

II. Mary as “full of grace”.

1. Teaching of the Catholic Church.

The Catholic Church teaches that Mary was “full of grace”.

To become the mother of the Savior, Mary “was enriched by God with gifts appropriate to such a role” (Vatican Council II, *Lumen Gentium*, 56). The angel Gabriel at the moment of the annunciation salutes her as “full of grace” (Luke 1:28). In fact, in order for Mary to be able to give the free assent of her faith to the announcement of her vocation, it was necessary that she be wholly borne by God’s grace.

Catechism of the Catholic Church, §490

She is also called in this way in the “Hail Mary” prayer.

Hail Mary full of Grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed are thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb Jesus. Holy Mary Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death Amen.

Full of grace, the Lord is with thee: These two phrases of the angel's greeting shed light on one another. Mary is full of grace because the Lord is with her. The grace with which she is filled is the presence of him who is the source of all grace. “Rejoice . . . O Daughter of Jerusalem . . . the Lord your God is in your midst” (Zephaniah 3:14, 17a). Mary, in whom the Lord himself has just made his dwelling, is the daughter of Zion in person, the ark of the covenant, the place where the glory of the Lord dwells. She is “the dwelling of God . . . with men” (Revelation 21:3). Full of grace, Mary is wholly given over to him who has come to dwell in her and whom she is about to give to the world.

Catechism of the Catholic Church, §2676

The Catholic Church uses the description “full of grace” as a basis for other Marian doctrines:

1. Of Mary’s redemption “from the moment of her conception” (see chapter III):

Through the centuries the Church has become ever more aware that Mary, “full of grace” through God (Luke 1:28), was redeemed from the moment of her conception. That is what the dogma of the Immaculate Conception confesses, as Pope Pius IX proclaimed in 1854:

The most Blessed Virgin Mary was, from the first moment of her conception, by a singular grace and privilege of almighty God and by virtue of the merits of Jesus Christ, Savior of the human race, preserved immune from all stain of original sin (Pius IX, *Ineffabilis Deus*: DS 2803).

Catechism of the Catholic Church, §491

2. Of her “immaculate conception” – being conceived without the original sin (see chapter III):

The Holy Spirit *prepared* Mary by his grace. It was fitting that the mother of him in whom “the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily” (Colossians 2:9) should herself be “full of grace.” She was, by sheer grace, conceived without sin as the most humble of creatures, the most capable of welcoming the inexpressible gift of the Almighty. It was quite correct for the angel Gabriel to greet her as the “Daughter of Zion”: “Rejoice” (cf. Zephaniah 3:14; Zachariah 2:14.). It is the thanksgiving of the whole People of God, and thus of the Church, which Mary in her canticle (cf. Luke 1:46-55) lifts up to the Father in the Holy Spirit while carrying within her the eternal Son.

Catechism of the Catholic Church, §722

3. About her being sinless (see chapter IV):

From among the descendants of Eve, God chose the Virgin Mary to be the mother of his Son. “Full of grace”, Mary is “the most excellent fruit of redemption” (Vatican Council II, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 103): from the first instant of her conception, she was totally preserved from the stain of original sin and she remained pure from all personal sin throughout her life.

Catechism of the Catholic Church, §508

This teaching is based on a Catholic translation of Luke 1:28 according to which the angel Gabriel calls Mary “full of grace”:

28 And the angel being come in, said unto her: Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women.

Luke 1:28 Douay-Rheims 1899 American Edition

28 Into her presence the angel came, and said, Hail, thou who art full of grace; the Lord is with thee; blessed art thou among women.

Luke 1:28 Knox Bible

2. Teaching of the scripture.

2.1. Meaning of the Greek text.

We should begin by saying that in Luke 1:28 the expression “full of grace” is not used. In the original Greek text the word κεχαριτωμένη (*kecharitōmenē*) is used. It is a perfect passive participle from the word χαριτώ (*charitōō*). According to the BDAG lexicon *charitōō* means “to cause to be the recipient of a benefit, bestow favor on, favor highly, bless”. Perfect tense means that a given activity was performed in the past and its effects last until the present. The meaning of *kecharitōmenē* we could thus explain as “the one who received grace and still possesses it”, and so – “the one who has been graced”, “the graced one”, “the favoured one”.

It is key to understand that the Greek participle *kecharitōmenē* does not contain the idea of fulness or highest degree of grace in itself. According to the quoted BDAG definition, *charitōō* – the root verb of this participle – means “to cause to be the recipient of a benefit, bestow favor on, favor highly, bless”, and not “to fill with benefit, favor or blessing to the point that the recipient is completely full of it and so unable to receive any more”, as the Catholic Church interprets.

In the New Testament this verb is also used in Ephesians 1:6, where Paul writes that God bestowed His grace on us in Christ and even the Catholic translations don’t say that He has “filled” us with this grace (Knox Bible has – “he has taken us into his favour”).

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with spiritual blessings in heavenly places, in Christ:

4 As he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and unspotted in his sight in charity.

5 Who hath predestinated us unto the adoption of children through Jesus Christ unto himself: according to the purpose of his will:

6 Unto the praise of the glory of his grace, in which he hath graced us in his beloved son.

Ephesians 1:3-6 Douay-Rheims 1899 American Edition

We are thus dealing with twisting the meaning of the original Greek in the Catholic rendering only in relation to Mary and this error played a crucial role in an unbiblical elevation of her status (this translation could have been a result of the cult of Mary itself). Contrary to what some Catholic theologians argue, the idea of fulness is also not given to this expression by the perfect tense, which merely signifies that a given activity was done in the past and its effects last to the present.

Without any linguistic basis the Catholic Church distorts the meaning of *kecharitōmenē* and ascribes the idea of fulness to this word, which is then used as a foundation for doctrines related to Mary’s alleged sinlessness. Catholic theologians argue that if Mary was full of grace, then this means that she

must have been without sin, since every sin would have disturbed this state of “fullness of grace” in God’s eyes. The original text, however, says that Mary received grace/favour, not that she was full of grace. The scripture also never teaches that Mary was sinless. She was a sinful human being, as we all are (see chapter V).

2.2. The meaning of *kecharitōmenē* according to the scripture.

2.2.1. Words of angel Gabriel in Luke 1:30.

The meaning of the word *kecharitōmenē*, distorted by the Catholic Church to provide a basis for its false doctrines, is explained in clear terms by the angel Gabriel himself. Luke 1:28-30 says:

28 And coming in, he said to her, “Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.” **29** But she was very perplexed at *this* statement, and kept pondering what kind of salutation this was. **30** The angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary; for you have found favor with God”.
Luke 1:28-30 NASB

We can see that Mary was herself perplexed (Greek διαταράχθη – *dietarachthē* – confused, perplexed) about the way she was greeted by the angel and “kept pondering what kind of salutation this was” (verse 29). In verse 30 Gabriel explains the greeting which perplexed Mary and clarifies the meaning of *kecharitōmenē*, saying “Do not be afraid, Mary; for you have found favor with God”. These words mean that through her faithfulness and obedience to the Lord Mary has found favour in His eyes.

2.2.2. The expression “to find favour with God/in God’s eyes” in the Old and New Testament.

It is in this meaning that this expression is used through the entire scripture. In the Old Testament the phrase “to find favour in the eyes of the Lord” was used – מָצָא חֵן בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה (*matsa chen be’inei YHWH*).

8 But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord.
Genesis 6:8 NASB

12 Then Moses said to the Lord, “See, You say to me, ‘Bring up this people!’ But You Yourself have not let me know whom You will send with me. Moreover, You have said, ‘I have known you by name, and you have also found favor in My sight.’ **13** Now therefore, I pray You, if I have found favor in Your sight, let me know Your ways that I may know You, so that I may find favor in Your sight. Consider too, that this nation is Your people.”
Exodus 33:12-13 NASB

17 The Lord said to Moses, “I will also do this thing of which you have spoken; for you have found favor in My sight and I have known you by name.”
Exodus 33:17 NASB

And in the New Testament we have its exact Greek equivalent.

45 And having received it in their turn, our fathers brought it in with Joshua upon dispossessing the nations whom God drove out before our fathers, until the time of David. **46** David found favor in God’s sight, and asked that he might find a dwelling place for the God of Jacob.
Acts 7:45-46 NASB

In the Greek text of Acts 7:45-46 the same expression is used in relation to David, as in Luke 1:30 towards Mary – “found favor”¹, in Greek εὗρεν χάριν (*heuren charin*), the verb „to find” (εὕρισκω –

¹ The very minor difference between these two expressions is that Luke 1:30 says “with God” and Acts 7:46 - “before God”.

heuriskō) in the past aorist tense and the noun „grace” (χάρις – *charis*) in the accusative. Throughout the scriptures the phrase “to find favour/grace with God/in God’s eyes” is used towards believers who thanks to their faithfulness to the Lord were able to obtain His grace and blessing.

The Bible hence gives no basis to perceive the grace and favour which God displayed towards Mary as some magical power which secured her sinlessness. It is the same sort of grace, favour and kindness in God’s eyes that were gained by other remarkable believers (as confirmed by the usage of this expression in both the Old and New Testament) and which are available to all, even if they are appropriated by few.

2.2.3. Grace and the way we obtain it.

Grace is an unmerited gift we receive from God. This meaning of grace is best shown through the greatest grace that God has given us – the grace by which we are saved. We would never be able to redeem ourselves from sin; God, through His love towards us, did it by sending His Son, Jesus Christ, who paid for all our sins and made our salvation possible. It is this grace that Paul refers to in Ephesians 1:6 and that is mentioned throughout the scripture as its most important teaching.

5 He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, **6** to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.
Ephesians 1:5-6 NASB

15 But the free gift is not like the transgression. For if by the transgression of the one the many died, much more did the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abound to the many.
Romans 5:15 NASB

Apart from this greatest gift (2 Corinthians 9:15), grace also refers to any other favour or blessing that God bestows on us through His love (cf. Romans 1:7; 1 Corinthians 1:3; 2 Corinthians 1:2; Galatians 1:3, etc.).

Since grace is unmerited, we don’t earn it or work for it. And yet whether we receive it or not still depends on us; we appropriate grace by a conscious free will choice – by faith. This is why the way we achieve salvation is described in the scripture as “by grace through faith”.

8 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; **9** not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.
Ephesians 2:8-9 NASB

It is by faith and obedience that comes from faith that all the prominent believers like Abraham, Moses or David found favour with God and became partakers of great blessings graciously given by Him (1 Samuel 17; Hebrews 11, etc.)

6 Then he believed in the Lord; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness.
Genesis 15:6 NASB

23 and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, “And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness,” and he was called the friend of God.
James 2:23 NASB

6 And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.
Hebrews 11:6 NASB

So it was with Mary. Through her faith she “found favour with God” and was given the unique grace-blessing of becoming the mother of the Messiah in His humanity. It’s a blessing she couldn’t possibly

have become worthy of through her own efforts, but at the same time it was bestowed on her because of her free will choice to believe God and be faithful to Him.

The fundamental flaw in the teaching of the Catholic Church is the absence of the free will choice in the reception of grace by Mary. It is this error which contributed to the establishment of such false doctrines as Mary being “redeemed from the moment of her conception” or “conceived without sin”.

Through the centuries the Church has become ever more aware that Mary, “full of grace” through God (Luke 1:28), was redeemed from the moment of her conception.
Catechism of the Catholic Church, §491

. . . from the first instant of her conception, she was totally preserved from the stain of original sin and she remained pure from all personal sin throughout her life . . .
Catechism of the Catholic Church, §508

She was, by sheer grace, conceived without sin . . .
Catechism of the Catholic Church, §722

It was only possible for Mary to find favour in God’s eyes and, through it, become a partaker of His grace-blessings for her after she has become able to make free will choices concerning her relationship with God. She was obviously not able to exercise her free-will faith before she came to existence and so the teachings that through the grace referred to in Luke 1:28-30 she was redeemed from the moment of her conception or preserved from original sin are false.

Both the perfect tense of the participle *kecharitōmenē* in Luke 1:28 and angel Gabriel’s words in Luke 1:30 indicate that Mary found favour with God at some point in the past. Although the scripture doesn’t state when this occurred², the necessity for Mary to make a free will choice to believe in God in order to be bestowed with grace precludes the possibility that this point in time precede her conception, which is what the Catholic Church teaches (“Immaculate Conception and Assumption”, n.d.). As discussed above, this is incorrect for both linguistic and theological reasons.

Misunderstanding grace and presenting as facts inventions and conjectures which lack any biblical basis and frequently directly contradict the teaching of the Bible opens the door to attributing to Mary any and all attributes that the Church may consider fitting. For example, if in the eyes of the Church it was the will of God for Mary to become conceived without the original sin (despite the scripture never teaching it nor providing any basis for such a conjecture – see chapters III and IV), then nothing stands in the way for this to become a dogma, since God must have bestowed this grace-gift upon her without any free will choice on her part being necessary for this objective to be achieved.

The first step is thus proclaiming inventions and conjectures lacking any biblical foundation as facts, and even declaring them as resulting from God’s will and being His works, despite the scripture not providing any basis for such statements (cf. Words of Pius IX in the fragment of constitution *Ineffabilis Deus* quoted in paragraph 419 of the Catechism). This is a very serious error (see chapter VI, point 3, analysis of paragraph 37). Once this border has been crossed, any teaching can be justified; only the right theological sophistry is needed. In the case of teachings such as Mary’s redemption “from the moment of her conception” and being conceived without the original sin, the key element of this sophistry is the false representation of grace and the way it’s obtained.

2.2.4. Christ grew in grace.

Finally, we should bear in mind that even our Lord, Jesus Christ, grew in grace as a human being.

2 We should be careful not to attempt to point to a precise moment in time when Mary “found favour with God”. It was rather a consequence of her faithfulness and obedience displayed throughout her life and so we shouldn’t perceive God looking upon her with favour as a specific event in time which can be accurately indicated.

52 And Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.
Luke 2:52 NASB

Professor Luginbill (n.d.) writes:

Also in Luke, **Luke 2:52** to be precise, we are told that “Jesus **continued to grow** in wisdom, and in stature, and **in grace** with God and men”. If grace or favor is progressive in the case of our unquestionably perfect Lord³, how could it be that in Mary's case she was “perfectly filled with grace from eternity”⁴? Clearly, even our Lord in His capacity as a true human being was required to grow spiritually, showing that even in the case of someone who did not in fact possess a sin nature or ever sin, still, grace or favor received from God remains a relative thing and is still dependent upon one's actions rather than being some sort of “magic” one just has.

3. Origin of the translation “full of grace”.

The expression “full of grace” in relation to Mary originates from the Vulgate – a fourth century translation of the Bible into Latin by Jerome. In his translation of Luke 1:28 Jerome used the words *ave gratia plena* (“Hail full of grace”) and the Catholic Church, instead of using the original Greek text, began building their doctrines on this incorrect rendering.

The Vulgate has long been an influential translation in Catholicism – it has been in use in the Roman Church since its completion, it was affirmed as its official Latin Bible during the Council of Trent (1545-1563) and it held this status until 1979. However, it remains a translation only and it is not the original text inspired by the Holy Spirit that should be consulted when defining any doctrine. Currently, in an attempt to salvage the foundation of numerous Catholic teachings, some Roman theologians attempt to defend the translation “full of grace”, but this is done against the meaning of the word in Greek.

4. Expression “full of grace” in the Bible.

The words “full of grace” (Greek πλήρης χάριτος – *plērēs charitos*) are used twice in the New Testament and on neither occasion in relation to Mary. In John 1:14 they describe Christ:

14 And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.
John 1:14 NASB

And in Acts 6:8 they are used for Stephen:

8 And Stephen, full of grace and power, was performing great wonders and signs among the people.
Acts 6:8 NASB

In the case of Christ these words refer to the fact that as God incarnate He was the perfect manifestation of God's grace towards sinners – an undeserved mercy which God displayed in sending His Son for the redemption of sins. Only in this grace, personification of which is Jesus Christ, is our salvation provided (Ephesians 1:6, 2:8-9). Christ is hence full of grace in the sense of being a perfect manifestation and personification of grace and is the source of God's grace towards us.

3 Jesus Christ did not possess a sin nature, never sinned (2 Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 4:15; 1 Peter 2:22; 1 John 3:5) and has perfectly fulfilled the Father's will (John 8:29).

4 Catechism of the Catholic Church Paragraphs 491, 508 and 722 all teach that Mary was “full of grace” from the moment of her conception.

In the case of Stephen, the phrase “full of grace” means that he was “full of the Spirit and of wisdom” (Acts 6:3, 6:5) – that he received gifts from God thanks to which he was performing miracles and signs, giving a powerful testimony to the truth.

While Jesus Christ was born without sin and remained sinless (see chapter V, points 2 and 3), Stephen was a sinner, as we all are. The words “full of grace”, just as the fact that someone received grace from God, are in no way equivalent with sinlessness. So even if Mary was “full of grace” - and she was not, and even if she did receive the grace at the point of conception – and that also did not happen – “fullness of grace” would not equate to being sinless. Paul was also a sinner (1 Timothy 1:15), despite being set apart by God from mother’s womb and called through His grace (Galatians 1:15).

4. Summary.

1. The Catholic Church teaches that Mary was “full of grace”. This teaching is a basis of other Marian doctrines.
2. Mary, however, was not “full of grace”. The Greek word *kecharitōmenē* is a passive participle in the perfect tense from the verb *charitoō* which means “to cause to be the recipient of a benefit, bestow favor on, favor highly, bless”. The perfect tense means that Mary received grace at some point in the past and this state of being graced/favoured was still lasting when these words were spoken to her. We should translate *kecharitōmenē* as “the one who has been graced/favoured”.
3. Without any linguistic basis the Church distorts the meaning of *kecharitōmenē* and ascribes the idea of fulness to this word, which is then used as a foundation for doctrines related to Mary’s alleged sinlessness. According to the reasoning of the Roman Church every sin would have disturbed this state of “fullness of grace” in God’s eyes. The original text, however, says that Mary received grace/favour, not that she was full of grace. The word *kecharitōmenē* does not contain the idea of fulness, neither is it given to this word by the perfect tense.
4. As the words of angel Gabriel from Luke 1:30 explain – “for you have found favor with God” - the word *kecharitōmenē* refers to the fact that Mary through her spiritual faithfulness to God has found favour in His eyes.
5. It is in this meaning that this expression is used throughout the entire scripture towards distinguished believers. The Bible gives no basis to perceive the grace and favour which God displayed towards Mary as some magical power which guaranteed her sinlessness. It is the same sort of grace, favour and kindness in God’s eyes that were attained by other remarkable believers and which are available to all, even if they are appropriated by few.
6. Grace is an unmerited gift we receive from God. Although we don’t earn it or work for it, whether we receive it or not still depends on us – we appropriate grace through our conscious free will choice to believe.
7. Through her faith Mary “found favour with God” and was given the unique grace-blessing of becoming the mother of the Messiah in His humanity. It’s a blessing she couldn’t possibly have become worthy of through her own efforts, but at the same time it was bestowed on her because of her free will choice to believe God and be faithful to Him.
8. It was only possible for Mary to find favour in God’s eyes and through it become a partaker of His grace-blessings for her after she has become able to make free will choices. She was obviously not able to exercise her free-will faith before she came to existence and so the teachings that through the grace referred to in Luke 1:28-30 she was redeemed from the moment of her conception or preserved from original sin are false.
9. If Christ, who did not possess a sin nature, never sinned (2 Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 4:15; 1 Peter 2:22; 1 John 3:5) and perfectly fulfilled the will of the Father (John 8:29), grew in grace as a human being, then it is clear that a teaching according to which Mary was “full of grace” -

“it was necessary that she be wholly borne by God's grace” (CCC, §490) – and that from the moment of conception (CCC, §491, §508, §722) is false. The growth of our Lord in grace shows that grace and favour in God's eyes are dependent on our faithfulness and are not a magic attribute that one receives and possesses.

10. The phrase “full of grace” towards Mary originated from an incorrect translation of Luke 1:28 by Jerome in the Vulgate. Instead of consulting the original Greek text, the Catholic Church began constructing their doctrines based on this wrong rendering.
11. The words “full of grace” are used twice in the New Testament – once referring to Jesus (John 1:14) and once to Stephen (Acts 6:8). This second usage shows that this phrase does not equate to sinlessness.
12. Mary, as Luke 1:28 says, has been graced. Thanks to her faith and obedience to the Lord she has found His favour (Luke 1:30) and because of that she was chosen to be the recipient of a great privilege of grace – to become the mother of Jesus Christ.

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See also:

<https://carm.org/mary-full-grace-and-luke-128>

<http://ichthys.com/mail-Mary-full-of-grace.htm>