



Marian Doctrine and Devotion

Chapter 27



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.

Commentary on the book of Isaiah is by noted theologian Rev. William G. Most (1914-1999). His contributions to theology have been recognized all over the world. He published 12 books and a host of articles on topics ranging from biblical studies to Mariology and Latin grammar.

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Private Revelations:

St. John of the Cross, a Doctor of the Church and one of the greatest of mystic theologians, who had had so many special favors himself, is very severe with persons who desire to be the recipients of visions and revelations. He never wearies of repeating that the proximate means of union with God in this life is the three theological virtues of faith, hope, and love. True growth consists in intensified love, which is founded on faith and hope. Now although St. John encourages everyone to aim at infused contemplation, even though relatively few attain it, he strongly reproves anyone who desires to be the recipient of a vision or revelation. They desire to see; faith holds on without seeing. St. Teresa of Avila, who herself had an abundance of visions, takes a similar stand. She admits that great profit can be had from such things when they are genuine and are received in the proper spirit. Yet she says (Interior Castle 6. 9): "I will only warn you that, when you learn or hear that God is granting souls these graces, you must never beg or desire Him to lead you by this road. Even if you think it is a very good one... there are certain reasons why such a course is not wise." She then goes on at length to explain her reasons: First, such a

desire shows a lack of humility; second, one thereby leaves self open to "great peril because the devil has only to see a door left a bit ajar to enter"; third, the danger of auto-suggestion: "When a person has a great desire for something, he convinces himself that he is seeing or hearing what he desires." Fourth, it is presumption for one to want to choose his own path, as only the Lord knows which path is best for us. Fifth, very heavy trials usually go with these favors: could we be sure of being able to bear them? Sixth, "you may well find that the very thing from which you had expected gain will bring you loss." She then adds that there are also other reasons, and continues with some wholesome advice that one can become very holy without this sort of thing: "There are many holy people who have never known what it is to receive a favor of this sort, and there are others who receive such favors even though they are not holy." We think of the frightening words of Our Lord in Mt. 7. 22 -23. Speaking of the last day, He said: "Many will say to me on that day: "Lord , Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out devils in your name, and work many miracles in your name? And then I will tell them: I never knew you. Depart from me you workers of iniquity." St. Teresa adds: "It is true that to have these favors must be a very great help towards attaining a high degree of perfection in the virtues; but one who has attained the virtues at the cost of his own work has earned much more merit."

It is, then, a sad mistake to center one's spiritual life about recounting and hoping for special revelations. Yes, we do well to follow those that have been approved by the Church, such as Lourdes and Fatima. But even there, they should not be the center of our spiritual lives except in so far as they are an exhortation to what the Gospel already calls for. Thus the three requests of Fatima are all just repetitions of what general theology provides: 1) Penance—which in the Gospel sense, means moral reform and reparation for sin; 2) Devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary—we saw above that this is merely the natural conclusion of learning what our Father's plan is, of His approach to us in which He has given her an all-pervading role; and 3) The Rosary, consisting mostly of lines from the Gospel, plus prayers composed by the Church.

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