



Marian Doctrine and Devotion

Chapter 8



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 *latría*, *hyperdulía* and *dulía* 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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Chapter 8

Divine Motherhood:

1)History of the Title Theotokos:

The title Theotokos, Mother of God, is first known to have appeared in an Egyptian papyrus containing parts of the prayer *Sub tuum praesidium*, from the third century. It was found in 1938 in Alexandria, Egypt, by a Protestant named Roberts. The title also appears in the Greek text of a work by St. Hippolytus, (died 235) *De Benedictionibus Jacob* (cf. *Marian Studies VI*, p. 49). However, since it does not appear in the Georgian translation of the text, the authenticity of the occurrence of the word Theotokos is debated. The church historian Socrates reports that the title Theotokos was used by Origen (died c 235) in his commentary on Romans—mostly now lost. The first incontrovertible use of Theotokos is in a letter of Alexander, Bishop of Alexandria (RJ 680. died 328).

Nestorius, Patriarch of Constantinople (c. 381-451) rejected the title Theotokos, wanted to use instead Christotokos or Anthropotokos. He defended the sermons of

Anastasius, one of his priests, who rejected the Theotokos. Nestorius asked for a council. He was deposed by the Council of Ephesus in 431 and his writings were burned by order of the Emperor Theodosius II. However, in 1895 a complete treatise of his was found in a Syriac version. It is called the Bazaar of Heraclides of Damascus—a name Nestorius used to hide his identity. It attacks the decisions of the Council of Ephesus and of St. Cyril of Alexandria. Cyril drew up 12 Anathemas against Nestorius, which were approved by the Council. They are found in his Letter 17. (There are 12 counter anathemas supposedly by Nestorius, which are spurious). Some scholars today insist Nestorius was not a Nestorian, that he even condemned Nestorianism. But it is hard for us to say such a thing when we have so little of his work, whereas the Council and St. Cyril had his works, and could talk to Nestorius in person. However, we must admit that Cyril was a harsh person. Had he shown more tact a serious heresy might have been avoided.

To put two persons in Christ would make the redemption finite, and would leave opening for teaching ignorance in Jesus. The Agnoites, an offshoot of Nestorianism, did that. Their ideas were condemned by Pope Vigilius in 553 AD: DS 419. If there were two persons in Christ, Mary would be the Mother of only the human person, and hence could not be called Mother of God. But if there is only one person, a divine person, then she would be the Mother not of the divine nature, but of the person who is divine. This is in a way parallel to the normal human case in which Mrs. Jones is the mother of John Jones—we do not say she is the mother only of the body of John Jones, but of the person John Jones.

St. Gregory of Nazianzus in his Epistle 101. 4-6 RJ 1017) made the title Theotokos the touchstone of orthodoxy. We could summarize, and clarify, his argument thus: If there were two persons in Christ, she would be the Mother of only the human person. If there were only one nature in Christ, and that human, she would not be the Mother of God. If there were only one nature in Christ, divine nature, she would not be the Mother of Christ. Hence the Theotokos implies one person, a divine person, and two natures, divine and human. Similarly, St. Cyril of Alexandria, in his Homily 15 on the Incarnation, also makes Theotokos the test of orthodoxy.

2) Dignity of Divine Motherhood:

Plato. in his Symposium 203 said: "No god associates with man." He did know of a great supreme God, with a concept much like ours, except his God was not the Creator. He also believed in secondary gods, which had a body finer than clouds, and a soul. Yet none of these would stoop to associate with us. In fact, to obtain favors from them we should employ the help of a class of beings Plato called daimones, who were also beings with body and soul—with a body like ours, of very high quality. (He seems to have thought the Olympian gods, such as the adulterous Zeus, were of this

type). Aristotle similarly in his *Nicomachean Ethics* 8. 7 said that for friendship, there should not be too great a gap between the friends. If it were very great, no friendship would be possible. So, no friendship of a god with a man would be possible. What would these philosophers think if they learned that the great, supreme, transcendent God actually became man. That He took on a human nature which would be joined to Him in one person, a divine Person.

We have grown up with these thoughts, and so they never did have the impact on us they had with the world of that time. And further, we have become so used to the formula: two natures, one Divine Person, that we do not really grasp the import. If we follow the philosophical framework of Aristotle, we would have to say that the sacred humanity received a relation to the second Person of the Holy Trinity, but that that Person took on no relation: would have been a change in Him! We sense there is something amiss here. Best we should simply say we have another example of transcendence.

What then of her in whose womb He took flesh, where He remained, physically developing for 9 months!. No wonder Pius XI following St. Thomas said, as we saw above, that the dignity of the Mother of God is a quasi-infinite dignity from the infinite good that God is. Philo, whose thought was taken up by the Rabbis as we saw above was very right in saying that Moses thought it unthinkable to have legitimate sex with his wife after just one brief encounter with God—what of her who carried Him 9 months! To think that some people with little or no perception of divine matters could suppose she had four more sons and at least two daughters.

And what should we think of Wilfrid Harrington (commentary on Mark, Glazier, 1979, p. 47), and others like him who erred so outrageously in commenting on Mark 3:20-35 as to suggest that she in Mk 3:20 did not believe in Him, and went along with others to seize Him? And Harrington added, incredibly, that the passage "may be seen to distinguish those who stood outside the sphere of salvation and those who are within it." Which implies that Mary was outside the sphere of salvation! This also supposes that Mark clashes with Luke, for Luke pictures her as blessed because of her faith. And Vatican II said in *Lumen Gentium* (LG) 56 that at the annunciation Mary "embracing the salvific will of God with full heart... totally dedicated herself... to the person and work of her Son."

Harrington got into this mistake by a poor analysis of the passage of Mk 3:20-25. There are three segments in that passage:

(1) Those about Him (in Greek it is *hoi par' autou*—an ambiguous expression that could mean His relatives or friends or those about Him) see that He is so busy preaching to the crowds that He does not take time to eat. They say that He is beside Himself, and go out to get Him forcefully.

(2) The scribes from Jerusalem say He casts out devils by Beelzebul. He told them that was the unforgivable sin. He did not mean God would simply refuse to forgive. He meant that their hardness was such that it was hardly likely they could ever repent.

(3) His Mother and relatives come to the edge of the crowd, and He comments that those who hear and keep the word of God are His mother, brother, and sister.

Harrington is certain that the groups in segments 1 and 3 are the same. This is not at all certain, for Form Criticism shows us that many Gospel passages are pieced together out of units that once were separate. Here in particular, the interjection of the charge of the scribes could at least suggest that units 1 and 3 are not connected. But Harrington is certain:

"For Mark [3. 31-35] is a continuation of vv. 20-21... his own did not receive him." And he adds, incredibly, that the passage "may be seen to distinguish those who stood outside the sphere of salvation and those who are within it." Which implies that Mary was outside the sphere of salvation!

Still further, even if we would think she was in the group in segment one of Mk 3:20-35, it would not follow that she too did not believe in Him. She may well have gone along to try to restrain those who did not believe. Even very ordinary Mothers are apt to believe in their sons even when the evidence is against them.

Vatican II warns us in *Dei Verbum* §12: "Since Sacred Scripture must be read and interpreted with the same Spirit by whom it was written, to rightly get the sense of the sacred texts we must look not less diligently to the content and unity of the whole of Scripture, taking into account the living Tradition of the Church, and the analogy of faith." So one Evangelist definitely cannot contradict another.

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