

SPEAKING THE TRUTH IN LOVE TO CATHOLICS
CONCERNING THEIR VIEWS ON MARY

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to help Lutheran pastors and lay people better understand why Roman Catholics view Mary in such high regard, and what we can do in order to reach out to them. Most people do not understand why or how Catholics began to incorporate Mary into their discussions as an important person in their theology. This thesis will examine the biblical passages that mention Mary and see how the Bible portrays her. It will look at some heretical writings such as the Pseudepigrapha and what they say about Mary. This thesis will examine the early roots of Mariology, and why the early church fathers used Mary in order to defend orthodox teaching. It will look at how Martin Luther corrected the abuses that entered the church concerning Mary. Finally, the thesis will focus on how we could use this knowledge and help not only fellow Lutherans understand Mary but also reach out to Catholics concerning their views about Mary.

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INTRODUCTION

The Virgin Mary, Mary the mother of God, Mary the mother of the church, Mary the co-redeemer, Mary the co-mediator, Mary the perpetual virgin, Mary the queen of heaven, etc. All of these terms may seem confusing to Lutheran ears because we are not familiar with these terms, nor do we know that some of these terms are unbiblical. “To the Protestant, who views Scripture as the only source anchor for theology, Catholic Mariology having cut loose from this anchor is hopelessly adrift upon a sea of splendid but dubious ‘Roman logic.’”¹

In conversations with fellow Lutherans about Catholicism and its view on Mary the typical response that I heard was, “Why are they so foolish in believing those things? Many of their teachings are not found in the Bible, so why do they focus so much on these teachings?” For the most part I have seen people just view Catholics as foolish, and to my shame I myself have said these things about Catholics.

The reason I have chosen my topic is to help lay people and pastors to get past that view about Catholics. We have books such as *Speaking the Truth in Love to Muslims, Mormons and Jehovah Witnesses*, but we don’t have one for Catholics. I think it would be beneficial to have people better understand the history of Catholic teachings specifically about the Virgin Mary. Therefore my thesis will be: “Speaking the truth in love to Catholics concerning their views on Mary.”

I will divide my thesis into three main points. In the first point I will focus on the early church fathers on their views of Mary. I will show how the early church fathers were trying to defend sound doctrine by emphasizing Christ’s human nature by pointing to Mary. The two main things that I will point out in this section are the ideas of Mary as the new Eve and the title of Theotokos. Unfortunately these views of Mary and their terminology for Mary were not properly explained to the people. Portraying Mary as the new Eve was meant to show how everything that was corrupted by sin and the disobedience of Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden was completely redeemed through Christ. In time this view became distorted and gave Mary an active role in salvation history since she obeyed God whereas Eve disobeyed God.

¹ Elliot Miller and Kenneth R. Samples. *The Cult of the Virgin: Catholic Mariology and the Apparitions of Mary*. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1993), 43.

Likewise the term Theotokos was used to defend Christ's two natures. Unfortunately this term was not properly explained to the people who had pagan beliefs or tendencies. Therefore in time the people viewed Mary as a goddess and began to give praise to her.

In the next main section of my thesis I will focus on Luther and the early reformers concerning their views of Mary. When Luther was reforming the church, he was still sensitive to how people viewed Mary. He did not force his reforms as some were doing with their iconoclasm. Rather Luther was patient with the people and instructed them on how to view Mary in light of Scripture. In his sermons, liturgies and teachings he mentioned how we should still hold Mary in high regard but not to the point where we worship her.

Finally, I will focus on how we can take all of this knowledge about the history of Mariology and the views of the reformers and incorporate all of this knowledge into our day and thinking. It will be beneficial for us to learn from Luther and the reformers on how to educate our people in our dealings with Catholics and their views on Mary. We can have festivals of Mary such as the Annunciation. Also when we deal with Catholics it is important for us to understand how they view Mary. They hold Mary in high regard because they view her as a kind and gentle mother who protects them. We can show how Christ is kind and gentle with us. By doing this we can be able to speak the truth in love to Catholics when it comes to their views about Mary.

Since this thesis focuses on Mary and Roman Catholic teaching concerning about Mary, it is important to establish what Scripture says about Mary. It is imperative to do this for only God's Word can establish doctrine since God's Word is truth², and Jesus warns everyone not to follow our own traditions or teachings.³ Therefore, let us examine the parts of Scripture that talk about Mary.

Mary in the Bible

Mary in the Old Testament

The Old Testament does not mention Mary by name. This is not surprising because the Old Testament does not mention Jesus specifically by his name either. Although the Old Testament does not mention Mary by name, there are prophecies about her in the Old Testament. The most important reference to Mary in the Old Testament is in Isaiah 7:14. "Therefore the

² John 17:17 All quotations from the Bible are taken from the New International Version 1984.

³ Mark 7:8-13.

Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and you will call him Immanuel.” This passage is important for a number of reasons. First, it mentions the one who is responsible for this miracle. It is the Lord. He is the one who provides the sign. He is the one who makes this miracle possible. Second, the passage mentions it is a virgin who gives birth to a son. This is significant for two reasons. One, it points to how this is an extraordinary sign since virgins by nature cannot have children.⁴ Two, this is directly fulfilled by Mary in the Gospels. Mary was a virgin who was with child and gave birth to Jesus. The Gospel writer Matthew even quotes this passage with Mary as its direct fulfillment.⁵ Finally, this passage is important because of whom the virgin gives birth to: Immanuel which means, “God with us.” This is how God fulfills his promise he made back in the Garden of Eden that someone born from the descendants of Eve would be the Savior.

Although Isaiah 7:14 is the only passage that speaks directly about Mary in the Old Testament, there is another passage that we should look at in connection with Mary. As mentioned above, God made a promise in the Garden of Eden. Genesis 3:15 says, “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.” Although this is the first gospel promise made by the Lord, it is interesting to note that nowhere in the New Testament is this quoted. Therefore, we should be careful not to apply too much of this passage to Mary, yet one thing should be said. Here the Lord promised that someone from Adam and Eve’s line would be the one to defeat Satan. The Gospel writer Luke in his genealogy of Jesus shows how this was fulfilled by detailing Jesus’ ancestry all the way back to Adam as being the son of God.

Genesis 3:15 only has this much to say concerning Mary, a Savior would be born of human descent. Yet, Roman Catholics have seen this passage apply to Mary in another way. The Vulgate, the official Roman Catholic translation of the Bible for centuries, translated the last half of the verse as, “ipsa conteret caput tuum, et tu insidiaberis calcaneo ejus.” The most important part of this translation is how the Vulgate translated the Hebrew word אִימָן. In their translation the Hebrew word is translated as, “she will crush your head.” Even though the Hebrew points the

⁴ Concerning whether or not the Hebrew word עַלְמָה means “virgin” a few words should be said. The Hebrew word can in some circumstances mean “young girl/maid” such as in Psalm 68:26. There are other contexts where the definition “virgin” is required such as when the word is described for Rebekah in Genesis 24:43 or for Moses’ sister in Exodus 2:8. Also, the Septuagint translates this word as παρθένος which in Greek means virgin.

⁵ Matthew 1:23.

verb as “he will crush your head,” and the Septuagint has “he” as well, it is understandable how the Vulgate got its translation. In the first five books of Moses, both pronouns “he” and “she” have the same consonant letters. Since vowel pointing for Hebrew was not introduced until the Middle Ages, we can see how Jerome, the translator of the Vulgate, could translate the Hebrew word as “she” instead of “he”.

Yet the mistranslation of the Hebrew word has dire consequences. Just who is the she referred to in their translation? Roman Catholicism understands it to mean the Church through the working of Jesus Christ and Mary in the Holy Christian Church. “Mary’s role in the Church is inseparable from her union with Christ and flows directly from it. ‘This union of the mother with the Son in the work of salvation is made manifest from the time of Christ’s virginal conception up to his death.’”⁶ More will be said on why exactly they connect Mary and her role in the Church later. For now, let it show that Roman Catholic teaching sees Mary involved in salvation according to their translation of this passage.

Mary in the New Testament

Mary is mentioned multiple times throughout the New Testament, but mostly in the Gospels. And even in the Gospels, Mary is mainly mentioned in the first few chapters of Matthew and Luke. Therefore, we will look mostly at the Nativity accounts where Mary is named and briefly mention the other places where Mary is named.

In the first chapter of the Gospel of Matthew, after he proves that Jesus came from the line of Abraham and David, Matthew quickly shows how Jesus was born. It is interesting to note that in Matthew’s account the emphasis is not primarily on Mary but rather on Joseph. The only thing that Matthew highlights about Mary is that she was pledged to be married to Joseph. She was a virgin, but she was found to be with child. Also as mentioned earlier, Matthew quotes Isaiah 7:14 as being fulfilled in Mary and the birth of her son Jesus. Other than that, Matthew’s focus is on Joseph for he wanted to divorce quietly so as not to bring her shame. An angel appeared and told him not to be afraid to take her as his wife since the Holy Spirit was responsible for this conception, and Joseph obeyed. As for the account of the Magi, Joseph is again Matthew’s focus since he had the dream to leave to protect the baby Jesus and Mary.

It is in Luke’s Nativity account where we hear the most about Mary. Whereas in Matthew’s account the angel appears to Joseph, Luke’s account has an angel appear to Mary.

⁶ www.vatican.va Catechism of the Catholic Church: Article 9, paragraph 6, 964.

Much can be said about Luke's account concerning Mary, but let these things be briefly brought up. When the angel appears to Mary to foretell the birth of Jesus, the angel calls her, "You who are highly favored!"⁷ More will be mentioned on what exactly this means in the Luther's explanation of the term since Roman Catholics have understood this phrase differently. Another item to note is Mary's response. Even though she knew she couldn't be pregnant since she was a virgin, she believed the angel's message and said, "I am the Lord's servant. May it be to me as you have said."⁸ Finally, Mary's song, known as the Magnificat, is another example of her faith and the love which she recognized that God had for her and the people. However Roman Catholics have understood this song differently, especially the phrase, "All generations will call me blessed."⁹ More will be said about this later.

Concerning the account of Mary and Jesus' birth, the story is very familiar. Mary and Joseph had to come to Bethlehem for the Roman census. Jesus is born and wrapped in cloths. Shepherds see angels and come to see the baby. Eight days later Joseph and Mary obey the law and had the baby circumcised. Here Simeon blesses their child and tells Mary specifically, "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel...and a sword will pierce your own soul too."¹⁰ Finally, a few things to highlight would be that Mary obeyed not only the Roman law but also God's law. Also, Mary remains humble for she pondered everything in her heart.

These two accounts provide the most detailed information about Mary. Yet Mary is still mentioned throughout the Gospels. What follows is every account where Mary, the mother of Jesus, is mentioned by name. Mary and Joseph travel with the young Jesus to Jerusalem where he remains behind (Luke 2:41-52). Mary attends the wedding at Cana where Jesus turns water into wine (John 2:1-11). Jesus is rejected by his hometown since they knew that he was the son of Joseph and Mary (Matthew 13:53-58; Mark 6:1-6; Luke 4:16-30). The account of Mary and Jesus' brothers who were waiting for Jesus, and Jesus replied, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers? Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother" (Matthew 12:46-50; Mark 3:31-35). Mary is present at Jesus' crucifixion (John 19:25-27).

⁷ Luke 1:28.

⁸ Luke 1:38.

⁹ Luke 1:48.

¹⁰ Luke 2:34-35.

Finally, the last time Mary is mentioned in the Bible is when all of the believers gathered together before Pentecost (Acts 1:14).

Mary in the Pseudepigrapha¹¹

The Bible portrays Mary as an ordinary person whom God used to fulfill his plan of salvation. There is nothing extraordinary mentioned about Mary that makes her different from or superior to Abraham, David, Peter, etc. So how does Mary become such a huge figure in Roman Catholicism? One of the things that led to the elevation of Mary in early religious thought was the New Testament Pseudepigrapha, specifically the *Proto-Gospel of James*. In general, the writings of the Pseudepigrapha go beyond what Scripture says in order to answer questions that Scripture does not answer. But the writings of the Pseudepigrapha are important because,

The writings [of the Pseudepigrapha] are another important window for discovering the ethos of early Christian people as well as their disposition to create imaginative theological ways of probing what was left unsaid about the persons who surrounded Jesus. These creative and fertile minds were, of course, deeply curious and interested in the manner in which Jesus was conceived, born, and reared as a child.¹²

The *Proto-Gospel of James* is especially important for two reasons. First, the work is very early in the Christian church, most likely written around 150 A.D. Second, the book is important because unlike the other Pseudepigrapha works that focus more on Jesus and his early life, this work focuses primarily on Mary. Most of the book talks about Mary's unique birth, her childhood and the special circumstances surrounding Jesus' birth with the focus on Mary.

The *Proto-Gospel of James* introduces new teachings about Mary that are not found in the Bible. The first chapters of this book focus on the unique birth of Mary. The story starts by mentioning Mary's parents Joachim and Anna. They are sad because they do not have any children, and they are being mocked for it. Therefore they pray to God for a child, and God hears their prayer. God sends an angel to Anna who says, "Anna, Anna, the Lord has heard your plea, for you will conceive and bear a child, and your offspring shall be spoken of throughout the whole world."¹³ The announcement of Mary's birth sounds very similar to the announcement of Jesus' birth to Mary. Although there is nothing here that says Mary was conceived in a special

¹¹ The Pseudepigrapha refers to books written after 100 AD. People wrote these books and falsely used a name of an apostle to give their work more credence.

¹² Bertrand Buby, SM, *Mary of Galilee: The Marian Heritage of the Early Church Vol III* (New York: Alba House, 1997), 31-33.

¹³ *Proto-Gospel of James* 4:1. Cited by Bertrand Buby, 39.

way, the origins of Mary's Immaculate Conception, the belief that Mary was born without original sin, can be seen here.

Another teaching that the *Proto-Gospel of James* stresses is how Mary is highly favored among the priests and before the Lord. After Mary turns three years old, her parents bring her to the temple to have her dedicated to the Lord. While she is there she is treated as a special vestal virgin in the temple. "Mary was in the temple of the Lord. She was cared for like a dove and she received food from the hand of an angel."¹⁴ Also, "You who were brought up in the Holy of Holies and received food from the hand of an angel."¹⁵ The book also mentions how the Lord provides special signs that she is a special virgin among the temple virgins. "Finally [the high priest] received the staff of Joseph and lo a dove came forth from the staff and it alighted upon Joseph's head. Then the priest said to Joseph, 'You are the one chosen to receive the virgin of the Lord in your keeping.'¹⁶ Finally at the end of chapter 10 the book mentions how lots were cast to see who would make a special veil for the temple of the Lord, and the lot falls onto Mary.

It is clear that these teachings about Mary are not found anywhere in the Bible. These teachings clearly originate from a pagan background. The Greco-Roman world highly favored temple virgins thinking they were the most pure. The temple of the Lord never had special virgins, nor would they have been allowed to remain inside of the temple for only the priests were able to enter into the temple. Therefore this book has pagan roots mixed with Christian teachings.

The last main teaching the book addresses is the Perpetual Virginity of Mary, the belief that Mary always remained a virgin even after the birth of Jesus Christ. First the book explains how Mary could remain a virgin, and yet the Bible says that Jesus had brothers and sisters. *Proto-Gospel of James* says, "Then the priest said to Joseph, 'You are the one chosen to receive the virgin of the Lord in your keeping.' And Joseph replied, 'I already have sons and am advanced in years, while she is still a young maiden.'¹⁷ According to these two verses, Joseph is

¹⁴ Ibid., 8:1, 41.

¹⁵ Ibid., 13:2, 45.

¹⁶ Ibid., 9:1, 42.

¹⁷ Ibid., 9:1-2.

already a father and perhaps too old to have children. Therefore there was no need for Joseph to have children with Mary, and Mary's virginity was kept intact.¹⁸

But how does Mary remain a virgin after she gives birth to Jesus? The book answers that question in this way: it offers a different version of Jesus' birth. Joseph and Mary head down to Bethlehem because of the Roman census, but they can't make it on time before Mary goes into labor. They take refuge in a cave, and Joseph goes out to find someone to assist Mary. While Joseph searches for someone to help, time stops and Mary gives birth to Jesus. Joseph meets Salome and tells her about the miracle, but Salome doesn't believe. "By my God who lives, unless I place my finger and examine her condition, I will not believe that a virgin has given birth to a child."¹⁹ After she examines Mary, her hand begins to burn because she did not believe. Only after she prays for forgiveness is she forgiven. Therefore Mary never lost her virginity because Jesus did not break the hymen when he was born, and she never had any children with Joseph since he already had children.

A few more words should be said about the importance and influence of this Pseudepigrapha book. Although elements of Roman Catholic teaching can be seen in this book, and certainly its views of Mary were influenced by it, Pope Gelasius, who served from 492-496, condemned the *Proto-Gospel of James* as heretical. Yet the influence of the book can be seen in the early Christian church. Multiple church fathers such as Gregory of Nyssa, Origen, Clement of Alexandria and others have citations or allusions to this book. Despite all of this, one thing must be remembered: "It is important to see that the Catholic Church has always placed more emphasis on what we know about Mary from the New Testament... authentic devotion and knowledge about Mary of Galilee stems from the canonical Gospels and from a faithful tradition."²⁰

¹⁸ Concerning whether or not the Greek word ἀδελφός can only mean brother a few words should be said. In most contexts the word normally means a brother who has the same mother, but this word is used in different ways throughout Scripture. It can mean brother in the sense of someone who shares the same beliefs, such as: brothers in Christ. In the Septuagint Abraham and Lot are called brothers, yet Abraham is Lot's uncle. Also in the Septuagint the word is used to mean cousins (2 Chronicles 23:21-22). Therefore, exegetically it is possible that the brothers of Jesus are not his actual brothers but could be his step-brothers from a previous marriage of Joseph or his cousins.

¹⁹ *Proto-Gospel of James* 19:3.

²⁰ Buby, 34. Note the elevation of tradition in this quotation. Historically Roman Catholicism places tradition on a level equal to Scripture.

Mary in the writings of the early church fathers

Mary as the new Eve and the Recapitulation theory

Although the Roman Catholic Church has condemned the accounts found in the Pseudepigrapha, especially the *Proto-Gospel of James*, one could ask the question as to how Mary became such a huge figure in the Roman Catholic Church. The origins of Mariology started very early in the Christian church as the early church fathers began to attack heresies which challenged Jesus' two natures. In the early church the main celebration of the church was focused on the resurrection. Hardly any attention was given to Jesus' birth.

Early Christology seldom included the matter of Jesus' birth. For the primitive church the focal point of faith was the Resurrection. The mind of the early Christians worked in a way different from our own. In a systematic approach to Christology, the first question to be raised today is that of the Incarnation. . . . But this was not the method of the early Christians. They look at the events surrounding Jesus' death and Resurrection.²¹

The problem with this thinking was that two major heresies arose concerning the divine and human nature of Christ. On one side was the heresy of the Ebionites. The Ebionites believed Jesus was only human and denied the virgin birth of Jesus making him the natural son of Joseph and Mary. On the other side was the heresy of Docetism. Docetism believed Jesus was only divine, and he only appeared to be human. Docetism offered stories about how Jesus did not die on the cross but only appeared to suffer, or the story when Jesus walked on the beach he did not leave footprints behind.

The church today is fortunate that the early church fathers dealt with such heresies and came up with the term "hypostatic union" to properly define the two natures of Christ. Yet the ancient church fathers did not have the liberty to use such a term in the early centuries of Christianity because it wouldn't have worked. "No such doctrine existed in the first century. The terminology had not yet been invented or refined. The phrase 'hypostatic union' would not have been understood at all. . . . The idea that the one person Jesus could have two *complete and separate* natures boggled the mind and exceeded the conceptual framework available."²² Therefore to prove that Jesus was not only true God but also true man, the early church fathers

²¹ Stephen Benko, *Protestants, Catholics and Mary* (Valley Forge, Pennsylvania: The Judson Press, 1968), 130.

²² Gregory J. Riley "I Was Thought To Be What I Am Not: Docetic Jesus and The Johannine Tradition." *Occasional Papers of The Institute for Antiquity and Christianity* 31 (1994): 11 (Italics original).

pointed to Mary and Jesus' Incarnation. However, in time, too much emphasis was put on Mary, and she became elevated in Christian teaching.

The earliest church father who introduced Mary to prove the hypostatic union of Christ's two natures was Ignatius of Antioch (c. 35-c.112). Ignatius wrote,

Jesus descended from the family of David, and [was] born from Mary. He was truly born as a human being, he ate and drank, he was persecuted under Pontius Pilate, indeed was crucified and died; he was able to be seen by heavenly creatures, earthly ones, and those under the earth. He really rose from the dead and was raised by the Father, the very Father who, since we are like to him, will also raise us up in Jesus Christ.²³

Ignatius understood the two natures of Christ were joined together in the one person of Christ. Ignatius spoke against the heresy of Docetism and encouraged Christians to believe that Jesus truly did suffer and die for them as a human.

Unfortunately, very shortly, the early church fathers began to use Mary not just in a Christological sense, but they also gave her an active role in salvation. Although this idea did not develop over night but rather through the centuries, the basic ideas that paved the way for Mariology began with Justin Martyr (c. 100-165). Justin wrote,

[Jesus] became man by the Virgin, in order that the disobedience which proceeded from the serpent might receive its destruction in the same manner in which it derived its origin. For Eve, who was a virgin and undefiled, having conceived by the word of the serpent, brought forth disobedience and death. But the Virgin Mary received faith and joy, when the angel Gabriel announced the good tiding to her that the Spirit of the Lord would come upon her.²⁴

Justin introduced Mary as the new Eve to show the similarities between how sin entered the world through a virgin and how Christ born of a virgin conquered sin. The emphasis was on Christ and not so much on Mary. Yet, the church father Irenaeus (140-202) expanded on Justin Martyr's analogy and gave Mary a more active role in salvation.

Irenaeus expanded on the new Eve metaphor for Mary because of the apostle Paul's line of thought found in Romans, specifically Romans chapter 5. Paul compared Jesus Christ to Adam and showed how Christ undid everything that Adam had done. "Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men. For just as through the disobedience of the one man

²³ *Ignatius to the Trallians*. Cited by Buby, 6.

²⁴ *Dialogue with Trypho*. Cited by Buby, 12.

the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.”²⁵ Although Paul did not continue to expand on this metaphor by addressing every single detail, Irenaeus did. Irenaeus introduced the theory of recapitulation. Recapitulation was the idea that everything that was cursed by sin must find a counterpart to save it from sin. “Salvation involves the cosmos, as Paul declared in Romans 5. But where there is a second Adam, there is also a second Eve. And when the two become one, that is the final redemption.”²⁶ This was why Irenaeus stressed Mary as the new Eve. “Christ restores the true image of Adam; the cross recalls the tree of the Fall; Mary is what Eve was intended to be... This is the necessary consequence of what happened in the beginning and is now recapitulated with Christ as the head and Mary the counter part to Eve as ‘mother of the living.’”²⁷

Although the idea behind Irenaeus’ theory of recapitulation certainly has some interesting connections to how God redeemed the world, Irenaeus pushed the theory too far. The apostle Paul’s point in Romans was to show Christ had done everything. The recapitulation theory suggested Christ had not done everything, for someone had to redeem what Eve corrupted. “Where the Apostle Paul had been concerned primarily with Christ as ‘the *second* Adam,’ Irenaeus’ recapitulative theology leads him to focus on Christ as ‘the *second Adam*.’”²⁸

According to Irenaeus, since Christ had to be a man in order to bring salvation to mankind then there must be a woman as the second Eve in salvation as well. This was how Mary began to play an active role in salvation. Irenaeus said this about Mary’s role in salvation: “And thus also it was the knot of Eve’s disobedience was loosed by the obedience of Mary. For what the virgin Eve had bound fast through unbelief, this did the virgin Mary set free through faith.”²⁹

According to Irenaeus, Mary played an active role in salvation because Mary believed the message of the angel whereas Eve obeyed the message of Satan and brought sin into the world. Therefore, salvation was not from Christ alone but also from Mary who cooperated with Jesus in order to save the world. The Roman Catholic Church has agreed with Irenaeus’ view for they

²⁵ Romans 5:18-19.

²⁶ Stephen Benko, *The Virgin Goddess: Studies in the Pagan and Christian Roots of Mariology*. (Leiden, The Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1993), 206.

²⁷ Buby 20-21.

²⁸ Benjamin Dunning. “Virgin earth, virgin birth: creation, sexual difference, and recapitulation in Irenaeus of Lyons,” *Journal of Religion* 89 (2009): 59 (Italics original).

²⁹ *Against Heresies III, XXII, 4*. Cited by Buby, 20.

have said, “By pronouncing her ‘fiat’ at the Annunciation and giving her consent to the Incarnation, Mary was already collaborating with the whole work her Son was to accomplish.”³⁰

One final note concerning the church fathers and their writings portraying Mary as the new Eve is needed. This is not a complete list of every church father who portrayed Mary as the new Eve. Plenty of church fathers, such as Ambrose, Jerome, Augustine, Basil the Great, Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa, John Chrysostom, etc., wrote many things about Mary. Yet most of these church fathers only continued the previous teachings that were already around because of Ignatius, Justin Martyr, and Irenaeus. Although more could be said about what each of these church fathers said concerning Mary, let it suffice to show that the majority of the early church fathers used this imagery of Mary as the new Eve.

Mary as the Theotokos

The early church fathers began to portray Mary with a higher status by giving her an active role in salvation. Soon they began to say more things about Mary that the Bible does not say about her. These things included her immaculate conception which meant she was born without original sin, Mary as a perpetual virgin, her bodily assumption into heaven, etc. Yet not every church father throughout all of Europe agreed with these teachings. Tertullian (c. 160-c. 225), while discussing the new Eve parallel about Mary and her perpetual virginity, wrote, “Mary was a virgin, in so far as a husband is concerned; and not a virgin, in so far as child-bearing is concerned... Although she was a virgin when she conceived, she became a wife by bearing her child... Indeed, she ought to be said to be not a virgin rather than a virgin.”³¹ But not everyone was content with what Tertullian said concerning Mary. Jerome (c. 347-420) had this to say about Tertullian, “As to Tertullian I have nothing else to say except that he was not a man of the Church.”³² Clearly the early church fathers debated between themselves on how to view Mary, but this began to change after Mary acquired the title of the Theotokos.

The term “Theotokos” means “God-bearer” or “Birth-Giver of God”. The term was used to promote orthodox teaching concerning the two natures of Christ. As mentioned earlier there was a lot of debate on how to understand Christ’s two natures. There was Docetism that said Christ only seemed like a person but was only divine. Eutychianism said that Christ’s human

³⁰ www.vatican.va Catechism of the Catholic Church: Article 9, paragraph 6, 973.

³¹ Cited by Buby, 83.

³² Cited by Buby, 84.

nature was swallowed up by God's divine nature with the result that there was only one nature in Christ. Monothelitism taught that Christ only had one will which was the divine will. In order to settle all of the debates and to confirm the true teaching of Christ's two natures the church fathers had a council at Ephesus in 431.

The main issue that the Council of Ephesus dealt with was Nestorianism. Nestorius (c.386-450) was the archbishop of Constantinople. Nestorius believed the term Theotokos should not be used to describe to Mary. He thought it was wrong to say that Mary gave birth to God since God is eternal and cannot have a beginning. Also Nestorius thought that the two natures of Christ could not be completely united for that would make Jesus less than God or less than human. He taught that Christ had a divine and human nature but they did not join together to form one nature but rather remained separate from each other.³³ Therefore he promoted the term Christotokos or "Christ-bearer" and rejected Theotokos.

The council of Ephesus rejected the Nestorian view and declared it to be heresy. They, and rightfully so, declared the term Theotokos to be the true teaching about Christ. For in Christ the divine and human nature became one and cannot be torn apart. Although the term Theotokos was the correct orthodox teaching about Christ, the common people did not understand the term properly.

When the Fathers said Theotokos they were concerned about *him* who was born. But it is very easy, indeed, to put the emphasis upon *her*, who bore him. When this happens, a Christological statement immediately becomes a mariological title. The moment Mary was included in the Christological debates as a theological argument, Mariology became a theological discipline.³⁴

Also: "Later, whenever the term [Theotokos] was used, everyone thought of Mary. When these fathers, however, used the term, they were not thinking of Mary but of Christ."³⁵ The emphasis was always on Christ. It had almost nothing to do with Mary besides the fact that she gave birth to Jesus.

Regardless of how the church fathers understood the term, the majority of the people thought of the term Theotokos in a completely different way. One of the reasons as to why the people did not understand the term Theotokos properly was because they were not instructed

³³ Such as two boards that are nailed together. Although they are joined, they remain two separate boards.

³⁴ Benko, *Protestants, Catholics and Mary*, 140. (Italics original).

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 136.

about their Christian faith. For the first few centuries the Roman Empire did not recognize Christianity as a legal religion, and at times the Roman Empire persecuted the Christians harshly. That all changed after Emperor Constantine (c. 272-337) became a Christian. On June 13, 313 the Edict of Milan declared Christianity to be a legal religion in the Roman Empire. The empire could no longer persecute Christians. Then emperor Theodosius I (347-395) declared that Christianity was the only recognized religion in the Roman Empire. This had dire consequences for Christianity because people who were not Christian became Christian overnight and they had no idea what the Christian faith was all about. Therefore these people mixed their old pagan religions with their new religion of Christianity.

Evidence for this can be seen in how the common people reacted to the news of Mary as the Theotokos after the Council of Ephesus. “By the time the council of Ephesus met in 431, the people on the streets of the city freely hailed [Mary] with the same titles with which they previously had hailed their Artemis.”³⁶ Artemis was the goddess of Ephesus and played a major role in the Ephesians’ religion. Luke even showed how much the Ephesians valued Artemis in Acts 19 after Paul had converted many Ephesians to Christianity. “‘There is danger...that the temple of the great goddess Artemis will be discredited, and the goddess herself...will be robbed of her divine majesty.’ When [the Ephesians] heard this, they were furious and began shouting: ‘Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!’”³⁷

But after the council of Ephesus declared Mary to be the Theotokos, the Ephesians were able to replace Artemis with Mary in their worship lives. The church fathers thought the people were happy that the Christian church had defended itself against false doctrine, but they did not truly understand what had happened. “Mary more and more emerged as the sublime female, the earth-goddess who gives life...Mary is thought of not as just another earth-goddess, but as an integral part of a “new creation” made by God.”³⁸ Since all of this devotion to Mary seemed to be Christian, and yet was actually very pagan, it was never persecuted by the established religion of the empire nor was it stopped in any form. Instead devotion to Mary began to flourish throughout the eastern half of the empire. “It is a well known fact that sanctuaries dedicated to

³⁶ Benko, *The Virgin Goddess*, 216.

³⁷ Acts 19:27-28.

³⁸ Benko, *The Virgin Goddess*, 212.

Mary were often built on sites that were originally used for the veneration of pagan goddesses.”³⁹ Among the common people, who were not instructed well by the priests, Mary was their new goddess.

The people were not instructed in the new established religion of Christianity, and it did not help that the early church fathers talked about Mary as the type of the Church. To make matters worse they did not explain that phrase very well. They talked in this way because Scripture defined the Holy Christian Church in female terms. Scripture called the Church the bride of Christ (Ephesians 5:22-33), the virgin daughter (Jeremiah 14:17), etc. Therefore the church fathers began to tie Mary with these terms since Mary was a virgin and gave birth to the Savior. “The church is female, Mary is the type of the church, and the church is now doing in a spiritual sense what Mary did physically. Thus there is a mysterious relationship between Mary and the church.”⁴⁰ Also: “The church is immaculate yet married, so is Mary. The virgin church conceives Christians by the Spirit and bears them without pain. Mary is married to Joseph but filled with another, so the individual churches are joined to a priest but are filled with the Holy Spirit.”⁴¹

Although these teachings of Mary as the type of the Church seem completely heretical, the church fathers used these terms in order to keep the Christian church united.

[Cyprian said], “He cannot have God as father who does not have the Church as mother.” To fully appreciate Cyprian’s categorical statement we must remember that the unity of the church was an overriding concern for him. Faced with severe persecution, many Christians were denying their faith...Cyprian stressed that to be a Christian means to be in the church...The image of the mother served Cyprian’s intentions well: as the mother holds a family together, so the church holds together the family of God.⁴²

In their minds they thought this terminology was beneficial for the church. Their focus was on Christ not primarily on Mary. Yet in the end it caused more damage than good. For the people and the priests began to say more and more about Mary.

After Ephesus the picture [about Mary] changes. [F]easts multiply and devotion becomes ever more fervent. The death and decomposition of her body seem no longer compatible with the dignity of the Mother of God. Her purity...finally raises the question of her

³⁹ Ibid., 213.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 234.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid., 233.

exemption from original sin, which is stated with increasing clarity from the end of the seventh century.⁴³

In time the people valued Mary as being more beneficial and more comforting than Jesus. The people saw Mary as perfect. She was the mother who protected the children of God, whereas Jesus was the holy judge who punished his children.

More could be said about the rise of Mariology, but let this suffice for now. The Pseudepigrapha showed how very early people began to ask questions about Mary's life, and why God chose her to bear the Savior. The different debates concerning Christ's two natures led the Christian church to bring up Mary in their discussions. The church fathers defended the term Theotokos since the word was biblical, yet they did not properly train the people to understand the term. Finally throughout the Middle Ages the devotion to Mary increased dramatically until more and more was said about her that was heretical, even to the point that Mary became sinless and helped to bring salvation to the world.

Restoration of the human race to its condition prior to the Fall means the restoration of the image of God, and that could be done only by elevating Mary above a fallen, sinful state. By thinking of Mary as free of all sin, including original sin, Christian theology developed the concept of a human being restored to Paradise, prior to the Fall. She is Eve before she was corrupted... Communication between God and man is impossible if they are totally alienated from each other, if there is no point where divine and human can connect. The *Immaculata*, representing earthly humanity in its unspoiled state, is the one with whom communion with God was restored.⁴⁴

Mary in the writings of Martin Luther

Mary in Luther's commentary

Martin Luther was familiar with the teachings about Mary and initially accepted them to be true since he grew up with Roman Catholicism. When Luther was in a thunderstorm, he called upon Mary's mother, St. Anna⁴⁵, to protect and promised to become a monk if she did. In time Luther began to examine the Bible as he taught classes at the University of Wittenberg. It was during this time that Luther rediscovered the truths of the Bible, and what the Bible had to say about Mary. Luther recognized the abuses the Roman Catholic Church had applied to Mary in

⁴³ Hilda Graef. *A History of Doctrine and Devotion. From the Beginnings to the Eve of the Reformation.* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1963), 160-161.

⁴⁴ Benko, *The Virgin Goddess*, 205.

⁴⁵ Anna was the patron saint of miners. Since Luther's father was a miner, Anna would have been a familiar figure in the Luther's home.

their teachings, and he sought a way to reform these teachings among the lay people and the priests. “[Luther’s] reform of doctrine and piety was not intended to push Mary aside, but rather to reorient the understanding of Mary and her role, namely, as a necessary but subordinate figure to Christ.”⁴⁶ In order to accomplish this Luther carefully and patiently taught the lay people and the priests the proper teachings about Mary in his sermons, liturgies, and commentaries.

The most comprehensive summary of Luther’s teachings on Mary is his commentary on the Magnificat, Mary’s song in Luke 1:46-55. Luther wrote this commentary between spring and summer of 1521. Although Luther was delayed by the Diet of Worms, he continued to labor on in finishing his commentary. He wrote it for John Frederick, the nephew of Elector Frederick.

In the introduction to his work Luther pointed out how rulers and leaders could gain knowledge from Mary’s song. Luther wrote,

In all of Scripture I do not know anything that serves such a purpose so well as this sacred hymn of the most blessed Mother of God, which ought indeed to be learned and kept in mind by all who would rule well and be helpful lords. In it she really sings sweetly about the fear of God, what sort of Lord he is, and especially what his dealings are with those of low and high degree...this pure virgin well deserves to be heard by a prince and lord.⁴⁷

Luther thought that Mary served as a prime example of how leaders should rule because Luther saw how kings could rule over their people. Right before this quote, Luther mentioned how kings end up not caring about their own subjects, and they forget about God because the kings have such great wealth and power. But if the kings would have studied the words of Mary’s song then they would see how to rule. The Lord blessed Mary who was lowly and not highly favored in her society. And when Mary heard this she did not lord it over anyone but humbly continued to serve God. “The tender mother of Christ does the same here and teaches us, with her words and by the example of her experience, how to know, love and praise God. For since she boasts, with heart leaping for joy and praising God, that he regarded her despite her low estate and nothingness.”⁴⁸

Although Luther wrote multiple pages and countless truths in his commentary on the Magnificat, only a few phrases will be the focus here. Specifically the focus will be on how Roman Catholics have misunderstood certain phrases in the song. First of all, the Roman

⁴⁶ Beth Kreitzer. “Luther Regarding the Virgin Mary.” *Lutheran Quarterly* 17 (2003): 249.

⁴⁷ Martin Luther. *Luther’s Works American Edition, Volume 21: The Sermon on the Mount and the Magnificat*, Ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1956), 21:298. [Hereafter cited as LW].

⁴⁸ LW 21:301.

Catholics have elevated the song not only to be a song of praise to God but also to be a song of praise to Mary. On the contrary, Luther said that Mary only sang this song of praise for God. “Mary indicate[d] what her hymn of praise is to be about, namely, the great works and deeds of God, for the strengthening of our faith, for the comforting of all those of low degree...for she sang it not for herself alone but for us all, to sing it after her.”⁴⁹ Also: “She does not say, ‘My soul magnifies itself’ or ‘exalts me.’ She does not desire herself to be esteemed; she magnifies God alone and gives all glory to him.”⁵⁰ Therefore Mary only sang this song to give glory and praise to God. Mary did not intend to glorify herself in anyway.

Although Mary never praised herself but only praised God in her song, how did Mary become the focus in the Magnificat? The problem arose from the misunderstanding of the phrase, “highly-favored” in Luke 1:28 and the phrase, “all nations will call me blessed” in Luke 1:48. First, concerning the phrase, “highly favored” the Vulgate translated the Greek word *κεχαριτωμένη* as “Ave gratia plena” which means, “Hail, full of grace.” Roman Catholics have believed this proves the teaching of Mary’s Immaculate Conception, the belief that she was free of original and actual sin. “From among the descendants of Eve, God chose the Virgin Mary to be the mother of his Son. ‘Full of grace,’ Mary is, ‘the most excellent of redemption.’ From the first instant of her conception, she was totally preserved from the stain of original sin and she remained pure from all personal sin throughout her life.”⁵¹ However this was an inaccurate translation in the Vulgate because the Greek word is not an active but a passive. Luther showed how Mary was not full of grace as in someone who deserved to receive this blessing from God. Rather she was full of grace because God has blessed her. “Thus what the Hail Mary says is that all glory should be given to God...You see that these words are not concerned with prayer but purely with giving praise and honor...But we can use the Hail Mary as a mediation in which we recite what grace God has given her.”⁵²

Second, concerning the phrase, “all nations will call me blessed,” Luther wrote,

She does not say men will speak all manner of good of her, praise her virtues, exalt her virginity or her humility, or sing of what she has done. But for this one thing alone, that God regarded her, men will call her blessed...Not *she* is praised thereby, but God’s *grace*

⁴⁹ LW 21:306.

⁵⁰ LW 21:308.

⁵¹ www.vatican.va Catechism of the Catholic Church: Article 3, paragraph 2, 508.

⁵² LW 43:39.

toward her. In fact, she is despised, and she despises herself in that she says her low estate was regarded by God. Therefore she mentions her blessedness before enumerating the works that God did to her, and ascribes it all to the fact that God regarded her low estate.⁵³

Luther saw the same thing that Mary saw which was the great grace of God. Not only in the sense that God chose Mary to bear the Son of God, but also in the sense that God had given her the faith to believe it to be true. “The blessed Virgin Mary is speaking on the basis of her own experience, in which she was enlightened and instructed by the Holy Spirit. No one can correctly understand God or his Word unless he has received such understanding immediately from the Holy Spirit.”⁵⁴ Luther stressed the great miracle of faith that he saw in Mary for there he saw the great power of God.

Luther’s commentary rightly described the proper views of Mary and her great hymn of praise to God. He pointed out that Mary’s song was an emphasis on God’s great power, and how all nations will call her blessed because God chose her purely out of his grace. There was nothing special about Mary for she even confessed that God was her Savior. Yet Luther wrote things that would seem inappropriate for us to say about Mary. At the end of his introduction Luther wrote, “May the tender Mother of God herself procure for me the spirit of wisdom profitably and thoroughly to expound this song of hers, so that your grace as well as we all may draw from it wholesome knowledge and a praiseworthy life.”⁵⁵ Luther asked Mary to help him as he wrote his commentary on her song. This would be hard to understand unless one understands the environment in which Luther lived. Luther wrote this in 1521 and was still not free of all Catholic teachings with which he grew up. Throughout his life Luther said things about Mary that the other Lutheran reformers would have been more reluctant to say.⁵⁶

Mary in Luther’s sermons and liturgies

In contrast to Luther’s commentary on Mary which was originally written to just one person, Luther also wanted to instruct all of the lay people about Mary. The best way to

⁵³ LW 21:321. (Italics original).

⁵⁴ LW 21:299.

⁵⁵ LW 21:298.

⁵⁶ A prime example of this would be what Luther says about Mary in his Smalcald Articles 1:4. There Luther uses a Latin word which describes Mary as the perpetual virgin, that is, she never lost her virginity. Although there is nothing unscriptural about this view, Lutherans today would be more tentative in describing Mary with such terms.

accomplish this task was through preaching and reforming the services dedicated to Mary. Yet the issue that Luther had to tackle was exactly how to do this. Unlike when Christianity became the only recognized religion after the decree of Theodosius, Luther did not automatically get rid of everything that belonged to Mary. Rather Luther patiently instructed the people on the proper biblical views of Mary.

Although this was the plan of Luther, not everyone approved of his method. Those who thought that Luther should abolish everything associated with Roman Catholics and their teachings were the Iconoclasts. Radical reformer Andreas Karlstadt (1486-1541) was one of the main leaders in the Iconoclastic Movement in Wittenberg. While Luther was exiled to the Wartburg castle in 1521 because of the death sentence Charles the V placed upon him after the Diet of Worms, Karlstadt forced reforms onto the people without teaching them the reason behind these reforms. Such reforms included: putting the host into the hand of a communicant, giving Communion in both kinds, abolishing the mass and private confession, and getting rid of any picture of Mary or any shrine dedicated to her. In time riots began and started to destroy pictures, altars and churches.

These riots caused Martin Luther to leave the Wartburg castle and to return to the University of Wittenberg. When Luther returned, he undid everything that Karlstadt had done. He reinstated the mass, private confession, and handing out Communion in only one kind. The rationale for Luther's actions was that the radical reformers had not properly instructed the people in what they were doing. In order to teach the people about his reforms Luther preached eight sermons in eight days. The sermons mostly dealt with the abuses of the Catholic Church and their teachings. In fact Luther did not force any of his reform on anyone, but rather he let the gospel motivate the people into doing the right thing. After Luther instructed the people, the people abolished the things that should have been abolished and kept the things that could be retained.

With this type of careful instruction Luther educated the people on the correct views of Mary. In Luther's day there were many different festivals that gave praise to Mary. Luther took advantage of preaching on these different festivals in order to give God the glory and show the truths about Mary. "For Lutheran pastors, sermons provided an important opportunity for instruction, especially moral instruction, and thus Mary, along with most other figures who

appear in the gospel texts, is frequently used as an exemplar for Christians.”⁵⁷ Therefore Luther preached 60 sermons on a number of Marian feasts, for the Immaculate Conception (Dec 8, 1520), for Mary’s nativity (Sept 8, 1522), for her Assumption (Aug 15, 1523), for the Annunciation (March 25, 1540, for the Visitation (July 2, 1544), and for her Purification (Feb 2, 1544).^{58 59}

Not only did Luther preach at these festivals, but in time he also removed some of them completely. When Luther was preparing his own order of service for worship he said,

When God’s Word had been silenced such a host of un-Christian fables and lies were introduced...all of the festivals of saints are to be discontinued...The festivals of the Purification and Annunciation of Mary may be continued, and for the time being also her Assumption and Nativity, although the songs in them are not pure.⁶⁰

Luther removed these Marian festivals very slowly after instruction. For if Luther had taken away these festivals of Mary right away then there would have been no comfort for the people. They would have wondered if they were disobeying God or Mary since they did not celebrate these festivals. But after careful instruction, the people began to understand how idolatrous these festivals to Mary were, and they abolished them as well.

Finally, a specific example of how Luther preached Mary in the pulpit would be beneficial. On Christmas day in 1530 Luther preached on Luke 2:1-14. In his sermon Luther emphasized how Jesus was born as true God and as true man. Luther affirmed the established teaching of Mary as the Theotokos. As to why God blessed Mary in this way Luther said, “Reason answers: in order that we may make an idol of her...Mary becomes all this without her knowledge and consent...although her part cannot be forgotten, for where there is a birth there must also be a mother. Nevertheless, we dare not put our faith in the mother but only in the fact that the child was born.”⁶¹ Not only does Luther not give praise, glory, and honor to Mary, but he

⁵⁷ Beth Kreitzer. *Reforming Mary: Changing Images of the Virgin Mary in Lutheran Sermons of the Sixteenth Century*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004) 22-23.

⁵⁸ Kathryn Greene-McCreight. “Mary goes to reform school: a reformer, a reformed, and reforming meet Mary.” *Ex Auditu* 16 (2000): 152.

⁵⁹ Some might be unfamiliar as to what these feasts celebrate. Therefore a brief summary of these feasts is provided. The Immaculate Conception celebrates Mary’s conception. Mary’s nativity celebrates Mary’s birth. The Assumption celebrates the bodily ascension of Mary. The Annunciation celebrates the angel Gabriel’s message to Mary that she is pregnant with Jesus (Luke 1:26-38). The Visitation celebrates Mary visiting Elizabeth (Luke 1:39-56). Her Purification celebrates when Mary and Joseph bring Jesus to the temple (Luke 2:22-40).

⁶⁰ LW 53:11-13.

⁶¹ LW 51:213.

even goes as far to say that he has a greater honor than Mary. “Mary, you did not bear this child for yourself alone. The child is not yours...even though you are his mother...I have a greater honor than your honor as his mother. For your honor pertains to your motherhood of the body of the child, but my honor is this, I know none, neither men nor angels, who can help me except this child whom you, O Mary, hold in your arms.”⁶²

Luther truly had the pastoral heart for his people and the Christian church. He rightly understood that reform had to come with careful instruction and patience. Instead of viewing Mary as an idolatrous image that had corrupted the church, he saw Mary as she was.

Along with his critique of "papist" superstition and the abuses associated with Marian veneration, Luther had an abundance of positive comments to make about the Virgin Mary. She was as great an example of faith as the patriarch Abraham, and modeled other important virtues as well. She served to teach all Christians about the theological virtues of faith, humility, and love, but could also model the social value of obedience to authority, and teach especially to women the virtues of modesty and propriety.⁶³

To Luther, Mary was a person of great faith. She followed not only the laws of God but also the laws of her government even if the laws were not convenient for her. God viewed her virginity, lowliness, and humility not in disdain, but rather he blessed her to the point that every generation would call her blessed. Mary was a prime example of a Christian in Luther's eyes.

How to use this information in order to witness to Catholics

Basic Warnings

As we have seen there is a lot of information concerning the history of Mariology, but not all that is written about her is bad or wrong. From Scripture we see that Mary was chosen by God in order to give birth to the Savior whom God had promised back in the garden of Eden. Mary is an example of a faithful Christian for even though she did not deserve this blessing from God, God blessed her. Mary shows her faith by believing the angel's message. There is no evidence that she tried to glorify herself, rather she praises God for what he will accomplish.

Unfortunately we also see how people gave too much glory to Mary and gave her an active role in salvation. This may lead us to judge the actions or the writings of these early church fathers in a negative light. Although we can see the mistakes that developed from these teachings or lack of education for the lay people, we must realize that hindsight is 20/20. One

⁶² LW 51:214.

⁶³ Kreitzer. "Luther Regarding the Virgin Mary." 256.

basic warning is that we cannot condemn these people solely based on a few quotes or phrases. We owe a debt of gratitude to these church fathers for they had to struggle against heresies and teachings without all of the terminology that we have today. For instance, we can look at all of the doctrines that are established and heresies that are denied in the Apostles' or Nicene Creeds which these church fathers wrote. Therefore it is not fair to view these men in the worst way possible for although we can look at some of their writings and see problems, these men helped Christianity in multiple ways.⁶⁴

Another basic warning is in place. We need to understand that we do not live in their culture. We see how far astray these teachings about Mary have gone, and we may wonder why these people even gave attention to Mary in the first place. As mentioned earlier in the paper a lot of these issues all started in order to combat the heresies that attacked Christ and his two natures. Another reason why these church fathers emphasized Mary is because of the culture they lived in. The Greco-Roman culture was extremely polytheistic. There was a god and goddess for everything. The roles of the gods and goddesses were important to the people living in that day and age. So when the early Christians witnessed to these polytheistic people that there is only one God, some of the people wondered about the female counterpart to God.

Another factor that contributed to the historical rise of the cult of the Virgin is the seemingly universal desire for a heavenly mother figure. Since in Scripture God is identified with the masculine pronoun and is represented as our heavenly Father, many feel that they must look elsewhere to find the particular attributes they associate with femininity and motherhood.⁶⁵

Therefore the early church fathers made use of Mary in order to help these people transition from their former way of religion to Christianity. The point was always to keep the focus on Christ and him alone, but in time the views of Mary became more distorted.

Another basic warning for us is to be careful with what Roman Catholicism truly teaches versus what most Roman Catholics believe. It is necessary to look at Roman Catholic official teaching in order to understand what they believe about Mary. In Roman Catholic doctrine there are only four official dogmas concerning her: Mary as the Theotokos (431), Mary's Perpetual

⁶⁴ To prove this point one can look at Luther and everything he wrote. One could easily pick a Luther quote out of context and make him sound like a heretic. Therefore it is necessary to look at the whole context of a quote or phrase to see what exactly is being said.

⁶⁵ Miller and Samples, 74-75.

Virginity (649), her Immaculate Conception (1854), and her Assumption (1950).⁶⁶ Mary as the Theotokos is biblical. It properly declares that Mary gave birth to God because in Christ his divine and human nature completely are joined together and cannot ever separate. As for Mary's Perpetual Virginity the Bible is silent. Nowhere in Scripture does it declare that Mary ever lost her virginity. As mentioned earlier, exegetically Jesus' brothers and sisters can be his cousins or half-brothers and sisters. Even Luther was hesitant to declare that Mary lost her virginity. The doctrines about Mary's Immaculate Conception and her Assumption are not found in Scripture. The Immaculate Conception, the belief that Mary was without original and actual sin, is contrary to Scripture. The Assumption, the belief that Mary ascended to heaven, could be true since Scripture describes Enoch and Elijah ascending to heaven. Yet Scripture is silent about what happened to Mary. However, parts of the Assumption are contrary to Scripture since Catholics believe Mary ascended to heaven in order to defend us.

Although these are the only four official doctrines about Mary in the Roman Catholic Church, there are people who view Mary in different ways. Some people view Mary as the co-redeemer and co-mediator. So far the Roman Catholic Church has not made this an official teaching and does not condemn those who do not believe this, but that could change in the future. For example, the deceased Pope John Paul II was a huge proponent of Mary as the co-mediator. On March 25, 1987 he wrote an encyclical called *Redemptoris Mater*, Latin for Mother of the Redeemer. In this encyclical he wrote,

Thus there is a mediation: Mary places herself between her Son and mankind in the reality of their wants, needs, and sufferings. She puts herself "in the middle," that is to say she acts as a mediatrix not as an outsider. She knows she can point out to her Son the needs of mankind, and in fact, she "has the right" to do so. Her mediation is thus in the nature of intercession: Mary "intercedes" for mankind.⁶⁷

Although Pope John Paul II highly favored Mary as the co-mediator, he did not make it official church doctrine. To this day many Catholics debate whether or not such a title should be applied to Mary. Therefore we cannot say that all Catholics believe this to be true about Mary since some Catholics do not.

Not only does the Roman Catholic Church just have four official doctrines about Mary, according to their teachings they do not worship Mary at all. In 787 Roman Catholic teaching

⁶⁶ The dates refer to when these teachings became official doctrine. Although these beliefs were around for centuries before they were officially adopted by Catholic theologians.

⁶⁷ www.vatican.va *Redemptoris Mater*, paragraph 21

described three different forms of devotion. First, there is *latria* which is adoration only reserved for God. Second is *dulia* or veneration which is only for angels and saints. The third is *hyperdulia* or hyperveneration which is only reserved for Mary. Although Roman Catholics make these distinctions about devotion, there are countless problems with these distinctions. “While in theory these categories are intended to prevent idolatrous worship of created beings, in practice they have little effect on the religious feelings of the masses.”⁶⁸ Most lay Catholics do not understand these different forms of devotion, and in the end they do end up worshipping Mary in an idolatrous way.

How to portray Mary properly in our worship services

As was mentioned before, Luther took advantage of the different worship services that focused on Mary in order to instruct and educate the people on how to view Mary properly. We can do the same thing within our circles as well. Although we do not have specific services that focus on Mary, we could set aside one Sunday during the church year to remember Mary. Even though we have the Christian freedom to have such a service, it seems like we might be hesitant to do such a thing. “It is true that some Protestants, no doubt in reaction to Catholic excesses, have almost forgotten Mary. But this is no more the will of God than it would be for Christians to ignore Moses, John the Baptist, or the apostles Paul, Peter, and John.”⁶⁹ No one would consider it offensive to have a service or sermon that talked about the faith of Abraham, Moses, or Peter. In the same way no one should find it offensive to talk about Mary in this way. Yet considering how churches have abused their views of Mary, we need to be careful. “There are certain limits that must be set so as to keep these truths in biblical perspective. First, we must be careful to direct all praise and adoration [to] God. Second, there is an infinite gap between admiration on the one hand and veneration on the other, between holding biblical personalities as models to follow and making them the objects of devotional life.”⁷⁰ If we were to have such a service or sermon that talked about the faith of Mary, we must do it in such a way that recognizes, respects, and rejoices in what God accomplished through Mary so as not to place too much emphasis on Mary.

⁶⁸ Miller and Samples, 70.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 72.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 72-73.

I will propose an idea that one could use in a worship service that tries to accomplish this. Certainly one can disagree with some of the ideas or use only parts of it as they seem fit. Concerning which Sunday to have the service, we can have it whenever, but I will suggest to have it as the fourth Sunday in Advent. This Sunday is right before Christmas, and it naturally focuses people on the miracle of the virgin birth. The style of the service can be the same as any normal Sunday service in terms of format: confession and absolution, prayer of the day, psalm of the day, etc. The different readings from the Old Testament could be either Genesis 3:1-15 or Isaiah 7:10-14. The Genesis reading would be appropriate since it shows how the Savior would come from Adam's line, and he would be the one who destroys the power of Satan. The reading from Isaiah directly speaks about Mary since God promised that the Savior would be born of a virgin. The Epistle lesson could either be Galatians 4:1-7 or Romans 1:1-6. Paul writes in Galatians that Christ was born of a woman and born under the law in order to buy us back and make us his children. The Roman's section mentions how Jesus came from the line of David and was also God. This section can be used to show how Mary was indeed the Theotokos since Christ is both true God and man. The Gospel could either be Luke 1:26-38 or Luke 1:46-55 or perhaps both can be used.⁷¹

I find it beneficial to choose the Gospel to serve as the basis for the sermon. This is my preference since it directly talks about Mary. It shows Mary's faith in action, and it provides the best opportunity to talk about the proper views of Mary. I propose the following as a possible sermon theme and parts:

Follow Mary's example of faith.

1. She believed God's message.
2. She carried her burden willingly.
3. She praised her God.

The introduction can be simply addressing the issues of how people view Mary, and how we might not know how to view Mary. Yet we do not need to be hesitant to talk about Mary because God does not hesitate to do so. In the first part of the sermon, one can emphasize the great statement of faith Mary confessed since she believed she was pregnant and what was conceived in her was from the Holy Spirit. In the same way, only through faith do we believe this is true. This faith can only come from God for "no one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy

⁷¹ Another possible idea is not to cram all of this into one Sunday but rather have an Advent midweek series about Mary so that a church can focus on all of the lessons about Mary instead of having only one sermon about her.

Spirit.”⁷² Also, the faith that Mary had is the same faith that we have. “There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, *one faith*, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.”⁷³ Emphasizing this can show that there was nothing extraordinary about Mary for she had to be brought to faith just like us, she was not full of grace and free of sin, and we all have the same faith as she had. Therefore we can follow her example of faith because we believe just like she believed.

The second part of the sermon focuses on how Mary carried her burden willingly. Her burden of being known as an adulteress would have brought her great shame. This is the reason Joseph did not want to divorce Mary publicly. Since Mary was still living under the Old Testament laws, the people could stone anyone to death who committed adultery. “If a man happens to meet in a town a virgin pledged to be married and he sleeps with her, you shall take both of them to the gate of that town and stone them to death.”⁷⁴ Even though Mary knew this could have happened to her even though she did nothing wrong, she still carried her burden willingly, “I am the Lord’s servant. May it be to me as you have said.”⁷⁵ She trusted that God would protect her. In the same way we carry our own burdens and trust that God will protect and guide us as well.

Finally the third point shows how Mary praised God. She was not afraid to confess boldly what God had done to her. At this point the preacher can show how Mary viewed God as her Savior, and how she too needed to be saved from her sin. Also the preacher can clarify in what way all generations will call her blessed. She is blessed because God chose her to give birth to the Savior; she is not blessed because there is anything special about her which is how Catholics view Mary since they believe that she was free of original sin. Here we see how Mary is an excellent example of faith that we all should study and emulate.

One could say more in all these different parts of the sermon, and one can focus on different aspects found in the verses. Possibly a person may choose not to preach on the Magnificat and may simply have Mary’s song be sung after the sermon. In this way we can sing the same song of praise to God which Mary sung. Regardless of how the service is done and

⁷² 1 Corinthians 12:2.

⁷³ Ephesians 4:4-6. Emphasis mine.

⁷⁴ Deuteronomy 22:23-24a. Concerning the rest of verse 24 the point is whether or not the virgin slept with the man willingly. For the next verse mentions if the man rapes this woman then only he deserves to die.

⁷⁵ Luke 1:38.

what sections of Scripture could be read or which verses the preacher preaches on, the glory must be given to God. Otherwise we risk on giving too much glory to Mary, and we fall into the sin of idolatry. Also, if we do preach about Mary we should be careful not to be too polemical in the sermon. The purpose of preaching about Mary is simply to teach the people about what the Bible says about her and not to get too involved in what Roman Catholicism says about her. A Bible class would be more appropriate for discussing the different views about Mary. Finally, we should not think that after one service or one Bible class the people will completely understand everything about Mary. This type of instruction must be done slowly and with great patience.

How to deal with Mary in personal evangelism to Catholics

When it comes to evangelism, it is important not to get too entangled in all of the minor details about someone's views on religion or different aspects about religion. What is most important is talking about Christ. For when we do talk about all of the minor details, we begin to debate with a person in order to win an argument rather than sharing the gospel with that person. Therefore when we evangelize to Catholics we should not bring up their views about Mary right away. Rather it is best to ask them why they think they are going to heaven and share God's word with them based on that answer.

Also it is important not to assume that every Catholic believes the same thing about Mary that Roman Catholicism teaches. Every individual will view Mary in a different way. Some Catholics will agree with everything that has been established as doctrine, some Catholics do not agree with everything that is said about Mary, and other Catholics may not have a complete understanding of what the Catholic Church teaches nor a complete understanding of what the Bible says about Mary. Every contact with a Catholic will be different depending on a Catholic's view and culture concerning Mary.

Although everyone will have different views about Mary, most Catholics see Mary as someone who brings them comfort. "It may be that some Catholics [may] feel threatened by the suggestion that God would have them abandon their veneration of Mary. Catholics have readily confessed that prayer to Mary, such as the rosary, is a great source of comfort to them."⁷⁶ Catholics find such comfort in Mary because she is the mother of the church in their eyes. They believe she is the one who protects them when they have done wrong. Just like Luther back in his day, many Catholics can view Jesus as just being the holy judge who will punish them. In St.

⁷⁶ Miller and Samples, 73.

Alphonsus de Liguori's devotional book called *The Glories of Mary*, which is a very popular work among Catholics, he offers this prayer: "O Immaculate Virgin, we are under thy protection...we beseech thee to prevent thy beloved Son, who is irritated by our sins, from abandoning us to the power of the devil."⁷⁷ To their credit Jesus is a holy judge who will punish wickedness and sin, and we should be afraid to address him in prayer because of our sin. Yet we have Jesus' command to pray to him for comfort and spiritual rest.⁷⁸ We do not have to be afraid of him because everyone who believes in him as their Savior stands not guilty in his sight.

This is what we have to share with those who believe Mary is interceding for them. We do not have to bash their views about Mary, but instead simply share how gracious and compassionate Jesus really is. One of the best books of the Bible which demonstrates Jesus' gracious and compassionate love is the book of Hebrews. The letter to the Hebrews shows how Christ is superior for salvation in everyway from beginning to end. He alone was worthy to be the sacrifice for our sins (9:12-14; 10:1-10). Since he canceled man's debt of sin before God (10:10-18), he serves as our advocate at the right hand of God (8:1; 9:24; 10:12). Christ is able to sympathize with our weaknesses and can help us in our times of trouble (2:14-18; 4:14-15). Since Christ serves as our high priest, no other mediators are necessary (7:23-28; 8:6, 13). Therefore we can approach God's throne with confidence that he will hear us, help us and protect us (2:18; 4:16; 10:19-22).⁷⁹

Roman Catholics hold Mary in high regards because she plays the feminine role in protecting God's children from harm, whereas Jesus plays the masculine role of condemning sin. Although God certainly describes himself in masculine terms, he also uses feminine analogies as well. In Deuteronomy 32:18 God says, "You deserted the Rock, who fathered you; you forgot the God who gave you birth." Obviously men cannot give birth to anyone, but God shows just how close he is to his people as if he gave birth to them. Not only does God mention how he gave birth to his chosen nation, but he also longs for them to be gathered to him. Both Matthew and Luke write, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her

⁷⁷ St. Alphonsus de Liguori, *The Glories of Mary*, ed. Eugene Grimm (Brooklyn: Redemptorist Fathers, 1931), 83.

⁷⁸ Matthew 11:28.

⁷⁹ Miller and Samples, 52.

wings, and you were not willing.”⁸⁰ Once again, Jesus describes himself in feminine terms as a mother hen longing to gather her children. Of course, we do not want to push these illustrations too far because even though God describes himself in masculine and feminine terms, he is a spirit and does not have a gender. But we can use these passages to show how God has a very loving heart that is very concerned about his children.

Finally it is important to understand that just because someone is Catholic that does not mean that they are not going to heaven. Catholics who believe in Jesus Christ as their only source of salvation will be heaven, yet this is not the case with every Catholic. Only God can read the heart of each person, and we can only go by what each Catholic confesses about their beliefs in God, Mary, and salvation. In the end the best thing that we can do is pray that God will use us as the jars of clay that we are⁸¹ in order to bring the gospel not only to Catholics but to everyone so that God can bring them to faith.

Conclusion

When the apostle Paul was on his second missionary journey, he made a trip down to Athens. Paul began to preach the gospel to the Athenians, and the people wanted to hear more. They brought Paul to their meeting place, and Paul said, “Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. For as I walked around and looked carefully at your object of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you.”⁸² Paul shared the gospel with them by pointing to their natural knowledge of God and by sharing with them the resurrection. Although many rejected his message, a few became followers and believed.

Here we see how Paul is truly the greatest missionary that Christianity has ever known. For Paul could have pointed how horrible their sin of idolatry was, but instead he saw that they were very religious and willing to learn about religion. Paul used this as a starting point and shared the gospel with them. The same thing applies to Roman Catholics as well. Roman Catholics are often very religious, unfortunately their religion can focus on wrong views about Mary and Christ. It may be easy for us to call them foolish for believing these things that are not found in the Bible, but, “sympathy with the Catholic approach to these [Marian] doctrines will

⁸⁰ Matthew 23:37; Luke 13:34

⁸¹ 2 Corinthians 4.

⁸² Acts 17:22-23.

help Protestants [to] open the way to a more fruitful discussion on these highly controversial topics.”⁸³ Having an understanding of how Mary became a huge figure in Christianity can help us to understand why the early church fathers elevated her but the focus was to be on Christ and not her. Seeing how Luther reformed people’s views of Mary can help us to become better on how exactly we can witness to Catholics and help our people to do the same as well. For Luther saw a lot of good in Mary because she was an excellent example of faith, we can see that in her too. Finally the most important thing to do is to pray that God will help and guide us to understand their views about Mary and speak the truth in love to them.

⁸³ Miller and Samples, 165.

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