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A NEW MARIAN DOGMA?

By David Phillips

In February a letter was published from four Roman Catholic Cardinals and apparently over 500 Bishops and 7 million laity requesting a 'solemn definition' of the aspects of the Roman teaching on Mary. In one respect the motivation for this is laudable; their desire is that the Roman teaching should be clear. They state in the letter that those of other religions and other churches should know what Rome teaches on this issue. However, this is what they are seeking in such a definition: *regarding Mary Most Holy as the Spiritual Mother of all humanity, the co-redemptrix with Jesus the Redeemer, Mediatrix of all graces with Jesus the one Mediator, and Advocate with Jesus Christ on behalf of the human race.*

Therefore they are asking for assertions regarding four matters:

- The role of Mary as the spiritual mother of all humanity,
- her role as co-redemptrix,
- her role as mediatrix of all graces, and
- her role as advocate.

It can be seen how calling for a definition will stop some misunderstanding. For example, when they wish to talk about Mary as co-redemptrix they do not mean to say that Mary has an equal role with Jesus in redemption. Indeed it is possible for us to agree that in the overall plans of God Mary does have an important and unique role. However, since a clear definition will make it plain what Rome does mean, thereby removing uncertainty, this will simply make it clearer that what they believe is a perversion of the gospel which detracts from the glory of Christ and leads people away from Him.

Behind each of these ideas is some seed of Biblical teaching, a small chink of light regarding the role of Mary which has then been turned over the centuries and by layer and layer of accretions into the edifice of Roman Catholic doctrine which now obscures the Biblical teaching almost completely. We have drawn attention in previous issues to the way in which by speculation, reading into the text and distortion, the barest reference in Scripture is abused in this way.

There has been a constant problem with the teaching about Mary from a relatively early date, that is a tendency to elevate her far beyond anything which we find in the Bible itself. The question that remains is why, if Mary is so important, does the Bible not speak of her importance. Rome would have us believe that there has been some special deposit of teaching, which is not in Scripture, but this runs entirely counter to the teaching of Scripture that the mystery of salvation has been made known. The gospels say very little about Mary but the rest of the New Testament says nothing at all except a passing reference in Acts 1 and when Paul declares that Jesus was 'born of a woman'. Rome, of course tries to make up for this by claiming that the woman of Revelation is Mary but this is to read meaning into the text in order to defend an indefensible position. If we as human beings are to bring glory to Christ, as indeed if that is the task also of the Holy Spirit, what possible use can be served by magnifying the role of Mary, a mere creature, other than to detract from her Son.

Likewise, when we portray Mary, or anyone else, as someone to whom we should direct our prayers, we deny to believers the full and immediate access to the Son who is at the right hand of the Father, and also our access to the Holy Spirit who intercedes with sighs too deep for words. Thus they are inventing something, which Scripture does not teach, and thereby encouraging people not to do what the Scripture does teach. It is impossible to treat this as a matter of indifference and

those who uphold Biblical teaching cannot do so. It is a deception, which leads people away from the Saviour.

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Roman Catholics consider that there are 4 Marian Dogmas and are therefore seeking a fifth.

1st - That Mary is Mother of God. The Greek phrase *theotokos*, meaning 'god-bearer', against those who argued that the child Jesus was human and not divine, was used by the Council of Ephesus (431). It was not intended to glorify Mary, but Christ, sadly the term has been subsequently distorted.

2nd - The perpetual virginity of Mary. The earliest unequivocal reference to this idea is in Origen (c 250) though many notable later teachers assumed it and taught it. It was made a formal decree by the Council of Trent 1555.

3rd - Immaculate conception (Mary conceived without sin). This was certainly a popular belief long before the Reformation but was made a formal dogma only in 1854.

4th - The assumption of Mary (she entered heaven without dying). The idea dates at least to the 5th century but was made an infallible decree in 1950.