

An important aspect of the doctrine of Mary's immaculate conception is that she was free of darkness of the intellect because of her sinlessness. If this is the case she most certainly would have been able to grasp what Jesus was telling her in Luke 2:49 about having to be in His Father's house. Yet Mary was just as puzzled as Joseph in not understanding the reasons for Jesus' behavior.

It must be borne in mind that all subsequent doctrines relating to the mother of Jesus are inexorably linked to this doctrine. Her perpetual virginity, her assumption into heaven, her position as Mother of God, cannot stand the test of logic or God's justice if this one doctrine of her immaculate conception is not true.

Whatever you choose to believe, you must understand that any doctrine that places a human being in a position of special favor with God, by its very nature, nullifies the professed belief in the atoning work of Jesus on the Cross. In order to have salvation, you must receive the gift by faith in Him only. To say that someone, as in this case, can be conceived without sin is to say that the cross is meaningless simply because God could have created each individual in the same manner, thereby avoiding the agony of Calvary. Yet this is contrary to His basic law of justice where He says that, "without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness" (Hebrews 9:22).

MARY'S ASSUMPTION INTO HEAVEN

I DOGMA

I DECLARED BY POPE PIUS XII - AD 1950

I BASIS FOR BELIEF: TRADITION

I TIMES MENTIONED IN SCRIPTURE:
NONE

THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH
TEACHES:

Definition:

Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary - The doctrine of the taking up of the body and soul of the Mother of God into heaven after her death was an early teaching of the fathers and of special interest to all Christians. Tradition and theological reasoning show that the privilege of the Assumption was revealed implicitly. On Nov. 1, 1950, Pope Pius XII de-

clared the Assumption of the Blessed Mother of God a doctrine of faith. The solemnity is celebrated on Aug. 15 and is a holy day of obligation.

The feast was celebrated by the Christians of the seventh century, based on the Scriptures. In the OT the singularity of the Blessed Mother as the "woman" was declared (cf. Gn. 3:15) as being through whom the redemption would become fulfilled. The NT declares that redemption (Lk. 1; I Jn. 3:9) and the Blessed Virgin Mary was "full of grace" and could not be perfect as God foretold unless she remained incorruptible (cf. I Cor. 15:54-57). Pope Alexander III (1159 to 1181) wrote: "Mary conceived without detriment to her virginal modesty, brought forth her Son without pain, passed hence without decay, according to the word of the angel, or rather God speaking by the angel, that she might be shown to be full, not half-full of grace." (The Catholic Encyclopedia, Nelson-p. 56)

Teachings:

Almost as soon as Pius IX defined the dogma of Mary's Immaculate Conception, Rome was besieged with petitions for defining her bodily Assumption. It is calculated that from 1870 to 1940, over four hundred bishops, eighty thousand priests and religious, and more than eight million of the laity had formally signed requests asking for the definition.

As a consequence, on May 1, 1946, Pius XII sent the following questionnaire to all the bishops of the Catholic world: "Do you, Venerable Brethren, in view of the wisdom and prudence that is yours, judge that the bodily Assumption of the Blessed Virgin can be proposed and defined as a dogma of faith; and do you, along with your clergy and faithful, desire it?"

Within a few months, the replies received in Rome were "almost unanimous" in favor of definition. The Pope drew the inevitable conclusion from the consent of those whom "the Holy Spirit has placed as bishops to rule the Church of God."

On November 1, 1950, Pius XII answered these requests of the Catholic Hierarchy with a solemn

definition that "by the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ, of the Blessed Apostles Peter and Paul, and by Our Own authority, We pronounce, declare, and define as divinely revealed dogma: The Immaculate Mother of God, Mary ever Virgin, after her life on earth, was assumed, body and soul to the glory of heaven." (Encyclical *Munificentissimus Deus*)

The spontaneous reaction of the faithful was gratitude for the exalted honor paid to the Mother of God. The Pope's own sentiments were expressed to the bishops gathered in Rome for the occasion when he told them the joy he felt over the proclamation and the assurance it gave him that Mary would obtain the graces of which mankind stood in such dire need. On the level of piety and devotion, therefore, Mary's Assumption was only the climax in a series of definitions to honor the Blessed Virgin, beginning with the divine maternity at Ephesus and terminating in the past century with the doctrine of her Immaculate Conception. But dogmatically the Constitution of *Munificentissimus Deus* has a much deeper meaning.

Pope Pius defined Mary's Assumption as a truth divinely revealed. Of the two sources of revelation, theologians commonly say the Assumption was implicit in Tradition, in spite of the practical absence of documentary evidence before A.D. 300. Yet the Pope finally declared that the doctrine was in revelation. How do we know? On the answer to this question rests a new insight into Christian Tradition that had been gaining momentum since the eighteenth century. Briefly stated, Tradition is coming to be identified more with the Church's magisterium or teaching office and less exclusively as the source along with Scripture, of the truths of salvation. Behind this new emphasis is a development of dogma since the Council of Trent that reveals hidden depths in the Mystical Body of Christ. The Church is not only the guardian of a faith once and for all given to the apostles, but expositor of that faith in every age to the end of time.

In August of the same year that he defined the Assumption, the Pope laid down the principles that guided the marian definition. The Church's teaching authority, he said in *Humani Generis*, is not confined to reflecting or consolidating the past. It is also, and especially, the vital present-day function of an organism animated by the Spirit of God. "Together with the sources of revelation (Scripture and Tradition) God has given to his Church a living magisterium to elucidate and explain what is contained in the deposit of faith only obscurely and, as it were, by implication." The degree of obscurity, we may add, is unimportant. Given this faculty by her founder, whose Spirit of truth abides with her at all times, the Church can infallibly discern what belongs to revelation no matter how cryptic the contents may be.

Consequently, when Pius XII defined the Assumption, he did more than propose the doctrine for acceptance by the faithful or give them a new motive for devotion to the Blessed Mother. He indicated the Church's right to authorize a legitimate development in doctrine and piety that scandalizes Protestants and may even surprise believing Catholics. (The Catholic Catechism, Doubleday - pp. 160-161)

The Passion of our Lord found its echo in the compassion of his Holy Mother. In truth the sorrows of Mary, the sorrows of her trans-pierced heart, were necessary not only that many thoughts should be revealed of sorrowing men and women, but also for her own perfect sanctification. Her soul had to be made perfect in the furnace of trial and tribulation. As in all things else so pre-eminently in this must she resemble our Lord, that he was the Man of Sorrows and acquainted with grief. Of all the redeemed his Mother must be nearest to his Cross, not only on Calvary, but also in every hour of her earthly pilgrimage.

But that pilgrimage, both for Jesus and for Mary, at length was over. And now that our Lord is glorified in his Kingdom, every tear that his Mother shed on earth shall be wiped away by his pierced hand, and changed into a jewel in the crown upon her peerless brow. Mary must die, for this

is the lot of mortals. "It is appointed unto man to die, and after death the judgement;" and as Jesus died, so will his Mother die, for in all things, so far as may be, shall her lot be like to his; moreover, since all her children must pass one day through the gate of death, so bitter to human nature, so their Mother will go before them, treading the same path. But in her passing hence there will be for her no bitterness, death will lead her straight to God. She had waited, obedient to the will of God who would have her remain a while on earth, the Apostles' Queen. But now the chains which held her captive at length were broken and her sinless soul winged its flight to be with her Son for ever. And Mary's judgement: "Well done, good and faithful servant." Were these words for which all Christ's servants wait expectant ever spoken as when they were addressed to her, who alone was crowned in heaven as the Mother of her Lord?

The bodies of the holy Apostles, of the Martyrs who shed their blood for Christ, of men and women famed for their sanctity, were to be carefully preserved and venerated in the Church from the first beginnings of Christianity. Of the Mother of God no relics should remain upon the earth. Mary was taken up, body and soul, to the unveiled presence of her Son. She was the mystic Ark of the Covenant which God had sanctified. The body of the Virgin Most Holy from which the Holy Spirit had formed the body of Christ should not be permitted to see corruption. Behold the Queen in her beauty by the side of her Son, as already the Psalmist saw her in prophetic vision, in a vesture of gold wrought about with divers colours. She is the eldest daughter of the Father, and the beloved Mother of the Son, and the chosen Spouse of the Everlasting Spirit.

We, too, have to die and to meet Christ in judgement. We trust to be greeted with forgiveness and love as we enter into his Kingdom. He will not reject us, whose arms were extended wide for us upon the Cross of pain. "Who is he that shall condemn?"

Christ Jesus who died for us?" (Rom. 8:34)

But if, notwithstanding all, our hearts fail within us at the thought of our sins and miseries, we will entreat our dear Mother who is also the Mother of our Judge, to be to us *Felix caeli porta*, the gate of a happy eternity, that when all is passing and death is near, she may turn her eyes of mercy towards us, and show unto us at length the ever-blessed Fruit of her womb, Jesus, teaching us to trust him absolutely and to the full. So may it be for us all we beseech thee, O loving, O kind, O sweet Virgin Mary. (The Teaching of the Catholic Church, Macmillan - pp. 547, 548)

SCRIPTURAL REFERENCES TO REFUTE THE DOCTRINE OF THE ASSUMPTION OF MARY INTO HEAVEN:

II Kings 2:9-12

When they had crossed over, Elijah said to Elisha, "Ask for whatever I may do for you, before I am taken from you." Elisha answered, "May I receive a double portion of your spirit." "You have asked something that is not easy," he replied. "Still, if you see me taken up from you, your wish will be granted; otherwise not." As they walked on conversing, a flaming chariot and flaming horses came between them, and Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind. When Elisha saw it happen he cried out, "My father! my father! Israel's chariots and drivers!" But when he could no longer see him, Elisha gripped his own garment and tore it in two.

Genesis 5:22-24:

Enoch lived three hundred years after the birth of Methuselah, and he had other sons and daughters. The whole lifetime of Enoch was three hundred and sixty-five years. Then Enoch walked with God, and he was no longer here, for God took him.

I Corinthians 15:51-52:

Not all of us shall fall asleep, but all of us are to be changed—in an instant, in the twinkling of an eye, at the sound of the last trumpet. The trumpet will sound and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

COMMENTS:

One might wonder what II Kings 2:9-11 and Genesis 5:22-24 have to

do with the doctrine of the Assumption of Mary. Actually, they are an indication that the teachings around which this doctrine revolves are faulty. Notice that the Roman Catholic Church approves the teaching that Mary must die and, although she is far above every creature, even death cannot be spared her.

Yet, both Enoch and Elijah were taken to heaven without seeing death. If God favored Mary above all others why would he not have spared her having to see death? But even more significant than this is the fact that death is the penalty for sin. Without sin there would be no death. The fact that Mary died at all, whether her body saw corruption or not, can only attest to the fact that she had to have been born in sin just as all humans are. Enoch and Elijah are proof that God can spare death to His children if He so sees fit, in spite of the fact that it is the consequence of sin. Elijah's and Enoch's lives were so exemplary that God saw fit to take them without their seeing death. If Mary's life was so much more exemplary than theirs, which the Roman Catholic Church teaches, then she would not have had to see death either.

Jesus was the exception on the other side. He was the only person who didn't deserve to die. Yet God made Him to be sin for our sins, and hung Him on a cross to pay the penalty for those sins. He could not die a natural death because His flesh was sinless. He had to be put to death in order to taste of it for our sakes. What a sacrifice! That God would become man for worms like us and allow Himself to suffer the humiliation and torture of death as a criminal. How can we escape if we neglect so great a salvation that He has provided for us?

We cannot forget I Corinthians 15:52. Here we are told that even all the members of Christ's Body who are alive on the day that He returns will be changed into their incorruptible bodies without seeing death. So again, God is indicating to us that the sting of death is still at His option for individuals, although there are only two recorded instances where He actually has, in the past, nullified the death penalty

for those He considered especially anointed.

This particular doctrine is also commemorated on a special, holy day of obligation. For those who don't know what a holy day of obligation is, it simply is a law that obliges all true believers to attend a Mass and observe that day in a special manner, in honor of the occasion for which it is named. In other words, not only are members obligated to acknowledge the proposed truth of the doctrine, but they are bound under the penalty of mortal sin to observe it in a special way. Should one not do so and die without confessing this sin he will be judged condemned to Hell for eternity regardless of the merits of Christ's death on the Cross for his sins.

INDULGENCES

Besides these six doctrines that nullify salvation by grace, there is the Roman Catholic practice of granting indulgences. For monetary payment, through doing penance, or by observing special rituals, the Catholic Church teaches that one may acquire credits toward purgatorial suffering for himself or for some loved one who has passed away.

While acknowledging that indulgences have been abused, the Roman Catholic Church ascribes that abuse to "the past." As if no such abuses occur today. But the very nature of indulgences is an abuse against the purity of the Faith. To make matters worse, the Roman Catholic Church condemns those who oppose the idea of indulgences:

[The Roman Catholic Church] teaches and commands that the usage of indulgences—a usage most beneficial to Christians and approved by the authority of the Sacred Councils—should be kept in the Church; and it condemns with anathema [cursing by ecclesiastical authority] those who say that indulgences are useless or that the Church does not have the power to grant them.

What could do more to denigrate the efficacious sacrifice of Jesus, our Savior? To say that men can earn credits toward their own salvation is to trample the blood of Christ under foot. It is to count that blood less than pure in its ability to pro-

vide complete and everlasting salvation for those who believe in Him.

CONCLUSION

As significant as these doctrines and practices are in nullifying salvation by grace, there is also to be considered the impact of the Roman Catholic Church's belief in its authority to teach from whatever motive it deems suitable. In its own words, "Tradition is coming to be identified more with the Church's magisterium or teaching office and less exclusively as the source along with Scripture, of the truths of salvation." This can only mean that the Roman Catholic Church regards its teaching office as more reliable than the Scriptures. The reason they can feel justified in this position is that they consider themselves the only true deposit of faith and, consequently, whatever they say has to be the truth. This is held to regardless of the obscurity of the tradition as their own words reveal.

In effect, then, this dogma, because of its threat of the penalty of mortal sin according to faith, nullifies the essential doctrine of faith in the atoning work of Christ on the Cross. It says that, in order to maintain fellowship with God, you must honor the mother of Jesus with special days of devotion. Should you not do so you can lose your salvation.

This fact cannot be denied. It is a condition which men have attached to the saving work of the Savior in dying for our sins.

Yet Paul tells us in Romans that we are justified by faith without the deeds of the law. In this case, which takes precedent—the Word of God or the laws of men?

As in all other cases, you must be the final arbiter of that question for your own life. I would encourage you to take the Lord's words at their face value. "If the Son frees you, you will really be free" (John 8:36). v

Copyright ©1988, Media Spotlight



Media Spotlight

A BIBLICAL ANALYSIS OF RELIGIOUS & SECULAR MEDIA

Media Spotlight

PO BOX 640 • SEQUIM, WA 98382-4310
Additional copies available on request.