

LESSON 2

SOME CONCEPTS UNIQUE TO CATHOLIC DOCTRINE

Introduction

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth;
And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, Our Lord;
Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary;
Suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried.
He descended into hell; the third day He arose again from the dead;
He ascended into Heaven, sitteth at the right hand of God, the Father Almighty;
From thence He shall come to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit;
The Holy Catholic Church; the communion of saints;
The forgiveness of sins;
The resurrection of the body;
And life everlasting. Amen.

The above statements comprise what is known historically as the 'Apostles' Creed'. It is affirmed in many churches, both Catholic and non-Catholic, around the world. While there may be some points at which specific interpretations might differ, even Christians who belong to churches or denominations that declare themselves to be non-credal would not debate the basic orthodoxy reflected in the Apostles' Creed. There are, then, some points upon which both Catholics and non-Catholics would be in basic agreement.

At the same time, there are obvious differences between Catholics and non-Catholics on many points of doctrine and practice. A number of commentators would agree that at some points the differences are enormous. This lesson identifies some concepts within the Roman Catholic system which, when evaluated in relationship to other Christian traditions, stand out as absolutely unique.

Theology, Doctrine, and Dogma

In a popular sense, not a great deal of distinction is drawn between theology and doctrine within Protestant and Evangelical circles. In a technical sense more is made of the distinction, but doctrine is never projected as authoritative in and of itself. Any authority a doctrine might have is derived from the biblical authority upon which it is based. This is because biblical authority always takes precedence over ecclesiastical authority.

Theology is usually viewed as simply *that which relates to the study of God* (from the Greek *theos*); or, as some would

TRUE OR FALSE?

- 1.) Only Catholics affirm the Apostles' Creed. _____
(1. False)
- 2.) There are some points of doctrine which can be agreed on by both Catholics and non-Catholics. _____
(2. True)
- 3.) There are no obvious differences between Catholic and non-Catholic doctrine. _____
(3. False)
- 4.) In Protestant and Evangelical circles doctrine is considered to be authoritative in and of itself. _____
- 5.) Any authority a doctrine may have is derived from the biblical authority upon which it is based. _____
- 6.) Ecclesiastical authority takes precedence over biblical authority. _____
(4. False, 5. True, 6. False)

suggest, theology is simply *God-talk*. From this particular perspective, theology may be thought of as scientific (in that, on a professional level, there is usually the implementation of a specific methodology), though this is likely to vary greatly from one denominational group to another, and will seldom carry with it any real official denominational endorsement. Therefore, the doctrinal conclusions that may result from such theological endeavour as viewed by Protestants and Evangelicals, that is, most non-Catholics, are open to reaction and additional debate.

The situation is somewhat different in Roman Catholic circles. There is much more concern about technical definitions on the part of the official Church. The limits for theological endeavour are much more rigidly applied. *Theology* is defined by the Roman Catholic Church as *the study of God*; and within that sphere, when interpreted as a discipline, some variations resulting in theological debate and even theological conflict will be found. However, that which is more important within Roman Catholicism is *doctrine* and *dogma*.

Doctrine may be perceived as a *kind of theological conclusion* if one desires to relate and compare it to Protestant and Evangelical theological activity; but, unlike its Protestant and Evangelical counterpart, *doctrine* represents *the official teaching of the Church*, and **must** be believed by the faithful. Indeed, doctrine may have developed through a process and be expressed in contemporary language; but the truth of doctrine is timeless and totally authoritative.

Dogma itself, in the Roman Catholic view, is not only a theological conclusion; but rather is *a truth that is revealed by God and declared to be true by the official teaching of the Church*—and thus **must** be believed by every Catholic. Therefore, Roman Catholic doctrine and dogma, unlike Protestant and Evangelical doctrine, are not open to debate. The Roman Catholic Church authoritatively declares its own dogma and doctrines to be true.

Traditionally, and on a practical level, Roman Catholic theological activity has not had arriving at doctrinal conclusions as its purpose. Such conclusions have already been drawn and affirmed as truth by the Church in decrees from its Councils or by papal declarations as the popes have functioned in their role as 'Teacher' of the Church. Within Roman Catholicism, at least since the Reformation, doctrine and dogma have not been the goal of theology in the sense of something to be arrived at in terms of doctrinal definition. The goal of Roman Catholic theology has been to interpret and to give theological support to doctrine and dogma already determined to be truth by the teaching authority of the Church. Viewed in this way, the task of Roman Catholic theology has had a clarifying and interpretive function as its purpose for the benefit of those within the Roman Catholic Church; and an apologetic (defensive) function for those outside the Church who would question and challenge the truth or correctness of Roman Catholic teachings. Such theological activity is characterized as *dogmatic theology* which relates to *the science of things to be believed*.

Within Roman Catholic dogmatic theology there is a subspeciality designated as *positive theology*. Positive theology actually relates to certain methodological emphases with the

FILL IN THE BLANKS.

Theology may be simply called G _____ t _____, that which relates to the s _____ of G _____. In Protestant and Evangelical circles doctrinal conclusions are open to r _____ and d _____.

(*God talk, study, God, reaction, debate*)

In the Roman Catholic Church *theology* is defined as the _____. However, _____ and _____ are more important within Roman Catholicism.

(*study of God, doctrine, dogma*)

Roman Catholics perceive *doctrine* as the official t _____ of the C _____ which m _____ be b _____ by the faithful.

(*teaching, Church, must, believed*)

To Roman Catholics *dogma* is a t _____ that is r _____ by G _____ and declared to be true by the o _____ t _____ of the Church and which must be b _____ by every Catholic.

(*truth, revealed, God, official teaching, believed*)

TRUE OR FALSE?

- 1.) Roman Catholic theology has arriving at doctrinal conclusions as its purpose. _____
- 2.) The goal of Roman Catholic theology has been to interpret and give support to doctrine and dogma. _____
- 3.) Theology serves an apologetic purpose for those outside the Church. _____
- 4.) Dogmatic theology is related to the science of things to be believed. _____

(1. False, 2. True, 3. True, 4. True)

intent of giving theological underpinning to the Church's dogma. This is done by means of a focused study of original sources related to Scripture and Tradition. Such study attempts to validate dogma on the basis of the original intent and meaning of the biblical message and, likewise, the actual purposes of conciliar and papal actions of the past—since so many of those actions constitute the main elements of Catholic tradition. While Protestant and Evangelical theologians share much in common with this methodology, and certainly recognize and affirm the validity and necessity of dealing with original sources, the purpose and goal of each differ greatly. The one engages in such study to arrive at conclusions, while the Roman Catholic theologian does it to sustain a conclusion already declared true and final (dogma).

A second sub-speciality within the general category of dogmatic theology is *speculative theology*. Like its positive counterpart, speculative dogmatic theology seeks understanding, but does so basically by means of the application of human reason to the content of revealed truth expressed in dogma. In the overall sphere of dogmatic theology, the speculative emphasis is equivalent in methodological perspective with *natural theology*. Natural theology reflects the conviction of Scholasticism that there is knowledge concerning God which can be arrived at by the use of human reason alone.

Thus, Roman Catholicism's distinction between doctrine and dogma, with dogma being affirmed as truth that the faithful must believe, differs greatly from the usual non-Catholic position. Additionally, the goal or task of theology is seen in a quite different light, since Catholic theologians assume a conclusion (dogma) and then theologize (do theology) in order to strengthen the foundation upon which that dogma rests.

Ecclesiology

Ecclesiology refers to *teachings and convictions concerning the nature of the church*. Some would feel that many of the truly distinctive characteristics normally associated with Roman Catholicism are but the manifestations of the implications of their basic ecclesiology—that is, their doctrine of the church.

Certainly the question of the nature of the church has been crucial for Protestants and Evangelicals throughout history. For example, the matter of believers' baptism as adhered to by Baptists is really a question having to do with the nature of the church. If the church of Jesus Christ consists of believers only—those who profess their faith in Jesus and experience true regeneration—then only those who believe should be baptized. From a Baptist perspective it is as much a question of, What is the church?, as it is of, Who should be baptized? Obviously, there are significant differences between the Roman Catholic teaching concerning the church and that which is affirmed by most non-Catholic Christians.

Roman Catholicism affirms its doctrine of the Church from what it describes as a Christological perspective. This is true in the sense that: (1) they teach that Jesus himself founded the church; and (2) that the institutional church exists and manifests itself as the continuing incarnation of Jesus Christ in the world.

FILL IN THE BLANKS.

Positive theology has the intent of validating the d _____ of the Church since the aim of the Roman Catholic theologian is to sustain a conclusion which has already been proclaimed as t _____ and f _____.

(dogma, true, final)

Speculative theology seeks to understand revealed truth by the use of h _____ r _____. *Natural theology* is based on the idea that there is k _____ of G _____ which can be found by the use of human reason alone.

(human reason, knowledge, God)

Ecclesiology refers to the t _____ and c _____ concerning the n _____ of the c _____.

(teachings, convictions, nature, church)

TRUE OR FALSE?

- 1.) The nature of the church has nothing to do with the matter of believer's baptism. _____
- 2.) Most non-Catholics agree with Roman Catholics on the nature of the church. _____
- 3.) Roman Catholics basis their doctrine of the Church on a Mariological perspective. _____
- 4.) They believe that Jesus founded the church. _____
- 5.) They teach that the church is the continuing incarnation of Jesus Christ. _____

(1. False, 2. False, 3. False, 4. True, 5. True)

To teach that Jesus founded the church is not out of step with affirmations of other Christians groups. The difference lies in the particular interpretation that Roman Catholics give to that founding. The key passage of Scripture for them is Matthew 16:18-19 which reads: 'And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.' (NIV).

Roman Catholic interpretation of this passage suggests that Jesus is hereby establishing, in the person of the apostle Peter, the office and authority of bishop within an institutional structure. Thus, Peter was given a special position—that of first bishop of the Roman Catholic Church. For this reason, it is important for Roman Catholic tradition to maintain the idea of Peter's relationship to the church in Rome as its first bishop, for the pope also holds the title 'Bishop of Rome'. So then, according to Roman Catholic doctrine, the unity of all the bishops of the Church has its basis in Peter whom they affirm (again, on the basis of Matthew 16:18-19) as the first bishop of Rome¹ and thus the first pope. Roman Catholicism indeed teaches that Christ founded the church; and that foundation is Peter (the 'rock'), or the divinely instituted office of bishop.

Therefore, the concept of apostolic succession is, given this type of interpretation, of great importance to Roman Catholics. More important than Peter, the person, is the office he was given. Thus, for Roman Catholics, Christ entrusted special power to the bishops (plural)—not Peter alone—in order to rule and guide the Church in terms of universal jurisdiction over it. This power is conferred from one Bishop of Rome (pope) to another in succession, each of whom serves on earth as the 'Vicar of Christ', with *vicar* signifying *substitute* or *agent*. In this manner, bishops are the true successors of the apostles by means of an unbroken line from Peter forward.

According to Roman Catholic doctrine, their teaching regarding the church is also Christological in the sense that the living Christ is incarnate in the institution which he founded. Thus, in the same way that God was incarnate in Jesus to make himself known to man, so now Christ is incarnate within the institutional Roman Catholic Church. The logical implication of this concept is that even as Jesus of Nazareth was the channel for God's salvation; so now the Roman Catholic Church is the guardian and dispenser of salvation—and thus may give or withhold God's grace. If indeed the pope is the Vicar of Christ, then obedience to Peter and his successors is to be equated with obedience to Christ himself. This supposition then logically gives rise to the concept that there is no salvation outside the institutional expression of the body of Christ which is the Roman Catholic Church. According to the still often quoted declaration of the ancient Cyprian of Carthage (d. 258): '... the bishop is in the Church and the Church in the bishop, and ... if any one be not with the bishop he is not in the Church.'²

¹Roman Catholic tradition asserts that Peter was the first bishop of Rome, though actual historical data is not to be found that would substantiate such a claim.

²Henry Bettenson, ed., *Documents of the Christian Church*, 2nd ed., (New York: Oxford Press, 1963), p. 74.

FILL IN THE BLANKS.

Most Christian groups would agree that _____ founded the church. The difference between groups lies in the _____ given to the key passage found in _____.

(Jesus, interpretation, Matthew 16:18-19)

Roman Catholics teach that in the passage in Matthew Jesus establishes the apostle _____ as a _____ in an institution and gives him a special position of _____.

(Peter, bishop, authority)

Catholic tradition holds that Peter was the first '_____ of _____' and that he was thus the first _____.

(Bishop, Rome, pope)

The 'rock' is thus interpreted to be _____ or the office of _____.

(Peter, bishop)

In Roman Catholic interpretation, Christ entrusted special power to the b_____ in order for them to r_____ and g_____ the Church with universal j_____ over it. This power is conferred from one B_____ of R_____, who is also known as the V_____ of Christ, to another.

(bishops, rule, guide, jurisdiction, Bishop, Rome, Vicar)

According to Roman Catholic theology, since Christ is incarnate in the Church, there can be no _____ outside of the institution which is the _____ of Christ, the _____.

(salvation, body, Roman Catholic Church)

Some Roman Catholic theologians argue that the belief that outside the Church there is no salvation does not mean that only professing Roman Catholics will go to heaven. However, it does mean that no one can be saved without some relationship to the Roman Catholic Church. The most obvious relationship, of course, is actual membership; but there is also validity granted to the concept of being related to the Church by 'desire'. Interestingly enough, this *desire* need not be conscious. If one is sincere in one's love of God and is attempting to serve Him, then that person is not, in an ultimate sense, 'outside' the Roman Catholic Church.

Roman Catholics further declare that the true Church will be distinguishable by four marks or basic characteristics:

(1) The first mark of the true Church is that of **unity**. The affirmation is that 'the Church is one'. It is so because of the answer to Jesus' prayer 'that all of them may be one' (John 17:21, NIV); and it is so because of unanimity in the confession of faith (dogma); and especially is it so because of the oneness realized in the unifying of the Church under the one supreme head of the Church on earth, the pope.

(2) The second mark is that the true Church is **holy**. This is so because of the nature of holiness that was characteristic of Jesus Christ her founder, and the fact that He is the source of all holiness; and because the purpose of the Church is to make people holy.

(3) The third mark is that of **catholicity**. Here the emphasis is upon the universal nature of the Church. In this sense, it will fulfill the command of its founder as expressed in the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20), that is, to make disciples of all nations.

(4) The final mark of the true Church is that it will be **apostolic**. Their interpretation notes that the Roman Catholic Church is apostolic because it is the Church which Jesus established on the apostles, and because the doctrine it teaches is the same as that taught by the original apostles.

Of course, the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church is that only their Church manifests these four marks—and thus only the Roman Catholic Church can claim to be the true Church of Christ.

Mariology

Several years ago the Roman Catholic Church announced to the world that the year 1986 would be designated the 'Year of the Virgin'. The emphasis was clearly an attempt to reaffirm the Virgin Mary's place within the mainstream of Roman Catholic faith and practice. Since Vatican II there had been some analysts within the Church who felt that Roman Catholicism had made conscious efforts to downplay Mary's role in the Church and to give her a 'lower profile' in light of the Church's stated desire to dialogue with the non-Catholic world and to narrow the gap between itself and those they designated as the 'separated brethren'. However, with Pope John Paul II leading the way, the prior position of prominence given to Mary has been reassumed—if, indeed, it had every really been relinquished.

FILL IN THE BLANKS.

Some Roman Catholic theologians say that even though there is no salvation outside the _____, the relationship with the Church does not have to be actual _____ since their can also be a relationship with the Church through _____ even though it may be unconscious and expressed only through trying to serve _____.

(Church, membership, desire, God)

The Roman Catholic Church believes that it is the only one which shows the four marks of the true Church which are:

_____, _____, _____,
_____.

(unity, holiness, catholic, apostolic)

The Roman Catholic Church declared 1986 to be the '_____ of the _____' in an attempt to reaffirm the importance of the _____ in Catholic _____ and _____.

(Year, Virgin, Virgin Mary, faith, practice)

It is generally recognized by Roman Catholics that there are few of their teachings and practices more offensive to non-Catholics than those associated with Mary. Likewise, many Roman Catholic analysts recognize that, historically, great latitude has been given in the development of popular concepts related to the Virgin. They would agree that many of these cannot be sustained on the basis of an objective reading of sources; and that, indeed, in many instances these concepts tend to be excessive.³ Be that as it may, apart from obvious excesses which alarm and offend even some Roman Catholics, the heart of Roman Catholic teaching itself, as related to the Virgin Mary, is extremely problematical.

Some of the historical processes that went into the development of official dogma related to Mary will be more specifically noted in other sections of this book. But, because their teaching about Mary is so unique to Roman Catholicism, the broad outline of that teaching is noted here.

Within Roman Catholic dogmatic theology there is the category of *Mariology* just as there are categories for *Christology*, *Ecclesiology*, etc. Historically, Mariology began as an appendage of Christology—that is, her importance tended to be viewed in terms of her relationship to Jesus. Since the end of the nineteenth century, Mariology has been given a theological position all its own. In terms of sequence, the treatment of Mary now generally follows the theological treatment of the incarnation and of redemption.

Many non-Catholics cringe at what they perceive to be the worship of the Virgin Mary on the part of Roman Catholics. While indeed worship of her may take place on the popular level of Roman Catholic practice, official Church teaching does not affirm the worship of Mary—or of saints either for that matter. Mary has the highest position in the pantheon of the saints; and thus is worthy of the highest honour that one may give to her—and she is certainly to receive the **veneration** of all Roman Catholics—but *veneration* is **not** *worship* . As defined by Catholic teaching, *veneration* is ‘the respect shown to saints. It may take the form of prayers, hymns and services; or it may consist in honouring their relics or statues. Above all [Roman Catholics] show veneration by asking their prayers for us, and by imitating their virtuous lives.’⁴ And the point is made in Roman Catholic teaching that ‘veneration is distinct from the homage [worship] we give to God, usually called adoration.’⁵ Yet, as noted above, at the level of popular Roman Catholic practice by the theologically unsophisticated, the line between worship and veneration tends to become blurred or to be non-existent. And to say to non-Catholics that one may—and indeed is urged to—pray to Mary and to other saints suggests a spiritual activity that must be strictly reserved for the unique sphere of worship.

While, from the official Roman Catholic perspective, there is to be no *worship* of Mary or of the saints, to pray to them indicates their capacity to fulfill a mediatorial role. So then, from the viewpoint of the Roman Catholic Church, one may

³John L. McKenzie, *The Roman Catholic Church* (Image Books ed.; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Company, 1971), p. 232.

⁴*The Maryknoll Catholic Dictionary* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1965), pp. 586-7.

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 587.

TRUE OR FALSE?

- 1.) The teachings of Roman Catholics about Mary do not offend any non-Catholics. _____
- 2.) All Roman Catholics would agree with all aspects of popular concepts related to the Virgin. _____

(1. False, 2. False)

- 3.) Roman Catholics teach the worship of Mary. _____
- 4.) Veneration is the same as worship. _____
- 5.) According to the Roman Catholic Church, only God is to be adored. _____

(3. False, False, True)

DEFINE *Veneration* IN ROMAN CATHOLIC TERMS.

(Compare your answer with the text.)

pray directly to the Father or to the Son; but one's access to God is greatly facilitated by utilizing Mary as a mediatorial channel. The application of reason utilized by Roman Catholics at this point is the idea that Mary, because she is the mother of Jesus, has more direct access to him than anyone else could. As her son, he certainly would be more disposed to listen to her and to heed her wishes than those of others who come to him without the benefit of that special relationship and, at the same time, lacking the extra merits of her earned grace. Praying to Mary has also been facilitated by the use of a special prayer called the *Ave Maria* ('Hail, Mary') which has multiple usage—not the least being that of serving as an act of penance to pay, in part, the temporal penalty of one's own sin(s). (Penance is treated in a later lesson). The words of the *Ave Maria* are well known:

Hail Mary, full of grace,
the Lord is with thee,
Blessed art thou among women,
and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.
Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now
and at the hour of our death. Amen.

Within the Roman Catholic Church many organizations and ceremonial forms have developed in relation to Mary. Perhaps most popular, in terms of expressing devotion toward her, is the *Rosary*. It constitutes a form of prayer, or series of prayers, in honour of Mary. A mechanical device (also known as a *Rosary*), consisting of a string of beads, is used in counting the prayers. Central to the *Rosary* in terms of actual prayer is a series of ten repetitions of the *Hail Mary*; each series preceded by a recitation of the Lord's Prayer and followed with the doxology of: 'Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost; As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.' After several cycles of recitations in this order, the prayers are concluded with what is known as the *Hail, Holy Queen* prayer:

Hail, holy Queen, Mother of Mercy! our life, our sweetness, and our hope! To thee do we cry, poor banished children of Eve; to thee do we send up our sighs, mourning and weeping in the valley of tears. Turn, then, most gracious Advocate, thine eyes of mercy toward us; and after this our exile show unto us the blessed fruit of thy womb, Jesus; O clement, O loving, O sweet Virgin Mary. Pray for us, O holy Mother of God, that we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.

The veneration of the Virgin Mary, together with prayers offered to her, have implications for giving Mary a role in the redemptive process. This role the Roman Catholic Church readily acknowledges. It is, according to Roman Catholic interpretation, a 'secondary' role, but a role nonetheless. She points persons to Christ. She herself derives importance from her relationship to her son; and, thus, true devotion to Mary will ultimately bring one to her son whose role is 'primary' in the redemptive process. Many Protestants or non-Catholics generally affirm a redemptive role for all believers in that the Holy Spirit may use the individual Christian's testimony and witness, as well as that of the corporate church, to bring others to salvation in Christ. But this is not what Roman Catholic belief is affirming. Within Roman Catholicism Mary not only

FILL IN THE BLANKS.

Roman Catholics reason that Mary can _____ between one who prays to her and _____ since he is her son and so is more apt to listen to her than to one without a special _____ to him and without any of her earned _____.

(mediate, Jesus, relationship, grace)

The most popular form of expressing devotion to Mary is by the use of the _____. The *Rosary* is a series of _____ counted by the use of a string of _____ also called a _____.

(Rosary, prayers, beads, Rosary)

The v _____ of Mary implies that she has a role in the r _____ p _____. Though she is held to have a secondary role, she is considered able to bring one to C _____ whose role is primary. To many non-Catholics all b _____ may hold a redemptive role through their individual t _____ and w _____.

(veneration, redemptive process, Christ, believers, testimony, witness)

carries the title 'Mother of God', but also the title 'Mediatrice of All Graces'. According to Roman Catholic interpretation, this is 'a title given to the Blessed Virgin because of her role of dispensing grace on mankind through the Holy Spirit because of the infinite merits of her son, Jesus Christ. Theologians hold that because of her role in the Incarnation and Redemption and her own sorrows and sufferings, Mary becomes a channel of grace flowing from these same acts.'⁶ In some literature, Mary is already being referred to by the titles of 'Co-Mediatrice' and 'Co-Redemptrix' with Christ. At times some observers have seemed to suggest that an official dogma to that effect may not be long in coming.

While Mary may not share the divine nature in the same way that Jesus does, Roman Catholics obviously believe that she is very special. That she is special, different from other humans and different from other saints, is reflected in the dogmas which the Church has declared concerning her. It will be recalled from an earlier discussion that dogma, as a Roman Catholic concept, is a revealed truth affirmed by the Church and therefore must be believed by all faithful Catholics. Some of these dogmas will be treated more fully in their historical context later, but in outline form they are:

Her Divine Maternity

This concept is caught up in the title 'Mother of God'. Originally (and this would be the non-Catholic Christian affirmation), the title had primarily Christological implications in that its intent was to affirm more about Jesus than about Mary. In the context of the Nestorian controversy of the fifth century, it was maintained to affirm both Christ's humanity (his mother being Mary) and his divinity (by use of the term 'God').

Her Perpetual Virginity

Roman Catholicism believes and teaches that Mary, though the mother of Jesus, never lost her virginity. (Catholics utilize other explanations for New Testament references to Jesus' 'brothers'.) According to dogma, Mary remained a virgin even after Jesus' birth, since to have lost her virginity at any time, even in her marriage to Joseph, would taint her holiness.

Her Immaculate Conception

While Roman Catholics believe that the rest of humanity is tainted with original sin in conception and birth, Mary is held to be different. We shall see the developmental process of this particular dogma, as declared by Pope Pius IX in 1854, in more detail in a later discussion.

Her Assumption into Heaven

Pope Pius XII affirmed this concept as dogma in 1950. It states that Mary did not die—and therefore her body did not suffer decay—but rather she was assumed into heaven. Again, this dogma will be treated in greater detail within its specific historical context.

Roman Catholics have probably been correct in their criticism suggesting that non-Catholics have neglected or given too little attention to Mary. In their fear of saying too much about Mary, Protestants and Evangelicals have no doubt said too little. For any Christian, there should be no doubt whatsoever as to her importance. With Elizabeth, the mother of John

FILL IN THE BLANKS.

Two titles given to Mary by Roman Catholics are _____ of _____ and _____ of _____. The latter title is given since she is considered to be a _____ of _____. In some literature Mary is already called _____ and _____ with Christ.

(Mother, God, Mediatrice, All Graces, channel, grace, Co-Mediatrice, Co-Redemptrix)

LIST AND DISCUSS FOUR DOGMAS OF THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH CONCERNING MARY.

1.) _____

2.) _____

3.) _____

4.) _____

(Compare your answers with the text.)

⁶Maryknoll Catholic Dictionary, p. 367.

the Baptist, all Christians should join in declaring her 'blessed among women' (Luke 1:42), for she is the mother of Jesus. However, for non-Catholics the importance of Mary does not suggest that she had a redemptive role which places her in a position for veneration as interpreted by Roman Catholics. Her importance rather rests in the fact that her place in God's plan gives significance to the truth of the incarnation. There have been those in every period of Christian history who have tended to doubt that Christ was man in every sense of that word. But according to Scripture, Jesus was born of a woman and that woman was Mary; and the affirmation of faith has declared him not only truly God but also truly man. Also, all Christians ought to view Mary as somewhat the prototype of Christian believer in the early church. Those accounts in the New Testament about her serve as something of a summary of the Christian life in all its aspects, including as much those moments of discouragement as those times of joy. The example of her faith and triumphant spirit in the face of her own spiritual struggles to understand and to be faithful ought to inspire all believers.

Saints, Relics, and Images

Closely related to the veneration of the Virgin Mary is the special honour accorded to saints in the Roman Catholic system. There is a three tiered arrangement as far as honour is concerned: the first and highest is that reserved for God; the second, that for Mary; and the third, the honour shown to saints. God alone is honoured through worship. While both Mary and the saints are venerated (that is, honoured but not worshipped), the veneration directed toward Mary surpasses that given to the saints.

Non-Catholics generally are comfortable with actions or words that seek to 'honour' Christians of the past who have demonstrated unusual faithfulness to God. The honour in that sense reflects admiration for a life well-lived, and generally recognizes significant contributions made by the person to the Christian faith. For example, who would not be desirous to honour the memory of apostles like Peter and Paul, or some outstanding missionary of the past such as William Carey, or a beloved member of one's own local church? Do not non-Catholic Christians often give financial gifts to churches or institutions or name buildings for certain persons in order to honour the memory of someone deemed to have been significant in terms of Christian devotion? But that type of honour is quite different, as has already been noted, from that directed toward Mary. Likewise, a type of honour which results within Roman Catholicism in the veneration of the saints, including prayers offered to them, is quite unacceptable outside Catholic circles.

The term *saint* or *saints* as used by Roman Catholics is most often a technical designation rather than a general term applied to all faithful Christians. For Roman Catholics, to be called a saint worthy of veneration requires a three-stage process which may result in the pope conferring three different titles. First, a *martyr* or *one clearly demonstrating heroic virtue* may be designated as *Venerable*—though at this stage, and with this title, the venerable one may not be **publicly**

TRUE OR FALSE?

- 1.) All Christians should recognize that Mary was 'blessed among women'. _____
- 2.) Even for non-Catholics, this signifies that she has a right to veneration in the Roman Catholic sense. _____
- 3.) The importance of Mary lies in her role in the incarnation and humanity of Christ. _____
- 4.) Mary is an example of faith and of a triumphant spirit for all believers. _____

(1. True, 2. False, 3. True, 4. True)

LIST IN ORDER OF IMPORTANCE THOSE WHO ARE CONSIDERED WORTHY OF HONOUR IN THE ROMAN CATHOLIC SYSTEM.

- 1.) _____
- 2.) _____
- 3.) _____

(Compare your answers with the text.)

FINISH READING THIS PARAGRAPH ON THE NEXT PAGE AND THEN LIST AND DISCUSS THE STAGES IN THE PROCESS OF ESTABLISHING SAINTHOOD IN THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH. (CONTINUE ON THE NEXT PAGE.)

- 1.) _____

(Compare your answers with the text.)

venerated. The second stage is that of *beatification* and results in the title *Blessed*. To obtain to this title, there must be proof of at least two miracles resulting from the intercession of the one being beatified. The third stage, which requires proof of an additional two miracles and finally results in a formal papal declaration conferring the title *Saint* (thus signifying the one so designated as worthy of **public** veneration), is known as canonization.

Roman Catholic interpretation affirms that to honour the saints through veneration of them is to honour God. Generally, Roman Catholics may manifest honour to saints in three practical ways: (1) through imitating the holiness that was expressed in the lives of the saints themselves; (2) through praying to the saints—considered special friends of God with the status of intercessors—who then offer prayers on behalf of the one praying to them; and (3) through showing respect to their relics and images (*relics* are the physical remains of the saints, or objects connected with them or with Christ, such as a fragment of wood from the cross of Jesus, etc.).

Non-Catholics readily recognize the benefits of studying and seeking to emulate the lives and examples of great men and women of faith who have preceded them. However, within the Protestant and Evangelical traditions neither prayer for nor to the dead, be they saints or otherwise, has been an acceptable practice. For those outside the Roman Catholic tradition, prayer is offered only to deity—that is, to God alone. The whole matter of honouring relics and images has been another of those practices deemed highly offensive to most non-Catholics, and perceived by them to border on having a basis in superstition.

It needs to be understood, however, that the official Roman Catholic position likewise recognizes the dangers associated with believing that there may be power inherent within the relics or images themselves. The *Baltimore Catechism*, for example, states: 'In venerating relics, statues and pictures of our Lord and the saints we must not believe that any divine power resides in them, nor should we put our trust in them as though they had the power of themselves to bestow favours.'⁷ Thus the Catholic position affirms that they 'do not pray to the crucifix or to the images and relics of the saints'. Yet the same statement goes on to say: 'but [we pray] to the persons they represent'.⁸ And further, while emphasizing that trust should not be placed in relics or images themselves, the *Baltimore Catechism* does not say the same thing about the saints as persons, but rather declares: 'We place our trust in God and the intercessory power of the saints.'⁹

Saints, then, are perceived as being able to wield significant influence within the power spheres of heaven. Because of their special relationship to God, faithful Roman Catholics are encouraged to pray to saints for help, and to show respect to their relics and images. Historical developments since the sixteenth century related to these themes will be noted in other lessons.

⁷John A. O'Brien, ed., *Understanding the Catholic Faith: An Official Edition of the Revised Baltimore Catechism, No. 3* (Notre Dame, Ind.: Ave Maria Press, 1954), p. 152.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid.

CONTINUE THE EXERCISE FROM THE PREVIOUS PAGE.

2.) _____

3.) _____

(Compare your answers with the text.)

LIST THREE WAYS IN WHICH CATHOLICS MAY MANIFEST HONOUR TO THE SAINTS.

1.) _____

2.) _____

3.) _____

(Compare your answers with the text.)

FILL IN THE BLANKS.

For those outside Roman Catholic tradition, only _____ is to be the focus of prayer. Most non-Catholics consider the honouring of relics or images to be _____ and bordering on being the practice of _____.

(God, offensive, superstition)

The official Roman Catholic position does recognize the d_____ of believing that there may be p_____ inherent in the r_____ and i_____ themselves. Thus, the Catholic position states that they do not p_____ to the relics or images, but to the p_____ they represent. The *Baltimore Catechism* says: 'We place our t_____ in G_____ and the i_____ p_____ of the s_____.'

(dangers, power, relics, images, pray, persons, trust, God, intercessory power, saints)

Conclusion

Obviously there are many other unique features of Roman Catholic thought and practice which have not been addressed in this chapter. The whole system of Roman Catholicism could not be dealt with in one volume, much less one lesson. Some of those concepts presented up to this point, such as the Roman Catholic understanding of theology and its purposes, as well as giving attention to their view of the church, are viewed as basic to the understanding of Roman Catholic doctrine as a whole. Some of the matters touched on here will likewise reappear in later lessons, along with a host of other interesting concepts such as purgatory, prayers for the dead, the mass, indulgences, etc.

FILL IN THE BLANKS.

Two concepts important to the study of the doctrines of Catholicism are understanding Roman Catholic _____ and its _____ as well as giving attention to their _____ of the _____.

(theology, purpose, view, church)

Home Study Guide

Basic Assignment (Levels 1, 2, and 3).

1. Discuss the difference of the Protestant or Evangelical viewpoint of *theology* from the Roman Catholic stance.

2. What differences are there between the Protestant and the Roman Catholic perception of *doctrine*?

3. Define *dogma* in the Roman Catholic sense.

4. What is the purpose of Roman Catholic theological activity?

5. Define the following types of theology:

1) *Dogmatic theology* _____

2) *Positive theology* _____

3) *Speculative theology* _____

6. What conviction of Scholasticism is reflected by *natural theology*?

7. What is the Roman Catholic interpretation of Matthew 16:18-19?

8. What is the position of the Roman Catholic Church on salvation outside of the Church?

9. What are the four marks of the true Church according to Roman Catholic teaching?

10. What are two titles officially given to Mary by the Roman Catholic Church?

11. What are two titles which many Roman Catholics feel Mary should also be given?

12. Define the following words in the Roman Catholic sense:

1) *veneration* _____

2) *Venerable* _____

3) *Blessed* _____

4) *Saint* _____

13. Name four dogmas which reflect the special status of Mary in the teachings of Roman Catholics

14. List three methods by which Roman Catholics may honour the saints:

15. Why are saints considered able to wield influence in the power spheres of heaven?

Supplementary assignment (Levels 2 and 3). From your reading of Lesson 2, answer the following questions.

1. What is the difference between Roman Catholic *dogma* and non-Catholic *doctrine*?
2. Why is 'apostolic succession' such an important concept in the Roman Catholic doctrine of the church?
3. What does it mean when Roman Catholics say that they give *veneration* to the Virgin Mary rather than *worship*?
4. What is the *Ave Maria*? The *Rosary*?
5. List four ways in which Mary is different from other saints.
6. What is the purpose of the veneration of saints, relics, and images as practised by Roman Catholics?

Advanced assignment (Level 3). Read the pertinent material in *The Documents of Vatican II*, and do the following exercise.

1. Read section 16 from Chapter V of the 'Decree on Priestly Formation' and write a paragraph based on your background as a non-Catholic which would reflect a different view from that expressed in the paragraph from the reading which begins: 'Dogmatic theology should be so arranged that . . .'
2. Read sections 18, 19, and 20 from Chapter III of the 'Dogmatic Constitution on the Church'. What roles do bishops have in the Roman Catholic Church? According to Roman Catholics, where does the authority of bishops originate?
3. Read sections 51, 52, 53, and 54 from Chapter VIII of the 'Dogmatic Constitution on the Church' and make a list of 'Who Mary Is' based upon the reading.

Seminar Discussion

1. Discuss some of the differences between a Roman Catholic and a non-Catholic approach to doing theology.
2. Discuss the Roman Catholic interpretation of Matthew 16:18-19. Articulate your own understanding of this passage.
3. Critique the Roman Catholic criteria of what constitutes a 'true' church (unity, holy, catholic, apostolic). From your non-Catholic position, develop an interpretation wherein these 'marks' might apply to your church or denomination.
4. Discuss the Roman Catholic position on the Virgin Mary; then discuss the significance and importance of Mary to Christianity from a non-Catholic perspective.
5. Critique the Roman Catholic position on the veneration of Mary, saints, relics, and images. Expand the discussion to include the more general theme of the 'Use of Aids to Worship' (such as an empty cross, towel and basin, a painting in the baptistry, other symbols, etc.).