

The Marian Dogmas

The devotion of Catholics to Mary is baffling to most Protestants. We learn of the gospel of Christ, and enjoy the story of His birth, but do not attach special theological significance to Mary other than the fact of her virginity at His birth. This fulfillment of prophecy is the limit of our concern for Mary. Catholics, on the other hand, regard Mary as the pre-eminent heavenly person to whom they should give homage. In this section, we will explore the Marian dogmas.

There are four official Marian dogmas (and one unofficial dogma).

1. Perpetual Virginity
2. Immaculate Conception
3. Mother of God
4. Bodily Assumption

Each of these dogmas is an official RCC position, accompanied by appropriate RCC conciliar and Papal pronouncements. Every Catholic is required to believe them as a condition of salvation. The dogmas are stated as follows.

Perpetual Virginity

Mary was a virgin when she conceived Jesus, and remained a virgin throughout her life.

Immaculate Conception

Mary herself was conceived without original sin, and remained sinless throughout her life.

Mother of God

Mary's son was fully divine because Mary herself was divine. This dogma includes the subsidiary dogma: Mary, Queen of the Universe.

Bodily Assumption

Mary was bodily taken (assumed) to heaven.

The fifth (not yet) dogma: **Mary, Co-Redemptrix**

Mary shared equally with Christ in the process of redemption. This dogma exists fully within the other four, and lacks only the official title.

In our discussion, we will not deal with many of the supposed supporting texts, since these are essentially window dressing, and do not affect the core issues. For example, Mary's statement at the wedding feast in Cana "Whatever He says to you, do it.", is stretched by the RCC to be evidence of a divine command by Mary. When the other evidence of Mary's true human, sinful nature is examined, the fanciful nature of such interpretations becomes obvious.

The true origin of the Marian dogmas can be seen in the introduction of Louis-Marie Grignion de Montfort's "The Secret of Mary". "Here is a secret, chosen soul, which the most High God taught me and which I have not found in any book, ancient or modern. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, I am confiding it to you. . ." We could stop right here, and quote Isaiah 8:20 as our proof. We would be correct, but we would also remain unaware of the extent of the Marian issue.

The Perpetual Virginity of Mary

1. A virgin was prophesied to be the mother of the Messiah (Is 7:14). It is clear that Mary was a virgin when Jesus was born (Matt 1:23-25), fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah. What implication may be drawn from Matt 1:18, 25 regarding Mary's virginity after the birth of Christ?

2. If Mary remained a virgin after Jesus' birth, then how can we explain the statements in Matt 12:46-47; 13:55-56, Mark 3:31-32, Luke 8:19-20, John 2:12; 7:3, 5, 10, Acts 1:14, 1 Cor 9:5, and Gal 1:19? Does John 19:26-27 indicate a different understanding?

3. Irenaeus, a second century church father tells us that the apostles received no secret knowledge and delivered no secret traditions. Origen, another early church father again describes James and Jude as "the Lord's brothers" (Commentaries on John and Matthew). What logical conclusion should be drawn from the testimony of these early pioneers? (Note that the scriptures contain no statement that Joseph had children by a prior marriage.)

4. Even if Mary remained a virgin throughout her life, what effect would that have on the message of the gospel?

The Immaculate Conception

"We declare, pronounce, and define that the doctrine which holds that the most Blessed Virgin Mary, in the first instance of her conception, by a singular grace and privilege granted by Almighty God, in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, the Savior of the human race, was preserved free from all stain of original sin, is a doctrine revealed by God and therefore to be believed firmly and constantly by all the faithful." . . . "Mary is more excellent than all, and by nature fair and beautiful, and more holy than the Cherubim and Seraphim. To praise her all the tongues of heaven and earth do not suffice." (*Ineffabilis Deus*, Pope Pius IX, December 8, 1854)

5. The Bible contains no direct statement of Mary's birth. She is stated as being "of the house of David" (Luke 1:27). What does this heritage say about Mary's status with regard to original sin?

6. Roman Catholic teaching refers to Mary's "Magnificat" in Luke 1:46-55 as evidence for Mary's sinless state. In particular they cite verses 48-49. What do these verses say about Mary's "sinless" state?

7. Does Elizabeth's statement in 42-45 indicate sinlessness for Mary?

8. Does Gabriel's statement in verse 28 indicate sinlessness for Mary? (Note: in the Douay this is translated "Hail Mary, full of grace", the beginning of the Catholic "Hail Mary".) Note Gabriel's greeting to Daniel in Dan 9:23 and 10:11 for comparison. Also note the description of Christians in Matt 25:34.

9. Let us now examine key statements within the "Magnificat". In verse 47 Mary refers to Jesus as "my Savior". In verse 48, she calls herself a "bondslave", and notes that she would be considered blessed "from this time on". What is the proper understanding of these terms and phrases? Compare to Paul, in the opening of Romans, Philipians, etc.

10. Mary utterly disappears from the Bible after Acts 1. The only later reference to her is Paul's description of Jesus as "born of a woman" in Gal 4:4. Yet Paul does comment on her "sinless" state in Rom 3:10 & 23. What is Paul's testimony on the immaculate conception?

A number of subsidiary proclamations have been made regarding the supposed sinlessness of Mary. For example, she is alleged to have had no pain in childbirth, since pain in labor came as part of the curse of sin (Gen 3:16). Since all of these ideas require that Mary be free of original sin, and this is obviously untrue, we will not concern ourselves with them. It will be enough to note that the RCC is not content to propound the dogma, it must embellish it, and in doing so, contradicts itself.

“According to the belief formulated in solemn documents of the Church, this ‘glory of grace’ is manifested in the Mother of God through the fact that she has been ‘redeemed in a more sublime manner’”. (*Redemptoris Mater*, Pope John Paul II, March 25, 1987)

Mary Mother of God

In its simplest form, this dogma merely states that Mary was the mother of Jesus. This is not an issue of concern, since all Christians recognize this simple fact. The problems come from the extended conclusions which are drawn from it. The first problem is that if Jesus is a king as Jesus himself states in John 18:37, His mother must necessarily be a queen.

11. “As Mary was truly the mother of Jesus, and as Jesus was truly God from the first moment of His conception, Mary is truly the mother of God.” (Catholic Encyclopedia) The logical conclusion from this statement is that since Mary is the mother of a king, she is a queen. Since Jesus is King of the universe, Mary is the Queen of the Universe, a title accorded to her by the RCC. What fundamental error does this statement make? (John 1:1-3, 14, Psalm 90:2)

“Let all the children of the Catholic Church, who are so very dear to us, hear these words of ours. With a still more ardent zeal for piety, religion and love, let them continue to venerate, invoke and pray to the most Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, conceived without original sin. Let them fly with utter confidence to this most sweet Mother of mercy and grace in all dangers, difficulties, needs doubts, and fears. Under her guidance, under her patronage, under her kindness and protection, nothing is to be feared; nothing is hopeless. Because, while bearing toward us a truly motherly affection and having in her care the work of our salvation, she is solicitous about the whole human race. And since she has been appointed by God to be the Queen of heaven and earth, and is exalted above all the choirs of angels and saints, and even stands at the right hand of the only begotten Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, she presents our petitions in a most efficacious manner. What she asks, she obtains. Her pleas can never be unheard.” (*Ineffabilis Deus*)

12. In an earlier lesson we discussed the concept of *latria*, the true worship. To whom are we to give our worship? (Ex 20:3-6, Matt 4:10, Acts 10:25-26)

13. The RCC protests that they do not offer *latria* to Mary, but rather “veneration”, defined by the Latin term *dulia*. The Vulgate (Latin translation by Jerome, 5th century AD) translates “serve them” from Ex 20:5 as *dulia*. This shows that *dulia* or service, is something owed only to God. In fact, throughout the Vulgate, *dulia* and *latria* are used interchangeably. Should anyone give *dulia* to Mary? Is prayer to Mary a form of worship? Are we to worship anyone other than God? (Ex 20:5, Rev 22:8-9)

“From the omnipotent Son the Mother was made omnipotent. . . . when Mary goes to Jesus to ask a favor for any of her clients, ‘she approaches the altar of human reconciliation; not asking, but commanding, not as a servant, but as a mistress; for the Son honors her by not refusing her anything’.” (Dignity and Duties of the Priest, Alphonsus de Liguori [recommended by John Paul II])

“Mary is the ‘sealed fountain’, the faithful spouse of the Holy Ghost, to whom He alone has entrance. Mary is the sanctuary and the repose of the Holy Trinity, where God dwells more magnificently and more divinely than in any other place in the universe, not excepting His dwelling between the Cherubim and Seraphim. Nor is any creature, no matter how pure, allowed to enter into that sanctuary except by special privilege. . . . She is the grand and divine world of God, where there are beauties and treasures unspeakable. She is the magnificence of the Most High, where He hid, as in her bosom, His only Son . . . The most infallible and indubitable sign by which we may distinguish a heretic, an man of bad doctrine, a reprobate, from one of the predestinate, is that the heretic and reprobate have nothing but contempt and indifference for Our Lady, endeavoring by their words and examples to diminish the worship and love of her. . . . Instead of

devotion to the holy Virgin, they counsel him devotion to Jesus Christ.” (True Devotion to Mary, Louis-Marie Grignon de Montfort [recommended by no less than eight popes])

14. The RCC protests that Mary is not God. “For Mary is infinitely below her Son, who is God, and therefore she does not command Him as a mother here below would command her child who is below her. Mary, being altogether transformed into God by the grace and by the glory which transforms all the saints into Him, asks nothing, wishes nothing, does nothing contrary to the eternal and immutable will of God. When we read in the writings of Sts Bernard, Bernardine, Bonaventure and others that in Heaven and on earth everything, even God Himself is subject to the Blessed Virgin, they mean that the authority which God has been well pleased to give her is so great that it seems as if she had the same power as God; and that her prayers and petitions are so powerful with God that they always pass for commandments with His Majesty, who never resists the prayer of His dear Mother...” (Montfort) How should we answer this RCC objection? (John 10:33)

“. . . when we have recourse to Jesus, we consider him at the same time as our judge, to whom it belongs to chastise ungrateful souls, and therefore the confidence necessary to be heard may fail us; but when we go to Mary, who has no other office than to compassionate us as Mother of mercy, and to defend us as our advocate, our confidence is more easily established, and is often greater.” “But now, if God is angry with a sinner, and Mary takes him under her protection, she withholds the avenging arm of her Son, and saves him. ‘And so,’ so continues the same saint, ‘no one can be found more fit for this office than Mary, who seizes the sword of divine justice with her own hands to prevent it from falling upon and punishing the sinner.’ St. Anselm, to increase our confidence, adds, that ‘when we have recourse to this divine Mother, not only we may be sure of her protection, but that often we shall be heard more quickly, and be thus preserved, if we have recourse to Mary and call on her holy name, than we should be if we called on the name of Jesus our Saviour,’ and the reason he gives for it is, ‘that to Jesus as a judge, it belongs to punish; but mercy alone belongs to the Blessed Virgin as a patroness.’” (Liguori)

"She keeps her Son from striking us. . . the greatness of the power which she wields over one who is God cannot be conceived. . . " (Montfort)

15. What is the stated motivation of the RCC’s appeal to Mary in the place of an appeal to Jesus?

16. What does the Bible say about Jesus? (Joel 2:13, Matt 23:37, Rom 2:4, Eph 3:14-20, Heb 7:25, John 15:14-15, 1 Tim 2:5, Heb 4:15-16, Psalm 145:7)

17. In what manner is the Christian to approach Jesus? (Heb 4:15-16 esp. KJV) What is Jesus’ office with regard to the penitent sinner? (Heb 7:25)

“Christ is a faithful and powerful Mediator between God and men, but in him men fear the majesty of God. A mediator, then, was needed with the mediator himself; nor could a more fitting one be found than Mary.” “On account of the moral necessity of Mary’s intercession for all, every Christian out to be devoted to the Mother of God. . . he who expects graces from God without the intercession of Mary attempts to fly without wings.” (Liguori)

“She is the supreme minister of the distribution of graces.” (Pope Pius X, Feb 2, 1904)

“The maternal role of Mary towards people in no way obscures or diminishes the unique mediation of Christ, but rather shows its power.” (*Redemptoris Mater*, Pope John Paul II, March 25, 1987)

18. What does Paul say about the mediation of Mary? (1 Tim 2:5)

Catholic assertions about the status of Mary as the true mediator through whom all requests must be made and through whom all graces flow are overwhelming by their sheer volume. We will spend no further time on this issue, but instead proceed to the fourth official dogma:

The Bodily Assumption of Mary

"by the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ, of the Blessed Apostles Peter and Paul, and by our own authority, we pronounce, declare, and define it to be a divinely revealed dogma: that the Immaculate Mother of God, the ever Virgin Mary, having completed the course of her earthly life, was assumed body and soul into heavenly glory." (*Munificentissimus Deus*, Pope Pius XII, November 1, 1950)

19. The Papal Bull announcing this dogma relies entirely on church tradition. Not one text of scripture directly indicates that Mary was assumed into heaven. Our last view of Mary is in Acts 1:14, in the assembly of the disciples after Jesus' ascension. After this she vanishes entirely. How should we regard this dogma, when not one direct, or indirect reference to its subject matter can be found in scripture? (Is 8:20)

Mary, Co-Redeemer (an "unofficial" dogma)

The final dogma is stated repeatedly in the text of the other dogmas. Essentially it says that Mary suffered equally with Jesus, and won the victory over sin.

"Hence, just as Christ, the Mediator between God and man, assumed human nature, blotted the handwriting of the decree that stood against us, and fastened it triumphantly to the cross, so the most holy Virgin, united with him by a most intimate and indissoluble bond, was, with him and through him, eternally at enmity with the evil serpent, and most completely triumphed over him, and thus crushed his head with her immaculate foot." (*Ineffabilis Deus*)

20. What does the Protoevangelium (Gen 3:15) say about Mary? (Note: the Douay Rheims Bible translates this text "I will put enmities between thee and the woman, and thy seed and her seed; she shall crush thy head, and thou shalt lie in wait for her heel.")

"As she suffered and almost died together with her suffering and dying Son, so she surrendered her mother's rights over her Son for the salvation of the human race. And to satisfy the justice of God she sacrificed her Son, as well as she could, so that it may justly be said that she together with Christ has redeemed the human race." (*Inter Sodalicia*, Pope Benedict XV, March 22, 1918)

21. What may we properly learn from Luke 2:35 and John 19:26 regarding this idea? Could Mary have prevented Jesus' death on the cross? (1 Pet 1:17-21)

22. Based on all of the material we have studied (in particular Ex 20:3-6), how should we regard the Marian dogmas? (See 2 Thess 2:3-4)

23. How should we approach Catholics who believe in Mary? (Titus 3:3-7, Heb 4:15-16, Acts 4:10-12)

It is possible to go on at great length dissecting details of the Marian Dogmas. We have dealt with the essential underpinnings of them, and have no need to proceed further into trivia. Therefore, we will close with a selection of choice quotes from official RCC sources, realizing that the sheer volume of such material makes it certain that some select statements will be missed.

“And if, on account of the moral necessity of Mary’s intercession for all, every Christian ought to be devoted to the Mother of God, how much more should priests, who are bound by greater obligations, and stand in need of greater graces for salvation, practise devotion in her honor! . . . he who expects graces from God without the intercession of Mary attempts to fly without wings. . . It is impossible to be saved if we turn away from thee, O Mary.” (Dignity and Duties of the Priest, Alphonsus de Liguori)

“Every grace granted to man has three degrees in order; for by God it is communicated to Christ, from Christ it passes to the Virgin, and from the Virgin it descends to us.” (*Iucunda Semper Expectatione* [On the Rosary], Pope Leo XIII, September 8, 1894)

“God has entrusted Mary with the keeping, the administration and distribution of all His graces, so that all His graces and gifts pass through her hands; and (according to the power she has received over them), as St. Bernardine teaches, Mary gives to whom she wills, the way she wills and as much as she wills, the graces of the Eternal Father, the virtues of Jesus Christ and the gifts of the Holy Ghost. . .

Beware, predestinate soul, of believing that it is more perfect to go straight to Jesus, straight to God. Without Mary, your action and your intention will be of little value; but if you go to God through Mary, your work will be Mary’s work, and consequently it will be sublime and most worthy of God” (The Secret of Mary, Louis-Marie Grignion de Montfort)

“All our hope do we repose in the most Blessed Virgin - - in the all fair and immaculate one who has crushed the poisonous head of the most cruel serpent and brought salvation to the world: in her who is the glory of the prophets and apostles, the honor of the martyrs, the crown and joy of all the saints; in her who is the safest refuge and the most trustworthy helper of all who are in danger; in her who, with her only begotten Son, is the most powerful Mediatrix and Conciliatrix in the whole world; in her who is the most excellent glory, ornament, and impregnable stronghold of the holy Church; in her who has destroyed all heresies and snatched the faithful people and nations from all kinds of direst calamities; in her do we hope who has delivered us from so many threatening dangers. . . What she asks, she obtains.” (*Ineffabilis Deus*)