



Marian Doctrine and Devotion

Chapter 24



Marian devotions are those prayers and acts undertaken to honor Mary and with the intent of seeking her intercession with her Son, Jesus, and his Father. Devotion to the Virgin Mary does not, however, amount to worship - which is reserved for God alone. Catholics view Mary as subordinate to Christ, but uniquely so, in that she is seen as above all other creatures. In 787 the Second Council of Nicaea affirmed a three-level hierarchy of *latria*, *hyperdulia* and *dulia* that applies to God, the Virgin Mary and then to the other saints.

The Roman Catholic Church holds many teachings associated with the Blessed Virgin Mary. Four of these specific doctrines have been raised to the level of dogma, meaning in technical terms that they must be held by the faithful as essential to participation as Roman Catholics. The four Marian dogmas have been defined by the magisterium over the course of Christian history, using both Scripture and Sacred Tradition, the two elements of the one source of Revelation, as evidence for these proclamations. These four dogmas are: Mary the Mother of God, Perpetual Virginity of Mary, The Immaculate Conception, and The Assumption of Mary into Heaven. The twentieth-century has seen a significant drive to establish a fifth and final Dogma-Mary as Co-Redemptrix.

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Chapter 24

Marian Consecration:

The word consecration today varies in meaning. Sometimes it means merely to entrust to the care of Our Lady. At other times it means much more. Pope Leo XIII, in consecrating the world to the Sacred Heart in 1899 (cf *Annum sacrum*, May 15, 1899. ASS 31. 649) said that in consecration to the Sacred Heart, we as it were say to Him that even though all we have to give already belongs to Him—as Creator and Redeemer—we ask Him to graciously accept it again, on a title of love, and with the resolution to do much better. We owe all to Him since He made us out of nothing, and since He rescued us from the captivity of Satan in the redemption. So He is our King, to whom we owe all. He would not need to give us any compensation or reward, yet He wills to do that beyond what we can imagine.

Can we also consecrate ourselves to Our Lady? Some have said no, it is only through her to Him. But, even though our consecration to her is ultimately for Him, yet we also consecrate ourselves to her. She as Queen (let us recall what was said in our treatment of Queenship, above), shares in His claim to our service, for she is the

Mother of the Creator and the one who at such cost shared in redeeming us. Really, we should not think of two powers over us, one infinite, the other finite. No, Jesus and Our Lady act together, as one principle, per modum unius.

The most basic consecration is to God, through our Baptism. But this commitment is largely negative, to avoid sin. It does not explicitly add the positive note of complete service. Consecration does add that note: it says that even though we already owe all to God, to the Heart of Jesus, as Creator and Redeemer, we want to give it all anew, and most fully, on a title of love.

Mary, as we said, is Queen, and so shares, as Mother of the Creator, and as Cooperator in the Redemption, in these titles to our service. We make the same offering therefore to her in union with Him. We recall too that in the consecration we try to imitate her perfect response to the Father, made possible by her Immaculate Conception.

Vatican II showed us, as we saw above, the implications for living such a consecrated life: the Father has put her everywhere in His approach to us. Logically, then, we would put her everywhere in our response to Him. This fullness of Marian devotion is, however, not mandatory, merely ideal. There is a diversity of spiritual attractions. Not all are obliged to the objectively best in every category.

a) Preparation: While, strictly speaking, a consecration could be made merely silently and interiorly, by one act of the will, yet it is far better to make a preparation, and to make the act itself with the recitation of a good formula, even with some solemnity. The True Devotion book of St. Louis de Montfort contains in a supplement one concrete form—others are quite possible. It includes 12 preliminary days, followed by three weeks. It can be very helpful. (Go to: www.pamphletstoinpire.com Mary/total consecration)

b) Living out the consecration: There are several ways to describe this. We will propose a synthetic presentation, for the sake of clarity. We could sum it all up by saying that it calls for a spirit of union, a spirit of dependence, and a spirit of obedience to her.

(1) The spirit of union: We try to (a) live like her, in imitation of her virtues and (b) under her eyes.

(a) Imitation: She, by her Immaculate Conception, made the only perfect response to the goodness of the Father. We should try, at a distance, to imitate her in this. St. Maximilian Kolbe even speaks, in a somewhat poetic way, of "becoming her" or "being in her" (SK 579), so that we "forget ourselves" (Gli Scritti di Massimiliano Kolbe, Florence, Citta di Vita, 1975-79, hereinafter: SK 432) and are "annihilated in her, changed into her,

transubstantiated into her" (SK 508). Of course, we are not really annihilated, or changed into her or transubstantiated. But behind these poetic expressions lies a great reality.

To begin to see it, we recall that there are three levels of guides one may follow in making decisions: First: The whim of the moment: Animals live this way. Aristotle says this is a "life fit for cattle" (N. Ethics 1. 5). Higher is the Second level: Reason is our guide: It is in reality aided by actual graces which God offers abundantly. But still, the guide is basically reason. We move, often step by step, to reach a decision based on reason, even though that reason is aided by actual graces. Third level: The Gifts of the Holy Spirit are the Guide: Here the Holy Spirit gives the answers ready made, without a step by step process. (NB the danger of self-deception here!). St. John of the Cross writes of this level (Ascent of Mt. Carmel 3. 2. 10): " God alone moves the powers of these souls... to those deeds which are suitable, according to the will and ordinance of God, and they cannot be moved to others... . Such were the actions of the most glorious Virgin, Our Lady, who, being elevated to this level from the beginning [of her life] never had the form of any creature impressed on her, nor was moved by such, but was always moved by the Holy Spirit." We think of her response at the annunciation, not to tell even the authorities or Joseph, but to be silent in humility. This was not contrary to reason, but above reason.

Today that Spirit acts through her, His Spouse, and so, de facto, His movements and the movements from her are the same. In this sense, a soul that is perfectly responsive almost becomes her, is almost annihilated in her, as St. Maximilian said.

b) Living in her presence: In what sense is she present? God is present everywhere, not by filling space, but by producing effects. Where He does this, He is present.

Her Presence through producing effects in the soul: Thanks to her glorification in the Assumption, she too operates in this mode. And she is constantly producing effects in that she is Mediatrix of all graces. There is also an affective presence: When two persons have strong love, even physical distance does not destroy this sort of presence. She has that love for us, we should return it, and in the measure in which we do so, this presence grows.

How can we develop an awareness of her presence? It is not possible that it be constant. Our weakness and our duties prevent that, but we can do much. Here are some means: In the method of conditioned reflexes we can develop, in time, the habit of saying some brief prayer or ejaculation each time we do some action that is often repeated, such as going up or down stairs, or in or out of a room. This is not the highest prayer, but it is a start.

Thinking of her doing the same things: especially if one does housework, that one can think of doing what she did, and doing it as part of the Father's plan. She looked on it that way. In the small talk method we do what two persons often do when together

he will be incapable of seeing this light, because the pulls of creatures (cf. again Mt 6. 21, "Where your treasure is, there is your heart also.") can get such a hold on a soul that grace cannot get the good thought to register (cf. 2 Cor 3. 5). Now if grace cannot do this, which is the first step, it cannot do the rest either. So such a soul must be lost, unless an extraordinary grace, comparable to a miracle, is given. When is such a grace given? We think it is when someone puts an extraordinary weight into the pan of the scales of the objective order, by mortification and humility that goes beyond what people in general will do.

(e) Sometimes we must pick between options: Besides the plasticity we mentioned, we try to reason out what to do. We try to think how she, or her Son, would act in the same situation, which is different from first century Palestine. Growth in love of God (which is the same as obedience to His will) and in humility and mortification make us open to His guidance.

We ask also in such cases: Is the proposed course in harmony with our state in life (please recall the quote from St. Francis de Sales above). If what seems to be an inspiration comes, we ask: Is this conducive to peace and gentleness of heart? If not, it is not likely to be from God.

Clearly, the amount of effort we put into solving each instance should be in proportion to the importance of the matter on hand. Large things or small things that are part of a long pattern deserve more effort.

Finally, if possible, it is a wonderful help to have a good spiritual director to help with decisions. With his help it is good to form a set of private policies: what devotions should I have each day? What mortifications (we mean self-imposed, for those sent by God are clear, we should lovingly accept, though we may still use ordinary means to remove difficulties, e.g., take an aspirin for a headache. If it does not work, that is a providential mortification). Most people err by excess in mortification: either they do nothing, or too much for their current state. So a director is priceless for objectivity and wisdom.

St. Ignatius of Loyola, in his Spiritual Exercises provides helpful rules for discernment of spirits: how to tell if something is really a grace, or is from the devil, or from suggestion. Cf. our appendix below on discernment of spirits.

End

and yet occupied with some work. They exchange comments, small talk: what they are doing, how it is going, or other things that concern them. Again, this is not the highest prayer, but it is a means of contact.

(2) Spirit of Dependence: Even without a consecration, we depend on her for every grace, in the sense explained above. But if we make a total consecration and try to live it, there is much more:

(a) Prayer through her: There are two ways. In one, we speak to her, and then ask her to speak to her Son or to the Father for us. In the other, we speak directly to the Father, or to Jesus, or the Holy Spirit, or other Saints. But in doing so we are aware of her, and of the fact that all graces we obtain are those she has shared in winning for us on Calvary, and which she has helped to get now for us by her intercession.

How often should we pray in each of these two ways? No formula can be given. There should be some of each. There will be variations according to the Father's plans for each individual, that is, according to the providential diversity of graces.

(b) Giving her the right to dispose of all we have: This is to be taken very seriously. Yet, we must be careful not to think of this as the whole of consecration. It is only a part, even though a very important part.

Material goods: We cannot put her name on our bank account, but we should resolve not to spend anything except in ways she would really want us to do. Here the response will be different for a priest than from that of those others living a life in marriage, or for a single person. The married one must not impose on his/her family an almost monastic standard. The unmarried or the priest could ask: Does she really want me to have more things than an ordinary married couple in this area would have?

Spiritual goods: We have these kinds of values: (a) Condign merit—the claim we get under the covenant to a reward. This is so personal by nature that it cannot be given to anyone else. (b) Congruous merit: this is such that we can spend it on others. We give her the final right to decide where to use it. (c) Satisfaction—all goods deeds are less than pleasant for our fallen nature, and so can be a means of satisfaction. (d) Impetration—this is the power of prayer based on the "ask and you shall receive" promise.— We give her the final right to say what to use these for. But we still may and should pray for parents, spouses, children etc., towards whom we have obligations and duties. She recognizes these duties, and loves our dear ones even more than we do. So while asking her to use this for this particular one, we leave the final right up to her. Really, in this way we as it were pool our poor merits with her infinite resources, and that so our dear ones will obtain more.

To sum up: we give to her to dispose everything we have that is disposable.

For those who can, it is good at times to have a Mass offered for her intentions. Technically, we ask that it be said for the intention of the giver. For the priest must positively make the assignment of the Mass. But then we make our own intention that it is for whatever she wills. Priests who accept stipends must of course offer it for those intentions directly, without calling on her.

(c) Power of attorney: Some holy people have prayed for particular sufferings. But this is not the best. The goal is that our will should be perfectly aligned with the will of the Father. We do not know if it would please Him to send a particular suffering at a particular time. However, she knows what will please Him, specifically, on any given occasion. So we can give her a sort of power of attorney, so she can act for us, can make any "deal" in our name. We have ratified in advance. We can make such a grant once for life, and then can renew it informally, especially when things are difficult. It can be renewed informally, even just by saying interiorly: "Mother, please speak for me."

(3) Spirit of obedience: This is the most direct response to her Queenship. What does she want me to do? Of course we should pray for light, but we should not then wait, as it were, for a jab from heaven, and think that a command. No, we must work reasonably. Some things are entirely clear at the start:

(a) Legitimate commands: She surely want us to obey all of these, from any authority that has the right to command. Of course if a command is immoral, we must disobey.

(b) Duties of state in life: She definitely wants us to carry out faithfully all the duties of our state in life, which vary for each state. This is an absolute. St. Francis de Sales in his *Introduction to a Devout Life*, 1. 3 has very sound advice: "Tell me, is it suitable that bishops, like Carthusians, should want to pursue solitude? that married men should be no more concerned about their financial state than Capuchins? that a workman should spend whole days in the church like a religious? that a religious, on the other hand, should be exposed to all the cases and events that attend the needs of others, like a bishop? Would not this kind of devotion be ridiculous, disordered, and intolerable?" This whole book is extremely well-balanced and helpful. However, one must excuse the rather sugary language usual in his day, and the many comparisons to the most up to date science of his day, now mostly discarded. The theology and the common sense are outstanding. The same Saint's *Treatise on the Love of God* is most valuable as a sequel.

St. Francis de Sales also makes a remarkable comment in regard to duties of one's state. In his *Epistle 217* (St. Francis de Sales, *Letters of Spiritual Direction*, Paulist, 1988, p. 104; cf. *Epistle 241*, *ibid.* pp. 156-57), to a married woman, he told her that her husband would be greatly pleased if he would see that as her devotion grew, she would become "more warm and affectionate toward him." Some Saints have felt that detachment (taught by St. Paul in 1 Cor 7. 29, not letting earthly things get a hold on

one) required the lack of all feeling, e.g., St. Augustine felt guilty because he wept after the death of his Mother (*Confessions* 9. 12), even though Our Lord Himself wept at the tomb of Lazarus, who was not even a relative, just a good friend (*Jn* 11. 35). Feelings in themselves are neither good nor bad: all depends on how we use them. To use them to further what we ought to do is not at all wrong, it can be positively good.

(c) Conformity to the will of God: She wants us to cultivate this. Really, if one could perfectly align his will with the will of God that would be complete perfection. But this cannot be had by reciting a prayer of acceptance, even with all sincerity. Why? First, we cannot foresee now all that His will may call for before the end of our lives, and so cannot fully conform. Second, somatic resonance needs to grow gradually, for such is the law of physical bodies. (About that resonance: since I am made of body and spirit, and these two are so fully bound together as to add up to one person, it follows that if I have a condition on one side, for normal running—not for mere survival of it—there needs to be a parallel condition on the other side. That parallel is called a resonance. When it falls on the bodily side, the most common case, it is called somatic, bodily. For example, faith is on the side of the spirit, but it needs a resonance in the body, which is probably biochemical, to function normally. So spiritual growth needs a gradual adjustment of this resonance, which, according to the law of growth of bodies, follows a step graph, with long plateaus, and small rises in between. Mortification or suffering of any type that affect the bodily side may put this resonance into a more fluid state, as it were, and make possible a large rise at such points, if we respond most generously at each point. Negative mortification is needed for this: just being nice to people does not have this kind of effect.

We distinguish two kinds of cases. In some, the will of God is already clear. Then we must actively will what He wills, not just be passive. Secondly, there are times when His will is not yet clear: then we try to be open, as it were having plasticity, ready to take whatever shape He may call for. This plasticity is gained only by much mortification, to tame the disorder of our natural drives, a disorder increased by all deliberate sins. (Cf. Mt 6. 21: "Where your treasure is, there is your heart also. Cf. also the heroic positive and active following the will of Our Father by Our Lady, as described above in speaking of her sufferings on Calvary).

(d) Reparation for sin: She wants us to make reparation. We would know this even without Fatima, but we notice specially that there she told us to: "Pray, pray much, and make sacrifices for sinners, for many souls are lost because they have no one to sacrifice and intercede for them." How can this be? Some become hardened by repeated sin. So ordinary graces cannot get through to them. For the first thing a grace needs to do is to give the good idea of what God proposes. If one is deeply addicted to evil,