



Marian Doctrine and Devotion

Chapter 4



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 4

Sinai Covenant:

Since the redemption, in which she will share, was, under one aspect, in the form of a covenant, we need to go back to the great covenant of Sinai. There God spoke to the people through Moses (Ex. 19. 5): "If you really hearken to my voice and keep my covenant, you will be my special possession, dearer to me than all other peoples."

We notice two major features here: 1) It brings into being a People of God, 2) they get favor on condition of obedience. The Old Testament reports sadly how often they failed, going after idols. God warned them, and at last He would send in a foreign power to oppress them to bring them to their senses. When they would repent, He would rescue them. But finally came the great crash, when Nebuchadnezzar II of Babylon came down in two waves, 597 and 587 (some prefer 596 and 586). He ruined the Temple and city, and took most of the people into captivity to break their national spirit. It worked, for when Cyrus of Persia, after conquering Babylonia, in 539 allowed the Jews to return, only two tribes, Judah and Benjamin did return. The rest were absorbed into Babylonia and never came back.

(Mormons claim the lost tribes came across the Bering Strait and became American Indians. But the Smithsonian Institution reported:

"The American Indians are physically Mongoloids, and thus must have originated in eastern Asia." Cf. J. B. Billard, editor, *The World of the American Indian*, Washington, National Geographic Society, 1974, 1979, esp. the chapter "Across an Arctic Bridge" by J. D. Jennings).

It was during this period that God spoke again through Jeremiah 31. 31ff: "I will make a new covenant. It will not be like the covenant I made with your fathers, for they broke my covenant, and I had to show myself their master. But this is the covenant: I will write my law on their hearts; I will be their God and they will be my people."

We notice there will be a difference, for the old was broken, the new will not be broken. The old was on stone tablets; the new is written on hearts. But the two essentials we saw at Sinai are still there: a People of God, to get favor on condition of obedience. As we shall see later, the essential obedience would be that of Jesus (cf. Rom 5. 19 and LG 3). Did Jeremiah see that would be the case? We do not know. But the chief author of Scripture, the Holy Spirit, can intend more than the human author sees. Still less likely is it that Jeremiah saw that the obedience of our Lady would play a role here: cf. LG 56 & 61.

Before moving ahead, we should notice that if we ask why God gave good things under the covenant, the reply would come on two levels: 1) On the most basic level, no creature could by its own power generate a claim on God. Hence His giving is pure unmerited, un-meritable generosity. 2) On the secondary level, i.e. , given that fact that He had freely entered into and bound Himself by covenant, we could speak of Him as repaying the people. In this sense St. Paul in Rom 2. 6 could say that God will repay each one according to his works—in spite of his insistence that justification is gratuitous. This same distinction, as we shall see later, will apply in the new covenant.

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