

MARIOLOGY

For many Protestants, Mariology and Mariolatry are almost synonymous. This is unfortunate, as we will see, for there are many things Catholics and Protestants hold in common on the doctrine of Mary. These include her being the most blessed among women, her virgin conception of Christ the God-man, and by virtue of that her being in this sense “the Mother of God,”¹ a title used by both Luther and Calvin. To be sure, the title was used to stress the deity of Christ, not the privileges of Mary, but it was used nonetheless.

Since this section deals with the areas of difference, we will concentrate on the major points of tension between Catholics and Protestants on Mariology. These include the Roman Catholic dogmas of the perpetual virginity, immaculate conception, sinlessness, bodily assumption, mediatorship, and the veneration of Mary and her images.

THE PERPETUAL VIRGINITY OF MARY

¹ The controversy concerning the “Mother of Christ” (Gk: *Christotokos*) versus the “Mother of God” (Gk: *theotokos*) goes back to the fifth century, when the use of these terms caused no little disturbance in the church. “Mother of Christ” stresses Jesus’ *human* nature, while “Mother of God” emphasizes his *divine* nature. Nestorius, patriarch of Constantinople, championed the term “Mother of Christ,” while Cyril of Alexandria favored “Mother of God.” The Council of Ephesus (A.D. 431) decided in favor of Cyril. Harold O. J. Brown comments concerning *theotokos*: “The term, which means ‘God-bearing one’ (not precisely ‘Mother of God,’ as it is frequently translated), originally was descriptive of the man Jesus, born of Mary” (*Heresies: The Image of Christ*, p. 172). *Theotokos*, therefore, was designed to say more about Jesus than to glorify Mary.

Of the areas of difference between Catholics and Protestants on the doctrine of Mary, some are major and some are not. Since we will concentrate on the major ones we will mention only briefly a minor one first: the perpetual virginity of Mary.

The Lateran Synod of A.D. 649 was the first to stress the threefold character of Mary's virginity. As a result, Catholics believe that "Mary was a Virgin before, during and after the Birth of Jesus Christ."²

CATHOLIC DEFENSE OF MARY'S PERPETUAL VIRGINITY

Based on Isaiah 7:14 , Matthew 1:18 , and Luke 1:26 (cf. Gal. 4:4) both Protestants and Catholics believe that Jesus was conceived of a virgin. This has been universally taught in the Catholic church as a *de fide* dogma of the faith. Since all orthodox non-Catholic Christians agree we will not discuss Mary's initial virgin state further, given that our purpose in this section is to focus on the differences between Catholic and Protestant doctrine.

Catholics also believe, contrary to Protestants, that Jesus was also born in a way that left Mary a virgin.³ Ott puts it this way: "Mary bore her son without any violation of her virginal integrity."⁴ This is considered an official doctrine of Catholicism on the grounds of general proclamation. How this happened, however, is not a matter of Catholic dogma. Generally, traditional Catholic scholarship held that "Mary gave birth in miraculous fashion without opening of the womb and injury to the hymen, and consequently also without pains."⁵

Admitting that Mary's virginity was retained during Christ's birth has scant support in Scripture. Catholic scholars often point to the fact that "Holy Writ attests Mary's active role in the act of birth (Mt. 1 , 25 ; Luke 2 , 7): 'She brought forth' . . . , which does not seem to indicate a miraculous process."⁶

Catholic dogma also states that " *after* the birth of Jesus Mary remained a Virgin (*De fide*)."⁷ Hence, the title "perpetual virginity" is attributed to Mary. Roman Catholics defend this belief from both Scripture and tradition.

Argument from Scripture. Catholic scholars cite several verses to support Mary's perpetual virginity. Ott summarizes them as follows: "From the question which Mary puts to the Angel, Luke 1:34 : 'How shall this be done, because I know not man?' it is inferred [by some] that she had taken the resolve of constant virginity on the ground of special Divine enlightenment." Others "note that the fact that the dying Redeemer

2 Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, p. 203.

3 Ibid., p. 205.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid. Cf. Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* 3.28.2.

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid., p. 206, emphasis added.

entrusted His Mother to the protection of the Disciple John (John 19:26), ‘woman, behold thy Son,’ presupposes that Mary had no other children but Jesus.”⁸ As to the references to Jesus’ “brothers” (cf. Matt. 13:55 ; Mark 6:3 ; Gal. 1:19), Catholics generally follow Jerome’s argument that these refer to Jesus’ cousins, not blood brothers. Others have suggested that maybe these were Joseph’s sons by a previous marriage, thus preserving Mary’s perpetual virginity.

Argument from Tradition. Support for the doctrine is found in the early Fathers. Jerome claimed it was widely believed in his letter to Helvidius, and Gregory of Nyssa referred to it in A.D. 371. Pope Siricius (A.D. 393) held to Mary’s virginity after Christ’s birth, and the Fifth General Council at Constantine (A.D. 553) gave Mary the title of “perpetual virgin,” as did many later popes and Catholic liturgies. The doctrine was affirmed at later councils, such as Chalcedon and others.

Argument from Reason. One speculative argument sometimes used by Catholics emanates from Pope Siricius (A.D. 384–399), who argued that it would be horrifying to think of another birth issuing from the same virginal womb from which the Son of God was born.

PROTESTANT RESPONSE TO MARY’S PERPETUAL VIRGINITY

While it is not a major issue among orthodox non-Catholics, there have been some significant objections to the belief that Mary was a virgin *during* Christ’s birth. First, the fact that Mary “brought forth” Jesus at his birth does not indicate that it was miraculous. Rather, this is the normal way to indicate that, in the absence of a birthmaid, she delivered her own child. Second, all the descriptions of Christ’s birth indicate a normal birth, such as “born of a woman” (Gal. 4:4); “brought forth” (Luke 2:7); “delivered” (Luke 2:6); “birth” (Matt. 1:18); “born” (Matt. 2:2). Third, the Bible does not use any of the normal words for a miracle (sign, wonder, power) when speaking of Jesus’ birth, only of his conception (cf. Isa. 7:14 and Matt. 1:18–23). Fourth, it diminishes the humanness of the incarnational event to posit a miracle at the point of Jesus’ birth rather than his conception, as the Bible does. As the God-man, Jesus was human in every way possible apart from sin (Heb. 4:15). Fifth, the idea of a miraculous birth of Christ, without coming through the birth canal or causing pain, is more Gnostic than Christian. It is more like an event found in a second- or third-century apocryphal book than a first-century inspired Book.

Some Protestants have accepted Mary’s perpetual virginity, including Luther. He wrote, “She was a virgin before the birth of Christ (*ante partum*) and remained one at the birth (*in partu*) and after the birth (*post partum*),” even going so far as to affirm that “it neither adds nor detracts from faith. It is immaterial whether these men were

⁸ Ibid., p. 207.

Christ's cousins or his [half-] brothers begotten by Joseph.”⁹ However, many Protestants reject the Catholic view on the perpetual virginity of Mary.

Response to Argument from Scripture. Even Ott admits that there is no direct reference to Mary's perpetual virginity in any text of Scripture. And to infer from the above cited text that Mary was a virgin after Jesus' birth is unwarranted. First, as to the use of Luke 1:34 (that she had no relations with a man), Ott acknowledges that this supposition of a vow of virginity by Mary is contrary to the clear statement of Holy Writ that she was subsequently engaged to Joseph (Matt. 1:18).

Second, the fact that Jesus commended his mother to John at the cross need not imply that he had no brothers but only that they were not present, so he could not turn the responsibility over to them. Besides this, Jesus' brothers were not at this time believers (cf. John 7:5), so it was important that Mary be left in good spiritual hands.¹⁰

Third, there are clear references to Jesus' brothers and sisters in the context of his immediate family (namely, his legal father¹¹ and actual mother), which almost always indicate they were actual brothers, not cousins, as many Catholics believe. For example, Matthew 13:55 declares: “Is he not the carpenter's son? Is not his mother Mary and his brothers James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas? Are not his sisters all with us?” (cf. Matt. 12:46 and Gal. 1:19). There are several reasons why this text almost certainly indicates that Mary had other children after Jesus. For one thing, “brothers” and “sisters” are mentioned in the context of the family with the “carpenter's son” and “mother,” which clearly indicates they are immediate blood brothers. For another, the Greek term for “brother” (*adelphos*) here is the normal word for “blood brother.” In fact, there is no a single example where *adelphos* is used for “cousin” in the New Testament.¹² There is a

9 Eric W. Gritsch, “The Views of Luther and Lutheranism on the Veneration of Mary,” in *The One Mediator, The Saints, and Mary—Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue VIII*, ed. H. George Anderson (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1992), p. 239.

10 The fact that Jesus knew (in his omniscience) that one of his brothers, James, would later be converted (1 Cor. 15:7) is irrelevant since he was not there at the cross for Jesus to speak to him! Also, appealing to a natural law requirement that the closest blood relative is required to watch over her overlooks the fact that Jesus was showing his compassion for his mother in the absence of those who should have been caring for her. Further, since Jesus knew that commitment to him would separate even those with the closest blood ties (Matt. 10:34–36), it was appropriate for him to show this act of concern for his mother's care at that moment of his death.

11 That Joseph was not the actual father but only the legal father of Jesus does not change this fact, since he was the actual husband of Mary and the actual father of the other children. Further, the question is not over the use of the word “father” in this special sense but of the term “brother” in this normal sense.

12 The fact that there are not numerous New Testament examples of *adelphoi* meaning literal brothers does not diminish the argument, especially when it is remembered that (1) there are *many* such examples; (2) there are *none* using the available word “cousin”; and (3) literal brother is the *normal* meaning of the word in a family context.

word for “cousin” (*anepsios*), as in Colossians 4:10, where Mark is described as “the cousin [*anepsios*] of Barnabas.” But this word is not used in Matthew 13 or in any passage referring to Jesus’ brothers and sisters. Finally, the words “brother” and “sister” are used many other times in the New Testament in a family connection, always meaning a literal blood brother or sister (Mark 1:16, 19; 13:12; John 11:1–2; Acts 23:16; Rom. 16:15).

Even Ott calls implausible the suggestion that these “brothers” and “sisters” of Jesus were Joseph’s children from another marriage. If this were so then Joseph’s oldest son would have been heir to David’s throne and not Jesus, but the Bible affirms that Jesus was the heir (Matt. 1:1).¹³

Fourth, Matthew 1:25 seems to imply that Mary had sexual relations with Joseph after Jesus was born. Even the natural meaning of the Catholic translation (NAB) supports this idea when it says of Joseph, “He had no relations with her until she bore a son, and he named him Jesus.”¹⁴ Otherwise, why not say clearly that she never ever had sex with Joseph?¹⁵

In view of all this biblical evidence, there seems to be no real scriptural basis for the Catholic belief in Mary’s perpetual virginity.

Response to Argument from Tradition. Some early Fathers opposed the concept of the perpetual virginity of Mary, including Tertullian. The first-century Jewish historian Josephus referred to James as “the brother of Jesus.”¹⁶ Further, the doctrine was neither widely accepted nor formulated by creed or even local church councils until several centuries after the time of Christ. Like many other traditions, there is no evidence to support the idea that it was an apostolic teaching, as Catholics claim. Nor is it built on any alleged “unanimous consent of the Fathers,” of which the Council of Trent speaks.

Response to Argument from Reason. The idea that Mary had children after Jesus is only “horrifying,” as some Catholics claim, if one presupposes some kind of Gnostic

13 Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, p. 207.

14 The *New Jerusalem Bible* obscures the natural meaning of the Greek words for “until” (*eus ou*) here by mistranslating this verse in this unlikely way: “He had not intercourse with her when she gave birth to a son”! Who would have? Even Catholic scholar Raymond Brown states: “In my judgment the question of Mary’s remaining a virgin for the rest of her life belongs to post-biblical theology. . . .” *The Birth of the Messiah* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1977), p. 132. In other words, it is not really found in the New Testament.

15 Catholic appeal to the usage of “until” in passages like 2 Sam. 6:23 (where Michal had no children “until” the day of her death) is irrelevant, since the context (death) clearly indicates that she could not have any after her death! But Mary could have had children after she had Jesus, since she was still alive and young enough.

16 Josephus, “Antiquities,” in *Josephus: Complete Works*, ed. William Shiston (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1963), p. 423.

concept of virginal purity. In light of God's command to humanity to propagate children (Gen. 1:28) and God's command to Joseph, "do not be afraid to take Mary your wife to your home" (Matt. 1:20) and the statement "He had no relations with her until she bore a son" (Matt. 1:25), there is nothing unnatural or unbiblical about Joseph having sex with Mary after Jesus was born. In fact it can be argued that it would have been unnatural and unbiblical for him not to do so, since Scripture considers sex to be an essential part of marriage (cf. Gen. 1:28 ; 1 Cor. 7:1–7 ; Heb. 13:4).

A contemporary evangelical work on Mary argues against Mary's perpetual virginity from another angle. Since there is nothing defiling about sexual relations within marriage (Heb. 13:4), to suggest that Christ would not want to be conceived in a womb that would later conceive other humans is to take away from the glory that God would afterward give him for his voluntary humility in becoming human (Phil. 2:9–11).¹⁷

Having said all this, Luther's comment that this doctrine "neither adds nor detracts from faith," reminds us that it is not an essential difference between Catholics and Protestants.

THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

Roman Catholic teaching on Mary progressively widened the gap between Catholics and Protestants. The rift began with the proclamation of Mary's immaculate conception.

CATHOLIC DEFENSE OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

In 1854, Pope Pius IX, in the bull "Ineffabilis," pronounced infallible the following doctrine to be believed firmly and constantly by all the faithful: "The Most Holy Virgin Mary was in the first moment of her conception, by a unique gift of grace and privilege of Almighty God, in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, the Redeemer of mankind, preserved free from all stain of original sin."¹⁸ The decree went on to say that this "has been revealed by God, and on this account must be firmly and constantly believed by all the faithful."¹⁹ This pronouncement was "To the honor of the Holy and Undivided Trinity, to the glory and adornment of the Virgin Mother of God, [and] to the exaltation of the Catholic Faith."²⁰

The doctrine can be broken down into its various kinds of causes. "The efficient cause (*causa efficiens*) of the Immaculate Conception of Mary was Almighty God." The

17 See Elliot Miller and Kenneth R. Samples, *The Cult of the Virgin* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), p. 26.

18 Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, p. 199.

19 Ibid., cf. Denzinger, *Sources of Catholic Dogma*, no. 1641, p. 413.

20 Denzinger, *Sources of Catholic Dogma*, no. 1641, p. 413.

formal cause was the state of sanctifying grace, for “the essence of original sin consists (*formaliter*) in the lack of sanctifying grace, in consequence of the fall of Adam. Mary was preserved from this defect, so that she entered existence in the state of sanctifying grace.” The meritorious cause was “the redemption by Jesus Christ,” for “by reason of her natural origin, she, like all other children of Adam, was subject to the necessity of contracting original sin . . . but by a special intervention of God, she was preserved from stain of original sin.” Lastly, “The final cause [purpose, end] . . . of the Immaculate conception of Mary is her Motherhood of God.”²¹

Catholic scholars offer both a biblical and traditional defense of the dogma of the immaculate conception. The biblical basis is sought in several texts.

ARGUMENT FROM SCRIPTURE

Three verses are often used to defend this dogma. The first is found in Genesis 3:15 . Many Catholic scholars acknowledge that the “literal sense” of this text means that “between Satan and his followers on the one hand, and Eve and her posterity on the other hand, there is to be constant moral warfare. . . . The posterity of Eve includes the Messiah, in whose power humanity will win a victory over Satan.” However, they go on to insist that “the seed of the woman was understood as referring to the Redeemer . . . and thus the Mother of the Redeemer came to be seen in the woman.” Even the infallible pronouncement of the immaculate conception “approves of this messianic-marianic interpretation.”²²

Luke 1:28 is also used to support the immaculate conception. “Hail, favored one!” or “one full of grace.” Ott argues that “The expression ‘full of grace’ . . . in the angel’s salutation, represents the proper name, and must on this account express a characteristic quality of Mary. . . . However, it is perfect only if it be perfect not only intensively but also extensively, that is, if it extends over her whole life, beginning with her entry into the world.”²³ Thus, according to Catholic scholars, we have a reference here to Mary’s immaculate conception.

Luke 1:42 is offered in defense of this doctrine. When Elizabeth said, “Most blessed are you among women,” Ott says that the “blessing of God which rests upon Mary is made parallel to the blessing of God which rests upon Christ in His humanity. This parallelism suggests that Mary, just like Christ, was from the beginning of her existence, free from all sin.”²⁴

ARGUMENT FROM TRADITION

21 Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, p. 199.

22 *Ibid.*, p. 200.

23 *Ibid.*

24 *Ibid.*, p. 201.

Catholic scholars point to a few isolated references that they believe imply Mary's immaculate conception.²⁵ The Lateran Council of A.D. 649 refers to her as "immaculate Mary,"²⁶ though it is not clear that this refers to her being conceived without a sin nature. Ott points out that "Since the seventh century a Feast of the Conception of St. Anne, that is, of the passive conception of Mary, was celebrated in the Greek Eastern Church."²⁷ Later, in the early twelfth century, the British monk Eadmer (c. A.D. 1060–1128) advocated the immaculate conception of Mary. John Duns Scotus (d. 1308) defended the doctrine, and in 1439 the Council of Basle declared in favor of the teaching. The Council of Trent referred obliquely to Mary as "the Immaculate Virgin" but did not pronounce on the dogma. Not until 1854 did Pope Pius IX pronounce the immaculate conception of Mary as dogma.

ARGUMENT FROM REASON

The scholastic axiom that "God could do it, He ought to do it, therefore He did it" is sometimes used to support this dogma.²⁸ This argument was found previously in the writings of the twelfth-century British monk Eadmer.

PROTESTANT RESPONSE TO THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

Protestants, like some noted Catholic theologians before them, reject the doctrine of the immaculate conception of Mary. Following Aquinas, they believe it is inconsistent with the scriptural pronouncement on the universality of sin.

RESPONSE TO ARGUMENT FROM SCRIPTURE

Generally, three texts are used to support the immaculate conception. As we shall see, they all fall far short of proving this doctrine.

Genesis 3:15. The fact that even Catholic authorities like Ott acknowledge that the "literal sense" of this text does not refer to Mary but to Eve and her offspring should be argument enough that Mary cannot be legitimately inferred from this text. Even if by extension or culmination Mary is found in this text in some indirect way, it is a gigantic leap from this to her immaculate conception, which is nowhere stated or implied in this passage. The literal sense is that Eve (not Mary) and her posterity will win in their moral warfare against Satan and his offspring, culminating in the crushing victory of the Messiah over Satan and his hosts. The "woman" is obviously Eve, the "offspring" are

25 For example, Bishop Ambrose (A.D. 388) said that Mary was "free from every stain of sin" (*Commentary on Psalm 118* , 22:30), and Augustine (A.D. 415) exempted Mary from the universality of sin (*On Nature and Grace*, 36:42).

26 See Denzinger, *Sources of Catholic Dogma*, no. 256, p. 102.

27 Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, p. 201.

28 Ibid., p. 203.

clearly the literal offspring of Eve (cf. 4:1 , 25), and the victory is the victory of Christ over Satan (cf. Rom. 16:20).

Protestants need not object to the Catholic argument that, just as the Messiah is found by extension and culmination in the term “offspring,” even so Mary the mother of the Messiah is implied too. Be this as it may, the point still stands that there is no necessary or logical connection between Mary being the mother of the Messiah and her being conceived without sin.

Luke 1:28 . The angel said to Mary, “Hail, favored one!” Ott’s argument that the expression “full of grace” represents the proper name and therefore expresses a characteristic quality of Mary which must be understood extensively over her whole life bristles with problems. First, it is by no means necessary to take this expression as a proper name. Even contemporary Catholic versions of the Bible do not translate it as a proper name (e.g., NAB). It could refer simply to her state of being as a recipient of God’s favor.

Further, even if the expression were a proper name and referred to her essential character it is not necessary to take it extensively all the way back to her birth. The only way one could conclude this is by factors beyond the text itself. Catholics believe that tradition fills in what the Scriptures do not declare here. If this is so, then why appeal to Scripture for support? Why not just admit what many contemporary Catholics are reluctant to acknowledge, namely, that this teaching is not found in Scripture but was added centuries later by tradition?

Also, even if it were taken extensively to Mary’s beginning it does not necessarily mean an immaculate conception. It could simply refer to God’s grace being upon her life from the point of conception. That was true of others, including Jeremiah (Jer. 1) and John the Baptist (Luke 1), who were not immaculately conceived.

Finally, as Miller and Samples note in their excellent treatment of Mariology, *The Cult of the Virgin*, the Greek term for “full of grace” is *charito*. “ *Charito* is used of believers in Ephesians 1:6 without implying sinless perfection. So again there is hence nothing about Luke 1:28 that establishes the doctrine of the immaculate conception. That Mary was uniquely favored to be the mother of her Lord is the only necessary inference.”²⁹ One must appeal to traditions outside the Bible, and late ones at that, to find support for this Catholic dogma.

Luke 1:41 . Ott’s reasoning that this blessing is parallel to the one on Christ and, therefore, suggests that “Mary, just like Christ, was from the beginning of her existence, free from all sin”³⁰ is tenuous. The passage nowhere makes any such parallel between Mary and Christ. And even if the parallel could somehow be made, an immaculate

²⁹ Miller and Samples, *Cult of the Virgin*, p. 34.

³⁰ Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, p. 201.

conception would not necessarily follow from it. Jesus was conceived of a virgin. Mary was not so conceived; she had two natural parents.

RESPONSE TO ARGUMENT FROM TRADITION

Actually, the historical argument for the immaculate conception is very weak, with no conciliar reference to it until the twelfth century! The earlier possible references to it are late (4th century), scant, and indecisive, some not specifically referring to Mary's lack of original sin. There was no church-wide pronouncement on it by the church until the nineteenth century! And even when it was infallibly defined it was a dogma proclaimed solely by the authority of the pope, without the official sanction of a church council. This is scarcely early and wide support for the dogma, and it makes a sham of the "unanimous consent of the Fathers."

In point of fact, even Ott admits that many of the greatest scholastic theologians of the Catholic church flatly rejected the doctrine, including Peter Lombard, Albert the Great, Bonaventure, and Thomas Aquinas!³¹ They argued rightly that exempting Mary from original sin was inconsistent with the universality of original sin and the necessity of redemption for all human beings.³² In spite of Scotus's attempt to reconcile these, this is still the most serious objection. Duns Scotus argued that Mary was in need of salvation by Christ, like any other creature, but that, unlike all other creatures, she was saved from a sin nature by way of prevention, not by way of cure as the rest of us are. There are, however, many objections to this noble but futile effort to save this extra-biblical tradition. First, even if this were theoretically possible, there is no actual evidence that it is the case. Second, it is contrary to Mary's own confession that God was her "Savior" (Luke 1:46) after her conception, not just before it, by way of prevention. Third, at best the proposed solution of Scotus is *deus ex machina*, smacking of a desperate attempt to rescue a desired but unbiblical doctrine that was locked in deadly conflict with another clear teaching of Scripture and the church.

RESPONSE TO ARGUMENT FROM REASON

The scholastic axiom that "God could do it; He ought to do it, therefore He did it" is a weak justification of the dogma of the immaculate conception. Even those who use it admit that it "gives no certainty."³³ Indeed, it is a weak argument. Possibility does not prove actuality. Nor does desirability demonstrate reality.

THE SINLESSNESS OF MARY

³¹ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* 3.27.2.

³² Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, p. 201.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 202.

Not only was Mary conceived without original sin but, according to Catholic teaching, “from her conception Mary was free from all motions of concupiscence.” And “in consequence of a special privilege of grace from God, Mary was free from every personal sin during her whole life.” The Council of Trent declared that “no justified person can for his whole life avoid all sins, even venial sins, except on the ground of a special privilege from God such as the Church holds was given to the Blessed Virgin.”³⁴

CATHOLIC DEFENSE OF THE SINLESSNESS OF MARY

According to Catholic dogma, Mary had neither the tendency to sin nor did she ever actually sin during her entire life. Catholics use both Scripture and tradition to support this view.

ARGUMENT FROM SCRIPTURE

According to Roman Catholic teaching, “Mary’s sinlessness may be deduced from the text: Luke 1:28 : ‘Hail, full of grace!’ since personal moral defects are irreconcilable with fullness of grace.”³⁵ Grace is taken here to be both extensive and preventative.

ARGUMENT FROM TRADITION

The house of church fathers was divided on Mary’s sinlessness. Nonetheless, Roman Catholic scholars point with pride to the fact that “the Latin Patristic authors unanimously teach the doctrine of the sinlessness of Mary.”³⁶ Again, this is far short of the “unanimous consent” of all church fathers, which the Council of Trent claimed for dogma.

PROTESTANT RESPONSE TO THE SINLESSNESS OF MARY

The Bible does not support the sinlessness of Mary. To the contrary, it affirms her sinfulness. Speaking as a sinner, Mary said, “my spirit rejoices in God my savior” (Luke 1:46). An examination of the text used to prove Mary’s sinlessness reveals the lack of any real support for such a doctrine. Contrary to Scotus’s solution of her being prevented from needing to be saved from sin, she was confessing her present need (after her conception) of a Savior. Indeed, she even presented an offering to the Jewish priest arising out of her sinful condition (Luke 2:22–24) which was required by law (Lev. 12). This would not have been necessary if she were sinless.

RESPONSE TO ARGUMENT FROM SCRIPTURE

34 Ibid., p. 203 (cf. Denzinger, *Sources of Catholic Dogma*, 833, p. 260).

35 Ibid., following the Latin Vulgate.

36 Ibid.

The Catholic argument that Mary was “full of grace” at the annunciation in no way proves sinlessness during her entire life. First, the phrase “full of grace” is an inaccurate rendering based on the Latin Vulgate that is corrected by the modern Catholic Bible (NAB), which translates it simply “favored one.” The Vulgate’s misleading rendering became the basis for the idea that grace extended throughout Mary’s life. Second, taken in context the salutation of the angel is only a reference to her state at that moment, not to her entire life. It does not affirm that she was always and would always be full of grace but only that she was at that time. Third, the grace given here to Mary was not only limited in time but also in function. The grace she received was for the task of being the mother of the Messiah, not to prevent her from any sin. Finally, the stress on fullness of grace is misleading, since even Catholic scholars admit that Mary was in need of redemption. Why, if she was not a sinner? Ott says that Mary “required redemption and was redeemed by Christ.”³⁷ And, as we have already seen, it is biblically unfounded to suggest that she was prevented from inheriting sins rather than being delivered from it.

RESPONSE TO ARGUMENT FROM TRADITION

Besides the lack of scriptural support for Mary’s sinlessness the argument from the Fathers is weak. Even Ott admits that many “Greek Fathers (Origen, St. Basil, St. John Chrysostom, St. Cyril of Alexander) taught that Mary suffered from venial personal faults, such as ambition and vanity, doubt about the message of the Angel, and lack of faith under the Cross.”³⁸ Likewise, almost all major scholastic fathers, including Aquinas, rejected the immaculate conception. This being so, Mary’s consequent sinlessness must also be brought into question, despite scholastic protest to the contrary.³⁹ In spite of all the evidence to the contrary, however, the Council of Trent affirmed Mary’s sinlessness as an infallible truth of the Catholic faith.

THE BODILY ASSUMPTION OF MARY

The Roman Catholic dogmas concerning Mary reveal a progressive glorification of her. According to official Catholic doctrine, Mary moved from being sinless to being immaculately conceived to being bodily assumed into heaven and even venerated as Mediatrix (a mediator of grace) and “Queen of Heaven.” There is a strong cult of Mary within the Roman Catholic Church that would carry it even further. Indeed, as we shall see, in practice many folk Catholics virtually deify Mary.

37 Ibid., p. 212.

38 Ibid., p. 203.

39 Aquinas, for example, accepted the belief that Mary was free from personal sin from the time of her birth on.

CATHOLIC DEFENSE OF THE BODILY ASSUMPTION OF MARY

According to Catholic dogma, “Mary was assumed body and soul into heaven.”⁴⁰ In 1950, the Roman Catholic Church spoke *ex cathedra* to proclaim infallibly that “just as the glorious resurrection of Christ was an essential part, and final evidence of the victory, so the Blessed Virgin’s common struggle with her son was to be concluded with the ‘glorification’ of her virginal body.”⁴¹ In the bodily assumption, Mary “has finally attained as the highest crown of her privileges, that she should be immune from the corruption of the tomb, and that in the same manner as her Son she would overcome death and be taken away soul and body to the supernatural glory of heaven, where as Queen she would shine forth at the right hand of the same Son of hers, the Immortal King of Ages.”⁴²

Catholics defend the dogma of Mary’s bodily assumption by both Scripture and tradition. Biblical support is scant, but Catholic scholars still use several texts in support of it.

ARGUMENT FROM SCRIPTURE

1 Corinthians 15:23 . From this text Catholic theologians argue the “possibility” of Mary’s bodily assumption on the basis of her being one of those “who belong to Christ.”⁴³ They fail to specify just how Mary’s bodily assumption before other believers is compatible with this text.

Matthew 27:52–53 . Ott argues that the graves opening after Jesus’ resurrection and many saints emerging shows the “probability” of the bodily assumption of Mary. For “If . . . the justified of the Old Covenant were called to perfection of salvation immediately after the conclusion of the redemptive work of Christ, then it is possible and probable that the Mother of the Lord was called to it also.”⁴⁴

Luke 1:28 . Scholastic theologians argue Mary’s bodily assumption from her fullness of grace spoken of in this verse. Ott argues that “since she was full of grace she remained preserved from the three-fold curse of sin (Gn. 3 , 16–19), as well as from her return to dust.”⁴⁵

40 Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, p. 208.

41 Denzinger, *Sources of Catholic Dogma*, no. 2331, p. 647.

42 Ibid., no. 2332, p. 648.

43 Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, p. 208.

44 Ibid., p. 209.

45 Ibid.

Revelation 12:1–6 . This passage speaks of a woman who gave birth to “a male child, destined to rule all the nations” (= Christ) who was “caught up to God and his throne.” On this basis “scholastic theology sees also the transfigured mother of Christ.”⁴⁶

Psalms 131:8 (132:8 AV , NIV) . Some Fathers refer to passages like this psalm “in a typical sense to the mystery of the bodily assumption; ‘Arise, O Lord, into thy resting place; thou and the ark which thou hast sanctified,’ ” arguing that “the Ark of the Covenant made from incorruptible wood, [was] . . . a type of the incorruptible body of Mary.”⁴⁷

Genesis 3:15 . Modern Catholic theologians often cite this text in support of the bodily assumption of Mary, “since by the seed of the woman it understands Christ, and by the woman, Mary, it is argued that as Mary had an intimate share in Christ’s battle against Satan and in His victory over death.”⁴⁸

SPECULATIVE ARGUMENTS FOR THE BODILY ASSUMPTION OF MARY

Catholic theologians infer the bodily assumption of Mary from several other dogmas about her. Each is briefly stated here.

Argument from the Freedom from Sin . Catholicism argues that, since the dissolution of the body is a punishment of sin and Mary was sinless, “it was fitting that her body should be excepted from the general law of dissolution and immediately assumed into the glory of Heaven, in accordance with God’s original plan for mankind.”⁴⁹

Argument from the Motherhood of God . According to this reasoning, “As the body of Christ originated from the body of Mary . . . it was fitting that Mary’s body, should share the lot of the body of Christ. As a physico-spiritual relationship the Motherhood of Mary demands a likeness to her Divine Son in body and soul.”⁵⁰

Argument from the Perpetual Virginity of Mary . This speculation suggests that, “As Mary’s body was preserved unimpaired in virginal integrity, it was fitting that it should not be subject to destruction after death.”⁵¹ In short, Mary’s perpetual virginity is used to prove her bodily immortality.

Argument from Mary’s Participation in Christ’s Work . Catholic theology also speculates that “As Mary, in her capacity of Mother of the Redeemer, took a most

46 Ibid.

47 Ibid. See also Patrick Madrid, “Ark of the New Covenant,” *This Rock* (December 1991): cover and pp. 9f.

48 Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, p. 209.

49 Ibid.

50 Ibid.

51 Ibid.

intimate share in the redemptive work of her Son it was fitting that, on the completion of her earthly life, she should attain to the full fruit of the Redemption, which consists in the glorification of soul and body.”⁵² This kind of argument was later to lead to Mary’s role as coredeptrix and Queen of Heaven (see below).

PROTESTANT RESPONSE TO THE BODILY ASSUMPTION OF MARY

RESPONSE TO ARGUMENT FROM SCRIPTURE

Even noted defenders of Catholic dogma admit that “direct and express scriptural proofs are not to be had.”⁵³ They speak rather of the “possibility” or “probability” of it, based on certain texts. When, however, the texts are examined closely, no such probability exists.

Matthew 27:52–53 . The fact that some saints arose immediately after Jesus’ resurrection in no way shows that Mary was bodily assumed into heaven. First, the text speaks only of some being raised from their graves, not of ascending into heaven. Second, many scholars believe these saints were only resuscitated like

Lazarus, not resurrected in immortal bodies. Third, Mary is not mentioned in the group that was raised, nor is there any mention anywhere in Scripture of her being raised at a later time. So the belief that Mary was bodily assumed into heaven has no basis in this text whatsoever.

Luke 1:28 . Scholastic theology’s inference of Mary’s bodily assumption from her “fullness of grace” spoken of in this verse is unjustified for two basic reasons. First, as scholastic theology admit, no such teaching is explicit in this text. Second, “fullness of grace” is not such a theologically precise term as to carry the weight of this dogma. This phrase in no way specifies that Mary was “preserved from the three-fold curse of sin (Gn. 3 , 16–19), as well as from her return to dust.”⁵⁴

Revelation 12:1–6 . This passage does not support the bodily assumption of Mary for several reasons. First, the “woman” does not represent Mary but the nation of Israel for whom there is “a place prepared by God, that there she might be taken care of for twelve hundred and sixty days” (v. 6) during the tribulation period before Christ returns to earth (cf. Rev. 11:2–3).

Second, it was only Christ, not the woman who was “caught up to God and his throne” (v. 5). It is pure eisegesis (reading into the text), not legitimate exegesis (reading out of the text) to see Mary’s bodily assumption here. Likewise, to argue that Mary,

52 Ibid.

53 Ibid., p. 208.

54 Ibid., p. 209.

though not being caught up here, is pictured in heaven in the celestial imagery is equally farfetched. Nothing of the kind is stated in this text that would entail a belief in her bodily assumption, at least not before the resurrection of the rest of the saints (1 Thess. 4:13–18).

Psalm 131:8 (132:8 AV , NIV). Using verses like this one only confirms the impression that Roman Catholics are grasping for proof texts. First, it is confessedly not a literal interpretation of the text but only an alleged “typical” one which, in this case, boils down to an invalid argument from analogy. Second, the analogy between the ark and Mary is farfetched.⁵⁵ Nowhere is any such comparison stated or implied in Scripture. Nor is Mary’s immaculate conception foreshadowed in the creation of the universe in an immaculate state, nor in Eve, the mother of our race. Creating analogies like these prove nothing, except that one has run out of any real biblical support for the dogma. One could prove almost anything by the same kind of argument. Third, the argument is based on another baseless belief that Mary’s body was incorruptible after her death and before her alleged assumption. The

Bible says this was true of Christ (Acts 2:30–31), but it nowhere affirms this of Mary.⁵⁶ Indeed, the Bible equates death with the corruption of all human beings except Christ (cf. 1 Cor. 15:42 , 53). Yet most Fathers and theologians of the Catholic church believe that “Mary suffered a temporal death” like other mortals.⁵⁷ Why then should we believe she was exempted from physical corruption any more than she was not exempted from physical death entailed by the fall (Rom. 5:12)?

55 One Catholic apologist calls this the “most compelling type of Mary’s Immaculate Conception” (see Madrid, “Ark of the New Covenant,” p. 12). It is only compelling if one makes the unbiblical and unjustified assumption that it is a *valid* analogy. One can note certain similarities between many things that prove nothing (e.g., there are many strong similarities between good counterfeit currency and genuine bills). Thus, even proponents of this view have to admit that none of this “proves” the immaculate conception (ibid.). The ineptness of these kinds of analogies surface in Madrid’s question: “If you could have created your own mother [as God did in Mary], wouldn’t you have made her the most beautiful, virtuous, perfect woman possible?” (ibid.). Sure, I would have done a lot of things differently than God did. If I were God and could have created the most beautiful and perfect place for my Son to be born it would not have been a stinky, dirty animal stable! God, however, chose otherwise.

56 Even if, as some argue, this text (via David’s anticipation of his deliverance in Ps. 16:10) includes Mary’s bodily resurrection, nevertheless it does not apply to her in any more special sense than it does to the resurrection of the whole human race in the endtimes (cf. John 5:28–29 ; 11:24 ; 1 Cor. 15:20–21).

57 Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, p. 207. A contemporary Catholic lay apologist comments: “The Church has never formally defined whether she [Mary] died or not, and the integrity of the doctrine of the Assumption would not be impaired if she did not die, but the almost universal consensus is that she did in fact die” (Karl Keating, *Catholicism and Fundamentalism* [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988], p. 273).

Genesis 3:15. The bodily assumption of Mary is no more found in this text than is the immaculate conception. Even the Catholic authority on dogma, Ludwig Ott, admits that “It is true that the literal reference of the text is to Eve and not Mary.”⁵⁸ The text is clearly speaking about Eve and her descendants, not Mary. And, as already noted, the indirect sense in which Mary is involved as the mother of the “seed” or “offspring” (Christ) who will crush the serpent in no way even implies her sinlessness or immaculate conception.

RESPONSE TO SPECULATIVE ARGUMENTS

Catholic theologians infer the bodily assumption of Mary from several other Catholic dogmas about her. Each will be briefly stated here.

Freedom from Sin Argument. Mary’s bodily assumption cannot be legitimately inferred from her alleged sinlessness for many reasons. First, it assumes her sinlessness, which is not based in Scripture and even has strong arguments against it from the Fathers, such as Thomas Aquinas and others. Second, even Catholic scholars admit that there is no necessary connection here, thus settling for the weaker phrase “it is fitting.” At best this would show only the possibility, not probability, of this conclusion. Third, most Catholic authorities admit that Mary died. According to Paul (Rom. 5:12), however, death is a punishment for sin. It begs the question to say that Mary did not die a *natural* death; if she was sinless, why should she die at all? She should have been taken bodily into heaven without death. The fact that Mary died shows that she was not exempt from punishment due to inherited original sin, and thus reveals that she must have had original sin.

Motherhood of God Argument. This too is a weak argument. For one thing, it depends on another assumption, namely, that Mary was the mother of God in any sense more than that she was the human channel through which the God-man was brought into this world. As we will see below, while classical Protestantism accepts the term “Mother of God,” it rejects the veneration baggage with which Catholic theology had laden it. Further, the use of the phrase “it was fitting” belies the weakness of the argument’s premise. There certainly is no logically necessary connection between Mary being bodily assumed into heaven and her being the earthly mother of Jesus.

Perpetual Virginity Argument. Here again we have a premise that is an assumption (not based on Scripture) and an inference that is not necessary. A lot of things are merely “fitting” that never happen. Here too we have a weak analogy and a conclusion that does not validly follow from it.

Mary’s Participation in Christ’s Work Argument. Two assumptions in this argument need to be challenged. First, Mary’s alleged redemptive capacity as mother of the Redeemer is not supported by Scripture (see below). In fact, even Catholic theology

58 Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, p. 209.

admits that Christ alone, not Mary, suffered for our sins on the cross. Further, a bodily assumption is a large and invalid leap from sharing with her Son in his redemptive work.

RESPONSE TO ARGUMENT FROM TRADITION

Even if one grants the validity of arguments from tradition in general, the traditional argument for the bodily assumption of Mary is weak. Catholic authorities admit that “The idea of the bodily assumption of Mary is first expressed in certain transitus-narratives of the fifth and sixth centuries.” Further, they acknowledge that “these are apocryphal.”⁵⁹ In fact, the bodily assumption of Mary was not held by most of the early church fathers. Ott admits that belief in this dogma did not appear until nearly the seventh century.⁶⁰ Noted Catholic theologian Karl Rahner acknowledged that “at best it can only be considered as evidence of theological speculation about Mary, which has been given the form of an ostensible historical account.” He adds, “there is nothing of any historical value in such apocryphal works.”⁶¹

As Miller and Samples aptly note, “To the Protestant, who views Scripture as the only secure anchor for theology, Catholic Mariology having cut loose from this anchor is hopelessly adrift upon a sea of splendid but dubious ‘Roman logic.’ ” Citing Victor Buksbaze, “the non-Catholic student of Mariology who tries to follow its shaky premises and strained conclusions finds himself in a kind of theological Alice in Wonderland in which things, in spite of their seeming logic, become ‘curriouiser and curriouiser.’ ”⁶²

THE MEDIATORSHIP OF MARY

Another area of tension with Protestant theology is the Catholic belief in the mediatorship of Mary. This cooperative work with Christ in redemption runs headlong into conflict with the Protestant belief in the uniqueness of Christ’s atonement.

CATHOLIC DEFENSE OF THE MEDIATORSHIP OF MARY

According to Catholic theology, “although Christ is the sole Mediator between God and man (I Tim. 2 , 5), since He alone, by His death on the Cross, fully reconciled mankind with God, this does not exclude a secondary mediatorship, subordinate to Christ.”⁶³ Aquinas stated the relationship this way: “To unite men to God perfectly (perfective)

59 Ibid., pp. 209–10.

60 Ibid., p. 210.

61 Karl Rahner, *The Mother of Our Lord* (Wheathampstead, Hertfordshire: Anthony Clarke Books, 1963), p. 16.

62 Miller and Samples, *Cult of the Virgin*, p. 43.

63 Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, p. 211.

appertains to Christ according to 2 Cor. V. 19 . Therefore Christ alone is the perfect mediator between God and man, inasmuch as He reconciled mankind with God by His death. . . . But there is nothing to prevent others in a certain way (*secundum quid*) from being called mediators between God and man, in so far as they, by preparing or serving . . . , co-operate in uniting men to God.”⁶⁴

Mary was called “mediatrix” in the 1854 bull “Ineffabilis” of Pope Pius IX, the same document that proclaimed her immaculate conception. Catholic authorities take this to mean two things: “1. Mary is the Mediatrix of all graces by her co-operation in the Incarnation. And 2. Mary is the Mediatrix of all graces by her intercession in Heaven.”⁶⁵ According to Pope Leo XIII in “Magnae Dei Matris”: “Nothing whatever of that immense treasure of all graces, which the Lord brought us . . . is granted to us save through Mary, so that, just as no one can come to the Father on high except through the Son, so almost in the same manner, no one can come to Christ except through his Mother.”⁶⁶

Mary’s cooperation in the incarnation has earned her “the title Coredemptrix = Coredempstress, which has been current since the fifteenth century.”⁶⁷ This, Catholic scholars remind us, “must not be conceived in the sense of an equation of the efficacy of Mary with the redemptive activity of Christ, the sole Redeemer of humanity (I Tim. 2 , 5).” For “she herself required redemption and in fact was redeemed by Christ.”⁶⁸ Indeed, “Christ alone truly offered the sacrifice of atonement on the Cross; Mary merely gave him moral support in this action. Thus Mary is not entitled to the title “Priest” (*sacerdos*).” Nonetheless, as Catholic scholars point out, “In the power of the grace of Redemption merited by Christ, Mary, by her spiritual entering into the sacrifice of her Divine son for men, made atonement for the sins of men, and (*de congruo*) merited the application of the redemptive grace of Christ. In this manner she co-operates in the subjective redemption of mankind.”⁶⁹ Christ alone, of course, provided the objective basis for redemption in his death on the cross.

In addition to being the Mediatrix or channel through which Christ and his redemption came into the world, Catholics hold that “Mary is Mediatrix of all graces by her intercession in Heaven.” That is, “Since her assumption into Heaven, Mary co-operates in the application of the grace of Redemption to man. She participates in the distribution of grace by her maternal intercession which is far inferior in efficacy to that of the intercessory prayer of Christ, the High Priest, but surpasses far the intercessory

64 Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* 3.26.1; cited in *ibid.*, p. 211.

65 Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, pp. 212–13. Other Catholic scholars claim this has not been infallibly pronounced and do not hold it to be true.

66 Quoted in Pius X, 28; cited in Miller and Samples, *Cult of the Virgin*, p. 50.

67 Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, p. 212. Here again less Marian Catholic scholars contend that this is not mandatory Catholic doctrine.

68 *Ibid.*

69 *Ibid.*, p. 213.

prayer of all the other saints.”⁷⁰ According to many Catholic theologians, Mary is the intercessory channel of all grace bestowed on God’s people. However, Ott claims that “The implication of this is not that we are obligated to beg for all graces through Mary, not that Mary’s intercession is intrinsically necessary for the application of the grace, but that, according to God’s positive ordinance, the redemptive grace of Christ is conferred on nobody without the actual intercessory co-operation of Mary.”⁷¹

ARGUMENT FROM SCRIPTURE AND TRADITION

Both biblical and traditional evidence have been offered for Mary’s role as Mediatrix. The biblical texts cited, however, are scant. Ott summarizes the evidence this way: “Theologians seek a biblical foundation in the words of Christ, John 19:26 et seq.: ‘Woman behold thy son, son behold thy mother.’ . . . The mystical interpretation . . . sees in John the representative of the whole human race. In him Mary was given as the spiritual mother of the whole of redeemed humanity that she, by her powerful intercession, should procure for her children in need of help all graces by which they can attain eternal salvation.”⁷²

As to the evidence from tradition for Mary’s role as Mediatrix of redemption, some allusions to similar roles are found in Origen and Augustine and others to Mary’s spiritual motherhood. However, “They became more numerous during the peak period of the Middle Ages.” For example, Bernard of Clairvaux said, “God wished that we have nothing, except by the hands of Mary.”⁷³

PROTESTANT RESPONSE TO THE MEDIATORSHIP OF MARY

The way the role of Mary is carefully defined by many Catholic theologians makes it difficult to charge it with outright (formal) heresy. Be that as it may, there are some serious biblical and practical problems with it.

RESPONSE TO ARGUMENT FROM SCRIPTURE

The scriptural evidence for calling Mary a mediator or co-redemptrix is totally lacking. Even Roman Catholic authority Ludwig Ott confesses: “Express scriptural proofs are lacking.” He says merely that “theologians seek a biblical foundation” in a “mystical” interpretation of John 19:26 .⁷⁴ Such an interpretation is far removed from the actual meaning of the text and by virtue of its farfetched nature only weakens the case for the doctrine. Indeed, the clear meaning of many passages of sacred Scripture declare that

70 Ibid. Some Catholic scholars insist that this is not an infallible teaching of the church and, hence, do not accept it.

71 Ibid.

72 Ibid., p. 214.

73 Cited in *ibid.*

74 Ibid.

there is only “one mediator between God and the human race, Christ Jesus, himself human” (1 Tim. 2:5 ; cf. John 10:1–11 ; 14:6 ; Heb. 1:2–3 ; 10:12).

The Catholic claim that “one” (Gk: *monos*) in 1 Timothy 2:5 does not mean only one (*eis*) is a false disjunction. Obviously, Paul intended to convey here that there is (only) one God and (only) one mediator between God and man. And regardless of the fact that there are other human intercessors to God on earth (2:1–2),⁷⁵ it is clear that there is only one mediator between humans and God. For if *monos* does not mean “only one,” then the apostle has left open the door for polytheism too. For the same term is used of God in this text.

Finally, there is an inherent dilemma in Catholic Mariology. On the one hand, Catholic theology admits that everything we need as believers we can get from Christ. On the other hand, many Catholic theologians have exalted the role of Mary as the dispenser of all grace. For them there is a hopeless dilemma. For either the role of Mary is rendered superfluous or else the all-sufficiency of Christ’s mediation is diminished.⁷⁶ The only way out of the dilemma is to hold, as do Protestants, that Mary is not the dispenser of all grace. This is not to say that Mary, as the earthly mother of Jesus, was the channel through which God’s grace entered the world but only that Mary is not now, in heaven, the dispenser of God’s grace to us.

RESPONSE TO ARGUMENT FROM TRADITION

Catholic scholars also admit that “express testimonies” from the early Fathers are “few in number,” most being after the eighth century. O’Carroll explicitly admits that “the Fathers of the Church and early Christian writers did not so interpret the words of the dying Christ.”⁷⁷ Here again, Roman Catholic scholars manifest a rather arbitrary use of the Fathers, citing them when they favor their dogma and ignoring them when they do not. In fact, the mediatorship of Mary has never been proclaimed as an infallible dogma by the church and, therefore, can be rejected by faithful Catholics without fear of being censored.

THE VENERATION OF MARY

The Mariological doctrine that is perhaps most repugnant to Protestants is the veneration of Mary. This is based on her role as “Mother of God.” This is obvious in one of the most

⁷⁵ The fact that there are human intercessors to God *on earth* in no way implies there are any *in heaven* besides Christ (Heb. 7) and the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8).

⁷⁶ Miller and Samples, *Cult of the Virgin*, p. 56.

⁷⁷ Michael O’Carroll, *Theotokos: A Theological Encyclopedia of the Blessed Virgin Mary* (Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier, 1982), s.v. “Mother of Divine Grace (the Spiritual Motherhood).”

popular of all Catholic prayers known as the “Hail Mary,” which ends: “Holy Mary, Mother of God. Pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death.”

CATHOLIC DEFENSE OF THE VENERATION OF MARY

According to the teaching of the Catholic church, “Mary, the Mother of God, is entitled to the Cult of Hyperdulia,” meaning that Mary may be venerated and honored on a level higher than another creature, angels, or saints. In other words, “In view of her dignity as the Mother of God and her fullness of grace, a special veneration is due to Mary.”⁷⁸

Catholic scholars are quick to point out, however, that “this [veneration due to Mary] is substantially less than the cultus latriae (= adoration) which is due to God alone, but is higher than the cultus duliae (= veneration) due to angels and to the other saints. The special veneration thus given to Mary is called cultus hyperduliae.”⁷⁹ So God alone is worshiped in the sense of *latria*. Mary is venerated in the sense of *hyperdulia*, and saints and angels are honored with *dulia*.

Three kinds of arguments are offered in support of the special venerating of and prayers to Mary. Catholics argue from Scripture, tradition, and analogy.

ARGUMENT FROM SCRIPTURE

Ott summarizes the texts for honoring Mary at a level above all other creatures but below God.

The Scriptural source of the special veneration due to the Mother of God is to be found in [Luke 1:28](#) : “Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee,” in the praise of Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Ghost, [Luke 1:42](#) : “Blessed art thou amongst women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb,” in the prophetic words of the Mother of God, [Luke 1:48](#) : “For behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed,” in the words of the woman in the multitude, [Luke 11:27](#) : “Blessed is the womb that bore thee, and the paps that gave thee suck.”⁸⁰

ARGUMENT FROM TRADITION

According to Ott, veneration of Mary was practiced in connection with that of Christ for the first three centuries. Then, “From the fourth century onwards we find a formal veneration of Mary herself.”⁸¹ Indeed, such phrases as “Mother of God,” “Co-redemptress,” and even “Queen of Heaven” have been used to support the veneration of Mary down through the centuries.

⁷⁸ Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, p. 215.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

ARGUMENT FROM ANALOGY

Many Catholics think of Mary as the prototypical Christian, the one to whom God gave all the blessings of redemption. They argue that, while all Christians will eventually receive complete sanctification after death, Mary received hers at conception. Likewise, while other Christians will attain bodily resurrection after Christ's return, Mary received her bodily assumption before Christ's coming again. Hence, they insist that it is appropriate to honor her more than others now, since she has attained her glorification earlier than other creatures.

PROTESTANT RESPONSE TO THE VENERATION OF MARY

RESPONSE TO ARGUMENT FROM SCRIPTURE

There is absolutely nothing in the biblical text that supports the conclusions Catholics draw from them, namely, that Mary should be venerated above all creatures but below God. The texts say nothing about veneration or prayers to Mary; they simply call Mary "blessed" of God, which she truly was. Contrary to Catholic practice, however, Mary was not blessed *above* all women but simply was the most blessed *among* all women. Even the Catholic *New American Bible* reads: "Most blessed are you *among* women" (Luke 1:42 , emphasis added). This is not a distinction without a difference, for it is strange logic to argue that being the most blessed among women makes Mary worthy of more honor than all other women. Eve was the mother of all the living (Gen. 3:20), a distinctive honor held by no other person, including Mary, and yet she is not venerated by Catholics in accord with her blessed status. Even great sinners who are forgiven are highly blessed but need not be most highly esteemed because of that blessing (cf. 1 Cor. 15:9 ; 1 Tim. 1:15). There is not a single instance in the New Testament where veneration was given to Mary. When the magi came to the manger to visit the Christ child, Matthew 2:11 declares that "they prostrated themselves and *did him homage,*" not Mary (emphasis added).

Further, Scripture forbids us to bow down in veneration before any creature, even angels (cf. Col. 2:18 ; Rev. 22:8–9). The Bible makes it clear that we are not to make "idols" of any creature or even "bow down" to them in an act of religious devotion (Exod. 20:4–5).⁸² To call Mary "Queen of Heaven," knowing that this very phrase

82 The case in 2 Kings 5:17–18 where Naaman was given permission by Elisha to bow down with his master (the king) in the idol temple is not in real conflict with the prohibition not to bow before idols for several reasons. First, Naaman clearly affirmed his faith that "there is no God in all the earth, except in Israel" (v. 15). Second, he was clearly not an idolater for he declared: "I will no longer offer holocaust or sacrifice to any other god except the Lord" (v. 17). Third, his presence in the idol temple was only because of his duty to assist his master, the king, not because of his own personal desire to be there (v. 18). Fourth, he made it clear that, as "army commander of the king" (v. 1), "I too, as his adjunct, must bow down in the temple of Rimmon" (v. 18). Thus, his bowing was a social obligation, not part of his religious devotion. Fifth, the fact that he

comes from an old pagan idolatrous cult condemned in the Bible (cf. Jer. 7:18), only invites the charge of Mariolatry. And Mariolatry is idolatry.

Finally, despite theological distinctions to the contrary, in practice there is often no real difference between the veneration given to Mary and that given to Christ. This is true for many Catholics in spite of the church's use of verses showing that we should "honor" our parents (Deut. 5:16) and our rulers (Rom. 13:1–7). Furthermore, there is clearly a difference, both in theory and in practice, in the way Catholics honor other human beings and the way they honor Mary. Consider the following book, *Novena Prayers in Honor of Our Mother of Perpetual Help*, with the Catholic Imprimatur (and nihil obstat) on it which guarantees that there is nothing heretical in it.

We have no greater help,
no greater hope than you,
O Most Pure Virgin; help us, then,
for we hope in you, we glory in you,
we are your servants.
Do not disappoint us.⁸³

In the same devotional book Mary's devotees pray:

Come to my aid, dearest Mother, for I recommend myself to thee. In thy hands I place my eternal salvation, and to thee I entrust my soul. Count me among thy most devoted servants; take me under thy protection, and it is enough for me. For, if thou protect me, dear Mother, I fear nothing: not from my sins, because thou wilt obtain for me the pardon of them; nor from the devils, because thou art more powerful than all hell together; not even from Jesus, my judge, because by one prayer from thee, He will be appeased.⁸⁴

Numerous examples of this kind of Mary worship can be found in Alphonsus de Liguori's famous book, *The Glories of Mary* (A.D. 1750), which is published in over 800 editions! A few examples will suffice:

asked forgiveness for the appearance of evil, reveals his heart was not in the act of bowing (v. 18). This is quite different from someone who is intentionally and freely bowing before an image in an act of religious devotion, which the Bible condemns.

83 *Novena Prayers in Honor of Our Mother of Perpetual Help* (Uniontown, Pa.: Sisters of St. Basil, 1968), p. 16.

84 Ibid., p. 19. Citing Scripture to show it is not wrong to pray for someone else's forgiveness (Exod. 32:30–34 ; Job 42:8 ; Acts 7:59–60) or of appeasing God's wrath on others (Gen. 20:7 ; 1 Sam. 12:19 ; Job 1:5) does not negate the near blasphemous content and tone of these Catholic prayers to Mary or their clearly unbiblical direction of praying to a dead human being rather than to the living God.

Shall we scruple to ask her to save us, when “the way of salvation is open to none otherwise than through Mary.”

“Many things,” says Nicephorus, “are asked from God, and are not granted: they are asked from Mary, and are obtained.”

At the commands of Mary all obey—even God” [!!!] ⁸⁵

Protestants and find such prayers repugnant, if not blasphemous, as do some less traditional Catholics. ⁸⁶ The theoretical distinctions notwithstanding, on the experiential level, there appears to be little if any difference between the intensity of this devotion to Mary and the worship of God.

RESPONSE TO ARGUMENT FROM TRADITION

The evidence from tradition for venerating Mary is not solid and it is not early. While there was some earlier fascination with Mary, even Ott admits that the veneration of Mary only dates from the fourth century. ⁸⁷ It was at that time that a sect (cult) formed consisting of women who worshiped the virgin Mary as a goddess. The group originated in Thrace, was also found in Arabia, and baked cakes as an offering to Mary. ⁸⁸ This group was condemned by Epiphanius of Salamis (c. A.D. 315–403), who became metropolitan of Constantia (Salamis) and was considered an authority on devotion to the blessed virgin Mary. On this idolatrous cult condemned by the church, he stated: “Mary should be honored, but the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost should be adored. Nobody should adore Mary (Haer. 78, 7).” ⁸⁹

Very early in church history, Epiphanius sensed the potential danger inherent in too much attention being paid to Mary. In this he reminds us of Luther’s attitude many years later. Harold O. J. Brown states the concern of evangelicals: “Even if one accepts the traditional Catholic distinction between the ‘extreme veneration’ (*hyperdouleia*) offered

85 Alphonsus de Liguori, *The Glories of Mary*, ed. Eugene Grimm (Brooklyn: Redemptionist Fathers, 1931), pp. 169, 180, 137.

86 Less traditional Catholics, while bemoaning the extravagance in these prayers, tend to excuse it as poetic license, religious hyperbole, and/or insisting that there is an implied exception here for Christ. This, however, often does not come out in either the wording of the prayers or the religious fervor of the devotee to Mary.

87 Concerning devotion to Mary in the ante-Nicene period, Kelly states that, while not completely absent, “reliable evidence of prayers being addressed to her, or of her protection and help being sought, is almost . . . non-existent in the first four centuries” (Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrine*, p. 491).

88 See articles on “Collyridians,” in *The Westminster Dictionary of Church History*, ed. Jerald C. Brauer (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971), p. 220; Cross, *Oxford Dictionary*, pp. 314–15.

89 Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, p. 216. On Epiphanius, see John J. Delaney and James E. Tobin, *Dictionary of Catholic Biography* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1961), p. 379.

to Mary and the worship (*latreia*) which is legitimately offered only to God, one fears that such a distinction becomes quite obscure in practice.”⁹⁰ Indeed, when attention to Mary imperils the sufficiency of Christ, the very essence of the Gospel is threatened.

RESPONSE TO ARGUMENT FROM ANALOGY

There are many objections to the overused argument from analogy. First, it is not really an argument at all. At best, analogies only illustrate a point that must be proven some other way; they do not prove anything. Also, there is absolutely no indication in Scripture that any such comparison should be made; Mary is never referred to as the prototypical Christ. What is more, there is no evidence that Mary attained her sanctification earlier than the rest of us: she confessed being a sinner (Luke 1:46); she offered a sacrifice for her sinful condition (Luke 2:22); and, as even Catholic theologians admit, she died like the rest of us. So Mary showed no evidence of having received ultimate sanctification (glorification) while on earth. Even if Mary had attained her glorification earlier than other creatures, this still would not justify venerating her any more than we should a saint or an angel. Angels in Scripture even forbid humans to bow before them to worship God (cf. Rev. 22:8–9).

CATHOLIC DEFENSE OF THE VENERATION OF RELICS

A word should be said here about the Catholic doctrine of venerating relics of Mary and other saints. According to Catholic dogma, “It is permissible and profitable to venerate the relics of saints.”⁹¹ The Council of Trent declared: “Also the holy bodies of the holy martyrs and of the others who dwell with Christ . . . are to be honored by the faithful.”⁹² Ott says that “the reason for the veneration of relics lies in this, that the bodies of the saints were living members of Christ and Temples of the Holy Ghost; that they will again be awakened and glorified and that through them God bestows many benefits on mankind.” Further, “As well as the bodies and their parts, objects which came into physical contact with the saints are also venerated as relics.”⁹³

PROTESTANT RESPONSE TO THE VENERATION OF RELICS

Most Protestants find this practice repugnant. The reasons will become apparent as we critique the arguments offered by Catholics in favor of venerating relics, as well as note positive reasons against such veneration.

RESPONSE TO ARGUMENT FROM SCRIPTURE

90 Brown, *Protest of a Troubled Protestant*, p. 151.

91 Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, p. 319.

92 Denzinger, *Sources of Catholic Dogma*, no. 985, p. 299.

93 Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, p. 319.

While some Catholic apologists seek biblical support for this practice,⁹⁴ even noted Catholic authority Ludwig Ott admits that “Holy Writ does not mention the veneration of relics.”⁹⁵ Neither do the so-called precedents in Scripture prove the Catholic practice, for the bones of Joseph were not venerated, but were simply preserved (Exod. 13:19). Hence, to use this verse as proof for venerating relics is to take it out of context.

Likewise, the fact that God performed a miracle through contact with Elijah’s mantle (2 Kings 2:13–14) does not justify venerating them any more than it would justify venerating other physical means that God has used to convey miracles, such as the rod of Moses, the clay Jesus used to heal the blind man, or the hands or handkerchiefs of the apostles used to cure diseases!

Neither does the fact that the Old Testament ark of the Covenant was considered sacred and that Uzzah was struck dead for touching it (2 Sam. 6:7) prove that relics of dead saints should be venerated. First, Uzzah was not killed for failing to venerate the ark but for disobeying the law of God that forbade anyone but a priest to touch it (Num. 4:15).⁹⁶ Furthermore, showing respect for the ark, in which the very presence of God and his glory was manifested, is far from venerating the relics of human creatures. For one thing, the ark was a divinely appointed symbol, not the mere remains and adornment of men. Also, it was a special symbol in a unique theocracy, where God personally and visibly (in the cloud of his glory) dwelt among his specially chosen people, Israel. And, even granting this special place the ark had, they were not to venerate it (cf. Exod. 20:4–5) but simply to obey God’s laws with regard to its use.

Finally, the cures achieved by clothes from the apostle do not prove that we should venerate handkerchiefs (Acts 19:12) but only that God gave special “signs of an

94 Strangely, some Catholic apologists even cite the Pharisees’ practice of adorning graves (Matt. 23:29) or the common Christian custom of putting flowers on a loved one’s grave as proof that it is acceptable to venerate relics. This is the fallacy of noting superficial similarities and overlooking crucial differences. First, flowers in *memory* of a loved one are not the same as *venerating* them. Second, *honoring* the dead is far different from *praying to* them. Third, venerating relics of the dead ignores the biblical prohibitions against idolatry (Exod. 20:4–5) and the occult (Deut. 18:9–14). Finally, using the practice of the Pharisees as justification ignores the distinction between what the Bible *records* and what the Bible *approves*, and totally neglects the fact that Jesus here condemns the Pharisees for what they were doing, saying, “You . . . adorn the memorials of the righteous. . . . Thus you bear witness against yourselves that you are the children of those who murdered the prophets” (Matt. 23:29–31)!

95 Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, p. 319.

96 The Bible says Uzzah was stricken dead because of his “error” (2 Sam. 6:7 NKJV). The Hebrew word *shal* occurs only here and means “a fault, an error, a crime, a transgression.” It is believed to be an abbreviation of *shalal*, which occurs twice (2 Kings 4:28 ; 2 Chron. 29:11) and means “to be quiet, to be tranquil, to be negligent, to wander, to deceive.”

apostle” (2 Cor. 12:12). What is conspicuously absent in all of the alleged biblical “precedents” that Catholic apologists use is the act of veneration.

THE BIBLICAL CASE AGAINST VENERATING RELICS

Not only is there a total absence of veneration of any creature or physical object in Scripture; there is an explicit condemnation of it! It is a violation of the commandments against idolatry. For God clearly commanded his people not to make graven images or to bow down to them in an act of religious devotion (Exod. 20:4–5). Paul said that this was the same error of the pagans who “revered and worshiped the creature rather than the creator” (Rom. 1:25). Even noted Catholic scholar Louis Bouyer pointed affirmed that “it is much more important to agree unreservedly with the Protestants that, if there is one error Christians must guard against more than any other, it is idolatry.”⁹⁷ Unfortunately, the fine theological distinctions Catholics make between the different kinds of veneration or worship do not do this. Indeed, the Bible forbids us ever to make or even bow before an image of any creature in an act of religious devotion: “You shall not make for yourselves any carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the waters under the earth; you shall not bow down nor serve them. For I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God . . .” (Exod. 20:4–5 NKJV).

Roman Catholics responded by saying that the prohibition against making images and bowing down to them in religious devotion is not absolute for two reasons: First, God himself commanded the making of images such as the cherubim in the tabernacle (Exod. 25:18) and the flowered columns in Solomon’s temple (1 Kings 7:18–19). Second, there are many occasions in the Bible where bowing down before a person is not considered idolatry (e.g., Gen. 19:1 ; 23:7 ; 33:3 ; 2 Sam. 15:5). Both of these arguments fail, however, to observe significant differences.

First, the symbols used in the temple (e.g., cherubim) were divinely appointed symbols, not humanly contrived idols. Second, there was no chance that the people of Israel would fall down before the cherubim in the most holy place, since they were forbidden to enter the holy place at any time. Even the high priest went in only once a year on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16). Further, the prohibition is not against making any carved image for decorative purposes, but of those used in religious worship. In other words, they were not to worship any other God or any image of any god. These cherubim were not given to Israel as images of God but as representations of angels. Nor were they given to be worshiped or even venerated. And the flowered columns in Solomon’s temple were purely ornamental. They were not used for veneration, hence, they were not in violation of the commandment in Exodus 20 . Finally, the Exodus 20 prohibition is not against religious art as such, which includes things in heaven (angels) and on earth (humans, animals, etc.). Rather, it was against using any image as an object of religious devotion. This is evident from the fact the people were instructed not to “bow down to them nor serve them” (Exod. 20:5). The distinction between non-religious use of images and a religious use is important.

97 Bouyer, *Spirit and Forms of Protestantism*, p. 92.

The Use of Images or Representations of God

<i>Forbidden</i>	<i>Permitted</i>
Object of worship	Not an object of worship
Appointed by man	Appointed by God
Religious purpose	Educational or ornamental purpose
To represent essence of God	To affirm truth about Christ on earth

When Catholics argue that religiously bowing down before an image is not wrong because there are many cases in the Bible where such bowing down is approved (e.g., Gen. 18:2) they confuse two very different contexts. First, the people were not bowing before an image but a person, and they were bowing out of respect, not reverence. The Bible condemns even bowing before an angel to worship God (Rev. 22:8–9). More importantly, all the cases of approved bowing before another creature are not religious, but social.

Some contemporary Catholic theologians insist that the biblical prohibitions are only against idolatry, and venerating relics is not the same as worshipping them. One Catholic catechism even says: “Do we pray to relics or images? We do not pray to relics or images, for they can neither see, nor hear, nor help us.”⁹⁸ This response misses the point. The question is not whether one should pray to an image of Mary (or any creature) but whether they should pray to the saint with or without the use of an image. As we have shown elsewhere (chap. 16), only God should be the object of prayer. The response also diverts the issue, which is not whether one should pray to an image but whether one should use an image in one’s prayers. After all, even pagans do not pray to the image but to the spirit behind it. The Bible tells us clearly that there are demonic spirits behind idols (1 Cor. 10:19–20). Perhaps this accounts for many of the supernatural apparitions that are connected with using images and venerating or praying to departed persons, since the Bible speaks of demons working deceiving “signs” and “wonders” (2 Thess. 2:9 ; Rev. 16:14). Finally, it fails to recognize what God knows, namely, that the idolatrous tendency of the human heart will easily lead it from veneration to adoration, from honoring the relic or image to worshipping it or the person behind it. It is for this reason that even veneration of relics is prohibited.

God knows the idolatrous tendencies of the human heart. Even the bronze serpent that God designated for the healing of his snake-bitten people (Num. 21) was later worshiped by Israel in the days of the kings (2 Kings 18:4). God, knowing that even devout Israelites might be tempted to venerate the remains of Moses, buried him in an unknown place (Deut. 34:5–6) apparently to prevent idolatry that the devil desires to

⁹⁸ *The Penny Catechism: 370 Fundamental Questions and Answers on the Catholic Faith*, reprint (Libertyville, Ill.: Prow Books, 1982), p. 33.

encourage (cf. Jude 9). And Jesus condemned the Pharisees: “Because you . . . build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous” (Matt. 23:29).

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Catholics and Protestants share many beliefs about Mary. Both proclaim her to be the most blessed woman on the face of the earth. Both insist she was a virgin when she conceived Jesus. Both acknowledge that she was the mother of God, in the sense of being the earthly channel through which the God-man came into this world. Both believe she is a great model of the Christian life, a noble and virtuous woman. Both believe that she was a creature in need of redemption, which was wrought only through Jesus Christ. Some Protestants, for example, Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli, even believed in Mary’s perpetual virginity and immaculate conception. The first two named Reformers even believed that she interceded for us. However, Zwingli and Luther, as well as most Protestants following them, rejected the practice of praying to Mary to make intercession for us.⁹⁹

In spite of these areas of agreement, there are significant differences between Catholics and Protestants in the area of Mariology. Protestants take exception to the terms “mediatrix” and “co-redemptrix” being used of Mary. Despite the careful qualifications made by Catholic theologians,¹⁰⁰ even permitting the use of these terms tends to exalt Mary to a position far above that allotted her by Scripture.¹⁰¹ Even Vatican II attempted to put the brakes on Roman Catholic enthusiasm for Mary, noting that the role of Mary is a secondary theological issue and that our salvation depends solely on the work of Christ. The Council decided against producing a special document on Mary, fearing it might emphasize her role in salvation history to excess. Instead she is discussed in the last chapter of *Lumen Gentium*, situating her role as a member of the church. It declared that the Catholic church “strongly urges theologians and preachers of the word of God to be careful to refrain as much from all false exaggeration as from too summary an attitude in considering the special dignity of the Mother of God. . . . Let them . . . carefully refrain

99 We have taken pains to admit that the Reformers did not challenge some of the Roman Catholic beliefs concerning Mary. However, as to the doctrines which they believed could lead to a diminishing of the work of Christ, they were resolute. Concerning this danger Luther states, “We dare not put our faith in the mother but only in the fact that the child was born” (cited in Anderson, p. 241).

100 Less Marian Catholics wish to emphasize that the Catholic church only permits, not mandates, the use of terms like “co-redemptrix” of Mary. And, as stated above, they also note that Vatican II tended to downplay the Marian excesses because of their offensiveness to Protestants.

101 It is interesting to compare Marian devotion in Eastern Orthodoxy—which, as a jurisdiction, is at least as old as Roman Catholicism (see Appendix A).

from whatever might by word or deed lead the separated brethren or any others whatsoever into error.”¹⁰²

Protestants see no biblical basis for believing that Mary was perpetually sinless. And, despite technical distinctions to the contrary, evangelicals argue that there are no practical differences between the veneration of Mary and the worship of God in the minds of devout Marian Catholics.¹⁰³ Indeed, most Catholics bow in prayer before an image of Mary, which violates the prohibition against idolatry in the Ten Commandments.¹⁰⁴ Martin Chemnitz states the evangelical position well: “in this dispute I want nothing taken away from the dignity of the blessed Virgin Mary.” He continues, “I think that the Virgin Mary is rightly proclaimed blest if those things are attributed to her which are both in agreement with the Scripture and can be proved from there, so that the name of the Lord may be Holy. No other celebration can be pleasing to her.”¹⁰⁵

Another form of piety involving Mary is her alleged appearances in history called “apparitions.” An apparition has been defined as “the sudden appearance of a supernatural entity which directly manifests itself to a human individual or group.”¹⁰⁶ The most recent example of this religious phenomenon has occurred at Medjugorje in former Yugoslavia. Evangelical scholar Kenneth R. Samples traveled to Medjugorje to interview persons involved in the apparition. He and his colleague, Elliot Miller, have written an excellent critique of the phenomenon.¹⁰⁷

102 See *The Documents of Vatican II* (*Lumen Gentium*, IV). Even some traditional Catholics are disturbed by the excessive attention given to Mary; see Mark Brumley, “Putting Mary in Her Place,” *The Southern Cross* (28 April 1994).

103 Of course, only God knows the heart, but judging by the fervor of Catholics’ devotion and the actual words used of Mary and God there is little visible difference between their devotion to Mary and their devotion to God. And many of the folk Catholics involved in this are not even aware of the official theoretical distinction between the kind of devotion due to God alone and that due to Mary.

104 This is not the same as Protestants wearing a cross around the neck or hanging a cross on the wall of a church, since they are not (or at least should not be) bowing before the cross (a symbol of God the Son), to say nothing of an image of Mary, in devotion to a creature. Many Protestants pray with an open Bible before them, but they do not believe it is an image of God or any creature to whom they are directing their prayers.

105 Martin Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent, Part I* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1971), p. 383.

106 Miller and Samples, *Cult of the Virgin*, p. 80.

107 See Kenneth R. Samples, “Apparitions of the Virgin Mary: A Protestant Look at a Catholic Phenomenon,” in Miller, pp. 77–135.

We may summarize the whole matter of Mariology in this way: one ignores Jesus at one's peril, but no one will be deprived of heaven for neglecting Mary.¹⁰⁸

108 The virgin birth is a fundamental teaching of Scripture, but devotion to Mary is not. One must worship the Son of God to be his disciple, but one need not venerate Mary to enter the kingdom of God.