

What Is The Roman Catholic Doctrine of Mary?

Bible Answers About Denominations

The Roman Catholic Church strenuously objects to the name Mariolatry and prefers to call it the doctrine of Mary. (Donald Attwater, general editor, A Catholic Dictionary, p. 324) However, the name Mariolatry accurately describes the nature of what is involved in Catholic theology and practice concerning the mother of Jesus. In the book, What the Church Teaches, by Conway, which bears the Nihil Obstat and the Imprimatur of the Catholic Church, this statement is made:

“God’s Mother is worthy of honor. He honored her Himself in choosing her from among all His creatures. We never forget the basic truth of our religion: there is only one God, and He alone is to be worshipped. But that does not mean that we are forbidden to pay reasonable, sensible honor to creatures. God explicitly commands you to honor your own father and mother. Is it then wrong to honor God’s Mother? From the beginning, the Church has given to Mary the highest form of honor that can be properly given to any creature. She is human, just as we are. We must never adore her; that is for God alone. But otherwise we cannot honor her to excess, because it is not possible to overestimate the privileges God gave her in making her His own Mother.”

As Greg Litmer points out in his paper Catholicism Examined, “despite statements such as this it is obvious that in the Roman Catholic Church there is a great deal of emphasis placed upon Mary. There are Holy Days of Obligation devoted to Mary, there are prayers whose subject is Mary, there are shrines devoted to Mary that are visited by thousands of pilgrims a year, there are doctrines in Catholicism that separate Mary from all others. The Catholic Church teaches that Mary was born without sin, while all others were born in sin. It teaches that Mary lived her life free from sin. It teaches that she was received into heaven bodily. It teaches that she is the Co-Mediatrix with Christ. It calls Mary; Virgin of Virgins, Mother of God, Queen of Heaven, Queen of Sorrows, Refuge of Sinners, Virgin Most Merciful, and on and on. If such does not constitute worship, exactly what is it?” (Catholicism Examined, p. 160, 161).

The rise of the cult of Mary had its roots in the pagan influences on the church following the apostolic period. The phrase “Mother of God” began to be used by the late 2nd century. The Syrian monk Nestorius protested against the use of the title “Mother of God” but the Council of Ephesus in 431 A.D. condemned the teaching of Nestorius and solemnly affirmed that Mary was to be called “Mother of God.” (Funk & Wagnalls New Encyclopedia, 17:43). The titles “Holy Virgin” and “Blessed Virgin” also came into use in the 2nd and 3rd centuries. (Ibid.). It was not until the middle of the 7th century that it came to be concluded in the Roman Church that Mary remained a perpetual virgin. (Ibid). The doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of Mary, that she was conceived without the taint of “original sin,” was proclaimed in the 13th century and Pope Sixtus IV upheld the dogma and instituted a feast in its honor. Pius IX defined the doctrine as an article of faith in 1854. Nearly one

hundred years later in 1950 the doctrine of the Bodily Assumption of Mary was declared as an article of faith by Pope Pius XII. (Ibid. pp. 43-44). The worship of Mary has seen the formation of numerous shrines around the world, especially in countries under heavy Catholic influence. Thus, from "Mother of God" Mary proceeds ultimately to Queen of Heaven and co-redemptrix by way of the doctrines of Immaculate Conception, Personal Sinlessness, Perpetual Virginity, and Bodily Assumption.

As one can readily see the doctrines surrounding Mary of the Roman Catholic Church did not originate in the first century by the teaching of the apostles. While Mary is a remarkable figure in human and Divine history because she was chosen by God to become the mother of Jesus she is never presented in the Scriptures as the Catholic Church presents her in the doctrines they have manufactured concerning her. Mary appears in the following passages: She is found in the narratives concerning the events surrounding Jesus' birth, Matt. 1 and 2 and Lk. 1 and 2; we read of Mary at the wedding feast in Cana, Jno. 2:1-11; we read of her in the event described in Matt. 12:46-50, Mk. 3:21-35; she is seen also at the cross of Jesus in Jno. 19:25-27; and finally in Acts 1:14. This last passage is the last time we read of Mary. In the rest of the New Testament Mary is not mentioned. Even John, who was entrusted with her care by Jesus, does not mention her in any of his writings. There is no place of prominence, no position of extraordinary honor, given to Mary anywhere in the Bible. Mary is never presented as one to whom prayer should be offered, nor even one through whom one should go in order to reach Jesus.

Notice some things the New Testament actually has to say on the subject of Mary:

- Those who hear the word of God and obey it are viewed by Christ Himself as being more blessed than Mary (Lk. 11:27-28). If one would really honor Mary, he would hear the word of Christ and do it (Jno. 2:5).
- Jesus is the Savior (Matt. 1:21). Nowhere does the Bible teach that Mary's tears and prayers contribute anything to the salvation of one. Rather, it teaches that one must obey Christ in order to be saved (Heb. 5:8-9; 2 Thess. 1:7-9; Acts 4:12; 2 Tim. 2:10).
- Mary herself acknowledged that God is her Savior (Lk. 1:46-47). This implies that she was in need of redemption like anyone else. She therefore was guilty of sin and was not sinless as Catholicism teaches. Only sinners need a Savior!
- The Lord clearly teaches that "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me" (Jno. 14:6). Catholicism implies that Jesus should have added Mary to that text and said, "I and Mary are the way, etc." But He did not do that.
- Nowhere in Scripture is Mary called "Queen of Heaven," "Mother of God," or any of the other terms by which the Catholic Church refers to her. All such titles were given by men after the revelation of God's word was completed.
- Mary was not a perpetual virgin. She later had other children (cf. Matt. 1:25 Joseph knew (sexually) his wife after the birth of Jesus; Matt. 13:55-56 Mary had other children; Gal. 1:19 & Jude 1 James the brother to Jesus). In an attempt to get around these passages the Catholic Church has argued that these were either cousins of Jesus or children born to Joseph by way of another wife. The textual evidence is totally opposed to such a strained reading of the text.
- The Bible does not teach the doctrine that Mary's body was "assumed" directly into heaven. In 1941 this doctrine was not an article of faith and therefore did not have to be believed. However, in 1950 the Catholic Church made it an article of faith. What happened to those people who did not believe this prior to it being made a doctrine?

- The Bible clearly teaches that Christ is the only Mediator between God and man (I Tim. 2:5). Mary was never made a Co-Mediatrix nor a Co-Redemptrix as Catholicism teaches.
- The doctrine of Mary or Mariolatry is an essential pillar in the intricate superstructure of Roman Catholicism. The Rosary, the most popular of their ritual prayers, contains fifty “Hail Mary’s” in the common version and one hundred fifty in the long version. This and many other such prayers, the thousands of statues and paintings, the shrines dedicated to her honor, religious orders, hospitals, schools, etc., dedicated to her glory, as well as the fables and traditions about her—all of these things show that Catholicism is to a great extent a religion of Mary. But the Mary of Catholicism is not the Mary of the New Testament.

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