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> *"I will put enmities between thee and the woman, and thy seed and her seed: she shall crush thy head and thou shalt lie in wait for her heel." (Gen. 3:15)*

"Amongst all the works of the Great Creator," says Raymundus Jordanus (who, in his humility, called himself *Idiota*—i.e., "Idiot"), "after the wonderful operation whereby the Son of the Eternal Father was united to our nature, Thou, O Blessed Virgin, wast the special work of God, Who made Thee in order that what had become deformed of His first production might be reformed through Thee."

Every year in December, the Church celebrates two holy days of obligation: the Immaculate Conception and the Nativity of Our Lord. This seems most fitting because, since the foundation of the world, God bound together Our Lady and Her Divine Son. **The first mystery of Christ** is His Virgin Mother, She who is the Immaculate Conception. This dogma reminds us of St. Paul's teaching in regard to God's plan for the Redemption: "All things are done for your sakes" (2 Cor. 4:15), to which St. John Eudes adds, "If He created the world, it was *for us*, if He became Man, it was *for us*. If He was born in a stable, it was for *our sake*…For *our sake*, He died on the Cross, ascended into Heaven, established Holy Church, confided the sacraments to her care and especially the Most Holy Sacrament of the Altar where He resides for us…In a like manner, if He willed to have a Mother on earth, it was for *our sake*."[1] To the words of the saint must be added, "And if He created His Mother as the Immaculate One, it was for *our sake*."

The Divine Revelation that Mary is the Immaculate Conception remains the dogma which is most misinterpreted, misconstrued, and belittled. In treating of the confusion and resulting rejection of this most wondrous truth, an early 20th century Jesuit priest and author, Fr. P.J. Chandlery, S.J., recognized that

> "amongst the chief reasons why even 'learned and devout men,' outside the Church, do not understand the dogma of the Immaculate Conception is because they misunderstand the doctrine of Original Sin. **Not knowing the rule, they cannot realize the exception to the rule**; not recognizing the penalty, they cannot see the privilege. In other words, not appreciating what we mean by the stain and guilt of Original Sin, they do not and cannot know what is meant by

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exemption from it."[2]

"Great indeed was the injury entailed on Adam and all his posterity by his accursed sin," wrote St. Alphonsus de Liguori.[3] God had bestowed upon our first parents His sanctifying grace, "a gift to which, by nature, they had no claim. Through the sin of Adam, in which Eve bore her share, this gift was lost for all Adam's children."[4] In throwing away the gift that would have been his supernatural inheritance, Adam "also forfeited all the other precious gifts with which he had originally been enriched."[5]

When through his own fault, Adam lost Original Justice, Original Sin took its place, affecting both body and soul**.** St. Thomas Aquinas taught that while in the state of justice, "the whole body was held together in subjection to the soul," but with the fall of Adam, all "the powers of the soul were left, as it were, destitute of their proper order, whereby they are naturally directed to virtue," and this "destitution is called a wounding of nature."[6]

Barred from the Tree of Life and wounded by the four chief effects of his sin (weakness, ignorance, malice, and concupiscence), the first father Adam could bequeath to all of his descendants only his fallen human nature, sullied with Original Sin.

The New Adam and the New Eve

"But from this general misfortune," wrote St. Alphonsus de Liguori, "God was pleased to exempt that Blessed Virgin whom He had destined to be the Mother of the second Adam − Jesus Christ − Who was to repair the evil done by the first."[7]

A fundamental doctrinal theme of St. Paul is that **Our Lord is Adam's archetype** by way of contrast, for Jesus came to undo the work of Adam and to open the gates of Heaven, long closed to the first man's posterity as a consequence of Original Sin (see 1 Cor. 15:44-49). St. Paul speaks of "Adam, who is a figure of him who was to come…But not as the offense, so also the gift. For if by one man's offence, death reigned through one; much more they who receive abundance of grace, and of the gift, and of justice, shall reign in life through one, Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:14, 17).

In his book *The Teaching of the Catholic Church*, Canon George D. Smith explains, "A man led to our loss of the sanctifying grace of God; a Man gave us back the gift. Death reigned in the race of Adam; through one born of Adam's race, true Life was restored to men. Death was the punishment decreed for our first father's sin; when the Redeemer died, death was found to be the one efficacious remedy for our loss."[8]

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The corresponding doctrine that **the Blessed Virgin is the archetype of Eve** is the teaching of all antiquity, and it was for this reason that St. Ephrem wrote, "Those two innocents, those two simple ones, had been equal the one to the other, but afterward, one became the cause of our death, the other of our life."[9] Our Lady is "rightly called the second Eve in the same sense that Her Divine Son is rightly called the second Adam…"[10]

As Adam and Eve were created with sanctifying grace, so were the **New Adam and Eve**. Our Lord Jesus Christ, the second Adam and the Son of Mary, was always sinless in virtue of the hypostatic union of His sacred humanity with the Person of the Word. The hypostatic union is the mystery of the Incarnation of God; it is the reason for the mystery of the Immaculate Conception, the mystery of the perpetual virginity and sacred Motherhood of Mary, and the mystery of the redeeming Cross.

For the sake of the Incarnation and the Passion of Christ, which would offer redemption to the human race, the Lord's Virgin Mother was conceived without sin, "redeemed in the highest way−*the way of prevention*−from the shipwreck that involved all the other children of Adam, all our race, in dire catastrophe."[11]

The Redemption of the Virgin

St. Alphonsus was careful to observe, "There are two means by which a person may be redeemed, as St. Augustine teaches us: *'the one by raising him up after having fallen, and the other by preventing him from falling,'* and this last means is doubtless the most honorable."[12]

The sanctified state of the first man and woman prefigure the Incarnation of Christ and the Immaculate Conception. God created Adam from the virginal earth and imbued him with sanctifying grace; He then created the virgin Eve from the virgin Adam. (Here it should be noted that by *virgin* is meant purity not only in the material sense of the body, but also of intellect, will, and affections.)

When Adam was in the state of Original Justice, the Lord God cast a deep sleep upon him and took one of his ribs to form the first woman, Eve (see Gen. 2:21-22). From the very first moment of her existence, grace was imparted to the woman, granted by God through the stainless Adam.

In a similar fashion, the Virgin Mary (the New Eve) received at the very first moment of Her existence the gift of sanctifying grace, communicated from God through the virginal Jesus (the New Adam). How was this done, when Our Lady preceded Her Divine Son in historical time?

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The answer is found in the mystery of the Holy Trinity. God is present to all things that are, were, or shall be. What He is and does, He is and does outside of time. To Him, creatures and events which succeed each other in time are ever present. In the great mystery of the Holy Trinity, which our limited human minds cannot fully fathom, the three Divine Persons applied to Our Lady the foreseen merits of Jesus, the Word made flesh (see John 1:14).

To quote the illustrious words of St. Bernard of Clairvaux:

> "One man and one woman have wrought us exceeding harm; nevertheless, thanks to God, through one Man and one Woman all things are restored…and indeed Christ would have sufficed. Surely all sufficiency is of Him, but it would not have been good for us that Man should be alone. Rather, it was fitting that both sexes should take part in our Reparation, for neither sex had been guiltless in our fall."[13]

"I have loved, O Lord, the beauty of thy house, and the place where thy glory dwelleth" (Ps. 25:8), wrote King David, for the Holy Ghost inspired him to speak of his future daughter, Mary, the living *Temple of God* and *Ark of the Covenant*. For the glory of His Name, for the sake of the Incarnation of Christ, and for our sakes, the maiden Mary was prepared for Her dignity and office as the Virgin Mother of God both spiritually and physically, in Her soul and in Her body. Exempted and preserved from the sin which, as one of Adam's descendants, She otherwise would have inherited as the naturally generated child of Sts. Joachim and Anne, the Virgin Mary was conceived without sin.

The Immaculate Conception is "the woman," whose appearance in time commenced the fulfillment of the Lord's prophecy against the ancient serpent, the devil: *"I will put enmities between thee and **the woman**, and thy seed and her seed: she shall crush thy head and thou shalt lie in wait for her heel"* (Gen. 3:15). Created by the Holy Trinity to be the ever-Immaculate Mother of God, Our Lady "was fittingly prepared for the virginal childbearing through which was crushed the serpent's head."[14]

"In the Christian religion," explained Cardinal Billot, "Mary is absolutely inseparable from Christ both before and after the Incarnation: Before the Incarnation, in the hope and expectation of mankind; after the Incarnation, in the worship and love of the Church. For, indeed, in the primeval prophecy [of Gen. 3:15] we were shown not only Christ, but also *the Woman* whose Child He is…"[15]

"The Immaculate Conception means the restoration of grace once more to the human

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race,"[16] wrote Fr. H. O'Laverty, author of *The Mother of God and Her Glorious Feasts*. "The Immaculate Conception…was the long looked-for event in the history of the world, and from this we may really trace all the good things we have received through the sufferings and death of Christ."[17]

The Unbreakable Bond of the Woman and Her Seed

"A religion that separates Mary from Jesus—**the Woman from Her Seed**—is neither the religion of the promises and prophecies as we read of in the Old Testament, nor the religion of their fulfillment as we see it in the New,"[18] explains *The Teaching of the Catholic Church*.

Christ is our Divine Savior, and Mary is our holy Mother. Since the first days of the Church, there have always been those who try to separate Our Lord from His Mother. Just as many who forget that the entire human race was not condemned until Adam sinned are blindly inclined to point only to Eve as the reason for mankind's fall, conversely there are those who claim to admit Christ as Lord and Savior but contemptuously dismiss Our Lady's office in the Redemption. Just as the Lord God joined together the first Adam and Eve, whose fates were intertwined, so did He join together the new Adam and Eve in the *proto-evangelium* of Genesis 3:15.

To further the points of **"figure-types"** previously made, the historical persons of Adam and Eve can always be positively compared or negatively contrasted to their perfect archetypes, the Lord Jesus and the Lady Mary. Gathered from the Fathers of the Church, the following syllabus clarifies God's binding of the first Adam and Eve and that of "the Woman and her seed":

- Adam was created before Eve; the Word in eternity, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity Who said, *"Before Abraham came to be made, I am"* (John 8:58) preceded His human but sinless Mother.
- Adam was formed by God from the virginal earth; Jesus was conceived of the Holy Ghost and born of the Virgin Mary.
- Sanctifying grace was bestowed to Eve through Adam; Mary was conceived in grace through the foreseen merits of the new Adam.
- Eve sinned before Adam; Mary was born before Christ.
- Adam and Eve were created in Original Justice but fell from grace; Jesus and Mary were always "full of grace" (see John 1:14; Luke 1:28).
- Adam and Eve were intended to be the lord and lady over all the earth; Our Lord Jesus Christ and Our Lady Mary possess dominion over all creation.
- Mary is the cause of our salvation, even as Eve was the cause of our ruin.

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- "As Eve was seduced by an angel's word to shun God after having transgressed His Word, so Mary, also by an Angel's word, had the good tidings given her so that, after obeying His Word, she might bear God within her." (St. Irenaeus of Lyons)
- Adam, who sinned early in his life, sentenced the entire human race to death; Christ, Who died in the flower of His youth, redeemed us for eternal life.
- Both the Lady Eve and the Lady Mary became "the mother of all the living" (Gen. 3:20) – Eve in the natural order, Mary in the order of grace – **for the Mother of God is also the Mother of men**.

On the last point above, the Rev. F. Thaddeus, the priest-author of the wondrous late 19th century book entitled ***Mary Foreshadowed***, explains:

> "When Adam had…drawn upon his whole posterity the sentence of death: 'Dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return,' then, writes Moses, 'Adam called the name of his wife Eve, because she was the mother of all the living' (Genesis 3:20). Who is not filled with astonishment at these words? Through Eve death comes into the world, and yet she, who is the cause of death, receives the name which means 'Life' and she is called 'Mother of the living'!

St. Epiphanius explains this apparent contradiction in the following manner. "Adam," he says, "spoke at that moment in mysterious and prophetic terms. He mentioned indeed the name of Eve, but Mary was hereby foreshadowed. For as Eve is, in reality, the mother of the dead, so Mary is truly the mother of the living."

Consider the Blessed Virgin in this light, and you will see that she has a much greater claim to the title of "Mother of the human race" than our first mother Eve. For what is life, properly speaking? It is to be animated with a Divine principle. *In Ipso vita erat*—"In Him (in Jesus) was life" (John 1:4). And Jesus says: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). The Word Incarnate is for us the only source of this true life, the life of grace, which is so far superior to our natural life, that without it life is eternal death. The Son of God has taken our nature in order to make us partakers of His Divine life; and to bring about this ineffable union, He has used Mary as an instrument; for He was "conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary."

The Blessed Virgin has brought us forth to a new life, the life of grace, and therefore we properly call her "our Mother" and "the Mother of the living." The Church also calls her "our Life" in the *Salve Regina*: "Hail, our Life, our Sweetness, and our Hope!"

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And as in olden times the daughter of Pharaoh adopted Moses on the banks of the Nile, so Mary adopted all the Faithful in a special manner for her children at the foot of the Cross, when Jesus entrusted them to her care, saying: "'Woman, behold thy son.' After that, He saith to the disciple: 'Behold thy Mother.' And from that hour, the disciple took her to his own" (John 19:26-27). The Gospel does not say, "John took her" but "the *disciple* took her," a name common to all the followers of our Divine Redeemer.

St. Bernardine of Siena, explaining these words, says: "By John we understand all the elect, of which the Blessed Virgin became the Mother." Devotion to Mary, the Mother of the living, is looked upon as a sign of predestination, and election to eternal life. St. Bonaventure completes these remarks, saying that, "as Mary is the Mother of the elect here, so she is the Mother of all the saints in heaven, and the fullness of their joy after God."

The Glories of Mary

In the third century, St. Proclus wrote of the Immaculate Conception, "Mary is the glory of virgins, the joy of mothers, the support of the faithful, the diadem of the Church, the express model of the true faith, the seat of piety, the robe of virtue, *the dwelling-place of the Holy Trinity*."[20]

The Holy Scriptures relate that when the Virgin Mary, already full of grace, gave the angelic messenger Her *fiat* – "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to thy word" (Luke 1:38) – She was overshadowed by the Holy Ghost. The Lord of all was made Man, and "the woman" became *Theotokos* [21] (literally "God-bearer" in Greek, or in a variable translation, "God's Mother"). At the moment Our Lady became the Mother of God, She also became the spiritual Mother of all mankind. From that same instant, the new Adam and the new Eve together began the Redemption of mankind.

Those who truly adore Christ also honor the Perpetual Virgin who brought Him forth. In a similar manner, those who possess devotion "to Jesus through Mary" make their own the witness of St. Alphonsus: "The more we honor Mary, the more we shall honor God," for when Our Lord came to free us all, He did not disdain the humility of the Immaculate Virgin's womb.

"And she brought forth her first-born Son, and wrapped Him up in swaddling clothes, and laid Him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn" (Luke 2:7). Born in poverty and adored only by the humble Virgin, St. Joseph, and poor shepherds, the Christ Child would later be sought by wise men from the east, following a star.

"And entering the house, they found the Child with Mary, His Mother, and falling down they

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adored Him" (Matt. 2:11). So do all the faithful throughout history forever find Christ, always with Mary, His Mother and ours.

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Notes

[1] Eudes, St. John. *The Admirable Heart of Mary.* [Buffalo, NY: Immaculate Heart Publications, under license from Loreto Publications, Fitzwilliam, NH]: p. 80.

[2] Chandlery, S.J., P.J. *Mary's Praise on Every Tongue.* [London: Manresa Press, 1919]: p. 10.

[3] De Liguori, St. Alphonsus. *The Glories of Mary.* [Brooklyn, NY: The Redemptorist Fathers, 1931]: p. 287.

[4] Smith, D.D., Ph.D., Canon George D. *The Teaching of the Catholic Church: A Summary of Catholic Doctrine*, Vol. I. [New York: The MacMillan Co., 1959]: p. 526.

[5] de Liguori, *loc. cit.*

[6] Aquinas, St. Thomas. *The Summa Theologiae*. Second and Revised Edition, 1920. First Part of the Second Part, Question 85.

[7] de Liguori, *loc. cit.*

[8] Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 523.

[9] St. Ephrem, *Op. Syr., tom. ii*, p. 325. Cited by Canon Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 531.

[10] Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 524.

[11] Ibid., p. 528. [Emphasis added].

[12] de Liguori, *op. cit.*, p. 303.

[13] St. Bernard, *Sermo de Duodecim praerogativis B.V.M.,* I, 2. Cited by Smith, *op. cit.*, p.

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530.

[14] Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 526.

[15] *De Verbo Incarnato*, p. 401 (Rome, 1912). Cited by Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 530.

[16] O'Laverty, B.A., Fr. H. *The Mother of God and Her Glorious Feasts.* [Rockford, IL: TAN Books and Publishers, 1987; republished from the 1908-1915 edition]: p. 4.

[17] *Ibid.*

[18] Smith, *loc. cit.*

[19] Haer. V.19.

[20] St. Proclus, Patriarch of Constantinople (d. 446), *Orat. 6*. Cited by P.J. Chandlery, S.J., *op. cit.*, Section IX.

[21] The dogma that Mary is *Theotokos*, because Her Son Jesus is one Divine Person with two natures (divine and human; the hypostatic union), was formally defined at the Ecumenical Council of Ephesus in 431 A.D.

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