



Marian Doctrine and Devotion

Chapter 23



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 23

To Imitate Her Virtues:

A part of a full consecration consists in imitating her virtues.

There seems to be some sort of a problem: St. Paul says it is faith that decides whether or not we are justified; yet the critical condition in the New Covenant is obedience, while love is the great commandment. Yet, as we shall see now, although there is a theoretical difference among these three, yet in actual practice, they come to the same thing.

Yet the solution to the seeming problem is very easy: In St. Paul's thought, faith includes three things: 1) If God speaks a truth, faith will believe it; 2) if God makes a promise, faith will have confidence; 3) if God gives a command, faith will obey. So faith includes obedience, and to obey God is to love Him. For, to love anyone other than God means to will good to the other for the other's sake. But we cannot as it were say to God: "I hope you are well off, that you get what you need". For He needs nothing. Yet He does want us to obey, for two reasons: 1) His Holiness loves

The more perfectly a soul sees and accepts these truths, the more God will fill it with His graces. As St. Teresa of Avila wrote (Conceptions of Love of God 6) "God would never want to do other than give if He found souls to whom He could give."

Our Lady was so totally empty of self, so totally humble in the way described, that she was open to receive grace so great that "only God can comprehend it", and she could serve as the channel of all graces to all others.

The new theory we have sketched, was published in Rome in 1963 in Latin, received several fine reviews in Europe. Then it appeared in English translation in London in 1971, as *New Answers to Old Questions*. Whatever good is in it, then, it all comes from graces of light, which this writer did nothing to earn, merely did non-reject, as St. Francis says.

(A note on the difficult question of predestination. The old theories failed because they ignored the context of Romans 8:29 ff., and Ephesians 1, which speak of predestination to full membership in the Church, not predestination to heaven or the lack thereof. The new answer again is fully Scriptural (using three logical, not chronological, stages): 1) God wills all to be saved (1 Tim 2:4: Banez had denied that teaching of St. Paul, even though Romans 5:8 says God has "proved His love" by sending His Son to so horrible a death to make eternal life and all graces leading to it, available to us by the infinite title generated by the infinite price of redemption); 2) He looks to see who resists His grace gravely and persistently. He decrees, sadly, to let them go (reprobation after demerits); 3) all not rejected in stage 2 are positively predestined to heaven, not because of merits, which have not appeared on the screen at all yet, nor even because of a lack of grave and persistent resistance, but because in stage one, that is what He wanted and wants, that all be saved. These souls do not block His action: so we see predestination without merits. (The same work, *New Answers to Old Questions* gives a full explanation on this question as well).

To help humility, mortification, and detachment from every creature is indispensable. She lived the life of a poor person, did not seek to share the acclaim of the crowds when they did praise her Son, but came into the darkness that hung over Calvary when all rejected Him.

All these virtues need the nourishment of mental prayer. St. Luke tells us what we would know without hearing it, that she pondered all these things in her heart.

End

It is this: God sends a grace. Without help from me it causes me to see something as good, makes me favorably inclined (Not yet a decision). These things happen with no help from me. At this juncture, where I clearly could reject, but could not make a decision to accept (Phil 2:13) if I merely do not make a decision against the grace, if I non-reject, then grace continues in its course, and works in me both the will and the doing (Phil 2:13) in such a way that at the same moment I am cooperating with grace by power at that moment being received from grace (cf. Trent DS 1554).

If I look back and ask: what good did I generate in this process, that I did not receive from God? The answer is: The lack of a decision against the grace. So, on a ledger for myself, for what I have done on my own, without having received it from God, I write a zero. Therefore my self-esteem should be at zero. Then I look at the ledger for my sins: those I do produce on my own. So my self-esteem goes below zero!

Even Our Lady, magnificent, as she was and is, with holiness beyond the ability of anyone but God to comprehend, even she did not do more to produce good in what she did—though she did not have any entry on the debit side of the ledger for sins: she had none. Yet she knew all this. She knew what St. Paul was to write in 1 Cor 4:7: "What have you that you have not received? And if you have received it, why boast as if you had not received it?" So she could consider herself nothing before the Infinite Majesty. This is really what humility is, and she accepted it at all levels of her being, as we said: she did not even subconsciously grab some credit for herself.

St. Francis de Sales, Treatise 3. 5 wrote: "For although the gift of being God's belongs to God, yet this is a gift which God denies to no one, but offers to all, and gives to those who freely consent to receive it." But then, St. Francis gives more precision. Instead of saying "freely consents" he adds in 4. 6: "But all that—what is it but to receive the divine working and not to resist." So nonresistance is our contribution. So St. Francis continues in 4. 6: "Is it not the part of most insane impiety to think that you gave effective and holy activity to the divine inspiration because you did not take it away by resisting? We can hinder the efficacy of inspiration, but we cannot give efficacy to it."

If we think of the Aristotelian teaching on potency and actuality: A grace actualizes the potency of my mind to see something as good; that almost automatically makes me well disposed. If then I merely do not make a decision against it, grace continues, and works in me both the will and the doing, that is, it actualizes the potency of my will to consent, while making me able to cooperate at the same moment. Even that ability to cooperate was His gift to me. So I am left with nothing to claim as produced by myself. My contribution produced by my own power without God is, as St. Francis de Sales said, nonresistance! Again 1 Cor 4:7: "What have you that you have not received?" or St. Augustine in Epistle 194: "When God crowns your merits, He crowns nothing other than His own gifts."

everything that is good and right. But it is only good and right that creatures should obey their Creator, children of their Father. Hence He wants our obedience for that reason, even though it does Him no good whatsoever. 2) He wants to give good to us, for our sake, He wills us even the divine happiness of sharing His life in the next life. However, it does Him no good to try to give it to us if we are not open to receive it: His commandments tell us how to be open. At the same time, they steer us away from the evils that lurk in the very nature of things, e.g. , getting drunk brings a hangover, much premarital sex brings a great danger of a loveless marriage, for those who go in for much premarital sex are not really watching out for the well-being of the other: they are putting each other into a state such that if death happened along, they would be wretched forever. This is closer to hatred than to love. So real love can hardly develop in such a framework. Hence. St. Paul says (Rom 8:17): "We are heirs together with Christ, provided that we suffer with Him, so we may also be glorified with Him." This is really part of Paul's great syn Christo theme: we are saved and made holy if and to the extent that we are members of Christ, and like Him. We gather this from Romans 6:3, 6, 8, 17; Col 3:1, 4; Eph 2:5-6.

So since faith includes obedience, they come to the same thing in practice. But also, as we have just explained, to obey God is to love Him. So again, the three coincide in practice.

She always obeyed. The Church teaches (Council of Trent DS 1573) she was entirely free of any sin all her life long. This comes to light first at the annunciation, where her reply to the Archangel was: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord", thereby echoing the words with which He had entered the world (Heb 10:7: "Behold, I come to do your will O God". Obedience is the condition of both old and new covenants (cf. Ex. 19. 5 and Rom 5. 19 and LG 3). Her love (for holiness is in practice the same as love) was so great that Pius IX taught (Ineffabilis Deus) that even at the start of her life, it was so great that "none greater under God can be thought of, and only God can comprehend it." Her divine Son taught that all the law and the prophets are summed up in love.

How great was her faith? At the annunciation she certainly saw that her Son would be the Messiah, and most likely that He was to be God Himself. She most likely gathered that from the angel saying that the Holy Spirit, would "overshadow" her—a word standing for the Divine Presence filling the ancient tabernacle. Then for this reason "the Holy One to be born would be called Son of God." That means: Son of God in a unique sense. (To this she would add, in pondering in her heart all the Old Testament prophecies we saw above, tending to show His divinity). And the very word "overshadow" could easily suggest the divinity of the Holy Spirit, since it means the divine presence filling her as it once did the Tabernacle in the desert.

We have grown up with the thought of Three Divine Persons, who are but One only God. But to her, who had had it hammered into her that there was only one God—this would be an immense difficulty for faith. Then when her Son arrived and had the normal needs of other babies, her faith told her who it was. But her senses reported that it feels like just any other baby. And there would be more of this clash during the years to come. She also many times had to hold on in the dark, as we explained before.

Her love, as Pius IX told us (*Ineffabilis Deus*) was so great even at the start that (since love and holiness are interchangeable words) "none greater under God can be thought of, and no one but God can comprehend it".

Her obedience was expressed in her fiat: "Be it done to me according to your word." She knew all too much for comfort what that entailed, for she knew the prophecy of the passion in Isaiah 53, and other prophecies as well. She accepted to undergo all this. As Pope John Paul II wrote (*Mater Redemptoris*), on Calvary she made the greatest kenosis (self-emptying) in history, being asked to consent, to even will the terrible death of her Son for whom she had love so great that "none greater under God can be thought of, and no one but God can comprehend it"

The virtue that makes room for love is humility. It teaches us to know who we are in relation to God, and to accept that truth at every level of our being. There is a problem about Our Lady's humility. People usually think that humble people say they are not good and so on. But she was magnificent in holiness, so much so that Pius IX taught, as we saw, in *Ineffabilis Deus* that even at the start, her holiness was so great that "none greater under God can be thought of, and no one but God can comprehend it." We know she was humble. It is not her words in the Magnificat: "He has looked upon the humility of His handmaid (the Greek *doûle* really means slave girl)". They really mean that God has chosen her in spite of her lowly, humble, estate. And we saw too that it is highly probable that she knew she was immaculately conceived. So, how could she be humble?

As we said, humility requires knowing what we are in relation to God, and accepting that at every level of our being. How in her case?

We get a start from St. Paul. In 2 Cor 3:5: "We are not sufficient to think anything of ourselves, as from ourselves. Our sufficiency is from God." (We are translating in line with the definition of the II Council of Orange (DS 377) rather than following the common version). It means that we are incapable of getting a good thought on our own: it must come from God. Then in Phil 2:13 (cf. DS 374): "It is God who works [produces] in us both the will and the doing." That is, even our good decisions, and carrying them out, comes from God. So: we cannot on our own get a good thought, make a good decision, or carry it out. It seems we are just puppets on a string. But yet we know that is not so. 2 Cor 6:1 also says: "We urge you not to receive the grace of God in vain." So it is evident: in some way—hard to say what way—we control

whether grace comes in vain or not. Really the same teaching is all over Scripture, where it tells us to repent, to return to God.

How do we put together these seemingly contradictory teachings? Attempts have been made over the centuries. In 1597, Pope Clement VIII found that in Spain the Jesuits (Molinists) and Dominicans (who claimed to be following St. Thomas, were really following their own Domingo Banez) were at each other, were upsetting people on this topic, and on the related topic of predestination. Wisely the Pope gave an order: each group must send a delegation to Rome, to have a debate before a commission of Cardinals, to see who is right. The debates ran for ten years, with no result. The reason: both sides were sadly misusing Scripture, ignoring the context of every text. No wonder! Then after ten years, Pope Paul V consulted St. Francis de Sales, who was not only a Saint, but a splendid theologian, who had had a period of six weeks of blackness in 1586-87 from his understanding of the so-called Thomist theory (cf. his Letter 1974). He finally managed to muddle his way out. We find his results in his great Treatise on the Love of God, especially in 3. 5 and 4. 6 and 4. 5. Pope Pius IX praised St. Francis highly (ASS 10. 411-12): "... our Predecessor Paul V when the famous debate *De auxiliis* was being held at Rome, decided to ask the opinion of this bishop on the matter, and, following his advice, judged that this most subtle question, full of danger, and agitated long and keenly should be laid to rest, and that silence should be imposed on all parties." The Holy Spirit was really guiding the Church here! Pope Pius XI wrote (AAS 15. 56): "Taking opportunity, he [St. Francis de Sales] lucidly explained the most difficult questions, such as efficacious grace, predestination and the call to the faith."

So Pope Paul V gave an order in 1607 (DS 2997) that all must go home, stop calling each other names, and not even write on the subject without special permission, since it disturbed souls: DS 1997. Urban VIII through the Holy Office, on May 22, 1625 and Aug. 1, 1641 even threatened an automatic excommunication reserved to the Pope for disobeying this order: introduction to DS 1997.

So we will dismiss those two schools whom the Pope dismissed, even though they attempted to come back in our own times. Instead let us present a radically new way of solving the problem, which actually follows both St. Francis de Sales, and St. Thomas (in *Contra gentiles* 3. 159). But most of all we will adhere closely to Scripture. The process begins when God sends a grace of light to give the good thought of what He wills to lead a soul to do (2 Cor 3:5): He gives the soul the good thought. Even then, the soul cannot make a decision to accept it—Phil 2:13 says good decisions are moved in the soul by God. But clearly the soul could reject, or not reject. To non-reject gives the same effect as acceptance, but the mechanism as it were is radically different.