

## [Pope Innocent XI \(1611-1689\)](#) <sup>[1]</sup>

By: Brind'Amour, Katherine Garcia, Benjamin Keywords: [Catholicism](#) <sup>[2]</sup> [Popes](#) <sup>[3]</sup> [Abortion](#) <sup>[4]</sup> [Fetus](#) <sup>[5]</sup>

[Pope Innocent XI](#) <sup>[6]</sup>, born Benedetto Odescalchi, made considerable contributions to the Roman Catholic approach to [embryology](#) <sup>[7]</sup> by condemning several propositions on liberal moral theology in 1679, including two related to [abortion](#) <sup>[8]</sup> and [ensoulment](#) <sup>[9]</sup>. His rejection of these principles strengthened the Church's stance against [abortion](#) <sup>[8]</sup> and for the idea of "hominization," meaning the presence of human qualities before birth.

He was born 19 May in 1611 in Como, Italy, and began his studies under the Jesuits at Como before studying jurisprudence at both Naples and Rome. Pope Urban VIII named him prothonotary, president of the Apostolic Camera, commissary at Ancona, administrator of Macerata, and governor of Picena in succession. Shortly thereafter he was appointed cardinal-deacon of Santi Cosma e Damiano in 1645 before being named cardinal-priest of Sant' Onofrio by Pope Innocent X. During his time as cardinal, Odescalchi was beloved by his people for his love, charity, and devotion to his position. He spent the majority of his time and effort trying to preserve the purity of faith and the morals that governed this purity. This effort to maintain traditionalism and wholesomeness resulted in regulating the dress of Roman women, suppressing the gambling houses, and encouraging receiving daily Communion.

Odescalchi was actually introduced to the famine-stricken people of Ferrara as "Mittimus patrem pauperum," meaning "father of the poor" because of his characteristic attention to their needs. In 1650 Odescalchi was named Bishop of Novara, where he spent six years spending all of his time and money on helping the sick and the poor of his diocese. In 1656 he resigned and went to Rome to work with various congregations there.

It was expected that Odescalchi would become pope with the death of Clement IX in 1669, but King Louis XIV of France used his royal influence to keep Odescalchi out in favor of Clement X. When Clement X died in 1676, Louis XIV tried once again to keep Odescalchi out of the papacy but was forced to approve him due to tremendous popular support for Odescalchi from the Cardinals and the Roman citizens. Odescalchi officially became Pope in 1676 under the name Innocent XI, and spent much of his time in the papacy combating the ideologies and actions of King Louis XIV.

In a papal bull issued in 1679, "Sanctissimus Dominus," Innocent XI condemned sixty-five propositions that favored a laxist or liberal approach to moral theology, including two related to [abortion](#) <sup>[8]</sup>. The first that he rejected, proposition thirty-four, stated: "It is lawful to procure [abortion](#) <sup>[8]</sup> before [ensoulment](#) <sup>[9]</sup> of the [fetus](#) <sup>[10]</sup> lest a girl, detected as pregnant, be killed or defamed." The second, proposition thirty-five, stated: "It seems probable that the [fetus](#) <sup>[10]</sup> (as long as it is in the [uterus](#) <sup>[11]</sup>) lacks a rational soul and begins first to have one when it is born; and consequently it must be said that no [abortion](#) <sup>[8]</sup> is a homicide." The modern [Roman Catholic Church](#) <sup>[12]</sup> still rejects these statements. The denunciation of these propositions clarified the Church's doctrine regarding [abortion](#) <sup>[8]</sup> as homicide, and distanced the Church from claims that the value of the [fetus](#) <sup>[10]</sup> depended on the moment at which it became ensouled.

Innocent XI died 11 August 1689 in Rome, Italy. Pope Benedict XIV began and Popes Clement XI and Clement XII continued the beatification of Innocent XI, but an accusation of Jansenism (the idea that Christ died for the elect and not for all of humanity and that human nature is corrupt), along with negative French influence, caused the effort to cease. Appeals for his beatification were later renewed, however, and [Pope Innocent XI](#) <sup>[6]</sup> was beatified by [Pope Pius XII](#) <sup>[13]</sup> in 1956.

Pope Innocent XI's attempt to preserve the morals of the Church resulted in what has become his footprint on Roman Catholicism's history surrounding [embryology](#) <sup>[7]</sup>, namely the condemnation of several important propositions that he felt were not in line with Catholic teachings. The rejection of the two propositions that referenced [abortion](#) <sup>[8]</sup> and [ensoulment](#) <sup>[9]</sup> defined the stance of the Church in favor of the life of the [fetus](#) <sup>[10]</sup>, defended [ensoulment](#) <sup>[9]</sup> at some time before birth, and stated that all abortions should be considered homicide.