



Marian Doctrine and Devotion

Chapter 17



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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Chapter 17

Assumption:

There had been a problem of how the Pope could define the Assumption. There seemed to be nothing in Scripture on it, and what things there were in the Tradition of the Fathers seemed to come not from an apostolic origin, but from some apocryphal stories that circulated chiefly beginning in the fourth century.

A Pope is not required to specify precisely where in the sources of revelation he finds a given doctrine. Yet, those documents often do review various things that at least in a way seem to support the teaching. We see an example of this in the Bull *Ineffabilis Deus* in which Pius IX defined the Immaculate Conception.

One thought that was clearly in the mind of Pius XII was the principle of consortium that she was "always sharing His lot" (AAS 42. 768).

In line with this, he showed the relation of the Assumption to the Immaculate Conception: "For these two privileges are most closely related to each other. Christ

has overcome sin and death by His own death; and one who is reborn in a heavenly way through baptism has, through Christ Himself, conquered sin and death. However, in accord with His general rule, God does not wish to grant the full effect of victory over death to the just until the end of time shall have come.... Yet God wished that the Blessed Virgin Mary be exempt from this general law. For she, by a completely singular privilege, conquered sin in her Immaculate Conception, and thus was not liable to that law of remaining in the corruption of the grave, nor did she have to wait for the end of time for the redemption of her body." (AAS 42. 754).

Pius XII next said he had asked the opinions of all the Bishops of the world on the Assumption. Their response was almost unanimous in the affirmative. The universal teaching of the authorities of the Church by itself, he tells us, gives us a proof. (Cf. LG §§ 25 and 12).

He next reviewed some of the outstanding statements of Tradition throughout all the centuries. This teaching is found at a very early date in the liturgical books. After the patristic age, the same doctrine was studied in detail by scholastic theologians. For example, he quotes the words of St. Bernardine of Siena who ". . . gathered up and carefully treated everything that medieval theologians had said and discussed on this matter. He was not satisfied to repeat the chief considerations which doctors of previous times had already proposed, but added others of his own. For the likeness of the Mother of God and the Divine Son in regard to nobility of soul and body—a likeness which forbids the very thought that the heavenly Queen should be separated from the heavenly King—absolutely demands that Mary 'must not be anywhere but where Christ is.' And furthermore, it is reasonable and fitting that not only the soul and body of a man, but also the soul and body of a woman should have already attained heavenly glory. Finally, since the Church has never sought for bodily relics of the Blessed Virgin, nor exposed them for the veneration of the faithful, we have an argument which can be considered as 'practically a proof by sensory experience.'" (AAS 42. 765-66.)

He then speaks of St. Francis de Sales, who "after stating that it would be wrong to doubt that Jesus Christ has kept in the most perfect way the divine commandment that children honor their parents, puts this question: 'What son, if he could, would not bring his mother back to life, and take her, after death, into paradise?'" (AAS 42. 766.)

We have given only a sample of the great review of earlier teachings given in the *Munificentissimus Deus*. After this survey, the Pope sums up: "All these arguments and considerations of the Holy Fathers rest on the Sacred Writings as their ultimate foundation. These place the revered Mother of God as it were before our eyes, as most closely joined to her Divine Son, and always sharing in His lot. Hence it seems practically impossible to think

of her who conceived Christ, brought Him forth, gave Him milk, held Him in her hands and pressed Him to her heart as being separated from Him after this earthly life in body, even though not in soul." (AAS 42. 767-68).

But it seems that the precise ground for the definition is in the following passage just before the definition: " We must remember especially that, since the second century, the Virgin Mary has been presented by the Holy Fathers as the New Eve, who, although subject to the New Adam, was most closely associated with Him in that struggle against the infernal enemy which, as foretold in the protoevangelium, was to result in that most complete victory over sin and death, which are always correlated in the writings of the Apostle of the Gentiles. Wherefore, just as the glorious resurrection of Christ was an essential part and final sign of this victory, so also that struggle which was common to the Blessed Virgin and her Son had to be closed by the 'glorification' of her virginal body." (AAS 42. 768.)

The thought is brilliant. The Pope first recalled the New Eve theme, which we have seen. Then he focused on the fact, within that theme, that the New Eve had been closely associated with the New Adam in the struggle against sin and death. Still further, in the case of her Son, that struggle had brought glorification. Since the struggle was in common to both, then a common cause would have a common effect: it had to bring a parallel glorification to her, the Assumption.

Comments:

1. We notice that her cooperation in the redemption is described strongly: the struggle was in common. This cannot be taken loosely for the Pope uses it, it seems, as the chief support for a solemn definition.
2. Pius XII carefully refrained from saying in his own words at any point that she died. Some, even a few of the Fathers, had denied that she ever died: basing this on the fact that death was the result of original sin, which she lacked. However, because as Pius XII also said, she was "always sharing His lot," for this reason, likeness to Him, it seems much more probable that she did die.
3. How did she die? St. John of the Cross, Living Flame of Love 1. 30 says: "For while the deaths of others may come from sickness or old age, when these souls die, even though it may be from sickness or old age, their souls are carried away by nothing less than some loving impulse and encounter that is higher and of greater power and strength than any in the past. For it can break the web, and carry off the jewel of the spirit. So the deaths of such souls is sweet and gentle, more so than their spiritual life in the past, for they die in delightful encounters and lofty impulses of love." Similarly, St. Francis de Sales, in his Treatise on the Love of God 7. 14: "... we must not suppose an impetuous agitation in this heavenly love of the motherly heart of the Virgin. For love in itself is sweet, gracious, peaceful, calm... . It was in this way then that holy love worked its force in the virginal heart of the Holy Mother, without any violent

impulse, for it found no resistance or hindrance at all." He adds (13. 24) that love at the cross gave her the supreme sorrows of death. So it was right that finally death should give her the sovereign pleasure of love."

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