



# *Marian Doctrine and Devotion*

## Chapter 2



Marian devotions are those prayers and acts undertaken to honor Mary and with the intent of seeking her intercession with her Son, Jesus, and his Father. Devotion to the Virgin Mary does not, however, amount to worship - which is reserved for God alone. Catholics view Mary as subordinate to Christ, but uniquely so, in that she is seen as above all other creatures. In 787 the Second Council of Nicaea affirmed a three-level hierarchy of *latria*, *hyperdulia* and *dulia* that applies to God, the Virgin Mary and then to the other saints.

The Roman Catholic Church holds many teachings associated with the Blessed Virgin Mary. Four of these specific doctrines have been raised to the level of dogma, meaning in technical terms that they must be held by the faithful as essential to participation as Roman Catholics. The four Marian dogmas have been defined by the magisterium over the course of Christian history, using both Scripture and Sacred Tradition, the two elements of the one source of Revelation, as evidence for these proclamations. These four dogmas are: Mary the Mother of God, Perpetual Virginity of Mary, The Immaculate Conception, and The Assumption of Mary into Heaven. The twentieth-century has seen a significant drive to establish a fifth and final Dogma-Mary as Co-Redemptrix.

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### In the Eternal Plans:

#### a) The existence of the plan for Incarnation and Mary:

Pius IX, *Ineffabilis Deus*, 1854: "The unspeakable God... since from all eternity He foresaw the most dolorous ruin of the whole human race that would come from the sin of Adam... decreed that by the Incarnation of the Word He would fulfill in a more mysterious way the original plan of His goodness... and so that what fell in the first Adam might be restored much more happily in the second, from the beginning and before the ages He chose and planned a Mother for His Only-begotten son."

Vatican II, *Lumen gentium* §61: "The Blessed Virgin, planned for from eternity as the Mother of God along with the Incarnation of the divine Word, was the loving Mother of the Redeemer... His generous associate, more than others, and the humble servant of the Lord."

**Comment:** 1. All the decrees of God are eternal, since they are identified with His

Even though He could not receive or gain, He still wanted to create us for two reasons: (1) To have someone to receive His generosity. For it pleases Him to give. But then He gave commandments, for (a) it would do no good to give if we were not open to receive: His commandments tell us how to be open; (b) observing the commandments also steers us away from things built into nature that would harm us. For there are automatic penalties, e. g. a hangover after a drunk, or, very likely, a failed marriage after much premarital intercourse. (c) His Holiness loves everything that is right, and hence He wants us to obey, even though it profits Him nothing. For it is right that creatures should obey; and the things commanded are objectively good.

(2) This is His glory: to give benefits to creatures. Hence Vatican I defined that He created for His own glory, in the sense just given: DS 3025. For the interpretation, cf. W. Most, *New Answers to Old Questions*, pp. 50-61.

**e) Would there have been an Incarnation if Adam and Eve had not sinned?:**

The Dominicans and the Franciscans have debated this for centuries. See especially Juniper B. Carol, O. F. M.

However, it is almost certain, considering human weakness even had there been no original sin, that some, perhaps all, would sin, and then would not be able to pass on the life of grace to their children. Hence, considering the immense love of God for the human race, and his love of the fulfillment of the objective moral order (more on this later) we must say that to make up for even one mortal sin—by Adam and Eve or by later persons—God would have wanted to repair it. And if He wanted full reparation—a thing He did not have to do—He would have needed an Incarnation.

End

eternal Being. Hence the decree for the Incarnation is eternal. But that decree also needed to contain the choice of a Mother for the Incarnation. That was the Blessed Virgin. Hence her union with Him is eternal. Vatican II notes that she was His associate as well as His Mother. The Council develops this most fully and in detail, as we shall see.

2. The liturgy often has employed Proverbs 8. 22-31 to express this eternal union: "The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his ways, before he works from of old. I was set up from eternity and of old before the earth was made. When there were no depths, I was brought forth, when there were no fountains abounding in water. Before the mountains were settled, before the hills was I brought forth. When as yet he had not made the earth... When he prepared the heavens I was there; when he marked out the vault over the face of the deep; when he established the skies above; when he made firm the foundations of the earth; when he fixed a limit for the sea so that the waters should not pass his commandment. Then I was beside him as his craftsman, and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him... and my delights were the sons of men."

Is the use of this text for Mary merely a fanciful or poetic accommodation? Such things are possible. But a deeper look is called for. First of all, early on the Law was identified with wisdom, for it is wisdom to follow the law. Thus Sirach 24:22-25 says that whoever follows wisdom will not be ashamed, and Proverbs 1. 7 says "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom."

These ideas fit with the fact that in the nature of things there are automatic penalties. Augustine in *Confessions* 1. 12: "You have ordered it, and it is so, that every disordered soul is its own punishment." Similarly 1 Cor 6. 12 says: "All things are permitted—but not all things are beneficial." Excessive drink brings a hangover; premarital sex is very apt to mean a loveless, failed marriage, for love is a desire for the well-being of another for the other's sake. But if two people use each other for sense pleasure, that is not being concerned with the happiness of the other—it puts the other, and self too, into the state of mortal sin, which can bring hell if death intervenes. Yes, it may feel like love and tenderness—chemistry can cause that feeling. The chemistry is identical with or without the real love.

The idea that the law is Wisdom appears strongly in the Palestinian Targum on Dt. 32:4: "God divides the day into four parts: three hours he toils and is busy with [the study of] the Torah." The Babylonian Talmud, *Aboda Zara*, 3. b has the same idea.

Further, wisdom comes to be personified, as in Wisdom 9. 9-18: "With you is wisdom, who knows your works, and was present when you made the world." We think of John 1. 3: "All things were made by Him [the Logos] and without Him was made nothing that was made." The same thought appears in Col. 1. 15-16: "in Him all things were created". And more explicitly in 1 Cor 1. 25 Christ is the Wisdom of the Father.

We do not assume, of course, that the human author of Proverbs saw Christ as meant at all. But the chief Author, the Holy Spirit, could have in mind more than the human author saw, and later lead the Church to see it.

Then, in view of the eternal inseparable union of the Virgin Mary with Her Son, there is at least some basis for using to refer to her a text which Christian thought came to see as standing for Him." (About the inseparable union, cf. Pius XII, *Munificentissimus Deus*, 1950, AAS 42. 768: "Always sharing His lot." Vatican II developed the same thought in great detail, as we shall see.

## **b) Who was it who planned?**

There are two poles (centers around which things are grouped) in our relationship to God: 1) Love, closeness, warmth: this pole cannot be exaggerated, since He is infinite in all respects. But it can be a sick response if the other pole is almost or entirely omitted: 2) Sense of majesty, greatness. There are especially two ways to help add this second pole:

**a) The negative way:** The Fathers of the Church help: Arnobius, *Against the Nations* 1. 31: "To understand you, we must be silent; and for fallible conjecture to trace you even vaguely, nothing must even be whispered."

Pseudo-Dionysius, *Mystical Theology* 1. 2: Said that God is best known by "unknowing".

St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Life of Moses*: "The true vision of the One we seek, the true seeing, consists in this: in not seeing. For the One Sought is beyond all knowledge."

St. Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, 1. 6. 6: "He must not even be called inexpressible, for when we say that word, we say something."

These statements all use the negative way, i. e, they tell us what God is not. If we make a statement about Him, we need to refine or correct it at almost every step. Thus if we say: "In the beginning, there was a good Father"—we need many adjustments: "In the beginning"—but there is no beginning for Him. "There was"—the word "was" cannot be used, for He is not in time, all is present to Him. "Good"—Our Lord once replied (Lk 18. 18-19) to a young man who had addressed Him as Good Teacher: "Why do you call me good? One is good: God." He did not deny He was

good, but He meant to say that the word good as applied to God and as applied to any creature as something in common, but much more difference than similarity. "Father"—same sort of comment.

**b) Help from astronomy:** The heavens declare the glory of the Lord. so by meditation on astronomy we can gain help to realize partly His Majesty. Here are some data. With each we think: The God who made this by a mere act of will still loves me and wants me to call Him Father. So as in the verse before the Our Father: "Jesus taught us to call God our Father, and so we have the courage to say..."

Antares in Scorpio: 430 light years distant. Could not pass between earth and sun even if distance were tripled.

North Star: over 600 light years  
Andromeda Galaxy: 2.2 million light years  
Quasars: some estimates put farthest at 14 billion light years

**c) Divine transcendence:** This means He is above and beyond all our categories.

(1) Knowledge in general: Humans know either passively, by taking on an impression information they had lacked, or actively, by causing something, e.g. , a blind man knows a chair is moving because he is pushing it. But God cannot lack anything, so the passive way will not do; nor can we make Him as limited as a blind man. So we conclude: neither category fits: He is above and beyond all.

(2) Knowledge of free futures: My decision to be made at 10 AM tomorrow will not come from some causes already lined up, to intersect at 10 AM:—then it would not be free. On the other hand, it does not exist, has not yet been made. So it is unknowable as future. He knows these by way of eternity, in which all is present, even things that are future to us. We cannot understand how this can be. Further. even after eternity has made a future decision present, the question remains: How does He know—same problems as above. So, transcendence.

3) Knowledge of futuribles, e.g., what I would do tomorrow if some conditions would be present. These things are not really future—they are just would-be's. So not even eternity can make them present. Yet Scripture shows He knows these. And we all hold that if we should ask for something that would not be good for us, if it were granted, He would not grant it.

**d) Motive of the Incarnation:** St. Irenaeus (*Against Heresies* 4. 14. 1) wrote: "In the beginning, God formed Adam, not because He stood in need of man, but that He might have someone to receive His benefits."