

## The Veneration of the Virgin Mary.

A fascinating development in the history of the Roman Catholic Church is the intense popularity of, and the phenomenal devotion to, the woman whom her cousin Elizabeth called "the mother of my Lord." On May 13, 1946, 700,000 pilgrims, almost a tenth of the population of Portugal, gathered at Fatima in honour of Mary as Queen of Peace to thank her for the end of World War II. Since the recent apparitions in Medjugorje (Bosnia), a monthly pamphlet is published with a message from Mary and a short comment on it, as well as information on pilgrimages. "Mary's Faith has special relevance today," declared the lead editorial in *The Catholic Register* (Aug.12,1989). It noted that in the teachings of Roman Catholic Church Mary is inseparably linked with the Lord. "To understand Who the Saviour really is, is to understand also that Mary must be called "the Mother of God."

In 1997 *Newsweek* reported on an international petition campaign, signed by millions of Roman Catholics, asking Pope John Paul II to define as dogma the Virgin Mary's titles of Co-Redemptrix, Advocate, and Mediatrix of all Graces. The drive was endorsed by more than 500 bishops, including 42 cardinals. Dr. Mark Miravalle, one of the leading voices of the Coredemptrix movement in the United States, says that it denotes "Mary's singular and unique sharing with her Son in the saving work of redemption for the human family."

In the Philippines, where we served as missionaries, Roman Catholicism shows an excessive devotion to Mary. The country is the only Asian nation officially dedicated to the Virgin Mary. Mariology has played a central role in the building of ecclesiastical and folk traditions. A colleague remarked that the Filipino Trinity is God, Mary and Joseph. In popular belief Mary has a divine position. Some Filipinos claim that "if you have a special devotion to Our Lady of Carmel, Mary will lead you to heaven in case you die." May is the month dedicated to Mary. Throughout May little girls and young ladies, dressed in white, participate in ceremonies honouring Mary. Mary's image appears on magnets for dashboards, on amulets and medals, in stores and workshops.

Mary's popularity and the intensity of Roman Catholics' devotion to her is noticeably lay-driven. However, in recent history Roman Catholic officialdom solidified Mariology. In 1854 Pope Pius IX proclaimed the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, stating that Mary was "preserved immune from all stain of original sin." In 1891, Pope Leo XIII declared: "We can receive absolutely nothing unless, God willing, it is bestowed on us through Mary." In 1942, Pope Pius XII dedicated the world to the "Immaculate Heart of Mary," and soon afterwards he instituted a feast day by that name. In 1950, the same Pope declared the dogma of Mary's Assumption to heaven. When her earthly life was finished, she "was taken up body and soul into heavenly glory, and exalted by the Lord as Queen over all things." The Second Vatican Council (1962-65) stressed the relationship and the Church in the work of salvation. "In celebrating this annual cycle of Christ's mysteries, the Holy Church honours with special love the Blessed Mary, Mother of God, who is joined by an inseparable bond to the saving work of her son. In her the Church holds up and admires the most excellent fruit of redemption and joyfully contemplates, as in a faultless model, that which she herself wholly desires and hopes to be."

In 1964 Mary was given a new title "Mother of the Church." Pope Paul VI said, "We believe that the Holy Mother of God, the new Eve, Mother of the Church, continues in heaven to exercise her maternal role on behalf of the members of Christ." Some of her other titles are the Mother of God, the Queen of Heaven, the Door of Paradise, our Life, Mother of Grace, Seat of Wisdom, and Model of Faith. Pope John Paul II, who has visited nearly every Marian shrine in the world, credits Mary with saving him from an assassin's bullet early on in his pontificate. His personal motto, inscribed on his blue- and-white coat of arms, *Totus Tuus sum Maria*, which means "Mary, I am totally yours." He even claims that we must follow after Mary as the model of pilgrimage in our search for the unity of the Church.

Not Mary but the Lord must be praised. Neither in the book of Acts nor in the Epistles do the apostles ascribe any kind of honour to her. Whatever the Roman Catholics teaches about her is based not upon God's Word but upon traditions.

Johan D.Tangelder  
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