

MARY WORSHIP?

Mary Ann Collins
(A Former Catholic Nun)

Jesus said that the truth would set us free (John 8:32). However, He did not say that the truth would necessarily be easy to accept. It was painful for me to learn the information that I am about to share with you, but it was also liberating and led me to a closer relationship with God.

As a faithful Catholic, and later as a nun, I was devoted to Mary. The prayers and practices were so familiar. Sincere people taught them to me. I prayed the rosary, including rosary novenas. I wore a Brown Scapular and a Miraculous Medal. I visited shrines that honor Mary. I had beautiful statues of Mary. I attended special services where we prayed to Mary and recited a litany of titles honoring her. I read books about apparitions of Mary, and dreamed of visiting Lourdes and Fatima. I participated in processions honoring Mary. A statue of Mary was put on a platform that was decorated with flowers. There were poles on the platform so men could carry it. The men walked through the streets carrying the statue on the platform. We walked behind Mary's statue singing songs in her honor.

Was this worship? At the time, that question never occurred to me. Now, looking back on what I did, I believe that it was.

If modern, Catholic teachings and doctrines about Mary are true; they will not be contrary to Scripture, or the writings of the Early Fathers, or the decrees of past popes. For a devout Catholic to question these issues and put them to the test can be painful. It certainly was for me. However, it would be far more painful to have God correct us when we face Him on Judgment Day.

DEVOTION TO MARY

If you want to see what a person's real priorities are, then watch what they do when their life, or the life of a loved one, is in danger. When Pope John Paul II was shot, while the ambulance was rushing him to the hospital, the pope was not praying to God or calling on the name of Jesus. He kept saying, over and over, "Mary, my mother!" Polish pilgrims placed a picture of Our Lady of Czestochowa on the throne where the pope normally sat. People gathered around the picture. Vatican loudspeakers broadcasted the prayers of the rosary. When the pope recovered, he gave Mary all the glory for saving his life, and he made a pilgrimage to Fatima to publicly thank her.¹

Jesus said, "*For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also*" (Luke 12:34). Vast sums of money are spent on jeweled crowns and lavish clothing for some special statues of

¹ James G. McCarthy, *The Gospel According to Rome: Comparing Catholic Tradition and the Word of God*, (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1995), pp. 181-184, 199-200. (The author is a former Catholic.)

Mary. You can see pictures of them in the Catholic devotional book, *Miraculous Images of Our Lady*.²

In the Philippines, there is a statue of “Our Lady of the Rosary” that is nearly 5 feet high. It wears a crown of gold studded with diamonds, rubies, and other gems. There is a large halo, like a sunburst, behind its head, made of gold and diamonds.³

In Spain, a statue of “Our Lady of the Forsaken” has elegant gowns and mantles decorated with gold and jewels. In fact, it has a large collection of jewels, including \$50,000 worth of jewels that are a gift from Queen Isabella II.⁴

Also in Spain is a statue of “Our Lady of the Pillar” dressed in clothing decorated with gold and jewels and a large gold crown covered with jewels. There is a sunburst (halo) behind the statue with a diameter measuring larger than the height of the statue. A full-color, close-up picture of the crown and sunburst shows that they are covered with diamonds, emeralds, and rubies. There are so many jewels that I can’t see the gold underneath them. On the wall, behind the statue, are 148 gold stars; 80 of them are set with jewels.⁵

“Our Lady of Guadalupe” is best known by a painting in Mexico, but there is also a statue in Spain that is adorned with gold and jewels. It has a sunburst headdress with 30,000 jewels.⁶

In Germany, a statue of “Our Lady of Alotting” has a gold crown covered with rubies, emeralds, sapphires, and diamonds. It is decorated with a necklace of pearls and rubies, and a gown that is decorated with gold, pearls, diamonds, emeralds, and rubies. The statue is in a shrine with a silver altar and walls that are decorated with silver.⁷

Even paintings of Mary can wear jewels. In Russia, there is a painting of Our Lady of Kazan that is covered with a rizza (a structure of gold that covers the entire painting except for the faces of Mary and baby Jesus). This rizza has more than 1,000 diamonds, rubies, pearls, and sapphires on it.⁸

² Joan Carrol Cruz, *Miraculous Images of Our Lady: 100 Famous Catholic Portraits and Statues* (Rockford, IL: TAN Books & Publishers, 1994). This Catholic devotional book has 125 pictures, 32 of which are full color. Following page 238 there are 32 pages with full color pictures. They are numbered page 238-1, 238-2, 238-3, etc.

³ Ibid. Statue of Our Lady of the Rosary, color picture on page 238-18, text and 2 black-and-white pictures on pages 367-372.

⁴ Ibid. Statue of Our Lady of the Forsaken, color picture on page 238-22, text and 1 black-and-white picture on pages 419-421.

⁵ Ibid. Statue of Our Lady of the Pillar, color pictures on pages 238-2 and 238-7. (The picture on 238-7 is a close-up of the crown and sunburst, showing the jewels clearly.) Text and 4 black-and-white pictures are on pages 401-406.

⁶ Ibid. Statue of Our Lady of Guadalupe, color picture on page 238-16, text and 1 black-and-white picture on pages 407-409.

⁷ Ibid. Statue of Our Lady of Alotting, color picture on page 238-10, text and 3 black-and-white pictures on pages 115-119.

⁸ Ibid. Painting of Our Lady of Kazan, color picture on page 238-15, text, and one black-and-white picture on pages 297-400.

In Sabana Grande, Puerto Rico, preparations are underway to construct a huge statue of “Our Lady of the Rosary.” Inside the base of the statue there will be chapels, conference rooms, apartments, a food court, and radio and TV stations. There will also be observation decks. This statue will be part of a 500-acre “Mystical City” complex. According to an article in *Caribbean Business*, this statue “will top at 1,500 feet.” According to an article by the Associated Press, the statue will be 305 feet high.⁹

The discrepancy in numbers can be explained by looking at the Statue of Liberty, which is a 151 foot statue on top of a 154 foot base. Some sources say that the Statue of Liberty is 305 feet high (which includes the height of the base) and some say that it is 151 feet high (which is the height of the actual statue). What we possibly have in Sabana Grande is a 305 foot statue with a 1,200 foot base.

I have personally participated in American processions that honored Mary. We walked through the streets following a statue of Mary that was carried on a platform, high up where it was clearly visible. We sang songs in Mary’s honor. We prayed rosaries and other prayers to her. These were small processions. At Fatima, Portugal, crowds of over a million people gather and march behind a statue of Mary while singing her praises on the celebratory anniversary of the apparition of Our Lady of Fatima.¹⁰

One popular prayer in Mary’s honor is the “Hail Holy Queen,” which is known in Latin as the *Salve Regina*. It is traditionally included as part of praying the rosary. For Catholics who are reading this, please try to overcome your familiarity with this text and really look at the words. Doesn’t this sound like worship?

“Hail, holy Queen, Mother of Mercy! Our life, our sweetness and our hope! To thee do we cry, poor banished children of Eve. To thee do we send up our sighs, mourning and weeping, in this valley of tears. Turn, then, most gracious Advocate, thine eyes of mercy toward us; and after this our exile, show unto us the blessed fruit of thy womb, Jesus. O clement, O loving, O sweet Virgin Mary.”

Alfonsus de Liguori (1696-1787) was a principal proponent of the Marianist Movement, which glorifies Mary. He wrote a book titled, *The Glories of Mary*, which is famous, influential, and widely read. In this book, de Liguori says that Mary was given rulership over one half of the kingdom of God—Mary rules over the kingdom of mercy and Jesus rules over the kingdom of justice. De Liguori said that people should pray to Mary as a mediator and look to her as an object of trust for answered prayer. The book even says that there is no salvation outside of Mary.¹¹

⁹ Jim Tetlow, *Messages from Heaven*, (Fairport, NY: Eternal Productions, 2002), p. 7. (The author is a former Catholic.)

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ William Webster, *The Church of Rome at the Bar of History*, (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1995), p. 87. (The author is a former Catholic.)

Some people suggest that these views are extreme and not representative of Catholic Church teaching. However, instead of silencing de Liguori as a heretic, the Catholic Church canonized him as a saint and declared him to be a “doctor of the Church,” a person whose teachings carry weight and authority. Furthermore, the Catholic Church openly and officially promotes his book, and his teachings have influenced popes.¹²

Pope Benedict XV said of Mary that “[O]ne can justly say that with Christ, she herself redeemed mankind.”¹³ Pope Pius IX said, “Our salvation is based upon the holy Virgin....”¹⁴

A lay movement called *Vox Populi* (Voice of the People) gathers signed petitions to send to the pope, seeking to have him officially declare that Mary is Co-Redemptrix. Over six million signatures have been sent to him, representing 138 countries and all seven continents. Over 40 cardinals and 600 bishops worldwide support this doctrine.¹⁵

The Catholic Church exalts Mary as an idealized, larger-than-life, perfect mother. However, the Bible shows that at one point Mary misunderstood Jesus’ calling to the point that she thought He was insane, and she tried to prevent Him from doing what God wanted Him to do. Please, read the following,

“And the multitude cometh together again, so that they could not so much as eat bread. And when his friends heard of it, they went out to lay hold on him: for they said, He is beside himself.” (Mark 3:20-21)

According to *Strong’s Greek/Hebrew Dictionary*, the Greek word translated “his friends” has a variety of meanings, including “kinsmen.” However, we do not have to depend on the exact meaning of the word here because it will be made clear in verse 31. *Strong’s* defines “lay hold on” as “to use strength,” i.e., “seize or retain.” It defines “beside himself” as “become astounded, insane.”

Verses 22 through 30 describe a confrontation between Jesus and the scribes. Then we get back to what is happening with the people who thought that Jesus was out of His mind and were so concerned that they were coming to “lay hold on him” (to seize him).

“There came then his brethren and his mother, and, standing without, sent unto him calling him. And the multitude sat about him, and they said unto him, Behold, thy mother and thy brethren without seek for thee. And he answered them, saying, Who is my mother, or my brethren? And he looked round about on them which sat about him, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of

¹² Ibid.

¹³ In the Encyclical *Intersodalicia* (1918). Quoted in Donald G. Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology*, Volume 1 (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1982), p. 196.

¹⁴ In the Encyclical of February 2, 1849. Quoted in Donald G. Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology*, Volume 1, p. 196, op. cit.

¹⁵ *Queenship Jubilee Year 2000 Catalog*, p. 92. This is a catalog of the Queenship Marian Center for World Peace, which promotes the doctrine of Mary as Advocate, Mediator, and Co-Redemptrix. It also promotes the petition. The catalog gives information about the petition’s progress, and about church leaders who support the doctrine.

God, the same is my brother, and my sister, and mother.” (Mark 3:31-35, emphasis added)

CATHOLIC DOCTRINES ABOUT MARY COMPARED WITH WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS

IMMACULATE CONCEPTION — According to Catholic doctrine, Mary was preserved from all stain of original sin from the first instant of her conception.¹⁶

In Luke 1:46-47, Mary said,

“My soul doth magnify the Lord, And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.”
Mary knew that she needed a savior.

A heretic, a man whose teachings were officially declared to be contrary to Church doctrine, first introduced the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception. This doctrine was unanimously rejected for centuries by popes, Church Fathers, and theologians of the Catholic Church.¹⁷

ALL HOLY — According to Catholic doctrine, Mary, “the All Holy,” lived a perfectly sinless life.¹⁸

Romans 3:23 says,

“For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.”

Revelation 15:4 says,

“Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? For thou only art holy.”

Romans 3:10 says,

“There is none righteous, no, not one.”

Jesus is the only person who is referred to in Scripture as sinless.

2 Corinthians 5:21 says,

“For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.” 1 Peter 2:22 says, *“Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth.”*

Hebrews 4:15 says,

“For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feelings of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.”

¹⁶ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (New York: Doubleday Image, 1995), paragraphs 490-492. The *Catechism* comes in numerous editions and languages. Because it has numbered paragraphs, statements can be accurately located in spite of the variety of editions.

¹⁷ William Webster, *The Church of Rome at the Bar of History*, pp. 72-77, op. cit.

¹⁸ William Webster, *The Church of Rome at the Bar of History*, pp. 72-77, op. cit.

In contrast, Mary said that God is her Savior (Luke 1:47). If God was her Savior, then Mary was not sinless. Sinless people have no need of a Savior.

In the Book of Revelation, when they were searching for someone who was worthy to break the seals and open the scroll, the only person who was found to be worthy was Jesus. Nobody else in Heaven or on earth (including Mary) was worthy to open the scroll or even look inside it (Revelation 5:1-5).

PERPETUAL VIRGINITY — According to Catholic doctrine, Mary was a virgin before, during, and after the birth of Christ.¹⁹

Matthew 1:24-25 says,

“Then Joseph being raised from sleep did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife: And knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn son: and he called his name JESUS.” “Till,” (until), means that after that point, Joseph did “know” (have sexual relations with) Mary. (See Genesis 4:1 where it tells the reader that Adam “knew” Eve and she conceived and had a son.)

Jesus had brothers and sisters. The Bible even tells us His brothers’ names.

Matthew 13:54-56 says,

“And when he was come 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 Joses, and Simon, and Judas? And his sisters, are they not all with us?”

Other Scripture verses which specifically refer to Jesus’ brothers are: Matthew 12:46; John 2:12; John 7:3; Acts 1:14; and Galatians 1:19.

I was always taught that “brothers” and “sisters” were general terms that really could refer to any kind of kinsman, including cousins. This is true in the Hebrew language. However, the vast majority of the New Testament is written in Greek, which is an extremely precise language. It makes a clear distinction between the words used to describe family relationships. There is a Greek word that refers to people who are relatives but not of the immediate family, such as aunts, uncles, nephews, nieces, and cousins. There are other Greek words that refer specifically to a person’s brother or sister within a family.²⁰

MOTHER OF GOD — According to Catholic doctrine, because Mary is the mother of Jesus, and Jesus is God, therefore Mary is the Mother of God.²¹

¹⁹ Catechism of the Catholic Church, Para., William Webster, *The Church of Rome at the Bar of History*, pp. 72-77, op. cit., graphs 496-511.

²⁰ William Webster, *The Church of Rome at the Bar of History*, pp. 79-80, op. cit.

²¹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, paragraphs 963, 971, 2677.

The Incarnation means that Jesus was both fully God and fully man. Mary was only the mother of Jesus as man, and not the mother of Jesus as God. According to the Bible, the world was created through Jesus. The Bible says,

*“God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, **by ‘whom’ also he made the worlds.**”* (Hebrews 1:1-2, emphasis and single quotes added)

*“**For by him [Jesus] were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers; all things [including Mary] were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things [including Mary], and by him all things consist.**”* (Colossians 1:16-17, emphasis added)

“Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, before Abraham was, I am.” (John 8:58)

Jesus existed before Abraham was born. That means that He also existed before Mary was born. Jesus said,

*“And now O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory **which I had with thee before the world was.**”* (John 17:5, emphasis added)

So Jesus as God existed even before the world began. Jesus came first since He had no beginning—not Mary, who first came into existence when her natural parents conceived her.

MOTHER OF THE CHURCH — According to Catholic doctrine, Mary is the Mother of the Church.²²

Acts 1:13-14 gives a picture of a group of people praying together. Mary is mentioned as one of them, but nothing indicates any special prominence.

“And when they were come in, they went up into an upper room, where abode both Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, Phillip, and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon Zelotes, and Judas the brother of James. These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren.”

Mary was probably in the Upper Room when the tongues of fire fell upon the 120 disciples. However, she is never mentioned again in the Book of Acts, which is our only historical record of how the Church was born. She is also not specifically identified in the epistles. Paul did send greetings to “Mary,” but that was a common name. In the Gospels and in the

²² Catechism of the Catholic Church, paras. 963, 975.

Book of Acts, she is referred to as “Mary the mother of Jesus” to distinguish her from other women named Mary.

It is notable that John, who took Mary into his home after Jesus was crucified, does not mention her in his epistles, and he only mentions her on two occasions in his Gospel, that being the wedding at Cana and the crucifixion of Jesus. John mentions Mary Magdalene more times than he mentions Jesus’ mother.

ASSUMPTION — According to Catholic doctrine, at the end of her life, Mary was taken up (“assumed”) body and soul into Heaven.²³

There is no biblical reference to the assumption of Mary. The Gospel of John was written around 90 A.D., which is more than 100 years after Mary was born. Surely Mary was more than ten years old when Jesus was conceived. If Mary had been supernaturally assumed into Heaven, would not John, the disciple that Mary lived with, have mentioned it? When Enoch and Elijah were taken up to Heaven, the Bible recorded it. With Elijah it was recorded in some detail. (See Genesis 6:24 and 2 Kings 2:1-18.)

The Assumption of Mary was officially declared to be a dogma of the Roman Catholic faith in 1950. This means that every Roman Catholic is required to believe this doctrine without questioning it. However, as we will see, the teaching of the Assumption originated with heretical writings that were officially condemned by the early Church.

In 495 A.D., Pope Gelasius issued a decree that rejected this teaching as heresy and its proponents as heretics. In the sixth century, Pope Hormisdas also condemned as heretics those authors who taught the doctrine of the Assumption of Mary. Early on, the Catholic Church clearly considered the doctrine of the Assumption of Mary to be a heresy worthy of condemnation. Here we have “infallible” popes declaring something to be a heresy. Then in 1950, Pope Pius XII, another “infallible” pope, declared it to be official Roman Catholic doctrine.²⁴

CO-MEDIATOR — According to Catholic doctrine, Mary is the Co-Mediator to whom we can entrust all our cares and petitions.²⁵

There is only one mediator and that is Jesus. The Bible says,

“For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus: Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.” (1 Timothy 2:5-6)

“Wherefore he [Jesus] is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.” (Hebrews 7:25)

²³ Catechism of the Catholic Church, paras. 966, 974.

²⁴ William Webster, *The Church of Rome at the Bar of History*, pp. 81-85, op. cit.

²⁵ Catechism of the Catholic Church, paras. 968-970 and 2677.

“In whom [Jesus] we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him.”
(Ephesians 3:12)

If Jesus is constantly interceding for us and He is able to save us “to the uttermost,” (utterly, completely) then He does not need Mary’s help. If we can approach God with “boldness” and “confidence” because of our faith in Jesus, then we do not need Mary’s help either.

QUEEN OF HEAVEN — According to Catholic doctrine, God has exalted Mary in heavenly glory as Queen of Heaven and earth.²⁶ She is to be praised with special devotion.²⁷

The Bible says,

“Let them praise the name of the Lord: for his name alone is excellent (exceptional); his glory is above the earth and heaven.” (Psalm 148:13, emphasis added)

This makes it quite clear that only God’s name (not Mary’s) is to be exalted. (Note: In Catholic Bibles the numbering of the chapters and verses of some of the Psalms is slightly different.)

When people tried to give Mary special honor and pre-eminence because she was His mother, Jesus corrected them.

“And it came to pass, as he spake these things, a certain woman of the company lifted up her voice, and said unto him, Blessed is the womb that bare thee, and the paps which thou hast sucked. But he said, Yea rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it.” (Luke 11:27-28)

In chapters four and five of the Book of Revelation, we are given quite a detailed picture of Heaven. God is seated on the throne, surrounded by 24 elders and four living creatures. The Lamb (Jesus) is standing in the center of the throne. Ten thousand times ten thousand plus thousands of thousands of angels circle the throne, singing God’s praises, and Mary is not in the picture at all.²⁸

HOW DID WE GET HERE?

How did modern Catholic doctrine about Mary wander so far away from the teachings of the Bible and the Early Church Fathers? Two reasons are: the importance given to Church tradition and the doctrine of papal infallibility.

²⁶ Catechism of the Catholic Church, paras. 966.

²⁷ Catechism of the Catholic Church, paras. 971, 2675.

²⁸ (Estimated: one myriad equaling 10,000 angels. Revelation 5:11 speaks of myriads of myriads, possibly meaning tens of thousands times tens of thousands. It is intended to be a mathematical equation without resolution.) John Gill’s commentary, “The Jews speak of nine hundred and six thousand millions of ministering angels, that stand constantly before the Lord” (Rev. 5:11).

The Catholic Church officially states that Church tradition is equal in authority to the Bible.²⁹ The problem is that Catholic tradition consists of various expressions of worship and belief of the Catholic people.³⁰ It is nebulous. It keeps changing. You cannot find it written in one place. You cannot really put your hands on exactly what it is.

The Early Fathers used Scripture as the standard, against which they tested Church tradition. However, the modern Catholic doctrine that Church tradition is equal in authority with the Bible is contrary to the writings of the Early Fathers.³¹

According to Jesus, Scripture is the plumb line for measuring everything else. He judged religious traditions by comparing them to Scripture. When religious traditions contradicted Scripture, he condemned them. This shows clearly that nothing is equal in authority to Scripture. The Bible stands alone as the standard by which all other things are to be judged. The Pharisees criticized Jesus and His disciples for not following their traditions. Jesus' response shows his attitude towards those traditions:

*“He answered and said unto them, Well hath Esaias prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. **Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.** For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men, as the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things ye do. And he said unto them, **Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition.** For Moses said, Honour thy father and thy mother; and Whoso curseth father or mother, let him die the death: But ye say, If a man shall say to his father or mother, It is Corban, that is to say, a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; he shall be free. And ye suffer him no more to do ought for his father or his mother; **Making the word of God of none effect through your tradition, which ye have delivered: and many such like things do ye.**” (Mark 7:6-13, emphasis added)*

According to the official teaching of the Catholic Church, Catholic men and women are not allowed to believe what they read in the Bible until they check it out with the Catholic Church. They are required to find out how the bishops of the Church interpret a passage and they are to accept what the bishops teach, as if it came from Jesus Christ Himself. They are not allowed to use their own judgment or follow their own conscience. They are required to believe whatever the bishops teach without questioning it.³²

The Catholic Church teaches that when the bishops officially teach doctrine, relating to faith and morals, then God supernaturally prevents them from making any errors. This is called

²⁹ Catechism of the Catholic Church, paras. 80, 84, 86, 97.

³⁰ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, paras. 78, 98, 113, 2650, 2661.

³¹ William Webster, *The Church of Rome at the Bar of History*, pp. 22-33, op. cit. For a description of how pious practices can become official Catholic doctrine, and how this conflicts with both Scripture and the writings of the Early Fathers, see James G. McCarthy, *The Gospel According to Rome: Comparing Catholic Tradition and the Word of God*, pp. 281-309.

³² *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, paras. 85, 87, 100, 862, 891, 939, 2034, 2037, 2041, 2050.

“infallibility.” It applies to official councils such as the Second Vatican Council. It also applies to other teachings as long as the bishops and the pope are in agreement about them.³³

The pope is said to be infallible whenever he makes an official decree on matters of faith and morals. According to Catholic doctrine, it is impossible for the pope to teach false doctrine. Catholics are expected to obey the pope without question, even when he is not making an “infallible” statement about doctrine. They are expected to submit their wills and minds to the pope without question.³⁴

The Early Church Fathers, the theologians, and canon lawyers of the Middle Ages, never taught that the bishops or the pope were infallible. This is demonstrated by the fact that in 680 A.D., the Sixth Ecumenical Council condemned a pope as a heretic. It was not until the 14th century that the theory of infallibility began to emerge. With the development of this theory came a change in the interpretation of some biblical passages.³⁵

The history of the early Church shows that the bishop of Rome was considered to be just another bishop. For example, Pope Gregory (590-604 A.D.) explicitly stated that all of the bishops were equal. He specifically repudiated the idea that any one bishop could be the supreme ruler of the Church.³⁶

The claim for papal infallibility does not stand up to the test of history. For example, Pope Zosimus (417-418 A.D.) reversed the pronouncement of a previous pope. He also retracted a doctrinal pronouncement that he himself had previously made. Pope Honorius was condemned as a heretic by the Sixth Ecumenical Council (680-681 A.D.). He was also condemned as a heretic by Pope Leo II, as well as by every other pope until the 11th century. So here we have “infallible” popes condemning another “infallible” pope as a heretic. In 1870, the First Vatican Council abolished “infallible” papal decrees and the decrees of two “infallible” councils.³⁷

MARIAN APPARITIONS

On May 13, 1981, a man shot Pope John Paul II. As the ambulance carried him to the hospital, the pope kept praying, “Mary, my mother! Mary, my mother!” One year later, the pope made a pilgrimage to Fatima to thank Our Lady of Fatima for saving his life and to consecrate the entire human race to her.³⁸ The video, “Catholicism: Crisis of Faith,” shows the pope kissing the feet of a statue of Mary.³⁹

³³ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, paras. 890, 891, 939, 2033, 2034, 2049.

³⁴ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, paras. 892, 2037, 2050.

³⁵ William Webster, *The Church of Rome at the Bar of History*, pp. 34-55, op. cit.

³⁶ *Ibid.* pp. 56-63.

³⁷ *Ibid.* pp. 63-71.

³⁸ James G. McCarthy, *The Gospel According to Rome: Comparing Catholic Tradition and the Word of God*, pp. 181-184 and 199-200, op. cit.

³⁹ The video “Catholicism: Crisis of Faith” covers several topics, including Mary. The producer is a former Catholic. You can order it from D&K Press (800-777-8839) or Amazon.com.

Millions of pilgrims go to shrines that honor apparitions of Mary. Every year 15 to 20 million pilgrims go to Guadalupe in Mexico, five and a half million go to Lourdes in France, five million go to Czestochowa (Jasna Gora) in Poland, and four and a half million go to Fatima in Portugal. Special dates draw huge crowds. On August 15, half a million pilgrims go to Czestochowa. On October 13, a million people go to Fatima. On December 12, 1999, five million pilgrims went to Mexico to honor Our Lady of Guadalupe.⁴⁰

Are these pilgrims worshipping Mary? You can observe them and see for yourself, thanks to a video titled “Messages from Heaven.” If you watch the video (which is available online) you will see the pope bow in front of a painting of Mary and cover the area with incense. You will see a million pilgrims walking in a procession, following a statue of Our Lady of Fatima, and singing songs in her honor. You will see several million people in a procession following a painting of Our Lady of Guadalupe. You will see people weeping and raising their arms towards Mary. You will see the largest assembly of bishops and cardinals since the Second Vatican Council, gathered together to join Pope John Paul II in solemnly consecrating the entire world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary.⁴¹

KINDS OF WORSHIP

There are many traditional ways of expressing devotion to Mary. You can read about some of them online and decide for yourself whether or not these constitute worship.⁴²

Catholic theologians speak of three degrees of homage, which have Latin words. *Latria* is the kind of worship that is due to God alone. *Dulia* is appropriate for honoring the saints. *Hyperdulia* is appropriate for honoring Mary. It is higher than *dulia* but not *latria*. Therefore, Catholic theologians say that Catholics do not worship Mary.

⁴⁰ Jim Tetlow, *Messages from Heaven*, pp. 3-7, op. cit. Jim Tetlow also produced a video with the same title. If you can afford to get both, I recommend it. The book gives a lot of information and it is thoroughly documented. The author is a former Catholic.

⁴¹ Video, “Messages from Heaven,” produced by James Tetlow. You can watch it online. (Accessed 9/30/08) <http://www.creationists.org/MessagesFromHeaven/english.html>

⁴² Quotations from popes who exalted Mary. (Accessed 9/30/08)

<http://www.angelfire.com/ky/dodone/IMARY.html>

Mary’s Names and Titles. (Accessed 9/30/08)

<http://www.angelfire.com/ky/dodone/MNames.html>

The Rosary. (Accessed 9/30/08)

<http://www.angelfire.com/ky/dodone/Rosary.html>

The Litany. (Accessed 9/30/08)

<http://www.angelfire.com/ky/dodone/Litany.html>

Dr. Ken Lawson, “Mary Around the World.” (A series of articles about cultural devotion to Mary.) (Accessed 9/30/08)

<http://www.angelfire.com/ky/dodone/MaryLawson.html>

However, in the practical, down-to-earth, real world, these theological distinctions do not work. Most Catholics have never heard of these words. Of those who have, how many know how to apply them in practical ways? Catholics are not told how to engage in *hyperdulia* without crossing a line that results in actually practicing *latria* towards Mary without realizing it.

When asked about praying to Mary and the saints, I always used to say that actually I was just asking them to pray for me, like I would ask a friend. Well, that is not really accurate, because when I talk to my friends I am not talking to people who have died. Also, I just ask them directly for what I want. I would never begin talking to my friends by saying something like: "Hail holy Queen, mother of mercy, our life, our sweetness and our hope. To thee do we cry, poor banished children of Eve."

I personally participated in many kinds of Marian devotions. ("Marian" means something relating to the Virgin Mary.) I prayed the Rosary, which uses beads to keep track of the prayers. There are ten "Hail Mary's" for every "Our Father" (the Lord's Prayer). The words of the Hail Mary are: "Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death."

I wore the Brown Scapular (two pieces of cloth attached with strings, worn in honor of Mary). I also wore the Miraculous Medal. Both the Brown Scapular and the Miraculous Medal resulted from apparitions of Mary. There are special prayers associated with them. The apparitions of Mary promises to help people who are faithful to these devotions. I went to special services where we recited litanies (a series of titles honoring Mary), prayed to her, and sang songs in her honor, or else recited the words of the songs. I participated in a procession where people carried a statue of Mary, and we all followed it, singing songs in her honor. I visited several Marian shrines. I read books about apparitions of Mary, and dreamed of some day going to Lourdes.

I did not realize that what I was doing was actually a form of worship. I thought that it was pleasing to God. I thought that Jesus wanted us to honor His mother in this way.

The Bible says,

"There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death." (Proverbs 14:12, 16:25)

Our minds can be deceived, and so can the minds of bishops and popes. Only the Bible is totally trustworthy. When religious traditions conflict with the plain meaning of Scripture, then we need to discard those traditions. We cannot afford to do otherwise, because our eternal destiny is at stake.

The Apostles told the religious leaders of their day,

"We ought to obey God rather than men." (Acts 5:29b)

As an old hymn says,

“On Christ the solid rock I stand. All other ground is sinking sand.”

If you are not persuaded that Catholicism encourages, and even requires, a level of “devotion” to Mary that really is a form of worship, then I challenge you to ask God what He thinks about it. If you are sincere in your prayer, and open to letting God show you the truth, then He will.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Bloesch, Donald G., *Essentials of Evangelical Theology*, Volume 1. San Francisco, California: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1982.

“*Catechism of the Catholic Church*.” New York: Doubleday Image, 1995. The *Catechism* comes in many languages and editions. However, things can be accurately located because the paragraphs are numbered.

Code of Canon Law, Latin-English edition, New English Translation. Washington, DC: Canon Law Society of America, 1999. The laws have Canon numbers, so they can easily be found in any of the numerous editions and translations of the *Code of Canon Law*.

Cruz, Joan Carroll, *Miraculous Images of Our Lady: 100 Famous Catholic Statues and Portraits*. Rockford, Illinois: TAN Books & Publishers, 1994. This Catholic devotional book has 125 pictures, 32 of which are full color.

Elwell, Walter A. (editor), *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1984.

Johnson, Paul, *A History of Christianity*. New York: Touchstone, Simon & Schuster, 1995. The author is a Catholic.

McCarthy, James G., *The Gospel According to Rome: Comparing Catholic Tradition and the Word of God*. Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House Publishers, 1995. The author is a former Catholic.

“Queenship Jubilee Year 2000 Catalog,” Queenship Marian Center for World Peace. This catalog has a section called *Vox Populi* promoting books that support the doctrine that Mary is our Advocate, Mediator, and Co-Redemptrix. They also promote petitions asking the pope to officially give Mary those titles, and give information about the status of the petition.

Tetlow, Jim, *Messages from Heaven*. Fairport, New York: Eternal Productions, 2002. You can order it from D&K Press (800-777-8839) or by calling 877-370-7770.

Webster, William, *The Church of Rome at the Bar of History*. Carlisle, Pennsylvania: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1995. The author is a former Catholic.

VIDEOS AND DVD's

“Catholicism: Crisis of Faith” (video and DVD) by James G. McCarthy. You can buy this from D&K Press (800-777-8839) or Amazon.com. The DVD is multi-lingual (English plus seven other languages.) You can watch this video online. (Accessed 9/30/08) <http://www.creationists.org/MessagesFromHeaven/english.html>

“Messages from Heaven” (video and DVD) by Jim Tetlow. The DVD is multi-lingual (English, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, and Polish). You can order it by phone from D&K Press (800-777-8839) or by calling 877-370-7770.

Copyright 2001, 2008 by Mary Ann Collins.