the Temple.<sup>68</sup> She was a well enclosed garden inaccessible to sinful thoughts<sup>69</sup> and wholly immune of concupiscence and free of all actual sin.<sup>70</sup> He goes on to assert that because of her eminent sanctity Mary was not subject to the physiological manifestations of puberty common to all women.

Theognostes, the monk, was an ardent supporter of St. Ignatius and a determined opponent of Photius. On two occa-

<sup>65</sup> Georgius Nicomediensis, *Homil. 3 in S. Mariae Praesentationem*, PG 100, 1444

<sup>66</sup> *Id.*, *Homil. 3 in Praesent.*, PG 100, 1449 A

<sup>67</sup> *Id.*, *Homil. 3 in Praesent.*, PG 100, 1441 C

<sup>68</sup> *Id.*, *Homil. 2 in S. Mariae Praesent.*, PG 100, 1424 D

<sup>69</sup> *Id.*, *Homil. 2 in Praesent.*, PG 100, 1425 D

<sup>70</sup> *Id.*, *Homil. 3 in Praesent.*, PG 100, 1448 B

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sions he was sent to Rome as the representative of St. Ignatius. Upon his return from his second and unsuccessful mission he dropped out of sight and nothing is known of his subsequent fate. Among his writings there is a short homily on the Assumption, published for the first time by Father Jugie<sup>71</sup> in which we read the following passage: "It is meet, yes indeed, it is meet that she, who from the beginning was saintly conceived in the womb of a holy mother because of holy prayers, and who, holy as she was, after her birth had been nourished in the Holy of Holies, who, according to the angelic message received the privilege of a holy conception and a holy parturition; it is meet, I repeat, that she should be granted a holy dormition. For she whose beginning was holy, had a holy life, a holy end, a holy existence."<sup>72</sup>

Father Jugie calls our attention to the fact that the phrase τὴν ἐξ ἀρχῆς ἀγιαστικῶς ἐμβρυωθεῖσαν is equivalent to the Latin "in primo instanti conceptionis." He further calls our attention to the fact that, according to Theognostes, the sanctifying action of God resulted δι' εὐχῆς ἀγίας. Thus the prayers of Joachim and Ann were the instrumental moral cause of Mary's sanctification.<sup>73</sup>

But for a few discordant voices, this championing of the Marian privilege continues uninterruptedly and with ever increasing clarity through the subsequent centuries. However, none of the Fathers or subsequent theologians have reached the theological precision attained by Georgios Scholarios who, under the name of Gennadius II, occupied the patriarchal

<sup>71</sup> Graffin-Nau, *Patrologia Orientalis*, 16, 457-462

<sup>72</sup> Theognostes, in *Patrologia Orientalis*, 16, 457, quoted by Father Jugie, *L'Immaculée Conception*, p. 178, n. 3. "Ἐπρεπεν γάρ, ἔπρεπεν ὄντως τὴν ἐξ ἀρχῆς δι' εὐχῆς ἀγίας εἰς μήτραν μητρὸς ἀγίας ἀγιαστικῶς ἐμβρυωθεῖσαν, καὶ μετὰ τόκον εἰς ἀγίων ἄγια ἄγιαν τραφεῖσαν, δι' ἀγγέλου ἀγίαν σύλληψιν λαβοῦσαν, καὶ τὴν κύησιν ἀγίαν ἐσχηκυῖαν, ὁμοίως καὶ τὴν κοίμησιν ἀγίαν κομίσασθαι. \*Ἦς γὰρ ἡ ἀρχὴ ἀγία, ταύτης καὶ τὰ μέσα ἄγια, καὶ τὸ τέλος ἄγιον, καὶ πᾶσα ἡ ἔντευξις ἀγία

<sup>73</sup> Jugie, *L'Immaculée Conception*, p. 179



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throne of Constantinople on three different occasions between the years 1454-1462. He left behind a collection of philosophico-theological studies published, for the first time, in eight large volumes between the years 1928-1936.<sup>74</sup> Because of his thorough familiarity with the works of St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas and the Scotist Francis de Mayron, his works are characterized by a theological precision unknown to his predecessors. In his Mariology he makes use of all the material he could find in the tradition of the East, and tempered the excesses of his immediate predecessors with the best traditions he absorbed from the West. Particularly with reference to the Marian privilege, at least on four occasions, he unequivocally declared himself in favor of the Immaculate Conception. And there are certain circumstances that make his stand particularly significant. Although Georgios was well aware of the controversy that divided the theologians of the West, in his writings he makes no allusion to this debate. He had a great admiration for the learning of St. Thomas, yet on this issue he did not hesitate to part company with the Angelic Doctor.

Georgios expounded his opinion on the Marian privileges in three Marian homilies and in his second treatise on the origin of the human soul addressed to Theophane, Bishop of Midia. In the first homily which he delivered as a preacher at the imperial court on March 25, 1437, he spoke in terms which we have met during the course of the reading of the Fathers.<sup>75</sup> But in a homily delivered at the Pammacaristos

<sup>74</sup> *Oeuvres complètes de Georges-Gennade Scholarios* (publiées pour la première fois par Petit L., Siderides X. A., Jugie M.), Paris, 1928-1936.

<sup>75</sup> Georges Scholarios, *Homilia in Annuntiationem*, 43 (*Oeuvres complètes*, I, Paris, 1928, 40). "Comment ne conviendrait-il à la Bènie de se réjouir? Et comment ne serait-tu pas bènue, toi qui non seulement as complètement ignoré les opprobres de la première malédiction, mais qui délivreras les autres de ces opprobres? C'est bien véritablement que tu es bènue parmi les femmes non seulement parce que tu as été gratifiée de plus grands faveurs que toutes les autres; mais aussi parce que tu as été exempte des misères de la malédiction

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monastery in Constantinople on the feast of the Assumption in 1464 he spoke of the Marian privilege with a theological precision that must be admired. Among other things he made this statement: "Thus a marvelous purity shone forth in both. However, in the Son this purity is more glorious, for by its very nature it was removed from all occasion of taint; but in the Mother this purity exists because of grace. In fact, by a reason inherent to her very nature, Mary should have contracted the taint of sin. However, as the future Mother of the Most Pure, she had to be all pure from the very first instant of her conception. As one can see, everything in the life of this Mother was in harmony with a blessed purity which she among men was the first and the last to receive."<sup>76</sup> Towards the end

et que tu pourras en délivrer tout le genre humain, et de même que la honte de la malediction, tirant son origine d'une femme, a ruiné la commune nature, de même maintenant, par toi, le trésor de la bénédiction se communiquera aux autres, et tu deviendras le germe d'une seconde vie et le principe des hommes vraiment dignes de ce nom."

<sup>76</sup> Georges Scholarios, *Homilia in Dormitionem*, 8 (*Oeuvres complètes*, 1, Paris, 1928, 202-203) "Tout comme Jésus, la Vierge n'eut pas à progresser (péniblement) dans la vertu. Ce ne fut point par des purifications successives qu'elle atteignit au degré de pureté qu'on lui connaît, et ce ne fut point par ses seuls efforts qu'elle parvint à mener dans la chair une vie tout angélique, même avant de devenir la demeure du Seigneur des anges. Sans retard, et avant qu'arrivât le temps ou devait s'accomplir de mystère, Dieu la prépara à être le digne instrument d'un si haut dessein, qui réclamait non seulement la pureté de l'âme et du corps, mais aussi un certain développement de celui-ci. Aussi, Celui qui devait recourir à son ministère prit-il soin tout d'abord de la préparer, attendu qu'aucune âme ne pouvait, par ses seules forces, se disposer convenablement à remplir cet office, encore moins aucun corps. C'est pourquoi Dieu ne se contenta pas de prêter sa coopération et son assistance à la bonne volonté de la Vierge, comme il a coutume de la faire pour les autres ascètes, mais il lui accorda, en plus, d'agir conformément aux énergies infuses qu'il créa en elle pour la préparer. Sa volonté déployait sans doute normalement son activité suivant les habitudes et puissances reçues, mais ces habitudes, elle ne les avait pas acquises par un certain nombre d'actes régulièrement répétés et d'efforts soutenus, son âme les tenait du ciel, afin qu'on ne pût découvrir en elle la moindre trace des déficiences de notre nature. Et ce que la conception virginal opéra dans Celui qu'elle enfanta, la grâce divine la produisit en elle, bien qu'elle ait été engendrée de la manière commune. Ainsi une pureté

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of his life, about the year 1467, he repeated the same doctrine in his second treatise on the origin of the human soul: "Because she was born in accordance with the common laws of nature, she was not immune of the original sin: for even though her parents possessed virtue in an incomparable degree they, too, were subject to the common heritage. However, the grace of God delivered her completely from the original sin, as if she were conceived in a virginal manner, in order that she might contribute a perfectly pure flesh to the incarnation of the divine Word. Because she was completely delivered of the original culpability and punishment, a privilege she alone, among men, had received, her soul was completely inaccessible to the gloom of impure thoughts, and became in body and in soul the sanctuary of God."<sup>77</sup>

To fully appreciate his familiarity with the traditions of the East and the thoroughness of his doctrine (a point the Dissident would do well to take under serious consideration), it is interesting to note the commentary he has to make on the often mentioned special divine intervention in conjunction with the conception of Mary. In his homily on the Presenta-

merveilleuse brille dans tous les deux Mais dans le Fils cette pureté est plus glorieuse, à cause de sa nature, soustraite à toute occasion de souillure, tandis que dans la Mère, elle n'existe que par grâce. Marie, en effet, avait une raison inhérente à sa nature, de contracter la souillure Mais, future Mère de Très-Pur elle dut être très pure dès le premier instant de sa conception. Dans la vie de cette Mère tout, on le devine, fut en harmonie avec une si bienheureuse pureté, que, parmi les humains, elle a été la première et la dernière à recevoir"

<sup>77</sup> Georges Scholarios, *Second traité sur l'origine de l'âme*, 20 (*Oeuvres complètes*, 1, 501) "La Vierge Toute-sainte, par le fait qu'elle est venue au monde selon la loi ordinaire, n'était pas à l'abri du péché originel ses parents tout incomparables qu'ils aient été en vertu, avaient eu part, eux aussi, à l'héritage commun Mais la grâce de Dieu la délivra complètement, comme si elle avait été conçue d'une manière virginale, afin qu'elle fournit une chair parfaitement pure à l'incarnation du Verbe divin C'est pourquoi, parce que délivrée complètement de la culpabilité et de la peine originelle, privilège qu'elle est seule à avoir reçu parmi tous les hommes, elle est l'âme complètement inaccessible aux nuages des pensées (impures), et tant dans son âme que dans sa chair, devint un sanctuaire divin"

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the opponents of this doctrine relied upon the authority of two of the greatest Fathers of the East, St. Gregory Nazianzen and St. John Damascene. Having lost contact with their own traditions, completely ignorant of the great strides made by their own theologians and urged on by the spirit of contention, which seems to be the special curse of the East, the Western-bred new Greek theologians needed little prodding to side with the opponents. But even at that, many among the new generation continued to champion the Marian privilege. Thus, for instance, the famous Protestant sympathizer, Cyril Lucaris, patriarch of Alexandria and later on patriarch of Constantinople, did not hesitate to assimilate and propound the doctrine of St. Robert Bellarmine<sup>82</sup>

A survey of these scholars and hierarchs will show that, as the Holy See gradually favored the champions of the Marian privilege, the opposition among the Dissidents increased and became more intransigent. Finally, when Pope Pius IX proclaimed the dogma, all debate was dropped and a unanimous chorus of the Dissidents denounced the Pope as an innovator. This spirit of contradiction is common enough among all non-Catholics. But among the Dissidents it is more profound, more vital than it is among the Protestants of the West. In the East the hatred for the Pope, in whom they see not only the symbol but the very incarnation of the Anti-Christ, has taken on a messianic character not fully appreciated by the West. In the memory of the East the Emperor stands out as the mighty guardian of the kingdom of God and any evil done to the person of the Emperor, no matter how unworthy, or to the empire, was looked upon as a personal offense against God. Consequently, when the Pope crowned Charlemagne emperor of the West, it was not looked upon only as a grave diplomatic blunder. They saw in it the opening shot of a great religious battle. By the coronation he not only sanctioned the existing

<sup>82</sup> Jugie, *L'Immaculée Conception*, p. 320

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rift between the Eastern and Western portions of the empire, but he actually disrupted the visible kingdom of God, thereby declaring himself to be opposed to God. The setting up of a new empire could only mean one thing. It was the camp of the opposition, the camp of the Anti-Christ. Hence, whatever the Pope (the founder of the new empire) does, must necessarily be evil and must be resisted by the East, the mutilated but nevertheless faithful champion of God and sole defender of His kingdom on earth.

To the Western mind this may seem far-fetched, actually, however, it is but a broad outline of the spirit that keeps the masses of the Dissident faithful from returning to the unity of the Church. Only in the light of this spirit can we understand how the Dissidents can continue to chant the liturgy in which hymn after hymn praises the Marian privilege, and still insist that the dogma of the Immaculate Conception is an unfounded and pernicious Roman innovation contrary to the traditions of the East.

Let me conclude this paper with one final remark. Time and again we hear our clergy and a number of our theologians say that the Dissident Churches are opposed to the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Mother. This is not a correct statement of the facts. Notwithstanding the fact that all the members of the Dissident hierarchy and all of their theologians have spoken out against the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, the Dissident Church as such is not and never was opposed to this dogma. According to the Dissidents, only an ecumenical council can teach infallibly, and since no council ever considered this matter, to them it is still a question open to debate.

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### Exchange of Views on Father Gulovich's Paper

*Father Zvirblis, O P*, the discussion leader, expressed appreciation of the fact that Father Gulovich gave the mentality of the Eastern Churches rather than a litany of quotations. He pointed out that Mary was the royal daughter of an Eastern race. He mentioned that from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century many notable assertions of the Immaculate Conception occur, and gave several examples of clear statements of the doctrine.

*Father Vollert, S J*, wished to know whether it is true that the thought of the schismatic Churches was overwhelmingly in favor of the Immaculate Conception up to the time of the solemn definition in 1854, and that after that date reaction against the dogma set in, owing to anti-Roman sentiment. Father Gulovich replied in the affirmative. Father Vollert further inquired whether the *Summa* of St. Thomas was well known in dissident Eastern circles, and if so, whether the Marian doctrine of Aquinas affected Eastern views on the Immaculate Conception. Father Gulovich answered that the *Summa* was known to some schismatic theologians in translation, but that Eastern views about the Immaculate Conception were not influenced by St. Thomas.

*Father Shea* pointed out that we must be mindful of changing views on original sin in Eastern Churches. According to Jugie, Orthodox theology was infected by Calvinist ideas of original sin, namely, that it consists in the total deterioration of the human being—human frailties, darkness of intellect, concupiscence, etc.; therefore baptism does not remit the whole of original sin. Such views would color Orthodox ideas on the Immaculate Conception.

*Father Brennan, C.M.*, asked about the inferiority of womanhood according to Origen. Father Gulovich answered that in Origen's doctrine the Blessed Virgin was inferior to the Apostles in dignity and holiness, since they sinned, she also sinned.

*Father Huber O F M. Conv.*, said that one's notion of original sin influences one's idea of the Immaculate Conception. In the beginning, original sin was closely connected with concupiscence. St. John Damascene held that original sin was associated with the marital act. Thus Mary's Immaculate Conception would imply that her parents begot her without concupiscence, by God's special intervention. Only later, with St. Anselm and others, the seat of original sin was recognized as being the soul rather than the body. Hence St. Bernard, who adhered to the ancient view about original sin, was justified in his view of the Immaculate Conception.

*Father Titus Cranny, S A*, mentioned Father Garrigou-Lagrange's observation that we should all be happy that Scotus devised the important distinction between preservative and reparative redemption, thus

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clearing the way for the subsequent conviction of the Immaculate Conception.

*Father Zvirblis* asked why the feast of the Immaculate Conception is celebrated in the schismatic East on December 9. *Father Gulovich* replied that, according to popular persuasion, the conception of Mary was something extraordinary, and that consequently less than nine months elapsed between Mary's Conception and her Nativity, celebrated September 8. The chronological problem is most confused, in any case, the people's conviction is reflected by placing the Conception on December 9, so that at least one day less than nine full months between Conception and Nativity marks the extraordinary character of her origin.