

MARY WORSHIP by Mary Ann Collins (A Former Catholic Nun)

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A Study of Catholic Practice and Doctrine



by Mary Ann Collins (A Former Catholic Nun)

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INTRODUCTION

Jesus said that the truth will set us free. (John 8:32) However, He did not say that the truth would necessarily be easy to accept. It was painful for me to learn the information that I am about to share with you, but it was also liberating and it led to a closer relationship with God.

As a faithful Catholic, and later as a nun, I practiced Mary worship for many years without realizing it. The prayers and practices were so familiar. They were taught to me by good people, sincere people that I trusted. I prayed rosaries and wore a scapular and engaged in other “devotions” which I honestly thought were good and pleasing to God. Because of my lack of knowledge of the Bible and of Church history, I honestly had no idea that I was actually worshipping Mary.

If modern Catholic teachings and doctrines about Mary are true, then they will not be contrary to Scripture, the writings of the Early Fathers, or the decrees of past popes. For a devout Catholic to question these issues and put them to the test can be painful. It certainly was for me. However, it would be far more painful to have God correct us when we face Him on Judgment Day.

LETTING THE CATHOLIC CHURCH SPEAK FOR ITSELF

I believe in letting people speak for themselves. Therefore my primary sources about Catholic doctrines and history come from the Catholic Church.

First and foremost is the official Catechism of the Catholic Church which was written for the purpose of summarizing the essential and basic teachings of the Roman Catholic Church. It was approved by Pope John Paul II in 1992 and the English translation was released in 1994. The latest English edition was printed in 2000. Most of my other sources are either practicing Catholics or else former Catholics whose approach is loving and respectful and who have thoroughly documented their work.

When I cite the Catechism I will give paragraph numbers rather than page numbers. I will summarize what it says. If you want to see the paragraphs for yourself, there are two web sites with search engines for the Catechism. (Their addresses are given in the Notes.) You can search by topic or by paragraph number. [1]

Scripture quotations are from the King James Version of the Holy Bible.

If you really want to understand Catholic teaching in the light of Scripture and the history of the Catholic church, then I strongly recommend reading the following two books. The authors are former Catholics who love and respect Catholics. They are gentle and respectful in their approach. (See the Bibliography for information about these books.)

The Gospel According to Rome: Comparing Catholic Tradition and the Word of God, by James G. McCarthy. This book is easy to read, well documented, objective, and gentle. It is a comprehensive guide to Catholic beliefs, based on Catholic sources. It examines Catholic teachings in the light of Scripture.

The Church of Rome at the Bar of History by William Webster. This book compares modern Catholic doctrines with the teachings of the early Church.

For a good overview of Catholicism, I recommend the video Catholicism: Crisis of Faith. A friend of mine said that in one hour, this video gave him a better understanding of Catholicism than he had received from a college course on the subject. This video is gentle and respectful. An annotated transcript is available on-line. (Information about videos follows the Bibliography.)

WILL THE REAL CATHOLIC CHURCH

PLEASE STAND UP?

When I was in the convent, our mother superior told us about Catholics in Mexico who, in their devotion to Mary, were doing things that we would only do when worshipping God. We were concerned about this. We considered this practice to be unusual and unbalanced. We thought that the American practice of Catholicism was the true thing. However, many years later I realized that if you want to know what something really is, then look at how it behaves when it is in a position of power. In America, Catholics are in the minority. To see the true spirit behind Catholicism, watch what the Catholic Church does in countries where it is in power.

One place where the Catholic Church is strong is Spain, which is known for the Spanish Inquisition. I always thought that the Inquisition was ancient history. However, the last official Spanish execution for heresy occurred in 1826. A schoolmaster was hanged because he substituted the phrase “Praise be to God” in place of “Ave Maria” (“Hail Mary”) during school prayers. [2]

I always thought that abuses of power by the Catholic Church were something that happened long ago. However, look at the following example from the Philippines, where the Catholic Church is strong.

Beginning in 1948 there was a series of apparitions of Mary in the city of Lipa. These apparitions were sometimes accompanied by showers of rose petals and other supernatural phenomena. They occurred in a convent. The local bishop personally experienced a shower of rose petals and thereafter supported the apparitions. The media mocked the supernatural events in Lipa and street vendors sold phony “holy rose petals.” In response to the bad publicity, the Vatican sent a Papal Administrator to take over the diocese where the apparitions occurred. He replaced the bishop and the mother superior. The nun who saw the apparitions was forced to leave the convent. The nuns were ordered to destroy all materials associated with the apparitions, including a statue. The convent was sealed and the nuns were not allowed to talk to anyone outside the convent. An official Commission of Inquiry was convened, which unanimously ruled that the apparitions were not valid. However, they did not interview anybody who had personal, first-hand knowledge of the events. Several of the bishops who were part of the Commission of Inquiry stated on their deathbeds that the Papal Administrator had forced them to sign the verdict by threatening to excommunicate them if they did not sign it. [3]

After years of no longer being a Catholic, I attended a Catholic funeral. When I went into the church something hit me hard. It had always been there, but I had never noticed it before because I was used to it. There were statues of Mary and the saints. They looked solid, real, as if they represented people of power. Jesus only appeared as a helpless baby in Mary’s arms, as a dead man nailed to a cross,

and as little wafers of bread hidden inside a fancy box. Visually and emotionally the message was very clear -- if you want real power, if you want someone who can do something for you, then go to Mary and the Saints.

DEVOTION TO MARY

If you want to see what a person's real priorities are, then watch what they do when their life, or the life of a loved one, is in danger. When Pope John Paul II was shot, while the ambulance was rushing him to the hospital, the Pope was not praying to God or calling on the name of Jesus. He kept saying, over and over, "Mary, my mother!" Polish pilgrims placed a picture of Our Lady of Czestochowa on the throne where the Pope normally sat. People gathered around the picture. Vatican loudspeakers broadcasted the prayers of the rosary. When the Pope recovered, he gave Mary all the glory for saving his life, and he made a pilgrimage to Fatima to publicly thank her. [4]



Jesus said, "[W]here your treasure is, there will your heart be also." (Luke 12:34) Some statues of Mary have real crowns made of gold. The web sites listed in the Notes show pictures of statues of Our Lady of Fatima and Our Lady of Lourdes wearing crowns. [5] The statues in the pictures are replicas, and their crowns are ceramic and painted gold. But the crowns on the original statues at Fatima and Lourdes are real crowns made of real gold.

Vast sums of money are spent on some special statues of Mary. For example, the statue of Our Lady of the Pillar in Saragossa, Spain has a crown made of 25 pounds of gold and diamonds, with so many diamonds that you can hardly see the gold. In addition, it has six other crowns of gold, diamonds and emeralds. It

has 365 mantles which are embroidered with gold and covered with roses of diamonds and other precious stones. It has 365 necklaces made of pearls and diamonds, and six chains of gold set with diamonds. [6]

In Sabana Grande, Puerto Rico, preparations are underway to construct a huge statue of Our Lady of the Rosary. Inside the base of the statue there will be chapels, conference rooms, apartments, a food court, and radio and TV stations. There will also be observation decks. This statue will be part of a 500-acre “Mystical City” complex. According to an article in Caribbean Business, this statue “will top at 1,500 feet”. According to an article by the Associated Press, the statue will be 305 feet high. [7] The discrepancy in numbers can be explained by looking at the Statue of Liberty, which is a 151 foot statue on top of a 154 foot base. Some sources say that the Statue of Liberty is 305 feet high (which includes the height of the base) and some say that it is 151 feet high (which is the height of the actual statue). What we probably have in Sabana Grande is a 305 foot statue with a 1,200 foot base.

I have personally participated in American processions which honored Mary. We walked through the streets following a statue of Mary which was carried on a platform, high up where it was clearly visible. We sang songs in Mary’s honor. We prayed rosaries and other prayers to her. These were small processions. At Fatima, Portugal, crowds of over a million people gather on the anniversary of the apparition of Our Lady of Fatima. The celebration includes a procession of a million people following a statue of Mary and singing her praises. [8]

One popular prayer in Mary’s honor is the Hail Holy Queen, which is known in Latin as the *Salve Regina*. It is traditionally included as part of praying the rosary.

For Catholics who are reading this, please try to overcome your familiarity with this text and really look at the words. Doesn’t this sound like worship?

“Hail, holy Queen, Mother of Mercy! Our life, our sweetness and our hope! To thee do we cry, poor banished children of Eve. To thee do we send up our sighs, mourning and weeping, in this valley of tears. Turn, then, most gracious Advocate, thine eyes of mercy toward us; and after this our exile show unto us the blessed fruit of thy womb, Jesus. O clement, O loving, O sweet Virgin Mary.”

Alfonsus de Liguori (1696-1787) was a principal proponent of the Marianist Movement, which glorifies Mary. He wrote a book entitled *The Glories of Mary* which is famous, influential and widely read. In this book, de Liguori says that Mary was given rulership over one half of the kingdom of God; Mary rules over the kingdom of mercy and Jesus rules over the kingdom of justice. De Liguori said that people should pray to Mary as a mediator and look to her as an object of trust for answered prayer. The book even says that there is no salvation outside of Mary. Some people suggest that these views are extreme and not representative of Catholic Church teaching. However, instead of silencing de Liguori as a heretic, the Catholic Church canonized him as a saint and declared him to be a “doctor of

the Church” (a person whose teachings carry weight and authority). Furthermore, his book is openly and officially promoted by the Catholic Church, and his teachings have influenced popes. [9]

Pope Benedict XV said of Mary that “[O]ne can justly say that with Christ, she herself redeemed mankind.” [10] Pope Pius IX said, “Our salvation is based upon the holy Virgin... so that if there is any hope and spiritual healing for us we receive it solely and uniquely from her.” [11]

A lay movement called “Vox Populi” (“Voice of the People”) gathers signed petitions to send to the Pope, seeking to have him officially declare that Mary is Co-Redemptrix. Over six million signatures have been sent to him, representing 138 countries and all seven continents. This doctrine is supported by over 40 cardinals and 600 bishops worldwide. [12]

The Catholic Church exalts Mary as an idealized, larger-than-life, perfect mother. However, the Bible shows that at one point Mary misunderstood Jesus’ calling to the point that she thought He was insane and she tried to prevent Him from doing what God wanted Him to do. Look at Mark 3:20-34.

“And the multitude cometh together again, so that they could not so much as eat bread. And when his friends heard of it, they went out to lay hold on him: for they said, He is beside himself.” (Mark 3:20-21, emphasis added)

The New International Version says “His family”. The New King James Version says “His own people.” The King James Version says “his friends”. According to Strong’s Greek/Hebrew Dictionary the Greek word has a variety of meanings, including “kinsmen”. However, we don’t have to depend on the exact meaning of the word here because it will be made clear in verse 31. Strong’s defines “lay hold on” as “to use strength, i.e. seize or retain”. It defines “beside himself” as “become astounded, insane”.

Verses 22 through 30 describe a confrontation between Jesus and the scribes. Then we get back to what is happening with the people who thought that Jesus was out of His mind and were so concerned that they were coming to “lay hold on him” (seize him).

“There came then his brethren and his mother, and, standing without, sent unto him calling him. And the multitude sat about him, and they said unto him, Behold, thy mother and thy brethren without seek for thee. And he answered them, saying, Who is my mother, or my brethren? And he looked round about on them which sat about him, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother, and my sister, and mother.” (Mark 3:31-35, emphasis added)

CATHOLIC DOCTRINES ABOUT MARY

COMPARED WITH WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS

My sources for this section are the Bible and the Catechism of the Catholic Church, which has numbered paragraphs. For the sake of simplicity and brevity, I will just say Catechism plus the number of the paragraph (s). For example, “Catechism 411, 493” means “Catechism of the Catholic Church, paragraphs numbered 411 and 493”.

For each doctrinal category, I will indicate the Catholic doctrine, followed by the appropriate references from the Catechism. I will follow this with quotations from the Bible which relate to the doctrine. For the sake of clarity, I will emphasize some portions of Biblical quotations by using boldface type. The last book in the Bible is called “The Book of Revelation” in Protestant Bibles and “The Apocalypse” in Catholic Bibles. I will refer to it as “Revelation”.

IMMACULATE CONCEPTION -- Mary was preserved from all stain of original sin from the first instant of her conception. (Catechism 490-492).

In Luke 1:46-47, Mary said: “My soul doth magnify the Lord, And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour”. Mary knew that she needed a savior.

The doctrine of the Immaculate Conception was first introduced by a heretic (a man whose teachings were officially declared to be contrary to Church doctrine). For centuries this doctrine was unanimously rejected by popes, Fathers and theologians of the Catholic Church. [13]

ALL-HOLY -- Mary, “the All-Holy,” lived a perfectly sinless life. (Catechism 411, 493)

Romans 3:23 says “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God”. Revelation 15:4 says, “Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? For thou only art holy”. Romans 3:10 says, “There is none righteous, no, not one”.

Jesus is the only person who is referred to in Scripture as sinless. Hebrews 4:15 says, “For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feelings of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.” 2 Corinthians 5:21 says, “For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.” 1 Peter 2:22 says, “Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth”.

In contrast, Mary said that God is her Savior. (Luke 1:47) If God was her Savior,

then Mary was not sinless. Sinless people do not need a Savior.

In the Book of Revelation, when they were searching for someone who was worthy to break the seals and open the scroll, the only person who was found to be worthy was Jesus. Nobody else in Heaven or on earth (including Mary) was worthy to open the scroll or even look inside it. (Revelation 5:1-5)

PERPETUAL VIRGINITY -- Mary was a virgin before, during and after the birth of Christ. (Catechism 496-511)

Matthew 1:24-25 says, "Then Joseph being raised from sleep did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife: And knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn son: and he called his name JESUS." "Till" (until) means that after that point, Joseph did "know" (have sexual relations with) Mary. (See Genesis 4:1 where Adam "knew" Eve and she conceived and had a son.)

Jesus had brothers and sisters. The Bible even tells us their names. Matthew 13:54-56 says,

"And when he was come into his own country, he taught them in their synagogue, insomuch that they were astonished, and said, Whence hatch this man this wisdom, and these mighty works? Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary? And his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas? And his sisters, are they not all with us?"

Other Scripture verses which specifically refer to Jesus' brothers are: Matthew 12:46; John 2:12; John 7:3; Acts 1:14; and Galatians 1:19.

I was always taught that "brothers" and "sisters" were general terms that really could refer to any kind of kinsman, including cousins. This is true in the Hebrew language. However, the New Testament is written in Greek, which is an extremely precise language. It makes a clear distinction between the words used to describe family relationships. There is a Greek word which refers to people who are relatives but not of the immediate family, such as aunts, uncles, nephews, nieces and cousins. There are other Greek words which refer specifically to a person's brother or sister within a family. [14]

MOTHER OF GOD -- Because she is the mother of Jesus, and Jesus is God, therefore Mary is the Mother of God. (Catechism 963, 971, 2677).

The Incarnation means that Jesus was both fully God and fully man. Mary was only the mother of Jesus as man, and not the mother of Jesus as God. According to the Bible, the world was created through Jesus. This was long before Mary was born. Hebrews 1:1-2 says,

“God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds”.

Colossians 1:16-17 says,

“For by him [Jesus] were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers; all things [including Mary] were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things [including Mary] , and by him all things consist”.

John 8:58 says, “Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, before Abraham was, I am.” Jesus existed before Abraham was born. That means that He also existed before Mary was born. In John 17:5, Jesus says, “And now O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.” So Jesus existed even before the world began. Jesus came first -- not Mary.

MOTHER OF THE CHURCH -- Mary is the Mother of the Church. (Catechism 963, 975).

Acts 1:13-14 gives a picture of a group of people praying together. Mary is mentioned as one of them, but nothing indicates any special prominence.

“And when they were come in, they went up into an upper room, where abode both Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, Phillip, and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon Zelotes, and Judas the brother of James. These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren.”

Mary was probably in the Upper Room when the tongues of fire fell upon the 120 disciples. However, she is never mentioned again in the Book of Acts, which is our only historical record of how the Church was born. She is also not specifically identified in the epistles. Paul did send greetings to “Mary”, but that was a common name. (In the Gospels and in the Book of Acts, she is referred to as “Mary the mother of Jesus” to distinguish her from other women named Mary.) It is notable that John, who took Mary into his home after Jesus was crucified, does not mention her in his epistles, and he only mentions her on two occasions in his Gospel (the wedding at Cana and the crucifixion of Jesus). John mentions Mary Magdalene more than he mentions Jesus' mother.

ASSUMPTION -- At the end of her life, Mary was taken up (“assumed”) body and soul into Heaven. (Catechism 966, 974)

There is no biblical reference to the assumption of Mary. The Gospel of John was written around 90 A.D., which is more than 100 years after Mary was born. (Surely Mary was more than ten years old when Jesus was conceived.) If Mary had been supernaturally assumed into Heaven, wouldn't John (the disciple that Mary lived with) have mentioned it? When Enoch and Elijah were taken up to Heaven, the Bible recorded it. With Elijah it was recorded in some detail. (See Genesis 6:24 and 2 Kings 2:1-18.)

The Assumption of Mary was officially declared to be a dogma of the Roman Catholic faith in 1950. This means that every Roman Catholic is required to believe this doctrine without questioning it. However, as we will see, the teaching of the Assumption originated with heretical writings which were officially condemned by the early Church.

In 495 A.D., Pope Gelasius issued a decree which rejected this teaching as heresy and its proponents as heretics. In the sixth century, Pope Hormisdas also condemned as heretics those authors who taught the doctrine of the Assumption of Mary. The early Church clearly considered the doctrine of the Assumption of Mary to be a heresy worthy of condemnation. Here we have "infallible" popes declaring something to be a heresy. Then in 1950, Pope Pius XII, another "infallible" pope, declared it to be official Roman Catholic doctrine. [15]

CO-MEDIATOR -- Mary is the Co-Mediator to whom we can entrust all our cares and petitions. (Catechism 968-970, 2677)

There is only one mediator and that is Jesus. 1 Timothy 2:5-6 says, "For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus: Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time." Hebrews 7:25 says, "Wherefore he [Jesus] is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them." Ephesians 3:12 says, "In whom [Jesus] we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him."

If Jesus is constantly interceding for us and He is able to save us "to the uttermost," (utterly, completely) then He doesn't need Mary's help. If we can approach God with "boldness" and "confidence" because of our faith in Jesus, then we don't need Mary's help either.

QUEEN OF HEAVEN -- God has exalted Mary in heavenly glory as Queen of Heaven and earth. (Catechism 966) She is to be praised with special devotion. (Catechism 971, 2675)

Psalms 148:13 says, "Let them praise the name of the Lord: for his name alone is excellent; his glory is above the earth and heaven." This makes it quite clear that

only God's name (not Mary's) is to be exalted. (In Catholic Bibles the numbering of the chapters and verses of some of the Psalms is slightly different.)

When people tried to give Mary special honor and pre-eminence because she was His mother, Jesus corrected them.

“And it came to pass, as he spake these things, a certain woman of the company lifted up her voice, and said unto him, Blessed is the womb that bare thee, and the paps which thou hast sucked. But he said, Yea rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it.” (Luke 11:27-28)

In chapters four and five of the Book of Revelation, we are given a quite detailed picture of Heaven. God is seated on the throne, surrounded by 24 elders and four living creatures. The Lamb (Jesus) is standing in the center of the throne. Thousands upon thousands of angels circle the throne, singing God's praises. And Mary is not in the picture at all.

COMPARING CATHOLIC TEACHINGS ABOUT MARY

WITH MODERN GODDESS WORSHIP

Goddess worship is not ancient history. It is going on today. It is practiced in Wicca and a variety of modern pagan religions. (Wicca is a religion based on witchcraft. It involves goddess worship, rituals and spells.)

The credibility of goddess worship has been increased through its acceptance by university professors and its incorporation into textbooks. Wiccan doctrines are being promoted in publicly funded, accredited colleges and universities. Nursing school textbooks are overtly promoting goddess worship, including textbooks written by the National League for Nursing (an accrediting agency for nursing schools). [16]

The following table compares the Mary of Roman Catholic theology and religious practice with the Biblical portrayal of Mary and with the goddess which is worshipped by Wiccans and modern pagans. My information about Wicca comes from the book *Wicca: Satan's Little White Lie* by Bill Schnoebelen (who was the high priest of a Wiccan coven before he became a Christian), the World Book, the on-line version of The Encyclopedia Britannica, and numerous web sites. [17]

BIBLICAL MARY **CATHOLIC MARY** **THE GODDESS**

Humble and obedient. Calls herself “the handmaid of the Lord.”
The Pope officially gave Mary the title “Queen of Heaven” and established a feast

day honoring Mary, Queen of Heaven.
Wiccans call their goddess the “Queen of Heaven”.

Knew she needed a savior: “And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.”
(Luke 1:47)
“Immaculate Conception” (Mary was conceived sinless, without original sin) and
“All-Holy” (Mary lived a sinless life).
Goddesses don't need salvation. They make the rules.

Normal wife and mother who had other children.
“Perpetual Virginity” (Jesus' brothers and sisters are considered to be cousins).
Goddesses don't have human children.

No biblical evidence that Mary didn't die like a normal person.
“Glorious Assumption” (Mary was bodily taken up into Heaven).
Goddesses don't die.

Jesus told John to take Mary into his home and take care of her as if she was his
own mother.
Catholics are the adopted children of Mary. “Woman behold your son” (John
19:26) is taken to apply literally to every Catholic.
Witches are the adopted, “hidden children” of the Queen of Heaven.

Normal woman.
Sometimes pictured standing on a crescent moon, wearing a crown or with a
circle of stars around her head.
Moon goddess.

Normal woman.
Supernatural (apparitions accompanied by miracles and healings).
Supernatural.

Points people to Jesus. Mary said, “Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it.” (John
2:5)
Can make Jesus do things. A full page newspaper ad showing Mary and Jesus
says, “He hasn't denied her anything in 2,000 years. What would you have her
ask Him?” This is not official Catholic doctrine but it is a widespread attitude
which is encouraged by pious literature.
Points to herself.

Wants to be worshipped.

Knew that she needed a savior. (Luke 1:47)
Apparitions of “Mary” have promised that if people wear certain objects (such as
a Scapular or Miraculous Medal) or say certain prayers then they are guaranteed
to go to Heaven. The Catholic Church has not officially approved of these
practices, but it has also not discouraged them.

Invoked to make supernatural things happen through witchcraft (the use of special objects and special verbal formulas).

Goddesses don't need a savior.

Goddess worship has infiltrated main-line Christian denominations. In November 1993, a Re-Imagining Conference was held in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Most of the 2,000 participants were women. This ecumenical church conference was sponsored by and attended by members of over a dozen denominations, including Presbyterians, Episcopalians, Catholics, Lutherans and Methodists. They prayed to Sophia, the goddess of Wisdom, calling her their Creator. They did rituals for this goddess, including a communion service where bread and wine were replaced by milk and honey. They openly rejected the doctrines of the incarnation and the atonement. This conference was repeated in 1996, 1998 and 2000. [18] An on-line report (with photographs) is available at <http://www.layman.org/layman/news/reimagining-revival.htm>

There are Wiccan web sites with web pages devoted to individual goddesses. The Virgin Mary is included among the goddesses of the following web sites: The Spiral Goddess Grove, The White Moon, and Goddess 2000. They consider Mary to be the “Divine Feminine” and say that for centuries, many people have “blended” their ancient goddesses with Mary. [19]

HOW DID WE GET HERE?

How did modern Catholic doctrine about Mary wander so far away from the teachings of the Bible and the Early Fathers? Two reasons are the importance given to Church tradition and the doctrine of papal infallibility.

The Catholic Church officially states that Church tradition is equal in authority to the Bible. (Catechism 80, 84, 86, 97) The problem is that Catholic tradition consists of various expressions of worship and belief of the Catholic people. (Catechism 78, 98, 113, 2650, 2661) It is nebulous. It keeps changing. You cannot find it written in one place. You can't really put your hands on exactly what it is.

The Early Fathers used Scripture as the standard against which they tested Church tradition. The modern Catholic doctrine that Church tradition is equal in authority with the Bible is contrary to the writings of the Early Fathers. [20]

According to Jesus, Scripture is the plumb line for measuring everything else. He judged religious traditions by comparing them to Scripture. When religious traditions contradicted Scripture, he condemned them. This shows clearly that nothing is equal in authority to Scripture. The Bible stands alone as the standard by which all other things are to be judged.

“Then came together unto him the Pharisees, and certain of the scribes, which came from Jerusalem. And when they saw some of his disciples eat bread with defiled, that is to say, with unwashen, hands, they found fault. For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, except they wash their hands oft, eat not, holding the tradition of the elders. And when they come from the market, except they wash, they eat not. And many other things there be, which they have received to hold, as the washing of cups, and pots, brasen vessels, and of tables. Then the Pharisees and scribes asked him, Why walk not thy disciples according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashen hands? He answered and said unto them, Well hath Esaias prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men, as the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things ye do. And he said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition. For Moses said, Honour thy father and thy mother; and Whoso curseth father or mother, let him die the death: But ye say, If a man shall say to his father or mother, It is Corban, that is to say, a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; he shall be free. And ye suffer him no more to do ought for his father or his mother; Making the word of God of none effect through your tradition, which ye have delivered: and many such like things do ye.” (Mark 7:1-13, emphasis added.)

According to the official teaching of the Catholic Church, Catholic men and women are not allowed to believe what they read in the Bible without checking it out with the Catholic Church. They are required to find out how the bishops of the Church interpret a passage and they are to accept what the bishops teach as if it came from Jesus Christ Himself. They are not allowed to use their own judgment or follow their own conscience. They are required to believe whatever the bishops teach without questioning it. (Catechism 85, 87, 100, 862, 891, 939, 2034, 2037, 2041, 2050)

The Catholic Church teaches that when the bishops officially teach doctrine relating to faith and morals, then God supernaturally prevents them from making any errors. This is called “infallibility”. It applies to official councils, such as the Second Vatican Council. It also applies to other teachings, as long as the bishops and the Pope are in agreement about them. (Catechism 890, 891, 939, 2033, 2034, 2049)

The Pope is said to be infallible whenever he makes an official decree on matters of faith and morals. According to Catholic doctrine, it is impossible for the Pope to teach false doctrine. Catholics are expected to obey the Pope without question even when he is not making an “infallible” statement about doctrine. They are expected to submit their wills and minds to the Pope without question. (Catechism 892, 2037, 2050)

The Early Fathers, and the theologians and canon lawyers of the Middle Ages, never taught that the bishops or the Pope were infallible. This is demonstrated by the fact that in 680 A.D. the Sixth Ecumenical Council condemned a pope as a heretic. It was not until the fourteenth century that the theory of infallibility began to emerge. With the development of this theory came a change in the interpretation of some biblical passages. [21]

The history of the early Church shows that the Bishop of Rome was considered to be just another bishop. For example, Pope Gregory (590-604 A.D.) explicitly stated that all of the bishops were equal. He specifically repudiated the idea that any one bishop could be the supreme ruler of the Church. [22]

The claim for papal infallibility does not stand up to the test of history. For example, Pope Zosimus (417-418 A.D.) reversed the pronouncement of a previous pope. He also retracted a doctrinal pronouncement that he himself had previously made. Pope Honorius was condemned as a heretic by the Sixth Ecumenical Council (680-681 A.D.). He was also condemned as a heretic by Pope Leo II, as well as by every other pope until the eleventh century. So here we have “infallible” popes condemning another “infallible” pope as a heretic. In 1870, the First Vatican Council abolished “infallible” papal decrees and the decrees of two “infallible” councils. [23]

In the seventeenth century, the Catholic church officially condemned Galileo as a heretic because he taught that the earth revolves around the sun. This did not conflict with the Bible or with the teachings of the Early Fathers. However, it was contrary to seventeenth century Catholic theology. The Greek philosopher Aristotle taught that the sun revolves around the earth. Aristotle influenced Thomas Aquinas, a thirteenth century theologian and “doctor of the Church” whose theology had a major impact on the Catholic Church. Some modern astronomers believe that Galileo was right. Others believe that Einstein's theory of relativity makes the question irrelevant. [24] Either way, Galileo was not a heretic for disagreeing with Aristotle. The “infallible” pronouncement of the Catholic Church regarding Galileo's teaching was wrong.

Most people have heard of “papal bulls” and “infallibility”. Have you ever seen what they actually look like? Following is the ending of the bull *Ineffabilis Deus* in which Pope Pius IX declared the dogma of the Immaculate Conception of Mary in 1854:

“Therefore, if some should presume to think in their hearts otherwise than we have defined (which God forbid), they shall know and thoroughly understand that they are by their own judgment condemned, have made shipwreck concerning the faith, and fallen away from the unity of the Church; and, moreover, that they, by this very act, subject themselves to the penalties ordained by law, if, by word or writing, or any other external means, they dare to signify what they think in their hearts.” [25]

The phrase “subject themselves to the penalties ordained by law” is significant because less than 30 years earlier, a man in Spain was executed for heresy. [26]

MARIAN APPARITIONS

On May 13, 1981, a man shot Pope John Paul II. As the ambulance carried him to the hospital, the Pope kept praying, “Mary, my mother! Mary, my mother!” One year later, the Pope made a pilgrimage to Fatima to thank Our Lady of Fatima for saving his life and to consecrate the entire human race to her. [27] The video Catholicism: Crisis of Faith shows the Pope kissing the feet of a statue of Mary. [28]

Millions of pilgrims go to shrines which honor apparitions of Mary. Every year fifteen to twenty million pilgrims go to Guadalupe in Mexico, five and a half million go to Lourdes in France, five million go to Czestochowa (Jasna Gora) in Poland, and four and a half million go to Fatima in Portugal. Special dates draw huge crowds. On August 15, half a million pilgrims go to Czestochowa. On October 13, a million people go to Fatima. On December 12, 1999, five million pilgrims went to Mexico to honor Our Lady of Guadalupe. [29]

Are these pilgrims worshipping Mary? You can observe them and see for yourself, thanks to a video entitled Messages from Heaven. (Information about this video is given following the Bibliography.)

If you watch the video, you will see the Pope bow in front of a painting of Mary and cover the area with incense. You will see a million pilgrims walking in a procession, following a statue of Our Lady of Fatima and singing songs in her honor. You will see several million people in a procession following a painting of Our Lady of Guadalupe. You will see people weeping and raising their arms towards Mary. You will see the largest assembly of bishops and cardinals since the Second Vatican Council, gathered together to join Pope John Paul II in solemnly consecrating the entire world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

CONCLUSION

Proverbs 14:12 says, “There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.” Our minds can be deceived and so can the minds of bishops and popes. Only the Bible is totally trustworthy. When religious traditions conflict with the plain meaning of Scripture then we need to discard those traditions. We cannot afford to do otherwise, because our eternal destiny is at stake.

The Apostles told the religious leaders of their day, “We ought to obey God rather

than men.” (Acts 5:29b) As an old hymn says, “On Christ the solid rock I stand.
All other ground is sinking sand.”

If you are not persuaded that Catholicism encourages and even requires a level of
“devotion” to Mary that really is a form of worship, then I challenge you to ask
God what He thinks about it. If you are sincere in your prayer and open to letting
God show you the truth, then He will.