



**WIN Program: Witnessing in Neighborhoods
Advanced Class on Catholicism**

**Week Four: Supplemental
Role of Mary, Brief Issues and Is Mary a “Savior” in the
Roman Catholic Church?**

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What Is the Unique Role of Mary in Roman Catholicism and Is It Biblical?-Part 1

Brief of Issues

This article will examine the evidence concerning the position of Mary in the Roman Catholic Church and why Protestants disagree. Roman Catholicism teaches that Mary is the Mother of God. Pope Pius XII's encyclical in 1943 said, "She is the mother of our head." Catholicism claims Mary is full of grace, therefore free of original sin and kept from all *actual* sin. The pope's encyclical agreed, claiming Mary is free from any personal or inherited sin. Catholicism also asserts that Mary is perpetually a virgin; that is, Mary was a virgin not only before, but during and after the birth of Jesus.

In addition, Catholicism claims Mary was bodily assumed into heaven where she now reigns with Christ. The pope's encyclical says, "Mary, now glorified in body and soul, reigns together with her Son."

Catholicism has given to Mary the title of "Mediatrice of all graces," and the pope has agreed, teaching, "It was in answer to Mary's all powerful prayers that the divine Redeemer's Spirit was given to the newly born church, and by her intercession, obtains from him [i.e., Jesus] abundant streams of grace to all the members of the mystical body."

Another title given to Mary is that she is "co-Redemptrix" with Jesus. The pope affirmed this in his encyclical when he said, "Mary offered Jesus to the Father for all the children of man who are defiled by Adam's unfortunate fall," and "by bearing her immeasurable sorrows, she has supplied what was lacking in the suffering of Christ for his Body, the Church."

Many Protestants believe Catholicism has elevated Mary to Godhood. In *The Second Vatican Council and The New Catholicism* (1965, p. 239), G.C. Berkouwer observed "Mary's role is often delineated by Catholicism in a way that the gospels ascribe exclusively to Christ."

Protestants can agree that Mary was the honored mother of the human body of Jesus, but object to using the title "Mother of God," claiming it sets up a misrepresentation in most people's minds. Protestants maintain that *all* Christians believe God is eternal and without beginning, therefore He has no mother. Both sides agree that Mary was the mother of Jesus who was both God and man but she did not add divinity to Jesus' human nature. Therefore, Protestants say the title "Mother of God" should be dropped because it is a misleading term.

Second, Protestants believe it is not biblical to teach that Mary was conceived without original sin and committed no actual sin during her life. Thomas Aquinas, the supreme theologian of the Catholic Church, declared that only a sinner needs a Savior, and Mary must have been a sinner since she stated, "My spirit rejoices in God my Savior." Protestants think this doctrine deprives Christ of His uniqueness as the sinless One.

Third, Protestants argue that to say Mary is “full of grace” does not mean, as Catholicism implies, that Mary is sinless. Scripture also says Stephen, Elizabeth, Barnabas and others were “full of grace.” Yet no one claims they were sinless.

Fourth, Protestants do not believe that Mary was a perpetual virgin. The Bible, according to Matthew 12 and Mark 6, plainly shows Mary had other children.

Fifth, Protestants insist that Scripture nowhere teaches that Mary was assumed bodily into heaven.

And finally, Protestants insist that Mary cannot be Mediatrix or co-Redemptrix with Jesus, since the Bible states there is “only one Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus,” and that only Jesus can forgive a man’s sin.

Through all this we can see in Catholic theology how Mary parallels Christ. She is proclaimed to be the Mother of God; she is declared to be immaculately conceived, which means that she was conceived without the stain of original sin; she is proclaimed to be a perpetual virgin; she is declared to be assumed bodily into Heaven after her death which means that she was supernaturally transformed into a new body. She is proclaimed “Queen of heaven.” She is proclaimed “Mediatrix of All Graces,” which maintains that as Christ dispenses redeeming grace to mankind, Mary will, with Him, have the final word as to who will or who will not receive that grace of God. And finally, she is declared “Co-Redemptrix of the Universe.”

All of these have raised her step-by-step to the place where Pope Pius XII, in the Marian Year in which he proclaimed the Assumption of Mary, said,

Enraptured by the splendor of your heavenly beauty and impelled by the anxiety of the world, we cast ourselves *into your arms*, O, immaculate mother of Jesus, and our mother, Mary. God crowned you *Queen of the Universe*. O, *crystal fountain of faith*, bathe our minds with eternal truths; O, fragrant Lily of all holiness, captivate our hearts with your heavenly perfume. O, *conqueress of evil and death*, inspire in us a deep rise from every heart in this year dedicated to you. *Convert the wicked*, dry the tears of the afflicted and the oppressed. Comfort the poor and the humble. Quench hatred. Sweeten harshness. In your name, resounding harmoniously in heaven, may they recognize they are all brothers. And, finally, happy with you we may repeat before *your throne* that hymn which is sung today around *your altars*: You are all beautiful, O, Mary, *you are the glory: you are the joy: you are the honor* of our people.^[1]

To the contrary, Christ is the author and finisher of faith. Mary is *not* the “glory and joy and honor of Christians”—Jesus Christ is our glory. In Him is the hope of glory. He is our joy. Christ is the One we honor. Yet it is clear, just from reading this prayer, that titles are conferred upon Mary which belong to God. To “convert the wicked” is the job of the Holy Spirit, who “convicts the world of sin and of righteousness and of judgment.” Mary does not give comfort to all Christians. That is the very reason Jesus sent the Holy Spirit—to be our “Comforter.”

In the Catholic Church the faithful say, “Our life, our sweetness and our hope, to thee we cry, poor banished children of Eve.” Even giving Mary her due right, she is *not* our life—Jesus Christ is our life. She is not the sweetness of our life—Jesus Christ is the sweetness of our life. Mary is not our hope because “Christ in you is the hope of glory.” From a biblical perspective, it is more than clear that the Mary of the Bible is *not* the Mary of Catholic theology.

What Is the Unique Role of Mary in Roman Catholicism and Is It Biblical?

Significant areas of Catholic doctrine and practice are related to the person and work of Mary. Her unique relationship to God is usually discussed in a trinity of functions: 1) *Co-Redemptrix*, 2) *Mediatrix*, and 3) *Queen of Heaven*. As Co-Redemptrix, she cooperates with Christ in the work of saving sinners. As Mediatrix of all graces, she now dispenses God’s blessings and grace to the spiritually needy. As Queen of Heaven, she rules providentially with Christ the King of Heaven.^[2] Although views in the Church vary, Mary has usually been elevated above all the prophets, apostles, saints, popes and even the Catholic Church. In the words of Pope Paul VI, “...the place she occupies in the Church: [is] ‘the highest place and the closest to us after Jesus.’”^[3]

Consider just a few titles of the almost innumerable books glorifying Mary: *Mary the Mother of Redemption*; *Mary: Queen of Apostles*; *Mary: Queen of Peace*; *The Glories of Mary*; *Mary: Cause of Our Joy* and *Mary of Nazareth*.

Mariology is as firmly entrenched in Catholicism as ever, especially with the honored blessing given by Vatican II.^[4] Vatican II “admonishes all the sons of the Church that the cult, especially the liturgical cult, of the Blessed Virgin, be generously fostered. It charges that practices and exercises of devotion toward her be treasured as recommended by the teaching authority of the Church in the course of centuries, and that those decrees issued in earlier times regarding the veneration of images of Christ, the Blessed Virgin, and the saints, be religiously observed.”^[5]

This charge has found a welcomed reception especially among Catholic charismatics. For example, “It is far from unusual to hear those who claim the baptism in the Spirit profess that one result of their new experience is a deeper devotion to Mary. The devotional use of the Rosary has been stimulated rather than curtailed.”^[6]

But the Catholic view of Mary is not scriptural; it is entirely traditional. Some of the unbiblical teachings from Catholic tradition relating to Mary include the following:

1. *Mary's immaculate conception*. This doctrine teaches that she was born without original sin and was kept sinless throughout her life.
2. *Mary's perpetual virginity*. This dogma asserts that she had no children after Jesus.
3. *Mary's bodily assumption or physical ascension into heaven*. This teaches that because of her sinlessness, Mary never experienced physical death. Instead she was raised bodily into the presence of Christ the King where she now functions as "Queen of Heaven," dispensing graces to all the faithful.
4. *Mary's role as co-Redemptrix and Mediatrix of all graces*. This doctrine holds that the obedience and sufferings of Mary were essential to secure the full redemption bought by Christ.
5. *Mary's right to veneration and/or worship*. This teaching argues that because of her unparalleled role in the economy of salvation, Mary is worthy of special adoration.

We will begin a discussion of #4: "Mary's role as co-Redemptrix and Mediatrix of all graces" next time.

Notes

1. [↑](#) Walter Martin, *The Roman Catholic Church in History* (Livingston, NJ: Christian Research Institute, Inc., 1960), pp. 45-46.
2. [↑](#) David F. Wells, *Revolution in Rome* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1972), p. 132.
3. [↑](#) Pope Paul VI, *Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary [Marialis Cultus]* (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 1974), p. 20.
4. [↑](#) Robert C. Broderick, ed., *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, revised and updated (NY: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1987), pp. 374-375.
5. [↑](#) Walter M. Abbott, general editor, *The Documents of Vatican II* (NY: Guild Press, 1966), pp. 94-95.
6. [↑](#) H. M. Carson, *Dawn or Twilight? A Study of Contemporary Roman Catholicism* (Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press, 1976), p. 134.

By: **Dr. John Ankerberg, Dr. John Weldon**; ©2005

What Is the Unique Role of Mary in Roman Catholicism and Is It Biblical?-Part 2

Is Mary a “Savior” in the Roman Catholic Church?

Mariology is defined as the study of that theology “which treats the life, role and virtues of the Blessed Mother of God” and which “demonstrates... her position as Co-Redemptrix and Mediatrix of all graces.”^[1] Thus, Catholic popes have always glorified Mary.

Although the Catholic Church would reject the designation, Mary *does* function as a kind of secondary Savior in Catholic teaching and practice.

A few illustrations will suffice to show the preeminent place she holds in the universe.^[2] As G. C. Berkouwer observes:

The central question especially concerns *the elevation of what is creaturely into the supernatural perfection of the life of God...* We must state that the picture of Mary obscures the glory of Christ in an appalling way and demonstrates a doctrine of grace in which man himself is given a function which is not in accordance with the character of grace.^[3]

We will begin with a chronological listing of recent papal pronouncements:

Pope Leo XIII (1878-1903) stated in his Rosary encyclical, “*Octobri mense*” (1891): “From that great treasure of all graces which the Lord has brought, *nothing according to the will of God comes to us except through Mary*, so that, as nobody can approach the Supreme Father except through the Son, similarly *nobody can approach Christ except through the mother.*”^[4]

Pope Pius X (1903-1914) asserted that Mary is “the dispenser of *all gifts* which Jesus has acquired for us by His death and His blood.”^[5]

Pope Benedict XV (1914-1922) refers to her as “the mediatrix with God of *all graces.*”^[6] Pope Pius XI (1922-1939) says, “With Jesus, *Mary has redeemed the human race.*”^[7]

The conclusion of Pope Pius XII (1939-1958) in his encyclical, “*Mystici Corporis*” (1943) was that Mary *herself* actually offered Christ on Golgotha! “Who, free from all sin, original or personal, and always most intimately united with her Son, offered him on Golgotha to the eternal Father... for all the children of Adam.”^[8]

In his *Marialis Cultus* (Feb. 2, 1974), Pope Paul VI (1963-1978) also affirmed that Mary offered Christ to the Father on Golgotha:

This union of the Mother and the Son in the work of redemption reaches climax on Calvary, where Christ “offered Himself as the perfect sacrifice to God” ([Hebrews 9:14](#)) and where Mary stood by the Cross (cf. [John 19:25](#)), “suffering grievously with her only-

begotten Son. There she united herself with a maternal heart to his sacrifice, and lovingly consented to the immolation of this victim which she herself had brought forth” and *also was offering* to the Eternal Father.^[9]

Vatican II (1962-1965) declared that, “Taken up to heaven, she did not lay aside this saving role, but by her manifold acts of intercession *continued to win for us* gifts of eternal salvation.”^[10] Consider once again the following comments by Pius XII and the remarks of Dr. Walter Martin both before and after:

This is the Mary of Scripture: “The handmaiden of the Lord.” This is the Mary of Scripture: “I have rejoiced in God, my Saviour.” But here is the Mary of Roman Catholic theology, from the prayer recited by Pope Pius XII at the Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome on the opening of the Marian Year:

“Enraptured by the splendor of your heavenly beauty and impelled by the anxieties of the world, we cast ourselves into your arms, O *Immaculate* Mother of Jesus, and our Mother Mary.... We adore and praise the peerless richness of the sublime gifts with which God has filled you above every other *mere creature* from the moment of your conception until the day on which, after your *assumption* into heaven, He crowned you *Queen* of the Universe.

“O, crystal *fountain of faith*, bathe our minds with the eternal truths! O, fragrant *lily of all holiness*, captivate our hearts with your heavenly perfume. O, *conqueress of evil and death*, inspire in us a deep horror of sin which makes the soul detestable to God and a slave of hell.

“O, well beloved of God, hear the ardent cries which rise up from every heart in this year dedicated to you. Bend tenderly, O Mary, over our aching wounds; *convert the wicked*, dry the tears of the afflicted and the oppressed. Comfort the poor and the humble, quench hatreds, sweeten harshness, safeguard the flower of purity and protect the Holy Church....

“Receive, O most sweet Mother, our humble supplications and, above all, obtain for us that on that day, happy with you, we may repeat *before your throne*, that hymn which is sung today around *your altars*, *You are all beautiful*, O Mary. *You are the glory*, you are the *joy*, you are the *honor of our people*.”

I want to point out that in the opening verses of the Biblical record concerning Mary, and in every verse of Scripture which is applied to her, never once is she ever removed from the category of the “handmaiden of the Lord” who rejoiced in the God of her salvation. Yet today, after nineteen centuries, I make bold to say that the Roman Catholic Church and its theologians have unhesitatingly applied to her sacred titles alone given in the Bible to God the Father Himself and to Jesus Christ, Our Lord.^[11]

Thus, Dr. Martin says,

I want to make it clear at the beginning that I put much emphasis upon knowing the doctrine of the Virgin Mary in Catholic theology because if any one doctrine in the Roman Catholic formula of theology would cause us, on Biblical grounds, to withdraw from fellowship with them, this would be the doctrine.^[12]

Although the Catholic Church staunchly maintains that Mary's role does not obscure or diminish the efficacy of Christ as the one Mediator, a good portion of the Church also teaches that Christ could never have *become* the Mediator without Mary. When Mary accepted the angel's announcement that she would bear Jesus, Catholic tradition holds that her statement "be it done unto me according to your word" was a command. Thus, had Mary not "commanded" it, then, at least according to the so-called "maximalist" position of Mary within the Catholic Church, there would have been no redemption.^[13] Thus, "her statement in [Luke 1:38](#) giving her consent to the Incarnation 'became a vital link in the plan of salvation, so that in fact the whole plan hung upon her consent.'"^[14] According to Vatican II Mary is seen "used by God not merely in a passive way, but as cooperating in the work of human salvation through free faith and obedience."^[15]

All this is why Vatican II declares that "Mary figured profoundly in the history of salvation..."^[16] and, "In a wholly singular way she cooperated by her obedience, faith, hope and burning charity in the work of the Savior in restoring supernatural life to souls."^[17]

Some people might wonder why Mary should deserve credit as a co-redeemer, winner of all graces and Mediatrix merely because she assented to the angel's announcement. Catholicism answers by teaching that Mary is specially worthy and deserves special merit simply because she *obeyed* God.

But isn't this attitude contrary to that of the New Testament? Didn't Jesus Himself teach that when we had done everything we should do our only response was to say that we were merely "unworthy servants?" "So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty'" ([Luke 17:10](#)).

Nevertheless, in *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, Chapter 3, "Mary's Co-operation in the Work of Redemption—the Mediatorship of Mary", we read that Mary's obedience qualified her to dispense grace and become the cause of salvation:

Mary gave the Redeemer, the Source of all graces, to the world, and in this way she is the channel of all graces. Since Mary's Assumption into Heaven no grace is conferred on man without her actual intercessory cooperation.... Mary *freely and deliberately co-operated* in giving the Redeemer to the world.... The Incarnation of the Son of God, and the Redemption of mankind by the vicarious atonement of Christ *were dependent on her assent*.... Mary *by her obedience* became *the cause* of our Salvation....^[18]

Only this explains the Catholic Church's adoration of Mary. According to Rome, in a very real sense she did win our salvation by the role she played in the birth, life and death of Christ. And she *continues* this role through her own assumption and queenly reign in heaven where she *daily* dispenses grace to all the hundreds of millions of Catholics. Thus, expressions of Catholic devotion to Mary are everywhere. In his encyclical *Redemptor Hominis*, Pope John Paul II titled his last chapter, "The Mother in Whom We Trust". Some Catholics have even referred to Mary as "the Spouse of the Holy Spirit."^[19]

In *The Catholic Response* Stravinskis remarks that, "One cannot ignore this woman, lest one risk distorting the gospel itself."^[20] *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma* also confesses that, "Mary's

sublime dignity as the Queen of heaven and earth make her supremely powerful in her maternal intercession for her children on earth.”^[211] Thus, “...how generous she is in rewarding us in life, death and eternity, for the little services we render Her faithfully”,^[221] and “Jesus and Mary reward in a marvelous way those who glorify them.”^[231]

Again, although Mary did not literally die for the sin of the world, by giving birth to the Messiah and by giving Him moral support and other comfort, Mary can be seen as *indirectly* helping to atone for the sins of the world. Thus, *The Catholic Encyclopedia* teaches of her temporal earthly sufferings that she “endured them for our salvation.”^[241] Further, “In the power of the grace of Redemption merited by Christ, Mary, by her spiritual entering into the sacrifice of her Divine Son for men, *made atonement for the sins of men* and (*de congruon*) merited the application of the redemptive grace of Christ. In this manner she co-operates in the subjective redemption of mankind.”^[251] Thus, “Since her Assumption into Heaven, Mary cooperates in the application of the grace of Redemption to man.”^[261] For example, in one supernatural revelation of herself Mary allegedly said the following:

Just as Almighty God chose the Angelic Salutation to bring about the Incarnation of His Word and the Redemption of mankind, in the same way those who want to bring about moral reforms and to want people reborn in Jesus Christ must honor me and greet me with the same salutation. I am the channel by which God came to men, and so, next to my Son Jesus Christ, it is through me that men must obtain grace and virtue.^[271]

Now in all frankness, does this sound like the Mary of the New Testament?

The Catholic Catechism also discusses Mary’s role as one of “Mediatix Par Excellence,” noting her “vicarious assistance” to mankind. In the following citation we see the extent to which Mary is adored as a “Savior.” Thus:

...she deserves the title Mediatix because she cooperated in the unique way with Christ in his redemptive labors on earth, and because in heaven she continues interceding for those who are still working out their salvation as pilgrims in the Church Militant or souls suffering in purgatory.... Once entered heaven, she did not cease her mediatorial function in favor of mankind. Terrestrial mediation now became celestial.... Mary’s title to Mediatix-in-atonement rests on the pain she freely underwent in union with her Son. The sins of men called for suffering from the God-Man, and he wished his mother to share in the pain as she was the one whom he loved most.... Alongside her Son, Mary has become part of this plan [of justification] *by contributing her share to the justification of the human race, beginning with herself and extending to everyone ever justified....* Mary was more instrumental than any other creature and thus “co-meriting” with Christ.... and now in heaven continues interceding effectively as a reward of her virtue.^[281]

In conclusion, the Catholic Church may deny that Mary’s role in salvation does not detract from that of Christ’s, but we find it difficult to see how this can be maintained in any logical sense.

Notes

1. ↑ Robert C. Broderick, ed., *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, revised and updated (NY: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1987), p. 370.
2. ↑ Pope Paul VI, *Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary [Marialis Cultus]* (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 1974), p. 20.
3. ↑ Garrit C. Berkouwer, *The Conflict With Rome* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1958), pp. 174-175.
4. ↑ Ludwig Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma* (Rockford, IL: Tan Books and Publishers, 1974), pp. 213-214, emphasis added.
5. ↑ *Ibid.*, p. 214, emphasis added.
6. ↑ *Ibid.*, emphasis added.
7. ↑ R. C. Sproul, “The Virgin Mary,” lecture transcript, p. 5, emphasis added.
8. ↑ *Ibid.*, p. 6; cf., Ott, pp. 203-213, emphasis added.
9. ↑ Pope Paul VI, p. 15, emphasis added.
10. ↑ Walter M. Abbott, gen. Ed., *The Documents of Vatican II* (NY: Guild Press, 1966), p. 91, emphasis added.
11. ↑ Walter Martin, *The Roman Catholic Church in History* (Livingston, NJ: Christian Research Institute, Inc., 1960), pp. 45-46.
12. ↑ *Ibid.*, p. 43.
13. ↑ The maximalists assert that by means of her Fiat and offering of her Son on the cross that Mary is absolutely necessary not only to the incarnation but to Redemption itself. This is why she is called a co-redemptrix. But even the so-called “minimalists” affirm such beliefs as Mary’s alleged bodily assumption, immaculate conception and her coronation as Queen of Heaven.
14. ↑ H. M. Carson, *Dawn or Twilight? A Study of Contemporary Roman Catholicism* (Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press, 1976), p. 126.
15. ↑ Abbott, p. 88.
16. ↑ *Ibid.*, p. 93.
17. ↑ Cited in Paul G. Schrottenboer, ed., *Roman Catholicism: A Contemporary Evangelical Perspective* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1980), p. 36, cf., Abbott, pp. 86-96, and G. C. Berkouwer, *The Second Vatican Council and the New Catholicism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1965), pp. 221-248.
18. ↑ Ott, p. 212, emphasis added.
19. ↑ Schrottenboer, pp. 37, 40.
20. ↑ Peter M. I. Stravinskis, *The Catholic Response* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 1985), p. 80.
21. ↑ Ott, p. 211.
22. ↑ S. T. Louis De Montfort, *The Secret of the Rosary*, Mary Barbour translator (Bay Shore, NY: Montfort Publications, 1976), p. 95.
23. ↑ *Ibid.*, p. 47.
24. ↑ Broderick, ed., p. 285.
25. ↑ Ott, p. 213.
26. ↑ *Ibid.*
27. ↑ De Montfort, p. 84.
28. ↑ John Hardon, *The Catholic Catechism: The Contemporary Catechism of the Teachings of the Catholic Church* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1975), pp. 166-169, emphasis added.