

ENDTIME ISSUES NEWSLETTER No. 191

“MARIOLOGY”

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UPDATE ON RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

HOW TO CONTACT THE CENTER FOR CANCER CARE IN GOSHEN, INDIANA THAT TREATED MY CANCER

Two days following my 69th birthday, I learned that I had advanced-stage colon cancer requiring immediate surgery. Later I was told that the cancer had spread to the liver, infesting 90% of the organ and making his prognosis bleak. Several oncologists that I consulted, confirmed that I had Stage 4 terminal liver cancer, with only a few months to live. All what they could do was to prolong his life for a few months or a year at best.

Driven by my faith in God and optimistic attitude, I sought another opinion at the Goshen Center for Cancer Care in Goshen, Indiana. Following a two-hour consultation with Dr. Seza Gulec, a pioneer in the field of nuclear oncology, I learned that cancer was treatable with a combined strategy of chemotherapy and microsphere embolization – a treatment unavailable at

other cancer centers. Within one month, two rounds of the innovative treatment reduced the presence of liver cancer by almost 80% and decreased total tumor volume from 2435cc to 680cc. Within two months, two more treatments reduced Dr. Bacchiocchi's cancer by 95%.

Click here to see the pictures of the various stages of my cancer:
www.biblicalperspectives.com/goshen

PUSHING TECHNOLOGY FURTHER THAN IMAGINED

While at the Goshen Center for Cancer Care, I participated in an unprecedented clinical trial using the combined strategy to treat colorectal cancer that had advanced to the liver. Placed directly into the cancerous area via catheter, the microspheres delivered 40 times more radiation directly into the tumor than conventional therapy alone, eradicating it over a period of weeks. This targeted therapy aggressively attacked the tumors, quickly reducing their size, while normal liver tissue remained relatively unaffected.

The Goshen Center for Cancer Care is one of the few treatment facilities in the world to offer this breakthrough technology primarily due to the commitment of Dr. Gulec. A world-renowned physician, Dr. Gulec has dedicated years to research and develop the combination therapy, which greatly increases survival rates in those with advanced liver cancer. He has also authored landmark publications in lymphatic mapping, sentinel node biopsy, radioguided surgery and radionuclide therapy. Dr. Gulec currently leads the endocrine surgery, hepatic oncology, molecular imaging and positron emission tomography programs at the Goshen Center for Cancer Care.

Truly I can say that I believe that the Lord providentially placed me in contact with Dr. Gulec, who has done for me what appeared to be impossible. The Lord has used Dr. Gulec to give me a new lease on life. Now I feel like a new man energized to serve the Lord in a greater way in the sunset years of my life. Somehow I feel that I have more energy now than I had at 25 years of age.

PATIENT ORIENTED CENTER FOR CANCER CARE

The Goshen Center for Cancer Care is home to some of the world's most sought after cancer specialists who use groundbreaking research, state-of-the-art technology and patient-specific clinical trials to offer the most advanced treatments available anywhere. Incorporating conventional and alternative medicine, our multidisciplinary, integrated team of physicians, surgeons and specialists work together every day to provide unmatched care all under one roof.

What has impressed me about the Goshen Center for Cancer Care is their patient-oriented focus. Among other things they provide very comfortable free guest rooms facilities. They offer our a holistic approach to healing which addresses the emotional, spiritual, mental, as well as physical aspects of cancer. From relentlessly recruiting some of the brightest minds in cancer to pushing current treatments further than ever imagined, everything they do is for the betterment of their patients.

To find our more about the GOSHEN CENTER FOR CANCER CARE, click at these links:

CONTACT: www.cancermidwest.com/contact/contact.asp

WEBSITE: www.cancermidwest.com/

MORE ABOUT DR. GULEC: <http://www.cancermidwest.com/main.asp?id=217>

Update on the Writing of *POPULAR BELIEFS: ARE THEY BIBLICAL?*

The research and writing of the new book *Popular Beliefs: Are They Biblical?* has resumed, as you can tell from this newsletter, where I am posting the first part of chapter 7 on "Mariology." This chapter is requiring much more research and reflection than I had anticipated, because there are a cluster of dogmas and teachings about Mary that need to be examined. The cult of Mary is at the heart of Catholic worship and deserves a close examination.

In many ways the progressive Catholic glorification of Mary represents also, as we shall see, the progressive consolidation of papal

power. “As the invisible maternal supervisor of the Church becomes equal to God—or as ‘pure’ as the Second Person of the Trinity—so her visible paternal counterpart [the Pope] makes a commensurate advance.” In researching this chapter I came to the conclusion that the old saying “As Mary goes so goes the Church,” should be modified to say “As the papacy goes so goes Mary.”

Researching for this chapter has truly been a learning experience for me. It has help me to understand more fully not only the ecumenical role of Mary in bringing together Catholics, Protestants, and Muslims, but also the progressive glorification of Mary from being sinless to being immaculately conceived, to being bodily assumed into heaven, and being venerated as the Mediatrix, the dispenser of grace and salvation.

Due to the length of this chapter which is not yet completed, I decided to post the first half, dealing with the two important dogmas of the perpetual virginity of Mary and her immaculate conception. The next newsletter examines the Bodily Assumption of Mary, the Mediator Role of Mary, and the Veneration of Mary.

In view of the growing popularity of the veneration and worship of Mary, it is imperative to thoroughly examine this development from a biblical perspective. The study shows that Catholic Marian dogmas are Scripturally baseless, historically unjustified, and doctrinally unsound.

Financing the Printing of *Popular Beliefs: Are they Biblical?*

In my previous newsletters I told you that some fellow believers have promised to raise funds for the printing a large quantity of the new book *Popular Beliefs: Are they Biblical?* The idea is to offer the book (about 350 pages) to churches and individual members FREE OF CHARGE. The only expense will be the mailing cost.

So far the contributions to this project have been slow in coming. We are still a long way from reaching the goal of \$200,000.00 to cover the cost of printing 100,000 copies. This is partly my reason I had slowed down the research and writing of the remaining four chapters. Somehow I felt that if the printing was going to be delayed due to lack of sufficient funds, then there was no reason for me to give utmost priority to this project.

Your encouraging responses has cause me to change my mind. Many of you urged me to proceed without delay because this book ***Popular Beliefs: Are they Biblical?*** is urgently needed to help many sincere believers to understand why their popular beliefs are unbiblical and why the Adventist beliefs are biblical. Some of you have sent in contributions toward this project.

If the Lord impresses you to contribute to this project, I am pleased to inform you that now we can offer you a tax deductible receipt, because our son, Daniel, an Architech, has just received a non-profit status for his MASTER'S BUILDERS INC. He has established this organization to channel funds to build churches and schools in developing countries. Your contribution should be sent to this mail and address:

MASTER'S BUILDERS INC.
4990 APPIAN WAY
BERRIEN SPRINGS, MICHIGAN 49103

Your prayers and financial support for this new book is greatly appreciated. Our goal is to offer this urently needed outreach book FREE OF CHARGE, if sufficient funds come in to cover the cost of printing it.

THE SABBATH SEMINAR WITH WORDS AND SONGS

After weeks of preparation, the SABBATH SEMINAR WITH WORDS AND SONGS was presented and recorded on November 16-17, 2007, at the Avon Park SDA Church, a 900 members congregation near Orlando, Florida. The church was packed with visitors from the surrounding churches. The response surpassed our fondest expectations.

In the past I presented my *Sabbath, Advent, and Lifestyle Seminars* by myself with my broken Italian accent. But now, providentially the Lord has brought to my ministry a most gifted Brazilian lady, Cristina Piccardi, who touches the hearts of people with her powerful and passionate singing.

During the past five Sabbaths, Cristina has sung at rallies in Avon Park (near Orlando), Loma Linda, Hinsdale (Chicago), San Antonio,

(Texas), and Lexington (Kentucky). In Lexington we ministered to about 400 non-SDA sabbatarians, who came from different parts of the USA and Canada. Everywhere our seminars with words and songs, were warmly received.

This is what Pastor Paul Boling, the Senior Pastor of the Avon Park SDA Church, wrote about our SABBATH SEMINAR WITH WORDS AND SONGS, that was recorded at his church on November 16-17, 2007.

“November 18-2007

Over the past years I have had the privilege of inviting Dr. Samuele Bacchiocchi to speak at 2 churches that I have pastored. So, I was eager to again host his seminar in the Avon Park SDA Church, of Florida Conference.

However, the weekend visit of November 16-17, 2007 was slated to be different, because he was bringing his own guest singer, Cristina Piccardi. This gifted vocalist added immeasurably to Dr. Bacchiocchi's timely lectures. *She is extremely well trained, and she graciously brought to our congregation the most beautiful music we have ever heard, coupled with her love for God.* Our congregation was so overjoyed with her concert, and they want the team of Bacchiocchi and Piccardi to return soon!”

Pastor Paul Boling
Senior Pastor
Avon Park Seventh-day Adventist Church

Who is Cristina Piccardi?

Truly I can say that Cristina is by far the best Adventist soprano I have heard in my life. Surprisingly she is a slim, only 118 pounds, 5.6 feet high—not the typical heavy-set soprano. When my wife asked her: “How can you project such a powerful voice when you are so slim?” She replied: “It is God’s gift.”

Cristina was born in Brazil 26 years ago and came to Andrews University two years ago to accompany her husband who is studying at

the seminary. She has earned degrees in voice performance both in Brazil and at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh, PA, where she received full scholarship during the two years of her studies, graduating in December of 2005.

In the same year she performed in a leading role with symphonic orchestras in the USA and overseas. At the annual 2005 International Competition for Opera Singers she won the first prize as the best soprano singer of the year. Now that Pavarotti has passed away, it is encouraging to know that one of the best soprano in the world belongs to the Adventist Church.

I officially met Cristina on October 6, 2007 at Andrews University Pioneer Memorial Church. I was spellbound by the three sacred songs she sung during the communion service led by Pastor Dwight Nelson. When we met after the communion service, we both immediately felt that the Lord was bringing us together in a providential way to proclaim with words and songs our timely Adventist Message. She told me that after singing for five years in a leading role with various symphonic orchestras, she felt the call of God to leave glitzy world of the opera stage, in order to dedicate the gift of her voice to sing sacred music. This means that now we are presenting together with words and songs my powerpoint seminars on the SABBATH, SECOND ADVENT, and CHRISTIAN LIFE STYLE.

You can enjoy a preview of Cristina's outstanding singing by clicking at this link: <http://www.biblicalperspectives.com/cristina/> She sings the first stanza of THE HOLY CITY.

SPECIAL HOLIDAY OFFER of the New DVD Album on the SABBATH WITH WORDS AND SONGS

To make it possible for many fellow believers and especially small churches, to benefit from the newly released DVD Album on the SABBATH WITH WORDS AND SONGS recorded on November 16-17, 2007, **we are pleased to offer you the Album as a HOLYDAY SPECIAL for only \$30.00**, instead of the regular price of \$100.00. The price is valid until January 31, 2008, and includes the airmail cost to any oversea destination.

The DVD Album consists of 3 DVD disks containing a total of

6 hours of recording, that is, the Cristina singing and my preaching done on Friday evening, Sabbath morning, and Sabbath afternoon.

The Friday evening program begins with Cristina's mini Sacred Concert, and is followed by my testimony entitled "My Search for the Sabbath at a Vatican University. This is a gripping testimony delivered with 100 powerpoint slides. I share how the Lord opened the door for me to research and publish my dissertation *From Sabbath to Sunday* at a Vatican University in Rome and since then to share the message of the Sabbath in many countries.

On Sabbath morning Cristina leads the Praise Songs and then she sings "The Lord's Prayer" before my sermon. My powerpoint sermon "The Sabbath as a Time for Service," offers practical principles on how to keep the Sabbath to gain a greater blessing out of it.

The Sabbath afternoon program is divided into two parts. In the first part Cristina offers a sacred concert and in the second part I deliver my final lecture entitled "The Sabbath Under Crossfire." This lecture offers an update report on the latest Sabbath/Sunday developments.

You can enjoy this informative and inspiring 6 hours seminar in the privacy of your home or church, without having to travel long distances or investing money to fly us in.

How to Order the New DVD Album on THE SABBATH WITH WORDS AND SONGS at the SPECIAL HOLIDAY OFFER of only \$30.00 (instead of \$100.00) until December 31, 2007.

(1) **Online** by clicking here: http://www.biblicalperspectives.com/cart/catalog/product_info.php?cPath=26&products_id=104

(2) **By calling us** at (269) 471-2915

(3) **By emailing us** your address and credit card information

(4) **By mailing** a check for \$30.00 to BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVES, 4990 Appian Way, Berrien Springs, Michigan 4990, USA.

We guarantee to AIRMAIL the DVD album immediately to ensure that it will reach you in time for Christmas.

WOULD YOU LIKE US TO PRESENT A SEMINAR WITH WORDS AND SONGS AT YOUR CHURCH?

Would you like us to present a SABBATH, or ADVENT, or LIFESTYLE SEMINAR with WORDS AND SONGS at your church? Every weekend is already taken until the end of April 2008, but we have openings in the latter part of the year.

If you are interested to invite Cristina Piccardi and myself for a special seminar with Words and Songs, feel free to contact us by email <sbacchiocchi@biblicalperspectives.com> or by phone (269) 471-2915. We will be glad to give you the details and the open dates.

“MARIOLOGY”**Dr. Samuele Bacchiocchi****Retired Professor of Theology, Andrews University**

Religion writers often speak of the modern age as “The Age of Mary.” A cover story article of *Time* magazine entitled *The Search for Mary*, notes “In an era when scientists debate the causes of the birth of the universe, both the adoration and the conflict attending Mary have risen to extraordinary levels. A grass-roots revival of faith in the Virgin is taking place worldwide. Millions of worshippers are flocking to her shrines, many of them young people. Even more remarkable are the number of claimed sightings of the Virgin, from Yugoslavia to Colorado, in the past few years.”¹

The article reports that millions of “people the world over are traveling enormous distances to demonstrate in person their veneration of the Madonna. The late 20th century has become the age of the Marian pilgrimage.”² Several informative examples are cited. “At Lourdes, the biggest of France’s 937 pilgrimage shrines, annual attendance in the past two years has jumped 10%, to 5.5 million.”

“At Fatima, Portugal, the shrine marking the appearance of Mary before three children in 1917, draws a steady 4.5 million pilgrims a year from an ever widening array of countries. . . . In Czestochowa, Poland, attendance at the shrine of the Black Madonna has increased to 5 million

a year, rivaling Fatima and Lourdes, since John Paul's visit in 1979. Last August the Pope spoke there to 1 million Catholic youths. In Emmitsburg, Md., attendance has doubled in the past year, to 500,000, at one of the oldest of 43 major Marian sites in the U.S., the National Shrine Grotto of Our Lady of Lourdes."³

On a similar cover story entitled "The Meaning of Mary," *News-weeks* sums up the story of Mary, saying: "The secret of Mary's mysterious power may be just this: having no history of her own, she entices every new generation to draw her portrait. The Bible offers only scraps to build on . . . From this meager line of development, Mary gradually grew in stature. Astonishingly, this obscure Jewish mother absorbed and transformed the most powerful pagan goddesses. She was the Madonna who gives life, but also the pieta who receives the dead. Once asceticism became the privileged road to Christian holiness, she became the perpetual virgin, the model of chastity and self-denial. In 431, the Council of Ephesus issued the first dogmatic statement of Mary: she was to be honored as *Theotokos*, the Godbearer or Mother of God . . . In the 19th century, long after many Protestant reformers had rejected the cult of the Virgin as popish nonsense, Pope Pius IX proclaimed the Immaculate Conception Catholic dogma."⁴

John Paul: A Marian Pope

The boom in pilgrimages to Marian shrines is almost overshadowed by reports of alleged new appearances of Mary in different parts of the world. This development brought great satisfaction to the late Pope John Paul II, whose devotion to Mary was ingrained in his Polish homeland.

When John Paul was made bishop in 1958, he emblazoned a golden M on his coat of arms and chose as his motto *Totus Tuus*, which is Latin for "Totally Yours," referring to Mary, not Christ. "During his countless visits to Marian shrines, John Paul invoked the Madonna in nearly every discourse and prayer he delivered. He personally believed that Mary's personal intercession spared his life when he was shot in 1981 at St. Peter's Square. Moreover, like many others, he was convinced that 'Mary brought an end to communism throughout Europe.'"⁵

Mary is Seen as an Ecumenical Bridge

On November 21, 1964, the Second Vatican Council predicted in its *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, called *Lumen Gentium*, that Mary's intercessions "before the Son in the fellowship of all the saints" may succeed in "bringing together in peace and harmony into one People of God" all the families of the earth (#69). At that time Protestants viewed this prediction as ridiculous, but today the situation has changed. Recent publications by Protestants on Mary indicate that she could indeed be the ecumenical bridge that is being built to unite Christians of all faiths by eroding the existing rejection of Catholic dogmas about Mary.⁶

After listing seven major publications written in collaboration between Catholic and Protestant scholars, Anglican John Macquarrie concludes: "Paradoxically, some of the most important expositions of Marian doctrine in this century have come to us from Protestant scholars from a variety of denominations. Mary does not belong to any church or denomination. *She is the mother of those who 'have the testimony of Jesus Christ.'*"⁷

There is growing acceptance of Mary by Protestant writers as the hope for the ecumenical unity of all faiths. In his book *A Protestant Pastor Looks at Mary*, Lutheran scholar Charles Dickson speaks of Mary as a "shining model of genuinely Christian hope. It is the hope for all humankind. Such a rereading and enlightened understanding on the part of the Protestant community will help to refocus the attention of the entire Christian world on Mary, not as a point of division, but as *the real bridge to unity for us all.*"⁸

In his article "Protestants and Marian Devotion: What About Mary?" Methodist scholar Jason Byassee writes: "'To say 'Holy Mary, full of grace, pray for us sinners, now and in the hour of our deaths' seem to express an extrascriptural accretion. But perhaps asking Mary for her prayers is not in itself un-Protestant. To do so may even guard christological dogma and defend against patriarchy. Who knows? *Mary might just be key to the future of ecumenism after all.*"⁹

The ecumenical quest for a rediscovery of Mary is exemplified by the collaboration between Protestant and Catholic scholars in the evalua-

tion of Mary in the New Testament. The most notable result of this joint quest is the book *Mary in the New Testament* (1978, 340 pages), written by a team of Catholic and mainline Protestant scholars. A conference of Anglican and Eastern Orthodox theologians resulted in the important work *The Mother of God*. A series of conferences between Catholic and Lutheran scholars produced the book *The One Mediator, The Saints and Mary* (1992). Paradoxically, some of the most important re-evaluation of Mary in recent years have come from Protestant scholars of different denominations.

Mary Could Become the Bridge to Unite Catholics and Muslims

Mary could be the bridge to unite also Catholics and Muslims, because she is revered by both. This point was emphasized by speakers at a recent Christian and Muslim Conference on the role that Mary plays in each religion. At the Conference, Janan Najeeb, director of the Milwaukee Muslim Women's Coalition, addressed the role Mary plays in the Islamic faith.

She said: "Muslims do not believe Mary, who is known as 'Mariam' in their faith, is the mother of God. Nor do they believe her free of the human stain because they have no concept of original sin. Muslims do, however, revere Mary as the mother of Jesus, one of the five greatest prophets — though not the son of God. In the Islamic faith we see her as a 'perfected saint' whose purity and faithfulness make her an example for all Muslims to follow.

"All Muslims are taught from an early age to love, revere and honor Mary. It is hard to find a Muslim who is not spiritually elevated when reading the story of Mary. Mary is mentioned more times in the Quran than in the Bible, according to Najeeb. The 19th chapter of the Quran — entitled 'Mariam' — is devoted to Mary, and she is the only woman in the Muslims' sacred text who is referred to by her given name and not by reference, such as 'wife of' or 'daughter of.' So significant is her position in Islam that there are many Islamic scholars who believe her a prophet."¹⁰

In recent years both Pope John Paul II and Benedict XVI have been working hard to develop a new partnership between the papacy and Islam. This partnership is based on the belief that Catholics and Muslims worship

the same God of Abraham and venerate the same Mary, the Mother of Jesus. This belief is clearly expressed in the new official *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, which affirms: “The Church has also a high regard for the Muslims. They worship God, who is one, living and subsistent, merciful and almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth, who has also spoken to men. They strive to submit themselves without reserve to the hidden decrees of God, just as Abraham submitted himself to God’s plan, whose faith Muslims eagerly link to their own. Although not acknowledging him as God, they venerate Jesus as a prophet, *his virgin Mother they also honor, and even at times devotedly invoke.*”¹¹

It is evident that the Catholic estimation of Islam has undergone a fundamental change from the religion of “infidels” to that of believers who worship the same God of Abraham and venerate the same Mary, Mother of Jesus. The determination of the Popes to develop a partnership with Muslims stems from the simple fact that their 1.3 billion members outnumber the 1 billion Catholic members. By acknowledging the legitimacy of the Islam faith, the Pope is facilitating the Muslims’ acceptance of His role as the leader of a future New World Order.

Objectives of this Chapter

In the light of the growing cult of Mary among Catholics and of the increasing devotion to Mary by Protestants as the hope for the ecumenical unity of all faiths, it is imperative to examine the popular beliefs about Mary in the light of the Scripture. This is the objective of this chapter.

For the sake of clarity our study of the popular beliefs about Mary follows this sequential order:

- 1) The Perpetual Virginité of Mary
- 2) Mary’s Immaculate Conception
- 3) The Bodily Assumption of Mary
- 4) The Mediator Role of Mary
- 5) The Veneration of Mary

The procedure we follow in examining these popular beliefs about Mary is simple. First we state the Catholic and in some instances also the Protestant defence of their beliefs about Mary, and then we submit such beliefs to a biblical evaluation. This means that the chapter is divided in five parts in accordance to each of these beliefs.

PART 1
THE PERPETUAL VIRGINITY OF MARY

It was the Lateran Synod of A. D. 649 that emphasized for the first time the threefold character of Mary's virginity, namely that "Mary was a Virgin before, during and after the Birth of Jesus Christ."¹² This means, as stated by Catholic apologist Ludwig Ott, that "Mary gave birth in miraculous fashion without the opening of the womb and injury to the hymen, and consequently also without pains."¹³

The Catholic belief that Mary was a perpetual virgin, that is, she lived her all life as a virgin and died a virgin, is celebrated in Catholic liturgy as *Aeparthenos*, "Ever-virgin." The new *Catechism of the Catholic Church* affirms this belief, saying: "Christ's birth 'did not diminish his mother virginal integrity but sanctified it. And so the liturgy of the Church celebrates Mary as *Aeparthenos*, the 'Ever-virgin.'"¹⁴

The *Catechism* summarizes the belief in Mary's perpetual virginity, saying: "Mary remained virgin in conceiving her Son, a virgin in giving birth to him, a virgin in carrying him, a virgin in nursing him at her breast, always a virgin."¹⁵ Mary's virginity is seen as an essential prerequisite for her "to serve the mystery of redemption with him and dependent on him, by God's grace"¹⁶

The *Catechism* continues saying: "Being obedient she became the cause of salvation for herself and for the whole human race. Hence not a few of the early Fathers gladly assert . . . 'The knot of Eve's disobedience was untied by Mary's obedience: what the virgin Eve bound through her disbelief, Mary loosened by her faith. Comparing her with Eve, they call Mary 'the Mother of all the living' and frequently claim: 'Death through Eve, life through Mary.'"¹⁷

It is important to note that for Catholics Mary's perpetual virginity and lifelong sinlessness, enable her to serve as a Redeemer and dispenser of Christ's grace. This belief, as we shall see shortly, is clearly expressed in Pius IX's encyclical *Ubi Primum*, promulgated on February 2, 1849. Such a teaching is clearly negated by Scripture which teaches that "there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim 2:5).

Catholic Defense of Mary's Perpetual Virginity

Thomas Aquinas uses several arguments to defend the perpetual virginity of Mary. For example, he argues that if Mary had intercourse with Joseph after the birth of Jesus, that would be “an insult to the Holy Ghost, whose *shrine* was the vaginal womb, wherein he had formed the flesh of Christ; wherefore it is unbecoming that it should be desecrated by intercourse with man.”¹⁸

Aquinas concludes his defence of Mary's perpetual virginity, saying: “We must therefore simply asserts that the Mother of God, as she was a virgin in conceiving Him and a virgin in giving Him birth, so did she remain a virgin ever afterwards. . . . Mary gave birth in miraculous fashion without opening of the womb and injury to the hymen, and consequently also without pains.”¹⁹ This Catholic belief is expressed by the title “perpetual virginity.”

Reformers Believed in Mary's Perpetual Virginity

Surprisingly, the Protestant reformers affirmed their belief in Mary's perpetual virginity. For example, Martin Luther's (1483-1546) was true to the Catholic tradition when he wrote: “It is an article of faith that Mary is Mother of the Lord and still a virgin. . . . Christ, we believe, came forth from a womb left perfectly intact.”²⁰

The French reformer John Calvin (1509-1564) was not as profuse in his praise of Mary as Martin Luther, but he did not deny her perpetual virginity. The term he used most commonly in referring to Mary was “Holy Virgin.”²¹

The Swiss reformer, Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1531), wrote, on the perpetual virginity of Mary: “I firmly believe that Mary, according to the words of the gospel as a pure Virgin brought forth for us the Son of God and in childbirth and after childbirth forever remained a pure, intact Virgin.”²² Elsewhere Zwingli affirmed: “I esteem immensely the Mother of God, the ever chaste, immaculate Virgin Mary; Christ was born of a most undefiled Virgin.”²³

The Reformers' almost universal acceptance of Mary's continuing virginity, and their widespread reluctance to declare Mary a sinner, was gradually rejected by their followers. The reason for their break with the

past was partly due to a fresh examination of the biblical passages used to support Mary's perpetual virginity. Also, the idolatrous practices that developed in association with the veneration of Mary and the rejection of clerical celibacy, eventually led most Protestant churches to reject several Catholic beliefs about Mary.

Anglicans and Catholics Agree on Mary

In recent years, as noted earlier, the Protestant opposition to the veneration of Mary has weakened considerably. An example is the 57-page statement released by the joint commission of Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission on Marian devotion and doctrine. A key point discussed in the accord is the "non-Catholics view that Mary's immaculate conception, her freedom from original sin and resulting sinlessness, contradicts the Bible's teaching that 'all have sinned' (Rom 3:23) and that Jesus is the sole exception (Heb 4:15). The accord responds to this traditional Protestant view, saying: "we can affirm together that Christ's redeeming work reached 'back' in Mary to the depths of her being, and to her earliest beginnings without violating scripture."²⁴

Regarding the Protestant past rejection of the Catholic belief in Mary's assumption to heaven at the end of her life, the accord says: "we can affirm together the teaching that God has taken the Blessed Virgin Mary in the fullness of her person into his glory as consonant with scripture, since God directly received others (Elijah, Stephen, the thief on the cross)."²²

On other significant Catholic beliefs like Mary's perpetual virginity, her redemptive role, and her veneration by praying for her, the accord shows that Anglican theologians are seeking ways to embrace, at least in part, such beliefs. It is evident that the Protestant opposition to Marian devotion and veneration is gradually weakening.

Catholic Arguments from Scripture

The Catholic dogma of the perpetual virginity of Mary is based on dogmatic assumptions, not on factual biblical teachings. This is evidenced by the fact that Catholic scholars cite only a few Bible verses to support the alleged perpetual virginity of Mary. For example, Catholic apologist, Ludwig Ott summarizes them as follows: "From the question which Mary

puts to the Angel, Luke 1:34: ‘How shall this be done, because I know not man?’ it is inferred [by some Catholic theologians] that she had taken the resolve of constant virginity on the ground of special Divine enlightenment. Others note that the fact that the dying Redeemer entrusted His Mother to the protection of the Disciple John (John 19:26), ‘woman, behold thy Son,’ presupposes that Mary had no other children but Jesus.’²⁵

The references to Jesus’ “brothers” (cf. Matt. 13:55; Mark 6:3; Gal. 1:19) are interpreted by Catholics as referring to Jesus’ cousins, not blood brothers. Other Catholic scholars suggest that maybe these were Joseph’s sons by a previous marriage, thus preserving Mary’s perpetual virginity. The latter is very important in Catholic teachings, because sex is associated with sin. Virginity is seen as a prerequisite to achieve a higher level of holiness, and ultimately sainthood.

A BIBLICAL RESPONSE TO MARY’S PERPETUAL VIRGINITY

The Pagan Origin and Implications of Perpetual Virginity

The Bible clearly teaches that Mary was a virgin before and at the time of the birth of her son Jesus (Is 7:14; Matt 1:18-25; Luke 1:26-27), but nowhere it suggests that she remained a virgin afterwards. The roots of the dogma of Mary’s perpetual virginity, must be sought in the pagan environment of the post-apostolic age when there was a strong emphasis on celibacy within certain heathen religions (Vestal virgins of pagan Rome) and “Christian” gnostic sects. Sexual intercourse, even within marriage often carried the suspicion of sin. Such a view eventually led Augustine (354-430) to teach that original sin is transmitted through sexual procreation.

The association of sex with sin eventually gave rise to the idea that it was inconceivable that Mary should have engaged in normal marital relations after the birth of Jesus. To be holy Mary had to be virgin before and after giving birth to her son, Jesus. Her hymen had to remain intact during and after Jesus’ birth, in order for Mary to achieve the highest state of holiness. This idea consolidated the tradition of celibacy for priests and nuns.

The whole idea of Mary's perpetual virginity undermines the integrity and humanness of Christ's incarnation, by positing that He was not only conceived, but also born miraculously by the Holy Spirit. As the God-man, Christ could hardly have been "made like his brethren in every respect" (Heb 2:17) by partaking of "the same nature" (Heb 2:14), if He was snatched out from Mary womb miraculously, leaving Mary's hymen intact. If both Christ's conception and birth were strictly the work of the Holy Spirit who only borrowed Mary's womb for nine months, then the integrity and humanness of His incarnation are seriously jeopardized.

God Created Sex

The whole idea of Mary's perpetual virginity is based on the perverse belief that sex is sinful. Such a belief is negated by Scripture. The first statement relating to human sexuality is found in Genesis 1:27: "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." It is noteworthy that while after every previous act of creation, Scripture says that God saw that "it was good" (Gen 1:12,18,21,25), after the creation of mankind as male and female, it says that God saw that "it was very good" (Gen 1:31).

This initial divine appraisal of human sexuality as "very good" shows that Scripture sees the male/female sexual relations as part of the goodness and perfection of God's original creation. Thus, the dogma of the perpetual virginity of Mary negates the biblical positive view of sex, besides demeaning women who choose marriage rather than celibacy.

In Catholic teachings a woman who devotes herself to her family, bringing up the children in the fear of God, can hardly achieve the same state of holiness of a woman who chooses to remain virgin to serve the Lord. Such teaching can hardly be supported by Scripture which commends godly women like Hannah for devoting herself to the upbringing of Samuel (1 Sam 1 and 2).

Christ's Birth Was Normal

The belief that Mary remained virgin *during* and *after* Christ's birth, is discredited by all the descriptions of the event, which indicate a normal birth. Luke, for example, writes: "She gave birth to her first-born son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths" (Luke 2:7). Paul speaks of

Christ as “born of a woman” (Gal 4:4). In Matthew the angel explains to Joseph: “She shall bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus” (Matt 1:21).

None of these texts use the common words for a miracle, sign, or wonder. There is no reference to angels or to the Holy Spirit snatching Jesus miraculously out of the womb of Mary. They simply tell us that it was Mary who “gave birth to her first-born son” (Luke 2:7). The idea of a miraculous birth of Christ, without coming through the birth canal or causing pain, is to be found in the gnostic apocryphal writings of the second and third century, but not in the inspired New Testament.

Were Joseph and Mary Sexually Intimate After Jesus’ Birth?

Matthew suggests that Mary and Joseph were sexually intimate after Jesus’ birth. For example, Matthew affirms that “before they came together, she [Mary] was found to be with child of the Holy Spirit” (Matt 1:18). The term “came together” (from *sunerchomai*) includes the idea of sexual intimacy (cf. 1 Cor 7:5). The implication is that ultimately Joseph and Mary “came together” and experienced sexual intimacy.

Matthew declares also that Joseph “*knew* her not [Mary] *until* she had brought forth her firstborn son” (Matt 1:25; KJV). The phrase “knew not” suggests that Joseph did not have sexual relations with Mary until after the birth of Jesus. In Scripture a man *knows* a woman by becoming sexually intimate with her. “Now Adam *knew* Eve his wife and she conceived” (Gen 4:1).

The phrase “she brought forth her firstborn son” (Luke 2:7; Matt 1:25), suggest that Mary gave birth in a normal way, not in a miraculous fashion. It was Mary that brought forth Jesus. There is no mention of the involvement of the Holy Spirit in the actual birth of Jesus.

The adverb “until–*heos hou*” in the phrase Joseph “knew her not *till* she had brought forth her firstborn” (Matt 1:25; KJV), implies that after the birth of Jesus, they had normal marital relations. As Jack Lewis points out, “elsewhere in the New Testament (Matt 17:9; 24:39; John 9:19) the phrase *until (heos hou)* followed by a negative always implies that the negated action did take place later.”²⁶ There is no valid reason to assume that Matthew 1:25 is an exception. Had Matthew wanted to convey the

idea of Mary's perpetual virginity, he would have simply written: "But he never had any union with her."

Jesus is Called Mary's "Firstborn"

In Luke 2:7 Jesus is called Mary's "firstborn—*prototokon*." While the term "firstborn" does not unequivocally demand that Mary had other children, the natural meaning is that she did. If the perpetual virginity of Mary was a common belief in New Testament times, Luke would have simply written that she brought forth her "only" son. That would certainly have settled the issue.

Note that Luke wrote long after Christ's birth when Joseph and Mary were possibly dead. If Jesus had been Mary's only child, with hindsight, he would have used the word "only begotten—*monogene*," not the word "firstborn—*prototokon*." In the context "firstborn" implies that Mary had other children. This seems to be confirmed by the fact that all the Gospels affirm that Jesus had brothers and sisters.

Who Were Jesus' Brothers and Sisters?

There are several clear references to Jesus' brothers and sisters in the context of his immediate family. These texts suggest that they were actual brothers, not cousins, as many Catholics believe. For example, Matthew writes: "Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary? And are not his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? And are not all his sisters with us?" (Matt 13:55-56; cf. Mark 6:3). This text suggests that Jesus had a large family of at least four brothers and two sisters.

Even John, the most mystical of all the Gospels, suggests that Jesus was not the only child. "After this he went down to Capernaum, with his mother and brothers and his disciples" (John 2:12). "So his brothers said to him, 'Leave here and go to Judea, that your disciples may see the works you are doing'" (John 7:3).

Paul also refers to James as the "Lord's brother," in his letters to the Galatians and Corinthians. "Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas, and remained with him 15 days. But I saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord's brother" (Gal 1:18-19). "Do we

not have the right to be accompanied by a wife as the other apostles and *the brothers of the Lord* and Cephas?" (1 Cor 9:5; Emphasis supplied).

Two major explanations are given by Catholic apologists to reconcile these texts with their belief in the perpetual virginity of Mary. Some argue that the "brothers and sisters" mentioned were *half*-brothers and *half*-sisters of Jesus. They were Joseph's children from a previous marriage, thus preserving Mary's perpetual virginity. Other follow Jerome's argument that these were Jesus' cousins, not blood brothers.²⁷

The major argument used to defend these interpretations is that in the Hebrew language there are no specific nouns for kinfolk. The Hebrew word *ah* and the Aramaic *aha*, can mean brother, stepbrother, cousin, nephew or any blood relative. This is true in Hebrew, but not in *Greek*. This interpretation ignores that all the four Gospels were written in *Greek*, not Hebrew.

In the Greek language there are two distinct words for brothers and cousins. The Greek word for brother is *adelphos* and for cousin is *anepsios*. The latter is used in Colossians 4:10, where Mark is described as the *cousin-anepsios* of Barnabas. But the word *cousin* is never used in the references to Jesus' brothers and sisters. Had the Gospel writers known that James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas, were Jesus' cousins they would have used the word *anepsios* to avoid any confusion.

The words "brother" and "sister" are consistently used in the New Testament in a family setting, and always referring to a literal blood brother or sister (Mark 1:16,19; 13:12; John 11:1-2; Acts 23:16; Rom 16:15). Why should one assume that the terms "brothers" and "sisters" were used by Matthew figuratively, when he uses the term "mother" literally? If "sister" is literal in Acts 23:16 (Paul's sister), there is no reason to interpret the same word in a *different* sense in Matthew 13:56. It is an established hermeneutical principle that words should be understood in their literal sense unless a literal interpretation involves an obvious contradiction.

Indirect support for this conclusion is provided by the accounts of Joseph and Mary's travels first to Bethlehem and then to Egypt. Luke tells us that Joseph and Mary travelled from Nazareth to Bethlehem "to be enrolled" (Luke 2:5). If Joseph had at least six children from a previ-

ous marriage, we would expect them to travel with him as a family. The fact that only Joseph and Mary are mentioned by Luke, suggests that at the time of their betrothal Joseph had no children. It is hard to believe that a godly man like Joseph would forsake his children to marry Mary.

Support for this conclusion is provided also by Matthew's account of the flight into Egypt. An angel instructs Joseph in a dream, saying: "Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there till I tell you" (Matt 2:13). After the death of Herod, the same angel tells Joseph: "Rise, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who wanted the child's life are dead" (Matt 2:20).

In both instances the travelling party consisted only of Joseph, Mary, and the child Jesus. There is no mention of the six children that allegedly Joseph had from a previous marriage. Did Joseph leave them alone in Nazareth for several years until he and Mary returned from Egypt with Jesus? This could hardly have been the case, since all the members of the family were expected to be enrolled. These considerations lead us to conclude that Mary most likely had other children besides Jesus.

Did Mary Resolve to Remain Perpetually Virgin?

From the question which Mary puts to the Angel in Luke 1:34: "How shall this be, since I have no husband?" some Catholic infer that she resolved to remain virgin for the rest of her life. But Mary's question hardly suggests that she took a vow of virginity. Had she done so, why did she become engaged to Joseph (Matt 1:18)?

The notion of Joseph and Mary living in a perpetual celibate state, runs contrary to God's ideal for marriage, which is intended to bring together a man and a woman as "one flesh" (Gen 2:24; Matt 19:5-6). After the initial physical bonding, there is the continuing responsibility for husband and wife to honor their conjugal rights: "The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband" (1 Cor 7:3). Any abstinence is to be mutually agreed "for a season . . . but then come together again, lest Satan tempt you through lack of self-control" (1 Cor 7:5).

Why Did Jesus Entrust His Mother to John?

The fact that at the Cross Jesus entrusted His mother to John, saying: “Woman, behold, your son!” (John 19:26), is seen by Catholic apologists as an evidence that Mary had no other children. For example, Ludwig Ott writes: “The fact that the dying Redeemer entrusted His Mother to the protection of the Disciples John (John 19:26) ‘Woman, behold thy Son,’ presupposes that Mary had no other children but Jesus.”²⁸

This assumption ignores that Jesus’ brothers at that time were not believers (John 7:5) and presumably were not present at the Cross. The argument that according to the Mosaic law, the closest blood relative was required to watch over Mary, overlooks the fact that Jesus was showing His compassion for His mother in the absence of those who should have been caring for her.

Moreover, Christ taught that commitment to Him superceded the closest blood ties. When His mother and brothers showed while He was teaching, He said: “Who is my mother, and who are my brothers? And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, ‘Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother, and sister, and mother’” (Matt 12:48-50). With the exception of His mother, his own family at that time did not believe in Him. So He could only entrust his own mother into a believer’s hands. And John was close to Jesus and could be entrusted with His mothers keeping.

Conclusion

The Catholic dogma of Mary’s perpetual virginity is bereft of any reasonable biblical evidence. The few passages that are employed in defence of the dogma, do not even allude to the subject. But the Catholic Church does not depend upon biblical authority to define her teachings. She claims the authority to define its own dogmas, to write her own rules, and to create her own “Intercessors” (2 Thess 2:4).

The dogma of Mary’s perpetual virginity is one of the main ancient superstitions that have been thrust upon sincere souls who have been taught never to question the voice of their Church. It is a sad reality that today millions of sincere people sincerely, but ignorantly and uncritically follow an autocratic system that openly opposes divinely revealed truths.

PART 2

THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION OF MARY

There is a logical progression in the Catholic dogmas about Mary, each building upon the other and ultimately widening the gap between the biblical teachings and Catholic Marian teachings. Philip Schaff, a renowned nineteenth century church historian, rightly observes that “from the Roman standpoint this dogma [of the immaculate conception] completes the Mariology and Mariolatry, which step by step, proceeded from the perpetual virginity of Mary to her freedom from sin after the conception of the Savior, then to freedom from sin after her birth, and at last to her freedom from original and hereditary sin [at conception]. The only thing now left is to proclaim the dogma of her assumption to heaven, which has long been a pious opinion in the Catholic Church.”²⁹

Schaff’s prediction that the final step in the glorification of Mary would be the proclamation of the dogma of her assumption to heaven, was fulfilled in 1950, that is 57 years after his death which occurred in 1893. Schaff points out that the progressive glorification of Mary corresponds to “the progress in the worship of Mary, and the multiplication of her festivals. Her worship even overshadows the worship of Christ. She, the tender, compassionate, lovely woman, is invoked for her powerful intercession, rather than her divine son. She is made the fountain of all grace, the mediatrix between Christ and the believer, and is virtually put in the place of the Holy Ghost. There is scarcely an epithet of Christ which devout Roman Catholics do not apply to the Virgin.”³⁰

Definition of the Dogma of the Immaculate Conception

Some people confuse the Catholic dogma of the *immaculate conception* of Mary with the biblical doctrine of the *virginal conception* of Christ. Jesus’ conception was most assuredly immaculate (sinless), but this dogma refers to Mary, not to Jesus. It claims that Mary was preserved from original sin from the moment of her conception to the end of her life. How this allegedly happened will be explained below.

The official dogma of the immaculate conception, known as *Ineffabilis Deus*, was promulgated by Pope Pius IX on December 8, 1854, in occasion of the Feast of the Conception. In the presence of more than

200 cardinals, bishops, and other dignitaries, Pius IX solemnly defined and promulgated this dogma, saying: “We declare, pronounce and define that the doctrine which asserts that the Blessed Virgin Mary, from the first moment of her conception, by a singular grace and privilege of almighty God, and in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, Saviour of the human race, was preserved free from every stain of original sin is a doctrine revealed by God and, for this reason, must be firmly and constantly believed by all the faithful.”³¹

The Glorification of Mary as a Channel of Grace and Redemption

The promulgation of the dogma of the immaculate conception represents the culmination of the glorification process of Mary as a channel of grace and redemption for mankind. The intent of the dogma is revealed in the encyclical *Ubi Primum* that Pius IX sent to the bishops on February 2, 1849 to solicit their opinions and to urge their cooperation in promoting the acceptance of the dogma of the immaculate conception that he would soon promulgate.

The encyclical contains revealing statements: “We eagerly desire that, as soon as possible, you appraise Us concerning the devotion which animates your clergy and your people regarding the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin and how ardently glows the desire that this doctrine be defined by the Apostolic See. And especially, Venerable Brethren, We wish to know what you yourselves, in your wise judgment, think and desire on this matter. . . . We are sure that it will be your pleasure to cooperate, zealously and diligently, with Our wishes and that you will hasten to supply Us with the replies which We have requested.”³²

After appealing to the Bishops to accept and generate popular support for the belief in the Immaculate Conception of Mary, the encyclical continues stating: “The foundation of all Our confidence, as you know well, Venerable Brethren, is found in the Blessed Virgin Mary. For, God has committed to Mary the treasury of all good things, in order that everyone may know that through her are obtained every hope, every grace, and all salvation. For this is His will, that we obtain everything through Mary.”³³ More than six hundred prelates responded, and with the exception of four all approved the papal definition of the immaculate conception.

Note that this papal encyclical clearly expresses what often Catholic apologists tend to deny, namely, the belief that through Mary “are obtained every hope, every grace, and all salvation. For this is His will, that we obtain everything through Mary.” By making Mary the dispenser of “every hope, every grace, and all salvation,” the Catholic Church ultimately minimizes the redemptive role of Christ. If hope, grace, and salvation can be obtained through Mary, Christ’s intercessory and redemptive ministry are hardly needed. Ultimately, the worship of Mary in popular piety supplants the worship of Christ. The end-result is the idolatrous worship of a *creature* rather than of the *Creator*.

The Mechanics of the Immaculate Conception

To understand the Catholic definition of the Immaculate Conception of Mary, it is necessary to explain first the Catholic dualistic view of human nature. Simply stated, Catholics and most Protestants believe that every human being is born with a mortal body and an immortal soul. In chapter 2 we noted that in recent years numerous Catholic and Protestant scholars have rejected the Platonic dualistic view of human nature, embracing instead the biblical wholistic view.

According to the dualistic view, at conception a body is formed in the womb of a mother as a result of the insemination of a father. At the moment of the conception of the body, a soul is created and infused into the body. This process is called *animation*, that is, the implantation of an *anima* (which is the Latin term for the soul) into the body. Each soul is infused into the body with the stain of the original sin. Under normal circumstances such a stain is supposed to be removed at baptism soon after the birth of the child.

In the case of Mary, however, the stain of the original sin was not *removed* at baptism, but was *excluded* altogether from her soul at the time of conception. In other words, Mary’s body was infused with a clean soul without the stain of the original sin. In addition, a special sanctity was conferred upon her that excluded from her body the presence of all depraved emotions, passions, and inclinations.

The immunity from the original sin in the soul as well as the exclusion of inherited sin from the body, were given to Mary at conception by the same merits of Christ who cleanse believers from sin at baptism. Thus, the conception of Mary was immaculate, because she was exempted from

the presence of original sin in her soul and from inherited sin in her body. This is the essential meaning of the Catholic dogma of the Immaculate Conception.

This dogma goes beyond attributing sinless conception to Mary by claiming also that she lived a *totally sinless life*. As stated in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, “The Mother of God ‘the All-Holy’ (*Panagia*). . . [was] ‘free from any stain of sin, as though fashioned by the Holy Spirit and formed as a new creature.’ By the grace of God Mary *remained free of every personal sin her whole life long*.”³⁴ Thus, according to the official Catholic teaching Mary was conceived without any trace of sin and she remained sinless during her entire life. Shortly we shall see that this teaching is clearly condemned by Scripture that teaches that “*all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*” (Rom 3:23; Emphasis supplied)

A Long Debated Question

Catholic theologians have debated for centuries the question of the Immaculate Conception of Mary. The major divisive issue was whether Mary was sanctified, that is cleansed from sin, before or after the infusion of the soul into her body, a process known as *animation*. In the thirteen century John Duns Scotus and the Franciscan monks promoted the view that Mary was cleansed from sin at the conception of the body and before the infusion of a soul without the stain of original sin. Thus, for them both the body and soul of Mary were never exposed to sin.

This view was opposed by Thomas Aquinas and subsequently by the Dominican monks. The reasons given by Aquinas may appear cavillous and nitpicking to a modern mind unfamiliar with hairs splitting scholastic argumentations. Aquinas wrote: “The sanctification [cleansing from sin] of the Blessed Virgin cannot be understood as having taken place before animation [infusion of the soul], for two reasons. First, because the sanctification of which we are speaking, is nothing but the cleaning from original sin. . . . Secondly, because . . . before the infusion of the rational soul, the offspring conceived is not liable to sin.”³⁵

Simply stated, Aquinas argues that Mary’s cleansing from sin took place after the infusion of the soul because it is the soul that make a person rational and subject to sin. If both the body and soul of Mary were

sinless from conception, then she would not need a Savior. Such a view, according to Aquinas, “is derogatory to the dignity of Christ” who is “the universal Savior of all.”³⁶ Mary needed a Savior like every other human being. This is an undeniable biblical truth.

The solution that Aquinas defends is that Mary was cleansed from sin after her conception and reception of the soul, but before her actual birth. In other words, Mary was immaculate, that is without sin, not from conception, but from the time of her actual birth. The difference between the two seems insignificant to a lay person, but it is most important in Catholic theology, because it determines whether or not Mary was sinless from her conception or from her actual birth.

Note that for Catholics the issue is not Mary’s sinlessness. On this point they all agree that Mary was without sin. The only question that was debated is: “When did her sinlessness begin, at conception with the infusion of the soul, or nine months later at the time of her actual birth?” The dogma of the Immaculate Conception settled the question, by declaring that Mary was sinless from the very moment of her conception.

This dogma is designed to reassure Catholic believers, as stated by Pius IX, that Mary can dispense “every hope, every grace, and all salvation” because she was conceived sinlessly and lived all her life without any trace of sin. Her sinlessness qualifies her to be a co-redeemer—a popular Catholic belief examined later in this chapter.

The Immaculate Conception is Derives from the Dualistic View of Human Nature

A biblical response to this false teaching will be given shortly. At this juncture it is important to note that the whole dogma of the Immaculate Conception is based on the Platonic dualistic view of human nature, according to which the soul is infused into the body at conception and leaves it at death. In chapter 2 we noted that such teaching is foreign to the Bible, which teaches the wholistic view of human nature.

We have seen that the Bible teaches that human nature consists of an indissoluble unity, where the body, soul, and spirit represent different aspects of the same person, and not different entities functioning

independently. The soul is not infused into the body at conception, but is the animating principle of the body. Simply stated, in Scripture a living body is a living soul and a dead body is a dead soul.

The biblical wholistic view of human nature removes the basis for the belief in the Immaculate Conception of Mary, because it negates the notion of the infusion of the soul at conception. Nowhere the Bible suggests that the original sin is a biological reality transmitted through the infusion of the soul at conception. Original sin is a basic moral condition of our fallen nature that influences everything in us and about us. “All have sinned and come short of the glory of God” (Rom 3:23). The dogma of the Immaculate Conception represents one of the many heresies that derive from the dualistic view of human nature.

Historical Setting of the Dogma of the Immaculate Conception

It is most instructive to look at the historical setting of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception *Ineffabilis Deus* promulgated in 1854 by Pope Pius IX. His pontificate was the longest in history, from 1846 to 1878. This was a paradoxical time for the papacy. The greatest of these paradoxes was that while the popes were loosing their territorial and temporal power, it tried to compensate by solidifying their religious power by promulgating dogmas to prove their authority and infallibility (a movement known as “ultramontanism”).

In 1849 Pius IX was expelled from Rome and was unable to return until the French intervened in his favor. After his restoration, instead of continuing some of the reformatory measures, he tried to rule as an absolute monarch. He clashed with the leading European powers of his time, until on September 20, 1870, the troops of the new Kingdom of Italy took over the papal states.

Justo Gonzales, one of the most respected church historian of our times, perceptibly notes that “While loosing his power, Pius IX insisted on reaffirming it, even if this could be done only in religious matters. Thus, in 1854, he proclaimed the dogma of the Immaculate Conception. According to that dogma, Mary herself, by virtue of her election to be the mother of the Savior, was kept pure from all taint of sin, including original sin. This was a question that Catholic theologians had debated for centuries, without reaching any conclusion.”³⁷

Gonzales continues pointing out that “the most significant fact from a historical point of view was that, in proclaiming this dogma as the doctrine of the church, Pius IX was the first pope ever to define a dogma on his own, without the support of a council. In a way the bull *Ineffabilis*, promulgating the dogma of the Immaculate Conception of Mary, was a testing of the waters to see how the world would react. Since the bull did not meet much opposition, the stage was set for the promulgation of papal infallibility [in 1870].”³⁸

Historians Nicholas Perry and Loreto Echeverria emphasize the significant link between the two dogmas of Immaculate Conception and Papal Infallibility. They write: “Far from having coincidental gestation, the two dogmas are reinforcing and complementary. They are the consummation of an alliance between Rome and ‘Mary’ since earliest times. As the invisible maternal supervisor of the Church becomes equal to God—or as ‘pure’ as the Second Person of the Trinity—so her visible paternal counterpart makes a commensurate advance. When the world questions the Chair of Peter and its prerogatives, celestial confirmation is required. In turn, this supernatural factor can be ratified only by an incontrovertible, superhuman voice: that of infallibility.”³⁹

With the success of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, Pius IX subsequently called the First Vatican Council which formally declared papal infallibility. The Immaculate Conception was the first Catholic dogma that was defined solely by papal authority. The Pope did ask for the Bishops’ input in the encyclical *Ubi Primum*, but in promulgating the dogma he made no mention of representing the views of the church at large. As stated by Maurice Hemington in his classic book *Hail Mary?: The Struggle for Ultimate Womanhood in Catholicism*, “It was a solitary decree. Mary was used as an instrument for solidifying hierarchical power in Catholicism.”⁴⁰

From a historical perspective, the promulgation of the dogma of Immaculate Conception in 1854, represents a single-handed attempt by Pope Pius IX to prove his papal authority on religious matters, at a time when the political power of the popes was coming to an end. The end-result is that the Catholic Church today is plagued by unbiblical dogmas that cannot be undone because they were promulgated *ex cathedra*, that is, as official infallible papal pronouncements.

A BIBLICAL RESPONSE TO THE DOGMA OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

Catholic sources acknowledge the lack of direct biblical support for the dogma of the Immaculate Conception. For example, *The Catholic Encyclopedia* admits that there are “no direct or categorical and stringent proof of the dogma can be brought forward from Scripture.”⁴¹ Two major texts are generally used to support the Immaculate Conception: Genesis 3:15 and Luke 1:28. We shall see that none of these two texts even allude to this doctrine.

Genesis 3:15: Is Mary the Woman at Enmity with the Serpent?

Catholics believe that “the first scriptural passage [Gen 3:15] which contains the promise of the redemption, mentions also the Mother of the Redeemer.”⁴² “I will put enmity between you and the woman, between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, and you will bruise his heel” (Gen 3:15). Catholic sources generally interpret the enmity between Satan and the woman as representing the conflict between Satan and Mary.

For example, *The Catholic Encyclopedia* interprets the text saying: “The woman at enmity with the serpent is Mary. God puts enmity between her and Satan in the same manner and measure, as there is enmity between Christ and the seed of the serpent. Mary was ever to be in that exalted state of soul which the serpent had destroyed in man, i.e. in sanctifying grace. Only the continual union of Mary with grace explains sufficiently the enmity between her and Satan. The Proto-evangelium [Gen 3:15], therefore, in the original text contains a direct promise of the Redeemer, and in conjunction therewith the manifestation of the masterpiece of His Redemption, the perfect preservation of His virginal Mother from original sin.”⁴²

The identification of the woman at enmity with the serpent with Mary, cannot be justified by the literal sense of the text. “The literal sense is that Eve (not Mary) and her posterity will win their moral warfare against Satan and his offspring, culminating in the crushing victory of the Messiah over Satan and his hosts. The ‘woman’ is obviously Eve, the ‘offspring’ are clearly the literal offsprings of Eve (cf. Gen 4:1, 25), and the victory is the victory of Christ over Satan (cf. Rom 16:20).”⁴³

Even allowing by extension for an indirect application of the woman to Mary, it is a gigantic leap from this to her immaculate conception, which is not implied in the text. The fact is that there is no necessary or logical connection between Mary being the mother of the Messiah and her sinless conception.

Luke 1:28: Does “Full of Grace” Imply Sinless?

Does the salutation of the angel to Mary “Hail, O favored one, the Lord is with you!” imply that she was conceived without trace of sin? This is the interpretation of the new *Catechism of the Catholic Church*: “Through the centuries the Church has become ever more aware that Mary, ‘full of grace’ through God, was redeemed from the moment of her conception. That is what the dogma of the Immaculate Conception confesses. . . . By the grace of God Mary remained free of every personal sin her whole life long.”⁴⁴

The Catholic interpretation of “full of grace” as meaning that “God redeemed [Mary] from the moment of her conception . . . [and] by the grace of God Mary remained free of personal sin her whole life,” reveals a lot of inventiveness, poses four serious problems.

First, the phrase “full of grace” is an inaccurate translation based on the Latin Vulgate “*gratia plena*.” The original Greek *kecharitomene* is correctly translated even by the Catholic New American Bible simply as “favored one.” The Vulgate’s inaccurate translation became the basis for the idea that Mary was extended grace throughout her life. Such grace enabled her to live without sin—a teaching that is foreign to Scripture.

Second, the context indicates that the salutation of the angel refers only to her state at that moment, not to her entire life. It does not affirm that she was full of grace from conception to translation. Rather the context shows that Mary was “highly favored” (KJV) because God gave her the privilege to give birth to His Son?” In verses 30-31, the angel says to Mary: “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus.” Later Elizabeth greets Mary, saying: “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!” (Luke 1:42).

These texts indicate that Mary was highly favored and blessed because God chose her to bear His Son. As Norval Geldenhuys comments: “God had given her His free and uncaused grace in a unique measure by choosing her as mother of His Son.”⁴⁵ Even a cursory reading of the context reveals that the grace she received was for the task of being the mother of the Messiah, not to prevent her from sinning during her entire life.

Third, the emphasis on the fullness of grace is misleading, since even Catholic apologists acknowledge that Mary was a sinner in need of redemption. For example, Ludwig Ott says that Mary “required redemption and was redeemed by Christ.”⁴⁶ It is biblically unwarranted to suggest that Mary was prevented from inheriting sins. Instead, she was empowered by God’s grace to overcome sin.

Lastly, the same term for “grace–*charito*” is used for believers in general. In their excellent treatment of Mariology, entitled *The Cult of the Virgin*, Miller and Samples note that the Greek term for “full of grace” *charito* “is used of believers in Ephesians 1:6 without implying sinless perfection. So again there is hence nothing about Luke 1:28 that establishes the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception. That Mary was uniquely favored to be the mother of her Lord is the only necessary inference.”⁴⁷

Mary Acknowledged her Need of a Savior

In the Magnificat, Mary praised God as her Redeemer by singing, “My soul magnifies the Lord, and *my spirit rejoices in God my Savior*” (Luke 1:47; Emphasis supplied). The reason Mary called God *my Savior*, is because she knew that as a descendant of Adam, she was born in a sinful condition.

The dogma of the Immaculate Conception undermines the integrity of her human nature, reducing her to an image and making her life a phantasm. It implies that Mary was never a true human being and never lived a true human life.

In the Bible redemption is not a miraculous intervention accomplished at conception without human participation. The Holy Spirit does not work impersonally, without a free, human participation. Christ’s sin-

lessness was not mechanically guaranteed by his miraculous conception, but was His own achievement during His entire life through the enabling power of the Holy Spirit.

Conclusion

The glorification of Mary as sinless from conception, is an heresy that detracts from the uniqueness of the Son of God by placing a creature on equal footing with Him. Sinlessness is a quality reserved for Christ alone. *Savior* is a name that only Christ deserves. The angel instructed Joseph, saying: “You shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins” (Matt 1:21). Jesus is the only person who was born, lived, and died without sin. He is the only one qualified to save us from our sins because He alone is God. The dogma of the Immaculate Conception is Scripturally baseless, historically unjustified, and doctrinally unsound.

ENDNOTES

1. Richard N. Ostling, “The Age of Mary,” *Time*, December 30, 1991, p. 42.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. “The Meaning of Mary,” *Newsweek*, August 25, 1997, p. 36.

5. *Times* (note 1), p. 42.

6. See for example, Beverly Roberts Gaventa, *Mary; Glimpses of the Mother of Jesus* (1995) and a collection of essays she coedited called *Blessed One; Protestant Perspectives on Mary* (2002). Robert Jenson defends the role of Mary in his monumental two-volume *Systematic Theology* (1997 and 1999) and in collection of essays he co-edited, *Mary; Mother of God* (2004). All of these elevate the role of Mary in the Plan of Salvation.

Years of ecumenical dialogue between French Catholics and Protestants have produced a book entitled *Mary in the Plan of God and in the Communion of the Saints* (1999). The book calls for both a Catholic and Protestant “conversion” on the subject of Mary.

7. Eric Mascall, “Modern Protestant on Mary,” www.mariology.com/sections/modern.html. Emphasis supplied.

8. Charles Dickson, *A Protestant Pastor Looks at Mary* (1996), p. 110. Emphasis supplied.

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9. Jason Byassee, "Protestants and Marian Devotion: What about Mary?" www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=3156. Emphasis supplied.
 10. Will Ashenmacher, "Muslim, Christians Discuss Mary," *The Marquette Tribune*, September 14, 2004, Section on News.
 11. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, (San Francisco, CA, 1994) Paragraph 841, Emphasis supplied.
 12. Ludwig Ott, *Fundamentals of the Catholic Dogmas* (1960), p. 203.
 13. *Ibid.*, p. 205.
 14. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1994), p. 126, paragraph 500.
 15. *Ibid.*, p. 128, paragraph 510.
 16. *Ibid.*, p. 124, paragraph 494.
 17. *Ibid.*
 18. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* (1947), Pt. III, Q. 28, p. 2173.
 19. *Ibid.*, p. 2174.
 20. Weimar's *The Works of Luther*, English translation by Pelikan, Concordia, St. Louis, v.11, pp. 319-320; v. 6. p. 510.
 21. *Calvini Opera*, Corpus Reformatorum, Braunschweig-Berlin, 1863-1900, v. 45, p. 348, 35.
 22. *Zwingli Opera*, Corpus Reformatorum, 1905, v. 1, p. 424.
 23. Cited by E. Stakemeier in *De Mariologia et Oecumenismo*, 1962, p. 456.
 24. Richard N. Ostling, "Anglicans, Catholics Agree on Mary," *Deseret News* (Salt Lake City), May 28, 2005.
 25. *Ibid.*
 23. Ludwig Ott (Note 12), p. 207.
 26. Jack Lewis, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (1976), Vol. 1, p. 42.
 27. Ludwig Ott (Note 12), p. 207.
 28. *Ibid.*
 29. Philip Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom, with a History and Critical Notes* (1893), vol. 2, pp.211-212.
 30. *Ibid.*
 31. Henry Denzinger, *The Sources of Catholic Dogma*, (1957), paragraph 2803; Cited also in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (note 11), p. 124, paragraph 491.

32. *Ubi Primum*, On the Immaculate Conception, Encyclical of Pope Pius IX, February 2, 1849, *Papal Encyclical Online*, <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Pius09/p9ubipr2.htm>.

33. Ibid.

34. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (note 11), p. 124, paragraph 493. Emphasis supplied.

35. St. Thomas Aquinas (note 18), Part 3, Q. 27, vol. 2, p. 2164.

36. Ibid.

37. Justo Gonzales, *The Story of Christianity*, (1984), vol. 2. p. 297.

38. Ibid.

39. Nicholas Perry and Loreto Echeverria, *Under the Heel of Mary* (1989), p. 122.

40. Maurice Hemington, *Hail Mary?: The Struggle for Ultimate Womenhood in Catholicism* (1995), p. 19.

41. Frederick G. Holweck, "The Doctrine of the Immaculate Conception," *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (1910), vol. 7, p. 242.

42. Ibid.

43. Norman Geisler and Ralph E. MacKenzie, *Roman Catholics and Evangelicals. Agreements and Differences* (2004), p. 307.

44. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (note 11), p. 124.

45. Norval Geldenhuys, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke* (1983), p. 75.

46. Ludwig Ott (note 12), p. 212.

47. Elliot Miller and Kenneth R. Sample, *The Cult of the Virgin: Catholic Mariology and the Apparitions of Mary* (1992), p. 34.

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You may have noticed that the new 2008 Daily Devotional Book *The Gospel from Patmos*, is authored by Prof. Jon Paulien. He has done a masterful job in expanding each verse of the Revelation into a daily devotional thought.

To help you appreciate more fully Paulien's Daily Devotional, we offer you his DVD album on ***SIMPLY REVELATION*** that was released few months ago. We have been **airmailing** the DVD album to church leaders, pastors, and lay Adventists in different part of the world. Several pastors have already shown the lectures to their congregations. They wrote to me saying that viewing the lectures were truly an enlightening experience for their members.

My wife and I viewed ***Simply Revelation*** on our TV on a Sabbath afternoon. Though I had already watched Prof. Paulien's lectures during the taping session which I paid for, I was spellbound to hear him again offering so many refreshing insights into the most difficult book of the Bible. For me it is a thrilling experience listening to a scholar like Prof. Paulien, who knows what he is talking about.

Prof. Paulien is rightly regarded as a leading Adventist authority on the book of Revelation which he has taught at the Seminary for the past 25 years. His doctoral dissertation as well as several of his books deal specifically with the Book of Revelation.

The constant demand for Prof. Paulien's CD album with his publications and articles, led me to discuss with him the possibility of producing a live video recording of a mini Revelation Seminar, which he chose to call ***Simply Revelation***. As suggested by its title, *Simply Revelation* aims to present simply the message of Revelation—not to read into Revelation sensational, but senseless views.

The preparation of this video recording took several months. The ***Simply Revelation*** seminar consists of **four one-hour live video lectures**, which have just been recorded in the studio of Andrews University. An impressive virtual studio provides the background of the lectures. Each lecture is delivered with about 50 powerpoint slides. This mini Revelation seminar will offer you and your congregation fresh insights into the Book of Revelation. Be sure to inform your pastor about the newly released ***Simply Revelation***, if he is not aware of it.

You will be pleased to know that we have placed on a separate file all the powerpoint slides and the script of the live lecture. This means that if you are a pastor or a lay member who want to use Prof. Paulien's Simply Revelation Seminar, you can pick and choose the powerpoint slides that you like.

The file with the powerpoint slides is placed on Prof. Paulien's CD album containing all his publications and articles. The reason is that there was no memory left on the DVD disks. In spite of my pleas, Prof. Paulien was so full of the subject that he used the full 60 minutes of each lecture, leaving no space for the slides' file.

This has been a very expensive project, both in time and money. I sponsored it financially because I believe that many will be blessed by Paulien's fresh insights into Revelation. The regular price of the DVD album is \$100.00, but you can order it now **at the SPEPCIAL HOLIDAY PRICE UNTIL DECEMBER 31, 2007 for only \$30.00**. The price includes the airmailing expenses to any overseas destination.

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As an additional incentive, I am offering you together with Prof. Paulien's DVD/CD albums, also my own popular **DVD album on *The Mark and Number of the Beast*, for an additional \$20.00, instead of the regular price of \$100.00**. This means that you can order **the DVD and CD albums by Prof. Paulien, together with my DVD album on *The Mark and Number of the Beast*, for only \$70.00, instead of the regular price of \$260.00**.

This research on *The Mark and Number of the Beast*, was commissioned by Prof. Paulien himself. He asked me to trace historically the origin and use of the Pope's title *Vicarius Filii Dei* and of the number 666. I spent six months conducting this investigation which was professionally taped at the Andrews University Towers Auditorium. I use 200 powerpoint slides to deliver this informative two hours lecture which is warmly received by Adventist church leaders and pastors in many parts of

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UPCOMING SEMINARS FOR THE MONTHS OF DECEMBER

Gradually I am rescheduling some of the invitations I had to cancel because of liver-cancer treatments. Here is a list of the upcoming weekend seminars for the months of January and February 2008

JANUARY 11-12: BROCKTON PORTUGUESE SDA CHURCH

Location: 65 West Elm Street, Brockton, Massachusetts

For information and directions contact Pastor Felix Monteiro at (857) 204-3231

JANUARY 18-19: LOMA LINDA INDONESIAN SDA CHURCH

Location: 10827 California Street, Redlands, California 92373.

For information and directions contact Pastor Albert Pardede at (909) 796-2206

FEBRUARY 1-2: TORONTO EAST SDA CHURCH

Location: 170 Westwood Avenue, Toronto, ON M4K 2B1

For information and directions contact Pastor David Rogers at (905) 417-5468 or (416) 705-7665

FEBRUARY 8-9: LOMA LINDA ROMANIAN SDA CHURCH

Location: 26271 Mayberry Street, Loma Linda, CA 92354

For information and directions call Pastor Valentin Danaiaata at (909) 556-5491.

FEBRUARY 15-16: FIRST KNOXVILLE SDA CHURCH

Location: 3611 Kingston Pike, Knoxville, TN 37919.

For directions and information call Pastor Ed Komorowski at (865) 524-7842 or (865) 206-2082.

FEBRAURY 29-MARCH 1: LONDON, ENGLAND. EDMONTON

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