



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

**Week Five: Supplemental**

**Role of Mary, Brief Issues and Is Mary Worshipped in the  
Roman Catholic Church?  
The Biblical Mary**

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## What Is the Unique Role of Mary in Roman Catholicism and Is It Biblical?-Part 3

### Is Mary Worshipped in the Roman Catholic Church?

Although Catholic theology attempts to draw a fine line between the worship offered to God and that offered to Mary, in practice these frequently become indistinguishable. The specific terms used are *latria*—adoration which is due God alone; *dulia*—veneration offered to the saints and *hyperdulia*—special veneration given only to Mary. But, this kind of distinction is almost impossible to maintain in practice—and regardless, even Catholic texts may make terms such as “veneration,” “adoration,” and “worship” unclear when referring to God and Mary.<sup>[1]</sup>

As H. M. Carson remarks, “The development of Mariology has been accompanied by an ever-increasing tendency to accord Mary a worship that, in much popular devotion, is indistinguishable from that offered to God alone.”<sup>[2]</sup>

For example, when the average Roman Catholic invokes the aid of Mary as a heavenly, all powerful, omniscient intercessor, or to beseech Jesus for them, or to help forgive their sins, it is hard to imagine that in that precise moment they are mentally distinguishing in a split second between *latria*, *dulia* and *hyperdulia*. “Rome may deny that Mary is worshipped as God. But to attribute to her powers which involve omniscience and omnipresence, if she is to hear [and answer] the prayers of millions, is to accord to her what belongs to God alone. Furthermore, the prayers themselves are phrased in such a way that it is hard to distinguish them from those offered to God.”<sup>[3]</sup>

Indeed, Rome has at least fourteen “feasts of Mary”—special days “set aside to *worship God* with special commemoration of events referring to Mary the mother of God.”<sup>[4]</sup>

As a noted Protestant theologian, R. C. Sproul, remarks, “I think, however, for all practical purposes, that I can say without fear of ever being proven wrong, that millions of Roman Catholic people in this world today worship Mary, and in doing so, believe that they are doing what the Church is telling them to do.”<sup>[5]</sup>

In *The Roman Catholic Church in History*, Dr. Walter Martin outlined what he called the “seven steps to deity” that, in the end, made Mary like a God. In the material below we have summarized and added to Martin’s evaluation in the following chart:

| Mary  | Jesus                                       |
|---|---|
| Mother of God                                   | Son of God                                  |
| Sinless (Immaculate Conception)                 | Sinless                                     |
| Perpetual Virgin                                | Born of a virgin                            |
| Ascended (assumed) bodily into heaven           | Ascended bodily into heaven                 |
| Queen of Heaven                                 | King of Heaven                              |
| Dispenser (Mediatrice) of all graces to mankind | Dispenser of all redeeming grace to mankind |
| Co-Redemptrix in the salvation of man           | Redeemer and Savior of man                  |

The above chart indicates that Mary’s Person and Work is extremely parallel to that of Jesus Christ. This is why Dr. Martin refers to, “Rome’s systematic effort to raise Mary to Deity.”<sup>[6]</sup>

He also makes the following important comments:

I have in my library hundreds of pamphlets, manuscripts and books all published with the official imprimatur of the Roman Catholic Church. In every one of them, language which is applied to God *alone* in Scripture is applied to the Virgin Mary. She *is* worshipped: she is given almost every title of Christ. Thus, they are subtly but systematically raising her to a place of equality with our Lord.... Worship, prayers, shrines, and even altars in churches have been consecrated to her around the earth. The healing grottoes are seldom dedicated to Jesus of Nazareth, but to “Our Lady of Lourdes,” “Our Lady St. Anne de Beaupre,” “Our Lady of Fatima,” etc. The statues which are seen in Roman Catholic homes are invariably of Mary. The largest niches in Roman Catholic churches are occupied by images of Mary. The preponderance of prayers are to Mary, and the “Hail, Mary” is repeated in the Rosary continually.<sup>[7]</sup>

Is it any surprise then that Martin concludes, “This is indeed the elevation of a creature to Deity, and I plead with you to realize that we are dealing with one of the most dangerous teachings ever foisted upon the Christian church.”<sup>[8]</sup>

When the Catholic Church teaches that Mary rules over us, teaches us, sanctifies us, forgives our sins, etc., what really are Protestants to think?<sup>[9]</sup>

Christ *alone* is worthy of glory to receive our adoration, praise and worship. As Dr. Martin asks, “Mary wasn’t born of a virgin, was she? Was it Mary who performed miracles? Did she live a sinless life? Was it Mary who raised herself from the dead? Did Mary go to the cross and sweat blood? Did Mary come out of the tomb on the third day? Is it Mary who will return one day to save the Christian church?”<sup>[10]</sup>

All this is a classic example of how Church tradition, especially after the fact, corrupts biblical teaching. In fact, Dr. Martin quotes eleven leaders from prior church history, including four Catholic popes, all of whom directly contradict the 1854 pronouncement that Mary was conceived without sin. Among these are Clement of Alexandria, Augustine, St. Ambrose, Pope Leo I, Pope Gallatus, Pope Gregory I and Pope Innocent III.<sup>[11]</sup>

Again, the Catholic Church officially claims that its Mariology does not subtract from the worship and honor due Christ as God and Mediator<sup>[12]</sup>—but what good are mere claims? As an Evangelical Council on Catholicism observed, “In effect many Roman Catholics put her on the same level as the persons of the Trinity.”<sup>[13]</sup>

Perhaps it might be instructive to quote *The Catholic Encyclopedia* at this point: “Idolatry is the giving to another person or object that worship which is due to God alone. Idolatry, always a grave sin, is committed 1) by intending and actually worshipping a creature as God, called formal idolatry;...”<sup>[14]</sup>

Although (technically) Mary is not to be worshipped in the same sense that God is worshipped, she *is* to be granted devotion and worship in a lesser sense. And if the fine distinctions made by Catholic theologians “are usually not reflected in the practice of the faithful,”<sup>[15]</sup> idolatry would seem to be a distinct possibility in the lives of the faithful. Thus, “By the sixteenth century, as evidenced by the spiritual struggles of the Reformers, the image of Mary had largely eclipsed the centrality of Jesus Christ in the life of believers.”<sup>[16]</sup>

Catholics pray to Mary. They expect her to intercede for them with Jesus on their behalf. They venerate and/or worship her—thousands of shrines are dedicated to the worship of Mary throughout the world. They believe she plays a crucial role in their personal salvation. They believe Mary can relieve their suffering in purgatory because she was coronated as Queen in heaven and reigns with Jesus as King. They believe Mary pleads in heaven for divine graces and then distributes them to the faithful.

In conclusion, the traditions of Rome cast a lengthy shadow of doubt upon the saving role and mediatorship of Christ alone, as well as His sufficiency in interceding for all believers. They also detract from the worship that only Christ is worthy of.

## Notes

1. [↑](#) Robert C. Broderick, ed., *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, revised and updated (NY: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1987), p. 33.
2. [↑](#) H. M. Carson, *Dawn or Twilight? A Study of Contemporary Roman Catholicism* (Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press, 1976), p. 128.
3. [↑](#) *Ibid.*, p. 129.
4. [↑](#) Broderick, ed., p. 374, emphasis added.
5. [↑](#) R. C. Sproul, "The Virgin Mary," lecture transcript, p. 12.
6. [↑](#) Walter Martin, *The Roman Catholic Church in History* (Livingston, NJ: Christian Research Institute, Inc., 1960), p. 54.
7. [↑](#) *Ibid.*, p. 58.
8. [↑](#) *Ibid.*, p. 59.
9. [↑](#) *Ibid.*, p. 60.
10. [↑](#) *Ibid.*, pp. 60-61.
11. [↑](#) *Ibid.*, p. 56-58.
12. [↑](#) Broderick, ed., p. 380.
13. [↑](#) Paul G. Schrottenboer, ed., *Roman Catholicism: A Contemporary Evangelical Perspective* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1980), p. 31.
14. [↑](#) Broderick, ed., p. 284.
15. [↑](#) *Ibid.*, p. 32.
16. [↑](#) *Ibid.*, p. 33.

## What Is the Unique Role of Mary in Roman Catholicism and Is It Biblical?-Part 4

### The Biblical Mary

The Mary of Catholic teaching has nothing whatever to do with the Mary of the New Testament. Given Mary's supreme importance in the Catholic Church, one is amazed at the complete absence of even the mention of her name in the New Testament epistles.

Apart from [Acts 1:14](#), she is mentioned nowhere else outside the Gospels. And even in the Gospels, her spiritual power and authority are non-existent. Neither Jesus Christ, nor Paul, nor any other biblical writer ever gave Mary the place or devotion the Catholic Church has given her for a thousand years. This is all the more incredible when we consider that the New Testament letters were written specifically for the spiritual guidance of the Church, and that they have a great deal to say about both doctrine and worship. How then is it possible if Mary really performs the many *vital* spiritual functions we have just discussed, that Mary's name could be entirely absent from the very heart of the New Testament teaching—exactly where one would expect her to be most prominent?

Even Catholics are forced to confess that scriptural support for all these doctrines of Mariology is lacking. For example, concerning Mary's assumption into heaven, Keating writes, "Where is the proof from Scripture? Strictly, there is none."<sup>[1]</sup> And concerning Mary's role as Mediatrix he comments, "Mary is the Mediatrix of all graces because of her intercession for us in heaven. What this means is that *no grace accrues to us without her intercession....* True, scriptural proofs for this are lacking."<sup>[2]</sup>

Dr. Ludwig Ott in *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma* also frequently confesses that scriptural support for Rome's traditions on Mary are not forthcoming. For example, "The doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of Mary is not explicitly revealed in Scripture,"<sup>[3]</sup> and "The direct and express scriptural proofs [of Mary's bodily assumption] are not to be had,"<sup>[4]</sup> and concerning Mary as Mediatrix and an intercessor in heaven, again, "express scriptural proofs are lacking."<sup>[5]</sup>

So, what *does* the Bible teach about Mary? Since Mary is nowhere said to be sinless, the Bible assumes that Mary was a sinner like the rest of us. Why?

Because the Scripture emphasizes that *all* men and women, universally, are sinful ([Romans 3:10, 11-32](#); [Psalm 51:5](#); [Galatians 3:22](#); [Romans 3:23](#); [5:12](#), etc.). Therefore, Mary's prayer in [Luke 1:46](#) ff that God is her "Savior" rings true.

By contrast, there are numerous statements in Scripture that declare only Christ was perfect and without sin ([2 Corinthians 5:21](#); [Hebrews 4:15](#); [1 Peter 2:22](#); [Hebrews 7:26](#), etc).

If it were true that Mary were without original sin and hence sinless throughout her life, isn't it reasonable to expect we would find at least some indication in Scripture? But we find not a trace.

[Luke 1:28](#) says simply that Mary was favored by God for being chosen to bear the Messiah. A unique and profound privilege indeed, but God never says that, as a result, she has become omnipotent and can now bestow favors and grace upon all mankind.

In [Matthew 13:55-56](#) and many other places we see that Mary was not a perpetual virgin because she had at least six other children after Jesus: “Isn’t this the carpenter’s son? Isn’t his mother’s name Mary, and aren’t his brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas? Aren’t all his sisters with us?... ([Matthew 13:55-56](#)).

There is no justification for the Catholic response that must assume Mary’s other children were really cousins, or more distant relatives or perhaps even adopted or through another marriage. The best Catholic apologists can do is offer a series of arguments from silence.<sup>[6]</sup> (See also [Matthew 12:46](#); [John 2:12](#); [7:3-5](#); [Acts 1:14](#); [1 Corinthians 9:5](#).)

Further, the Bible is also entirely silent on Mary’s alleged bodily ascension into heaven and her subsequent coronation as Queen.

[Luke 11:27](#) tells us that apart from her role as bearer and mother of the Messiah, she was not unique or especially blessed. In fact, by Jesus’ words, “on the contrary” we see that those who obey God are *more blessed* than *if they had given birth to Jesus*. Here we find it is almost as if God were speaking to Catholic dogma: “...one of the women in the crowd raised her voice and said to him, ‘Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts at which you nursed,’ but he said, ‘On the contrary, blessed are those who hear the word of God and observe it.’”

Jesus acted similarly in [Matthew 12:46-50](#), again denying Mary a special status. When she wished to see Him, He told the crowd that His true mother, brother and sister—i.e., His true family—was “whoever shall do the will of my Father who is in heaven.” In [John 2:4](#) Jesus told Mary, “Woman, what do I have to do with you?”

How can the attitude of Jesus Himself be reconciled with Catholic teaching? Jesus often referred to Himself as “the Son of Man,” but never *once*, as Catholics do, as “the Son of Mary.”

Nor can Mary be a mediator in any sense between God and man because,

“There is one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus” ([1 Timothy 2:5-6](#)). In contrast, consider the conclusions of an official publication of the Church: “There is one mediator between Christ and men, *the Holy Mother Mary. Mary is the way, the truth and the life. No man comes to Jesus but by Mary.*”<sup>[7]</sup>

Unfortunately, by equating tradition with Scripture, the Roman Church will find Jesus saying the same words to it as He did to those who held to Jewish tradition and placed it above Scripture: “Why do you transgress the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition?” and, “But in vain do they worship me, teaching as their doctrines the precepts of men” ([Matthew 15:3,9](#)) and, “Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down” ([Mark 7:13](#)).



All this is why the Apostle Paul himself warns us to “See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy which depends on human tradition... rather than on Christ” ([Colossians 2:8](#)).

There is one final consideration. In dozens of countries around the world Marian devotion has become mixed with occult phenomena. There are seemingly endless revelations that have come from apparitions and physical materializations of “Mary” throughout the world—revelations which universally support unbiblical Catholic teachings. As we discuss in our next chapter, the most logical explanation for these thousands of supernatural manifestations is not that the biblical Mary herself has appeared in order to lend her support to the Church of Rome, but rather that supernatural powers are imitating Mary to lead people into false teaching. Having read a good deal of Marian revelations, we have yet to find one that is in accord with biblical teaching and authority.

In conclusion, despite Catholic denials, the Church’s teaching on Mary not only casts a lengthy shadow over the saving efficacy of Jesus Christ but it takes away from the worship due Him alone.

No Christian who loves Jesus Christ can accord to Mary the spiritual privileges and functions granted her by the Catholic Church.

## Notes

1. [↑](#) Robert C. Broderick, ed., *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, revised and updated (NY: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1987), p. 275.
2. [↑](#) *Ibid.*, p. 279, emphasis added.
3. [↑](#) Ludwig Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma* (Rockford, IL: Tan Books and Publishers, 1974), p. 200.
4. [↑](#) *Ibid.*, p. 208.
5. [↑](#) *Ibid.*, p. 214.
6. [↑](#) Karl Keating, *Catholicism and Fundamentalism, The Attack on “Romanism” by “Bible Christians”* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1988), pp. 282-289.
7. [↑](#) Walter Martin, *The Roman Catholic Church in History* (Livingston, NJ: Christian Research Institute, Inc., 1960), p. 49, emphasis added.