

Immaculate Conception

Dogma & Devotion

Second of a two-part series
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In 1866, following a hiatus of more than a decade, the American bishops again assembled at Baltimore and decreed that every diocese throughout the United States should observe the Feast of the Immaculate Conception on Dec. 8, as a holy day of obligation. In 1884, the Third and final Plenary Council placed this feast day among the six feasts of obligation, which Pope Leo XIII confirmed and gave the weight of his authority.

The hierarchy of the United States continued to meet annually, although such meetings were without canonical status. Consequently, they did not issue pastoral letters. During this time, the American bishops busied themselves with many things, not the least of which was the establishment of a Catholic university. In 1887, with the curricula, faculty, and architecture of the Catholic universities of Europe as their model, the American hierarchy and the Holy See established The Catholic University of America, the first pontifical university in an English-speaking country since the Reformation. As they had placed a young nation under the protection of the Blessed Mother, so too, did they place the budding university under her care. Accordingly, the new institution chartered that Dec. 8 would be a University “feast day,” a day not of classes but of symposia, lectures, and concerts in honor of Mary Immaculate.

Devotion to Our Lady under the title of the Immaculate Conception was the *raison d’être* for the National Shrine. Having emerged victorious from war, James Cardinal Gibbons, Archbishop of Baltimore and Chancellor of the University, earnestly enjoined the American Church with the construction of the national church as a memorial monument: “The trustees of the Catholic University, profoundly grateful to our Divine Lord Jesus Christ for the victory ... appeal to our Catholic people to join with them in the erection of a memorial monument of thanksgiving at the National Capital on the grounds of the Catholic University. We can imagine no better memorial of our common faith in God’s overruling providence and our gratitude for the greatest of victories than the erection of the noble church long contemplated by them

in honor of Mary Immaculate, the heavenly patroness of the Catholic Church in our beloved country” (Nov. 20, 1918).

Among the early benefactors who took up the standard of the Immaculate Conception, was George Logan Duval (1855-1931) senior member of Wessel, Duval & Co., merchants and exporters. Duval was a profound and life-long devotee of Mary Immaculate. Thus, in 1918, he established the Chair of the Immaculate Conception, the first of its kind in the world, at The Catholic University of America.

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The purpose of this endowment was to teach “the life and example of the Blessed Virgin and to exhibit from Catholic theology and the history of the Catholic Church, her eminent place in the plan of redemption” (Letter to Cardinal Gibbons, March 20, 1918). Shortly thereafter, universities in Paris and Rome established similar chairs.

On May 1, 1918, Bishop Thomas J. Shahan, Rector of Catholic University and founder of the National Shrine, inaugurated the Chair of the Immaculate Conception. Each succeeding Wednesday of May, Rev. Dr. Bernard A. McKenna, secretary to Bishop Shahan, gave the initial series of Marian conferences in the chapel of Divinity Hall, a.k.a. Caldwell Hall. In time, these conferences were held in the Marian Room of the Crypt until 1933. Fr. McKenna held the Chair of the Immaculate Conception throughout his tenure at the University and the Shrine (1918-1933). As fiscal demands changed, the Duval Chair merged with that of the Shakespeare Caldwell Chair. Today, it is the Shakespeare Caldwell-George Logan Duval Chair of Systematic Theology.



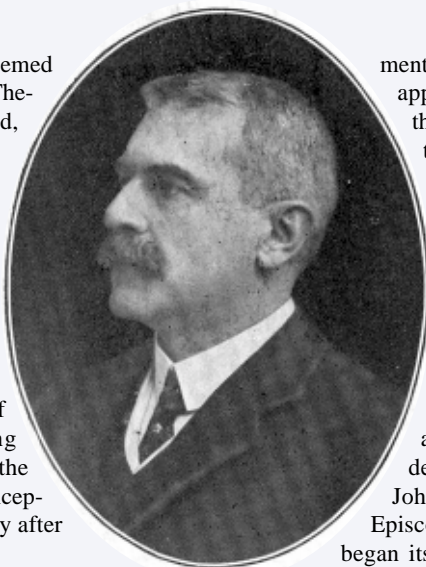
The current holder of this esteemed chair in the School of Sacred Theology is Fr. Patrick Granfield, O.S.B., Ph.D., S.T.D.

Like so many others of his time, Duval's devotion to the Blessed Mother manifested itself through extraordinary acts of philanthropy, for which the University of Notre Dame awarded him the Laetare Medal. One of the historic and interesting events concerning Duval and the dogma of the Immaculate Conception however, occurred shortly after his death in 1931.

Duval bequeathed a significant sum of money to the Shrine and University for the construction of a chapel honoring Our Lady of Lourdes, as well as one-fourth of the residue of his estate. Certain members of the Duval family contested the will stating that Mr. Duval's devotion to the Blessed Mother under the title of the Immaculate Conception was "evidence of unsound mind." Therefore, in December of 1931, Bishop Shahan testified to the courts of New York regarding the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church in reference to the Immaculate Conception. Following Shahan's testimony, the judge dismissed the case.

Over the years, many have sought the intercession of Mary Immaculate. In 1932, on the feast of the Immaculate Conception, a young woman correspondent for *Commonweal* and *America*, having filed her story on the demonstration - hunger march in downtown Washington, D.C., made a private pilgrimage to the National Shrine. The young woman was Dorothy Day (1897-1980). In an interview with a member of the Shrine staff in the 1970s, Day stated that while at the National Shrine she did not have a "mystical experience," but "simply prayed ... that the Lord would provide [her] with something to do for the worker." It seems her prayer was answered. Upon her return to New York, Day met Peter Maurin (1877-1977), whose spirit and ideals dominated the rest of her life. Together they founded the Catholic Worker Movement in 1933.

For almost 25 years, this "national monument or testimony of American devotion toward the Immaculate Mother of God" remained unfinished. By some accounts, the unfinished structure was a "disappoint-



ment," even an "eyesore." With the approach of the Marian Year and the centennial of the definition of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception (1953-1954), the time was ripe to launch a campaign for the Shrine's completion.

On Dec. 8 1953, Archbishop Amleto Cicognani, Apostolic Delegate to the United States, celebrated a Pontifical Mass in the Crypt Church to inaugurate the Year of Mary. Under the direction of Archbishop John F. Noll, of Fort Wayne, the Episcopal Committee for the Shrine, began its fund-raising drive to resume construction on the National Shrine. As George Logan Duval once observed, if one person gave the funds to complete the Shrine, it would be "a memorial to but one." Through a nationwide appeal, "it becomes a testimony of devotion and generosity" of all Catholics in America.



Appropriately, in this year of the sesquicentennial of the definition of the dogma, we also observe the 50th anniversary of the resumption of construction on the superstructure or Great Upper Church. The Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception is the preeminent Marian shrine of the Catholic Church in the United States. It is a beautiful votive church of pilgrimage honoring the Blessed Mother under the title of the Immaculate Conception as the Patroness of the United States. Here the architecture mingles with the symbol. As Bishop Thomas J. Grady (1914-2002), the fifth director once wrote, the Shrine is a "house of God and a tribute to Mary," a church that speaks of America's "Catholic heart."



Photos: The mosaic of the Immaculate Conception (facing page) is located to the left of the sacristy in the National Shrine's Upper Church. A replica of the oil painting by the Spanish artist, Murillo, it was a gift of Popes

Benedict XV and Pius XI. The Marian image has been venerated at the Shrine since 1930. Above (top) is George Logan Duval, a devotee of the Blessed Virgin Mary and benefactor of the National Shrine and Catholic University. Above center is Archbishop John F. Noll, who was instrumental in the completion of the Shrine's Great Upper Church. At left is Cardinal Patrick O'Boyle, who presided at the ceremony to commence resumption of work on the National Shrine in the International Marian Year of 1954.