

# Roman Catholicism By Lorraine Boettner

## Chapter VII Mary Part 2



Revelation 17:4 And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, ...

This is the continuation of [chapter VII Mary Part I](#).

### **9 Adoration or Idolatry?**

The Roman Church officially denies worshipping Mary. Officially she says that Mary is only a creature, highly exalted, but still a creature, in no way equal to God. Yet she tells us that Mary hears the prayers of millions and that she constantly gives attention to her followers throughout the world. It may well be that, as Rome says, she does not intend idolatry. But the intention and the practical working out of the system are two different things. We must insist that it is worship, and that therefore it is idolatry as practiced by millions of people who kneel before Mary's statues and pray and sing to her. Most of these people know nothing at all of the technical distinctions made by their theologians between adoration and worship. It certainly is idolatrous to give her the attributes of omnipresence and omniscience and to give her titles and which belong to God, as when, by the late pope Pius XII, she was officially designated the "Queen of Heaven," and "Queen of the World," and when prayers are made to her for salvation.

That the prayers addressed to Mary and the saints are idolatrous is clear from the fact that (1) they are precisely the same kind, and are expressed in the same terms, as those addressed to God; (2) they are presented in the ordinary course of worshipping God; (3) they are offered kneeling; and (4) they form the bulk of the prayers offered. We have mentioned the most famous prayer addressed to Mary, the *Ave Maria*, or *Hail Mary*. As commonly used, this prayer follows the Lord's prayer, and is offered in precisely the same way. Assuming that there are one hundred million "practicing" Roman Catholics throughout the world, and that half of them say the rosary at least once each day—the rosary contains 50 "Hail Mary's" and takes quite some time to repeat—Mary would have to have the attributes of deity to hear and answer such a mass of prayer. Surely Roman Catholics themselves can see the impossibility of all those prayers being heard and answered by one who by the admission of their own church is not God, but only human. The whole thing is a deceit and an illusion. Even if it were true that the spirits of the departed have access to this world, that could not be known except by divine revelation. And no such revelation exists. The growth of Mariolatry is indeed a sad chapter in the history of the church. Like the brazen serpent of Moses, which at the time of Hezekiah had become an object of idolatrous worship and

had to be destroyed, so in the Roman Church Mary has come to be looked upon as the instrumental cause of salvation, and as such is given divine honors. The Roman Church ascribes to her large numbers of miracles, fully supernatural and similar in all respects to those performed by Christ. Numerous appearances are claimed for her. On some occasions statues of Mary are said to have blinked or wept. Relics in abundance have been exhibited in European cathedrals. Samples of her clothing, hair, teeth, and milk have been exhibited in numerous places.

The worship of Mary is, of course, a great injustice to Mary herself, for it makes her the occasion for breaking the commandments of God. Nothing is more clearly revealed in Scripture than that divine worship is to be paid to God alone: "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve" (Matthew 4:10). Nothing is more severely rebuked than idolatry of every kind and form. If Mary could see all the Roman Catholics bowing down before her images in the thousands of churches and millions of homes, how great would be her grief! To pray to Mary is at the least a waste of time. And worse than that, it is idolatry, a direct product of the use of unscriptural doctrines and practices.

## **10 Latria, Dulia, Hyperdulia**

The Church of Rome, without any warrant whatever from Scripture, technically divides worship into three kinds: (1) *Latria*, the supreme worship, given to God alone; (2) *Dulia*, a secondary kind of veneration given to saints and angels; and (3) *Hyperdulia*, a higher kind of veneration given to the Virgin Mary.

The theory, however, is useless in practice, for the average worshipper is not able to make the distinctions, nor does he even know that such distinctions exist. The subtleties of definition only confuse the issue, for who can balance his feelings so nicely as to give God, the Virgin, and the saints their due proportion? This is particularly true in Roman Catholic countries such as Italy, Spain, and Latin America where so many of the people are illiterate and given to all kinds of superstitions. We must insist that any religious worship, whether inward or outward, consisting of prayer, or praise, and expressed by outward homage such as bowing, kneeling, or prostration, is properly termed worship and belongs to God alone.

The slogan, "Through Mary to Christ," does not change the fact that for many worshippers the devotion naturally stops with Mary. They pray to Mary, not to Christ. Their prayers are directed to her personally. Roman Catholics are taught that all grace necessarily flows through Mary. She is regarded as a kind of fourth person of the Blessed Trinity. To speak of Mary as "holy," as "the Mother of God," and as "co-redeemer with Christ," cannot but give the impression that she is more than human. Pope Benedict XV (1914-1922) gave expression to the thought that Mary suffered with her suffering and dying Son, and that with Him she has redeemed the human race. This pronouncement was also sanctioned by Pope Pius XI in 1923.

The distinction that Rome makes between latria, dulia, and hyperdulia does enable her to maintain officially that she does not teach the "worship" of

Mary. However, the lengths to which her apologists have gone in trying to distinguish between such devotions and actual worship is evidence that she feels uncomfortable about the lofty names given to Mary and about the actual results, and that she does not dare take responsibility for what goes on in her churches. And, subtleties aside, some Roman theologians acknowledge that they do worship Mary.

## 11 Jesus' Attitude toward Mary

It is particularly instructive to notice the attitude that the Lord Jesus Himself took toward Mary. The first recorded instance occurred when, at the age of 12, the boy Jesus, after attending the Passover in Jerusalem with His parents, remained in the temple. We read, in the Confraternity Version, that when His parents found Him, "His mother said to him, 'Son, what thou done so to us? Behold, in sorrow thy father and I have been seeking thee.' And he said to them, 'How is it that you sought me? Did you not know that I must be about my Father's business?' And they did not understand the word that he spake to them" (Luke 2:48-49).

Says *The New Bible Commentary* (Protestant) in explanation of this event: "The answer of Jesus is an expression of surprise. There was something about Him which He was surprised His parents did not know. ... He had always been occupied with His Father's affairs and had no interests of His own to engage Him. This was what His parents might have known" (p. 844).

On two later occasions, after Jesus had reached His maturity, Mary attempted to show her parental authority, but each time was held in check. The first occurred at the wedding in Cana of Galilee, when the wine ran out. We read, again in the Confraternity Version:

"And on the third day a marriage took place at Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there [Notice, it does not say, "Mother of God"]. Now Jesus too was invited to the marriage, and also his disciples. And the wine having run short, the mother of Jesus said to him, 'They have no wine: And Jesus said to her, What wouldst thou have me do, woman? My hour has not yet come.' His mother said to the attendants, 'Do whatever he tells you'" (John 2:1-5).

In this instance, the first of its kind after the beginning of His public ministry, Jesus gave Mary to understand that no one, not even His mother, must dictate to Him concerning the time and manner of opening His public ministry, that thenceforth she was not to exercise any authority over Him, and that His working of miracles and the redemption of souls was, strictly speaking, none of her business. He was pointing out to His mother that from then on He had no dependence on her, but that she must depend upon Him. Mary's words to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you," indicate that she understood and accepted this new role. In any event, Mary is not to be worshipped, nor does she have authority with her Son in behalf of others. Had Jesus submitted to His mother's suggestion and leading, there might have been some grounds for "Mary worship," and for the claim of the Roman Church that "Mary is the hope of all." But here at the very beginning of His public ministry the ground is cut from under any such claim.

On another occasion, apparently after weeks of absence, Mary came seeking Jesus at the place where He was preaching to the multitude, but could not get to Him because of the crowd. Apparently she sent word to Him by messenger, making known her desire that He would come to her, or perhaps making the direct request that He come to her without regard to how that might interrupt His work. But He ignored or refused her request. We read (Confraternity Version):

“While he was still speaking to the crowds, his mother and his brethren were standing outside, seeking to speak to him. And someone said to him, ‘Behold, thy mother and thy brethren are standing outside, seeking thee.’ But he answered and said to him that told him, ‘Who is my mother and who are my brethren?’ And stretching forth his hand toward his disciples, he said, ‘Behold my mother and my brethren! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven, he is my brother and sister and mother’” (Matthew 12:46-50).

Instead of granting Mary’s request, He replied in such a way that it was in effect a public rebuke. Undoubtedly she felt it keenly. Perhaps Mary was even ashamed of the fact that her Son was attracting so much attention and wanted to withdraw Him from the crowd, for in Mark’s account of this event we read, “And the multitude cometh together again, so that they could not so much as eat bread. And when his friends heard it, they went out to lay hold on him: for they said, He is beside himself” (3:20-21). As we read the New Testament we get the impression that neither Mary nor the brothers of Jesus understood His activities while He was on earth (“For even his brethren did not believe on him,” John 7:5), and that while Mary believed on Him earlier, His brothers may not have joined the company of believers until after His resurrection, perhaps not until after His ascension.

As a boy growing up in the home of Joseph and Mary, Jesus was obedient to them. But after His public ministry began, after He had presented Himself as the Son of God and as the Savior of the world, Mary had to sink into the background. It is to Jesus alone that the world must turn for salvation. Undoubtedly He gave this rebuke purposely, that the world might know that Mary was His mother as man, but not as God.

If Mary had had the influence and authority over Him that is claimed the Church of Rome, He would not have answered her as He did, but would have honored her request promptly. Here again we have Scriptural evidence that Mary has nothing to do with the ministry of the Son of God as regards the matter of salvation. By this statement He respectfully classes her and His brethren along with other converts. To Him they were all the same—“Who is my mother and who are my brethren? ... Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven, he is my brother and sister and mother!” As the Son of God and the Redeemer of men, His relation to Mary was identically the same as with any others who would hear His Word, and do it.

And on still another occasion a woman in the crowd raised her voice in praise of Mary (Confraternity Version): “Now it came to pass as he was saying these things, that a certain woman from the crowd lifted up her voice and said to him, ‘Blessed is the womb that bore thee, and the breasts that nursed thee.’ But he said, ‘Rather, blessed are they who hear the word of God and keep it’”

(Luke 11:27-28).

This was the most subtle attack of all, appealing as it does to the sentiments and the emotions. It is a device that even today traps unstable souls into worshipping a woman, that is, Mariolatry. But here again Jesus gave a plain and decisive answer which should settle forever the question regarding the superiority of Mary or the promotion of any Mary cult. He utterly rejected the idea that Mary occupies a position of holiness above that of other women, or that she was to be crowned the "Queen of Heaven" and become the object of worship. After the ascension of Christ she is seen with the apostles and several other women in Jerusalem (Acts 1:14), but no special honor or position is recorded as having been given to her. She was not, in herself, more than any other virtuous woman, except that she was especially chosen to be the mother of Jesus, and to be the kind and loving parent which she was to the most wonderful Child that ever grew up in a home.

We notice further that throughout our Lord's public life He was ever careful to call Mary "woman," never "mother." Even when He was dying on the cross He addressed her thus. The Greek, Hebrew, and Latin each had a word for "mother," as well as for "woman." But the Scripture says "woman," not "mother." And of course He never used the term "Lady," which is so much used in the Roman Catholic Church. Let us follow the Scripture.

While Jesus always spoke respectfully to His mother, He nevertheless made it clear that neither she nor anyone else had any part in the work of salvation. No mere human could assist in that work, and the Scriptures are careful to point out that no assistance or dictation in any form was permitted. When Jesus stepped out of His home life at Nazareth and began His public ministry, a new relationship was established. From that time on, His supernatural parentage was emphasized. For He was the only begotten Son of the Father in heaven. He rebuked the mistaken tendency which seeks to exalt the human relationship at the expense of the divine, the physical at the expense of the spiritual.

## **12 The Protestant Attitude toward Mary**

As evangelical Protestants we honor Mary, the mother of our Lord, with the honor the Scriptures give her as "blessed among women." No other member of the human race has received such high honor as was conferred upon Mary in that she was chosen to be the mother of the Savior of the world. She was truly a woman of virtue, and of extraordinary faith. She fulfilled admirably the office assigned to her. She was the chosen vessel to bring the Bread of Life to a sin-cursed world. But she was only the vessel, not the Bread of Life. We cannot eat the vessel; rather it is the Bread of Life that we need. It is not Mary the Jewish maiden, but Jesus the Son of God whom we need as Savior.

We honor Mary, and all generations shall call her "blessed," because she believed the word of God and accepted the message of the angel Gabriel. But we do not deify her, nor worship her, nor pray to her, and we are bound to protest strongly when Christ is dethroned and Mary is elevated to that place which belongs to Him alone. We worship *with* her the Son of God, but we do not

worship *her*, nor worship *through* her, as if she were a mediator. It is important that all understand the difference between the matter of honoring Mary, and the grossly unscriptural practice of *worshipping* her. We are constantly reminded of the words of Jesus: "Whosoever shall do the will of my Father who is in heaven, he is my brother, and sister, and mother" (Matthew 12:50).

Roman priests say that they honor Mary and accuse Protestants of failing to do so. There is the danger, of course, that in revolting against the recognized evil of Mariolatry, we may neglect to give Mary the distinguished and honored place which the Scripture itself accords her. And we should be on guard against that. But the priests do her a grave injustice in that they impose too much responsibility upon her. Peter, the alleged first pope, did not do that. He did not even mention her in any of his sermons or in his two letters. As is characteristic of Protestants, he said much about Christ as the only Savior from sin, but he did not present Mary as a mediator. To present her in that capacity is to rob God of part of His glory and to palm off a counterfeit salvation upon the people. There is no record in Scripture of anyone ever believing on Mary for salvation.

The false estimate of Mary's position on the part of the Roman Church is based in large measure on a mistaken interpretation of the words of Jesus spoken on the cross, when He said to John, "Behold, thy mother." Romanists say that these words were addressed to all men, present and future, and that He was committing all men to Mary as her sons. The truth, however, is that the New Testament is unmistakably clear on this point, and that the Lord committed His mother to John's care for the remainder of her natural life, and that He laid upon John as an individual the responsibility to serve as a son to her. It reads:

"When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by whom he loved, he saith to his mother, Woman, behold, thy son! Then saith he to the disciple, Behold, thy mother! and from that hour the disciple took her unto his own home" (John 19:26-27).

The natural meaning of those words is that they were addressed to Mary and to John as individuals, that from that time forward Mary should look upon John, the beloved disciple, as her son, as the one who in her life would take the place of Jesus, and that John should assume the duties of a son and care for Mary with filial affection, that he should comfort her in her loneliness, as a true son would. And that Mary and John so understood those words is clear from the immediately following verse, which reads: "And from that hour the disciple took her unto his own home" (v. 27).

This, then is the Mary we honor—not a weeping statue of stone, not a half-goddess, nor a "Queen of Heaven," but the humble servant of God, who found favor with Him and became the mother of Jesus.

### **13 Were There Other Children in the Family of Joseph and Mary?**

The Scriptures tell us that Jesus was virgin born. But what of the family of Joseph and Mary after the birth of Jesus? Did Joseph and Mary have other

children? Or was Jesus the only Child? The answers to these questions pointedly divide Roman Catholics and Protestants.

In Matthew 13:54-56 we read:

"And coming into his own country he taught them in their synagogue, insomuch that they were astonished, and said, "Whence hath this man this wisdom, and these mighty works? Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary? And his brethren, James, and Joseph, and Simon, and Judas? And his sisters, are they not all with us?"

Mark also names the brothers of Jesus and mentions his sisters (6:3). The natural meaning of these verses is that there were other children in the family of Joseph and Mary. There were four sons; and there were at least two daughters, for the term is in the plural. Presumably there were three or more daughters, for the term used is "all." When there are only two we say "both," not "all." And the reference in John 1:5, "For even his brethren did not believe on him," also finds its most natural meaning in other sons of Joseph and Mary. It was self-evident that the people at large did not believe on Him, but here John says that even His own brothers, the members of His own family, did not believe on Him.

A prophecy about Christ in Psalm 69, "I am become a stranger unto my brethren, And an alien unto my mother's children" (vs. 8), also finds its natural fulfillment in the attitude of Christ's brothers toward Him. That this is a Messianic psalm, prophetic of the coming and work of Christ, is clear from a number of New Testament references in which it is applied to Him. Compare verses 4, 8, 21, and 25 with John 15:25, 2:17; Romans 15:3; Matthew 27:34; and Acts 1:20, in which other elements of the Psalm are fulfilled. Luke's statement concerning Mary, "And she brought forth her firstborn son" (2:7), implies that there were other sons born after Jesus. Acts 1:14 refers to "Mary the mother of Jesus," and "his brethren," who are mentioned in addition to the disciples.

These would in fact have been half-brothers and half-sisters of Jesus since they were sons and daughters of Joseph and Mary, while He was the Son of Mary only. James, the half-brother of the Lord, became the head of the church in Jerusalem and presided at the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:13,19). And two of the books of the New Testament, James and Jude, were written by the sons of Joseph and Mary.

The Roman Catholic Church attempts to explain these away as cousins, and therefore not children of Joseph and Mary at all. But the Greek has another word which means cousin, *anepsios*, as in Colossians 4:10: "Mark, the cousin of Barnabas."

Another reference indicating the same is Matthew 1:24,25: "And Joseph arose from his sleep, and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took unto him his wife; and knew her not till she brought forth a son: and he called his name Jesus." All that the Scripture says is that Joseph knew her not *until after* the birth of Jesus. The inference is that after the birth of Jesus Mary became wholly and completely the wife of Joseph, that they then

lived as normal husband and wife, and, taken in connection with the other references that we have, that other children were then born into their family.

The Scriptures affirm that Mary was a virgin until after Jesus was born. Nothing beyond that is needed to safeguard the Deity of Christ and Virginity of Mary. What more is needed to prove that Jesus was virgin-born? What more do we need to prove that Joseph was not the father of Jesus? In going beyond that and teaching the "perpetual virginity" of Mary, the Roman Catholics go beyond Scripture and set up manmade doctrine which has no authority.

The priests make repeated references to "the Virgin Mary." They acknowledge that Joseph and Mary were husband and wife and attempt to portray them as the ideal human family, but deny that they lived in a normal marriage relationship. But such an unnatural relationship absurd on the face of it, and nowhere in Scripture is approval ever given for such an abnormal relationship. Such an arrangement would have been contrary to nature and simply a frustration for both parties. The priests must either give up the idea of Mary's perpetual virginity, or give up the idea that Joseph and Mary represent the ideal human family.

Back of Rome's insistence on the perpetual virginity of Mary, of course, is the desire to justify the celibate state of the priests and nuns. Rome teaches that the single state is holier than the married state, that there is something inherently unclean and defiling about marriage. Says one Roman Catholic writer concerning the Virgin Mary: "It cannot with decency be imagined that the most holy vessel which was once consecrated to be a receptacle of the Deity should be afterwards desecrated and profaned by human usage." According to this teaching a woman's body is "desecrated and profaned" when she becomes a mother in the normal course of family life! A nun is holier than the mother of lovely children! And since Rome thinks of marriage as unholy and unclean, and since she has set herself to maintain the holiness, even the sinless perfection, of Mary, she finds herself obliged to teach that Mary always remained a virgin.

## **14 The Immaculate Conception**

The doctrine of the "Immaculate Conception" teaches that Mary herself was born without sin, that from the very first moment of her existence she was free from the taint of original sin. It holds that while all the rest of mankind are born into an inheritance of original sin, Mary alone, by a special miracle of God, was excepted. The original decree setting forth this doctrine was issued by Pope Pius IX, on December 8, 1854, and reads as follows:

"We declare, pronounce and define that the Most Blessed Virgin Mary at the first instant of her conception was preserved immaculate from all stain of original sin, by the singular grace and privilege of the Omnipotent God, in virtue of the merits of Jesus Christ, the Saviour of mankind, and that this doctrine was revealed by God, and therefore must be believed firmly and constantly by all the faithful" (from the papal bull *Ineffabilis Deus*, quoted in *The Tablet*, December 12, 1953).



Many Protestants misunderstand this doctrine and assume that it relates to the virgin birth of Christ. It relates, however, to Mary's own birth, and has nothing to do with the virgin birth of Christ.

Side by side with the doctrine that Mary was born without sin, there developed the doctrine that she did not commit sin at any time during her life. Then, as one link reached out for another, they gave her the attribute of impeccability, which means that she could not sin, that her nature was such that it was impossible for her to sin! All of this was a natural outgrowth of their worship of Mary, a further step in her deification. Their Mariolatry demanded it! They sensed that if they were to give her the worship that is due our Lord, she must be sinless.

But this doctrine, like the other distinctive doctrines of the Roman system, completely lacks any Scriptural support, and in fact is directly opposed to the Scripture doctrine of original sin. The Bible teaches that all men, with the single exception of Christ, who was deity incarnate and pre-existent, are sinners. Mary herself acknowledged her need of a Savior, for she said:

"My soul doth magnify the Lord, And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour" (Luke 1:46-47).

Note particularly Mary's words, "my Savior." No one other than a sinner needs a Savior, for no punishment or evil in any form can be inflicted upon a sinless person. Roman Catholics will have to take Mary's word or accuse "Our Lady" of lying. For in those words she confessed that she was a sinner in need of a Savior. That should settle once and for all whether or not a Christian should pray to her. Mary was an admirable character, to be sure. But she was not sinless, and she was only human. It was, therefore, necessary for her to be born again of the Spirit and to participate in the redemption provided by her Son.

The Scriptures say clearly: "All have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God" (that includes Mary—Romans 3:23); "Therefore, as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin; and so death passed unto *all* men, for that *all* sinned" (Romans 5:12); "For as in Adam *all* die" (1 Corinthians 15:22); "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ... If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us" (1 John 1:8,10); "There is none righteous, no, not one" (Romans 3:10).

Scripture tells us that after the birth of Jesus, Mary brought the two offerings as prescribed in the law—one, a burnt-offering (symbolizing complete surrender of the will to God), and the other a sin-offering (a sacrifice acknowledging sin) (Luke 2:22-24, Leviticus 12:6-8). The last time Mary is mentioned in the New Testament she is praying on the same plane as other needy Christians, not being prayed to by them (Acts 1:13-14).

The doctrine of the immaculate conception has had a long and varied history. It was unknown to the apostolic church, and it was not even a matter of discussion until several centuries after the death of Mary. It did not become an official doctrine until the year 1854, more than 18 centuries after Christ

was born of the virgin Mary, and so is one of the later doctrines of the Roman Church. The Council of Ephesus, 431, used the expression, "Mother of God," but its purpose was to emphasize the deity of Christ, not to set forth a doctrine concerning Mary. But popular opinion reasoned that since the birth of Christ occurred without any taint of sin, Mary herself must have been without sin, even without original sin, which is the lot of all other human beings.

Augustine, who died in A.D. 430, and who was admittedly the greatest theologian of the ancient church, contradicts the idea of immaculate conception, for he expressly declares that Mary's flesh was "flesh of sin" (*De Peccatorum Meritis*, II, c. 24); and again that "Mary, springing from Adam, died because of sin; and the flesh of our Lord, derived from Mary, died to take away sin." He expressly attributed original sin to Mary in his *Sermon on Psalm 2*. The doctrine was opposed by Chrysostom, Eusebius, Ambrose, Anselm, most of the great medieval schoolmen, including Thomas Aquinas, Bonaventure, Cardinal Cajetan (Luther's opponent at Augsburg), and also by two of the greatest of the popes, Gregory the Great and Innocent III.

Thomas Aquinas says that while Christ did not contract original sin in any way whatsoever, nevertheless "the blessed Virgin did contract original sin, but was cleansed therefrom before her birth" (*Summa Theol.* III, ad 2; Quest. 27, Art. 1-5); and again that, "It is to be held, therefore, that she was conceived in original sin, but was cleansed from it in a special manner" (*Compendium Theol.*, p. 224). Geddes MacGregor, in his book, *The Vatican Revolution*, says:

"So strong was St. Thomas' [Aquinas] opposition to the doctrine that it became almost a point of honor throughout the Dominican order to oppose the notion as theologically untenable. The Franciscans, however, following Duns Scotus, were more inclined to foster the notion, and the Jesuits, later on, made it one of their special concerns to do so. If Pope Pius IX was right, let alone infallible, it seems regrettable that the learned theologians of Christendom should have been left for eighteen hundred years with such a marked lack of guidance on the subject that they not only erred on it but erred almost in proportion to their stature as the leaders of the Church's intellectual life, the luminaries in the firmament of her mind" (p. 9; Beacon Press, Boston; Macmillan & Co., Ltd., London and Toronto).

The dispute between the Dominicans and the Franciscans became so bitter that Pope Sixtus IV eventually took a hand and prohibited further discussion, without deciding the question in favor of either side. The Council of Trent, though called primarily to deal with the problems arising because of the Protestant Reformation, was asked by Pope Pius IV to make a pronouncement, but left the matter untouched.

Nevertheless, the idea that Mary was sinless continued to gain ground. Members of the Jesuit order soon began to propagate the doctrine anew, and it was largely through their work that it was decreed by pope Pius IX, "the infallible successor of Peter," in 1854, and was officially ratified by the docile Vatican Council of 1870 (which council also ratified the decree concerning the infallibility of the pope in matters of faith and morals).

Most of the theologians of the Middle Ages opposed the doctrine because they were unable to harmonize it with the universality of original sin. Most of them held that if Mary were not a partaker of the sin and apostasy of the race, she could not be the point of contact between Deity and humanity as was required for the human nature of Christ. Hence in this case, even tradition, the usual refuge of the Roman Church in matters of doctrine, contradicts this papal dogma.

So, Mary is now placed on a plane of absolute equality with her adorable Son, Jesus Christ, so far as sinlessness is concerned. Like the other doctrines of Romanism, this one is said to be based on "the unanimous consent of the fathers." Though the dispute in reality continued for centuries and was at times bitter, it is accepted by all Roman Catholics today, for the official pronouncement by the pope leaves them no other choice. For along with the decree there was issued this condemnation of any who dare to disbelieve it:

"Therefore, if some shall presume to think in their hearts otherwise than we have defined (which God forbid), they shall know and thoroughly understand that they are by their own judgment condemned, *have made shipwreck concerning the faith*, and fallen away from the unity of the Church; and, moreover, that they, by this very act, subject themselves to the penalties ordained by law, if, by word, or writing, or by other external means, they dare to signify what they think in their heart."

What a flagrant example of false doctrine and ecclesiastical tyranny! It is the very thing that Peter condemned when he forbade "lording it over your charges" (Confraternity Version, 1 Peter 5:3). The Council of Trent pronounced its anathemas primarily against Protestants who dared to differ with its decrees. But the anathemas pronounced by the later councils have been directed primarily against their own people, in order to force them into line.

But why should any Roman Catholic embrace that doctrine when the greatest teachers in his own church rejected it? Indeed, why should anyone believe it if the Bible does not teach it?

## **15 The Assumption of Mary**

The latest addition to the long list of Roman Catholic beliefs ("inventions" might be a more accurate term) came on November 1, 1950, with the *ex cathedra* pronouncement by Pope Pius XII from St. Peter's chair that Mary's body was raised from the grave shortly after she died, that her body and soul were reunited, and that she was taken up and enthroned as Queen of Heaven. And to this pronouncement there was added the usual warning that "anyone who may henceforth doubt or deny this doctrine is utterly fallen away from the divine and Catholic faith." That means that it is a mortal sin for any Roman Catholic to refuse to believe this doctrine.

According to tradition, Mary's assumption was on this wise:

"On the third day after Mary's death, when the apostles gathered around her tomb, they found it empty. The sacred body had been carried up to the

celestial paradise. Jesus Himself came to conduct her hither; the whole court of heaven came to welcome with songs of triumph the Mother of the divine Lord. What a chorus of exultation! Hark how they cry, 'Lift up your gates, O ye princes, and be ye lifted up, O eternal gates, and the Queen of Glory shall enter in.'"

This is the type of account that might be expected from a medieval monk who was not satisfied with the information given in the Bible concerning Mary, and who undertook to describe the events as he imagined they might have happened. Here we are told that Mary was not only received into heaven, but that she was raised to a preeminence far above that which it is possible for any of the saints to attain. Because of her alleged cooperation in the passion of her Son, she is assigned a dignity beyond even the highest of the archangels. She was crowned Queen of Heaven by the eternal Father, and received a throne at her Son's right hand.

Thus Mary's body was miraculously preserved from corruption, and her resurrection and ascension are made to parallel Christ's resurrection and ascension. And she, like Him, is said to be enthroned in heaven where she makes intercession for the millions of people throughout the world who seek her assistance. This was a natural consequence of the 1854 pronouncement of the immaculate conception of Mary—a supernatural entrance into life calls for a supernatural exit from life. A mysterious halo of holiness falls over her entire being. Whereas the glorification of the saints will take place at the end of the world, her glorification has already taken place.

The late pope Pius XII was called the "Marian pope" for his work in promulgating this doctrine of the assumption of Mary and in declaring her Queen of Heaven. By his decree a twelve-month period was set aside for this purpose, involving Marian congresses, special services, and pilgrimages to Rome (which, of course, brought huge revenues to the Vatican, primarily from American pilgrims or tourists), with the avowed purpose of turning the eyes of the world more intensively toward Mary—which inevitably meant a proportionate turning away from Christ.

To a Protestant the most amazing thing about the doctrine of the assumption of Mary is that it has no Scripture proof whatever. Not one shred of evidence can Roman Catholics find in the Bible about Mary's death, burial, location of her grave, or when or how she ascended to live. And yet this troubles the Roman Church not in the least. Pope Pius XII made the pronouncement with the utmost confidence, relying on an alleged original "deposit of faith" given to the apostles by Jesus Christ—but which, we note, did not come clearly to light until some nineteen centuries later. The early church fathers, who were closest to those events, knew nothing at all about such an ascension. One marvels that such unscriptural, unhistorical, and senseless teachings could be embraced by any people and treated as if they were unchallengeable Scripture truth.

All that the Roman Church pretends to have from an early date supporting this doctrine is an apocalyptic legend, contained in a book, *In Gloriam Martyrum*, written by Gregory of Tours, southern France, in the sixth century. On the face of it, it is a mere fairy tale. This book narrates how as Mary lay dying

with the apostles gathered around her bed, Jesus appeared with His angels, committed her soul to the care of Gabriel, and her body was taken away in a cloud. As Edward J. Tanis appropriately remarks, "There is no more evidence for the truth of this than for the ghost stories told by our grandfathers" (What Rome Teaches, p. 26). But this curious medieval folklore has now been made an official doctrine of the Roman Church, and any member who refuses to accept it is declared by papal decree to be "utterly fallen away from the divine and Catholic faith."

Here we have a typical example of how Roman Catholic doctrines develop. Millions of people are required to believe in the bodily assumption of Mary without the church furnishing any Scriptural or historical proof, and they do so even without a protest. Not even in the schools of learning is there any voice raised to demand proof for such a doctrine. Whether Scriptural or unscriptural, historical or unhistorical, scientific or unscientific, reasonable or unreasonable, every member of the church is under obligation to accept it and believe it. This shows the baneful effect of the kindred doctrines that the pope is infallible in his *ex cathedra* statements, and that the average church member is not to try to reason out his faith but to accept implicitly whatever the church teaches.

The doctrine of the assumption of Mary is merely one of the so-called "logical conclusions" that the Roman theologians have drawn to support their system. Since Mary was sinless it is illogical, we are told, to assume that her body remained in the grave. But the answer is: *If Mary was sinless, why did she have to die at all?* Death is the penalty for sin. And where there is no sin there can be no penalty. God would be unjust if He punished the innocent. Either Mary was sinless and did not die, or she did have sin, she died, and her body remains in the grave.

Rome has so built up the Mary role that it has become an indispensable part of the present day church, so much so that if Mary were placed back in the position given her in Scripture, it would change the whole character of that church. Some have even suggested that the Roman Catholic Church should be called the "Marian Church," because in its life and practice it gives first place to her.

Following the *ex cathedra* pronouncements concerning the immaculate conception and the bodily assumption of Mary, there remains one major link to complete the process to which the Roman Church is committed in regard to Mary—that of her co-redeemership with Christ. This doctrine has been under discussion for several years. Some prominent churchmen have indicated that the next official pronouncement will declare that Mary, though technically not divine, is nevertheless associated with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in matters of salvation, and that she is the "Mediatrice of all Graces," or "Co-redemptrix with Christ." At the present rate we eventually shall have in heaven no longer a Trinity but a Quartet! Thus in every age Rome moves forward deliberately in the formulation of her doctrines.

## **16 Rome's Purpose in Exalting Mary**

In the development of this section extensive use has been made of an article,

*The Secret Purpose of Mariolatry*, by Dee Smith, published in Christian Heritage, December, 1958. In the Roman Church so much of myth and legend has been added to Mary's person that the real Mary has been largely forgotten. Although there are but few references to her in the Bible, she is there presented as a sublimely courageous character. In no other event is her true character brought out so clearly as in her vigil at Calvary. When most mothers would have been in a state of collapse, Mary persisted through a long and agonizing ordeal which only the most valiant spirit could have endured.

What a contrast there is between this noble, heroic woman and the gaudily dressed doll that we see in the Roman Catholic Church! Instead of the candid and forthright gaze of one conscious of the dignity and self-respect of her womanhood, the "Blessed Virgin" shrinks in servility with lowered head and lowered eyes, as if ashamed of it. One searches the empty face for a single trace of such character as must have graced the one chosen to nurture the Christ. The astute observer soon realizes that this insipid caricature decked out in superfluous finery has no relationship at all to the Mary of Scripture, and is nothing more than a sheer fabrication, a fiction promoted with ulterior purposes.

What, then, is the purpose of the hierarchy in promoting this particular type of mannequin? In what way does she serve their interests?

It is obvious that the Blessed Virgin represents a model for Roman Catholic women, or to put it more accurately, a strait jacket in which the clergy would like to fasten them. She represents the type of woman most conducive to sustained clerical control over the minds of the Roman masses. Her outstanding qualities are humility, obedience, pliability— abject submission to authority. It is this ideal that the Roman Church wishes to instill— indeed must instill—in Roman Catholic womanhood if it is to retain its hold on the people and maintain the services rendered in its many institutional enterprises such as schools and hospitals, which for the most part are run with unpaid labor.

The most important service rendered by this caricature of the Blessed Mary is that of maintaining the control of the Roman clergy over Roman Catholic women. For the promotion of the church program it is absolutely essential that they remain spineless, mindless, "meek and mild," as Mary is pictured, willing to accept dumbly a half-life in which their role is merely to bear and to drudge. In Roman Catholic countries this control remains as complete today as ever it was at any age in the past, and in countries such as our own any deviation from this norm is due to the good fortune of those women in being born in a Protestant country in which truly Christian influences make for the general uplift of womankind. The hierarchy exacts a service from the women of the church that it cannot obtain from the men, yet ironically its contempt for womankind is coupled with a full awareness that its whole power system rests upon the Catholic woman, and that if she ever raises her bowed head, the worldwide political machine will lose its efficiency and collapse irreparably.

In Roman Catholic countries, where women can be kept in total ignorance, the priests, who are educated and intelligent men, have never hesitated to play

upon their emotions, to instill fear into their souls, and to encourage superstition as that suited their purpose. In enlightened countries common knowledge prevents much of that deception, and Roman Catholic women to a large extent share with their Protestant sisters the blessings of a common culture.

It is well known that the Roman Catholic clergy in all countries urge their people to produce large families. This serves a double purpose. First, it keeps both mothers and fathers so fully occupied, the women in caring for the children, and the fathers in making a living, that they have little chance to look around and make undesirable comparisons between the ethics of their creed and that of the Protestant countries. And, secondly, this large family program serves to plug the hole in the dyke left by the defection of a large number who leave their church.

As an alternative to her child-bearing services for the glory of Rome, the Catholic woman is offered the privilege of becoming a holy drudge within the church, namely, a nun in a convent. Here again the Blessed Virgin plays a key role, that of recruiting officer. Add to this the masterly publicity job that has been done on the Roman Catholic girl from infancy to make the nun an object of holy glamour, almost a replica of the Blessed Virgin, and it is somewhat surprising to learn that in recent years the Roman Church is finding it increasingly difficult to persuade American girls to enter convents. It has become so difficult in fact that the Roman Church has been obliged to import sisters from Europe to meet the need for teachers and nurses.

In concluding the article previously mentioned, Dee Smith says:

"Presiding over the two functions of Roman Catholic womanhood, the child-bearing program and the unpaid labor pool, stands the puppet figure of the Blessed Virgin, at once the instigator and the patroness.

"Compared with her services in insuring the cushioned privilege and power of the hierarchy by subjugating the Roman Catholic women, the enormous wealth brought to Rome's exchequer by the financial exploitations of Mariolatry is merely incidental. Yet it is worth a glance.

"From the sale of 'holy' pictures, leaflets, scapulars, candles burned before her altars, fees for masses, and so on, the staggering intake at commercialized shrines such as St. Anne de Beaupre, Our Lady of Guadalupe, and others, a steady stream of gold flows into hierarchical coffers. One might almost paraphrase the Roman title, 'Mother of God,' to 'Minter of Gold.'

"But all this is as nothing beside the Blessed Virgin's vital and indispensable function in maintaining the status quo. Without the inspiration of the Blessed Virgin the Roman Catholic woman could not be kept at her business of child-bearing and drudging. Without the subjection of the Catholic woman, without her submissive acceptance of the yoke of Mary caricatured by the Roman Church, the all-powerful, self-indulgent ambitious men who constitute the Roman hierarchy would not be able to use their power as a weapon against human liberties and human rights.

"Without doubt, the devotion to the Blessed Virgin constantly impressed upon the Roman population by its clergy is inspired not by piety, but by expediency. For the clergy, devotion to Mary is not merely a matter of

dollars and cents, but of survival. Their sinecure depends on it. That is the secret purpose of Mariolatry.”

What, then, is the remedy for this situation, this entire problem of Mariology and Mariolatry? It is, indeed, very simple. Let the Roman Catholic people *read the Bible*, particularly the New Testament. There they will find the living, compassionate, redeeming Christ, with very little said about Mary. It is not without reason that the Roman priesthood has striven so hard to keep the Bible from the people, and that even now the people are strictly forbidden to read any Bible except one that contains the approved set of explanatory notes.

(Continued in the next chapter [Roman Catholicism By Lorraine Boettner Chapter VIII The Mass.](#))

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