



MARY AND THE SAINTS

QUEST LESSON G-8

The Problem: The Roman Catholic Church teaches that the immortal spirits of the dead saints are in heaven. These saints, of whom Mary the Mother of Christ, is the chief, are mediators between God and man. They may be prayed to, and they are the source of spiritual blessings for believers on earth. In Roman Catholic teaching, the term "communion of saints... has come to apply only to the exchange of graces and blessings between individuals here on earth and the saints in heaven and the souls in purgatory (the Church militant, triumphant, and suffering) ... The doctrine is explicitly affirmed in the Second Vatican Council's Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (and reaffirmed in Pope Paul VI's Credo of the People of God): 'For all who belong to Christ, Having His Spirit form one Church and cleave together in him (see Eres 4:16). Therefore, the union of the pilgrims with the brethren who have gone to sleep in the peace of Christ is not in the least interrupted.' Those in heaven, because of their close union with Christ, 'establish the whole Church more firmly in holiness, lend nobility to the worship which the Church offers on earth to God, and in many ways contribute to its great upbuilding (see 1 Corinthians 12:12-27)' (n. 49). Such persons intercede for those of us on earth and place their merits at our disposal." [Richard P. McBrien, *Catholicism* (Minneapolis, MN: Winston Press, 1981), pp. 1155-1156.]

McBrien continues: "The Church has also always venerated the saints, especially the Blessed Mother, and has sought their aid." (p. 1156).

In his book, *The Roman Catholic Church*, John L. McKenzie explains how the Saints are chosen for canonization by the Roman Catholic Church: "The Roman Church does not expect its heroes to be free from fault, but it does expect them to be free from nonheroic flaws. The divine approval of the candidate is proved by miracles worked through the intercession of the candidate... The Roman Church in all simplicity expects this sign of approval, and the fact that canonizations occur shows that miracles are attested." [(New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969), p. 227.]

The Catholic McKenzie admits: "Some of the worst enemies of the saints have been their admirers. Hagiography, the writing of the lives of the saints, has rarely been an exact science in the Roman Church. The earlier saints acquired legends even during their lives, and after their deaths, the legends grew more fantastic. It must be admitted that the legends had much to do with the institution and completion of the process of canonization. Typical legends had to do with the thaumaturgic powers [the supposed working of miracles, magic] of the saints and the mystical qualities of their prayers. One would have to conclude that many of their admirers spent much time peeping through keyholes... When historical criticism studies the legends, it finds that the saints are heavily encased in plaster, and the recovery of the historical person may sometimes be impossible with the material available." (p. 233).

McBrien provides a brief history of the veneration of Mary in the Roman Catholic Church. (*Catholicism*, chapter 24). He gives evidence that the Roman Church's position on Mary was not developed until the Middle Ages: "Mariology, the theological study of the person and role of Mary, began in the Middle Ages as an appendix to Christology. By the end of the nineteenth century, it had acquired a separate theological position immediately after the Incarnation and the Redemption and before the mystery of the Church... There is relatively little about Mary in the New Testament, and what does appear is not unequivocally positive... Second century literature on Mary is thin." (p. 896).

Thus, by the admission of a leading Roman Catholic theologian, the belief in Mary as the supreme saint in heaven, who mediates for us, did not come from the Bible or even from the earliest Christian literature. It was the concoction of early medieval writers.

McBrien illustrates by reference to Bernard of Clairvaux (d. 1153): "His sermons 'In Praise of the Virgin Mary' were as influential as the legend of Theophilus in confirming the medieval Christian in his or her childlike trust in the all-powerful

help of Mary. He influenced not only popular devotion but theology as well. It was Bernard's view that Mary had an intimate role in the redemption. She was the aqueduct that led the waters of divine grace down to earth. God willed us to have 'everything through Mary, a saying that became a principle of Mariology, to be repeated again and again by popes, theologians, and spiritual writers down to Pope Pius XII in the middle of the twentieth century.

"Bernard did not deny that Christ was the one true Mediator but felt that men and women might be afraid of him because he is also their God and their Judge. Hence, we need a mediator with that Mediator, and there is no one more efficacious than Mary.' If Bernard used the image of the aqueduct, others used the image of the neck. Mary is the neck which joins the Head with the rest of the Body of Christ, which is the Church." (pp. 874-875).

Although the veneration of Mary was rejected by the sixteenth-century Reformers, it has been kept very much alive in the Roman Catholic Church to the present day. The dogma of the Immaculate Conception teaches that Mary was free from Original Sin from the moment of her conception. Since this belief had been held for centuries by Roman Catholics, it was declared an official dogma by Pius IX in a papal bull of December 8, 1854, entitled *Ineffabilis Deus* ("Ineffable God"). Thus, the Roman Catholic Church believes officially that Mary was a sinless being.

In 1950, Pope Pius XII officially declared the dogma of the assumption of Mary. This states that it was Mary's "'crowning glory . . . to be preserved from the corruption of the tomb and, like her Son before her, to conquer death and to be raised body and soul to the glory of heaven, to shine refulgent as Queen at the right hand of her Son, the immortal King of ages.'" [Pope Pius XII's Apostolic Constitution *Munificentissimus Deus* (1950), quoted by McBrien, p. 881].

Both Pius IX and Pius XII issued severe warnings to those who would refuse to believe their dogmas. In regard to the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, Pius IX warned: "'If, therefore, any persons shall dare to think which God forbid otherwise than has been defined by us, let them clearly know that they stand condemned by their own judgment, that they have made shipwreck of their faith and fallen from the unity of the Church.'" Pius XII similarly warned those who would reject the dogma of the Assumption: "'Wherefore, if anyone which God forbid should willfully dare to deny or call in doubt what has been defined by us, let him know that he certainly has abandoned the divine and catholic faith.'" (Quoted by McBrien, p. 887).

Thus, the popes have declared as sacred truth dogmas which, it is admitted by Roman Catholic writers, cannot be found in Scripture. The sole authority for such beliefs is that of the popes themselves. They have attempted to exalt to the level of inspired truth ideas that have their origins in ancient pagan religions, and that did not become a significant part of the beliefs of professed Christians until the Middle Ages.

Those of us who base our faith solely on Scripture want to know what God has to say about Mary and the saints. We turn to the Bible for the answer.

Objectives

First, we ask, who is a saint according to the Bible?

Second, are there human saints in heaven?

Third, should we pray to the saints?

Fourth, was the virgin Mary sinless?

Fifth, is Mary an assistant mediator in heaven?

I. Who Is A Saint According To The Bible?

The Bible's concept of a saint is markedly different from the Roman Catholic Concept. Note what the Bible has to say.

The Word

1. What were God's people on earth often called in Old Testament times? Psalm 16:3; 31:23; Deuteronomy 33:3; (compare 7:6); 1 Samuel 2:9.

2. What are believing Christians called in the New Testament? Acts 9:13,32,41; Romans 1:7; 1 Corinthians 1:2; Ephesians 1:1.
3. What are the special characteristics of God's earthly saints? Revelation 14:12; 1 Peter 1:15-16; 2:9
4. According to the Old Testament, who are the saints in heaven? Deuteronomy 33:2; (compare 1 Kings 22:193; Daniel 7:10); Daniel 8:13,16; Zechariah 14:5.
5. According to the New Testament, who are the saints in heaven? 1 Thessalonians 3:13; Jude 14; (compare Matthew 16:27; 25:31).

Explanation: God's faithful people on earth in Old Testament times were often referred to as "saints." The word is a translation of the Hebrew words that mean "holy, sacred," or "pious, godly." (The Hebrew noun qodesh means "apartness, sacredness, holiness." The adjective gadosh means "sacred, holy." The Aramaic adjective qaddish means "holy." The Hebrew adjective chacid means mings Pious (one), godly." These are the four words that are translated "saint," or "saints" in the Old Testament). A saint in the Old Testament is not an immortal soul in heaven; it is a living believer on this earth who trust in Jehovah and obeys His will.

Likewise in the New Testament, a "saint" is a "holy one" (Greek hagios) on this earth who is a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. Living Christians are quite often referred to as "saints" (hagioi).

The characteristics of Christ's living saints are stated very clearly. "Here is the patience [Greek meaning "endurance, fortitude, steadfastness, perseverance] of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus" (Revelation 14:12). Earthly saints live by faith in Christ and so obey His commandments. They are holy people (1 Peter 1:15-16) because the holy Christ is living in their hearts by the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:9~10).

Both Old and New Testaments speak of saints in heaven. They are the unfallen angels who, because they are holy beings, can be referred to as "saints." The "ten thousand of saints" (Deuteronomy 33:2) who were with God on Mount Sinai were angels. The saints who conversed with Daniel were angels (Daniel 8:13,16). The saints who come with the Lord are angels (cf. Zechariah 14:5; 1 Thessalonians 3:13; Jude

Relevance: Never in Scripture are the saints identified as the immortal souls of the dead who have been taken to heaven. Saints are either living believers or heavenly angels.

II. Are There Human Saints In Heaven?

The only human saints in heaven are the relatively few who have been raised bodily from the grave and taken to the heavenly kingdom.

The Word

6. What Old Testament saints can we be certain are in heaven? Genesis 5:24 (Hebrews 11:5); 2 Kings 2:11; Jude 9; Matthew 17:1-3.
7. Who were raised from the dead with Jesus? Matthew 27:52-53.
8. What vision of some redeemed human beings in heaven did John the Revelator receive? Revelation 4:4.
9. How do we know that believers are not taken to heaven at death? Acts 2:34; Ecclesiastes 9:5,6,10.
10. When are the sleeping saints awakened and taken to heaven? 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17.

Explanation: We know definitely that Enoch, Moses, and Elijah are already in heaven in bodily form. Enoch and Elijah were translated without seeing death, and Moses was raised from the grave and taken to heaven. We know also that "many bodies of the saints which slept arose" (Matthew 27:52) from the grave at the resurrection of Jesus. Undoubtedly, they were not left on this earth to die again. They were taken back to heaven with Jesus at the time of His ascension. This explains John's vision of the 24 elders (Revelation 4:4). Because they are clothed with white robes and have crowns on their heads, we can identify them as redeemed human beings before the throne of God in heaven. Since the prophecy is highly symbolic, we know that the number 24 symbolizes a larger number, Just as there were 24 orders of Levitical

priests who assisted the ancient High Priest (1 Chronicles 24), so the 24 elders of Revelation 4 represent the redeemed human beings in heaven who are sitting upon thrones witnessing and assisting in the work of heavenly judgment.

We know that the disembodied souls of believers are not taken to heaven when they die. In fact, the Bible never teaches the doctrine of the immortality of the soul (see lessons E-10 "and G-11). David did not go to heaven when he died (Acts 2:34), even though he died a righteous man. We are clearly told that "the dead know not anything" (Ecclesiastes 9:5). When people die, whether they are righteous or unrighteous, "their love, and their hatred, and their envy, is now perished; neither have they any more a portion forever in anything that is done under the sun" (verse 6). In fact, "there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest" (verse 10; compare Ecclesiastes 3:19-20). The sleeping saints are not taken to heaven until they are raised from the grave at the second coming of Jesus (1 Thessalonians 4:13-17).

The parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31) does not prove that immortal souls go to heaven when bodies die. The story is an obvious allegory that results in a series of absurdities if it is taken literally. Moreover, the rich man and Lazarus continued in bodily form after their deaths; an idea that is not believed by the exponents of the immortality of the soul.

Hebrews 12:1 does not teach that the "great cloud of witnesses" surrounding us consists of the immortal souls of the saints in heaven. A few verses earlier we are told, "And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect" (Hebrews 11:39-40). If they had not yet received the promise, and they are not to be made perfect without us, they were certainly not taken to heaven when they died. Hebrews 12:1 is referring metaphorically to the list of faithful men and women spoken of in chapter 11. They have passed to their deaths, they are sleeping till Jesus comes, but their life's record is a continuing inspiration for us to "lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us."

The symbolic depiction of souls under the altar in Revelation 6:9-11 is not a reference to disembodied souls in heaven. The allusion is to the blood of the earthly sacrifices having been poured under the altar of burnt offering in the court of the sanctuary (see Leviticus 4:7,18,25,30). Since the life was in the blood (Genesis 9:4; Deuteronomy 12:23), when the blood was poured beneath the altar, the life was poured out. The faithful martyrs gave their lives in sacrifice for the Lord Jesus Christ, as He gave His life for them. The word "souls" used in Revelation 6:9 means "lives." [The Greek word *psyche* (soul), as used in the Greek Old Testament (Septuagint) and the Greek New Testament, never refers to a disembodied immortal soul. The word may refer to the total personality or to part of it; the part referred to is never conceived as having an existence separate from the body]. The blood of the dead, unconscious martyrs cry out to God metaphorically from the ground. The record of their faithfulness pleads, as did the blood of Abel, that they be vindicated and their enemies justly punished. (Compare Genesis 4:10).

Paul told the Gentile Ephesians who had become Christians that they were now "fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God" (Ephesians 2:19). In context, there is no suggestion that the saints are disembodied, immortal souls in heaven. In this passage, the saints are Jewish Christians and other Gentile Christians into whose fellowship the Ephesian Christians have been admitted. The ceremonial law has been abolished (verses 13-16) by the death of Christ, and the Gentile Christians are now members of the true, spiritual Israel of God on this earth.

Relevance: There are a small number of human saints in heaven. But, as we have discovered from the Scriptures, they are the ones who either were translated without seeing death or were raised from their graves and taken to heaven. Hence, they are in bodily form. They were not taken to heaven as disembodied, immortal souls. Moreover, there is absolutely no suggestion that these redeemed human beings who are already in heaven should be venerated, worshiped, or appealed to for assistance.

III. Should We Pray To The Saints

The Bible could not be clearer on this point. The only Being in the universe who is to receive our worship is the Deity Himself.

The Word

11. How many mediators between God and man are there? 1 Timothy 2:5; compare John 14:6.
12. Who appears in the presence of God for us? Hebrews 9:24.
13. Who is the Advocate for sinners? 1 John 2:1.
14. Why is it not right to pray to any being other than God? Revelation 19:9-10; 22:8-9; Acts 10:25-26; (compare Matthew 4:10).
15. Why is it right to pray directly to Christ? Philippians 2:9-11; Revelation 5:8; (compare Matthew 2:11; 14:33; 28:9; Hebrews 1:6).

Explanation: There is "one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5). There is no suggestion in Scripture that the immortal souls of the saints in heaven are assistant mediators, or that we need mediators between us and the supreme Mediator. The Holy Spirit assists us in making known our requests to God (Romans 8:26), but the one Mediator is Jesus Christ. Jesus said, "No man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6). That being so, we cannot approach the Deity through an angel, a redeemed human being in heaven, or an earthly human being. The only One whom the Bible mentions as appearing "in the presence of God for us" (Hebrews 9:24) is the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the only One spoken of as the Advocate for sinners in the ay sanctuary (1 John 2:1; cf. Hebrews 8:1-2; 9:15; 2:24).

The Bible teaches that it is wrong to pray to an angel or another human being. The angel before whom John bowed in an act of worship refused to accept such adoration. He said, "See thou do it not: I am thy fellow-servant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus: worship God: for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy" (Revelation 19:9-10). A second attempt by John to worship the angel resulted in a similar response: "See thou do it not: for I am thy fellow servant, and of thy brethren the prophets, and of them which keep the sayings of this book: worship God" (Revelation 22:8-9). It follows that heavenly angels, holy prophets, and those who obey the will of God are not to be worshiped. Our acts of devotion and our prayers are to be directed solely to the Deity.

The Apostle Peter made it very clear to Cornelius that it is wrong to worship a man, even though he happens to be one of Christ's apostles (Acts 10:25-26), and the Apostle Paul refused to accept acts of worship directed to himself (Acts 14:11-18). Jesus reminded Satan of the divine instruction in this regard: "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve" (Matthew 4:10).

As the supreme Deity (Colossians 2:9), Jesus accepted people's worship while He was here on earth and forgave their sins (see Matthew 2:11; 14:33; 15:25-28; Luke 5:20-25; John 9:38). After His resurrection, He was worshiped by His followers (Matthew 28:9,17; Luke 24:52; John 20:28). The New Testament command is that we should bow before Him, acknowledging Him as our Lord (Philippians 2:9-11). Mae was very appropriate to speak directly to Christ in prayer (Acts 7: 593m 1Acts 3 Revelation 22:20). Since heavenly beings worship Him, it is important that we worship Him also (Hebrews 1:6; Revelation 5:8).

Relevance: Nowhere in Scripture is there any instance of a saint in heaven accepting worship, forgiving sin, acting as a mediator, or supplying the needs of people on earth. Saint worship is totally unscriptural and contrary to the will of God as expressed in His Word. The only Being we are to worship is the Deity Himself. Since Jesus Christ, along with the Father and the Holy Spirit are supreme Deity, we are commanded to worship Him, seeking His forgiveness for our sins, and asking for His guidance, wisdom, and strength in the affairs of our everyday lives.

IV. Was The Virgin Mary Sinless?

There is absolutely no evidence in Scripture that Mary the mother of Jesus was conceived sinless, or that she remained entirely free from sin throughout her lifetime.

The Word

16. Apart from Jesus Christ, how many human beings are sinners? Romans 3:23; 5:18; 1 John 1:8; (compare Isaiah 53:6; 64:6; Psalm 51:5).
17. What evidence do we have that Mary was a recipient of God's grace like any other human being? Does any passage of Scripture teach that we can receive grace from Mary? Luke 1:28-30; compare Ephesians 1:6.
18. What was Jesus' reaction when a woman attempted to exalt His mother? Luke 11:27-28; compare Matthew 12:48-50.

Explanation: The Bible statement, "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23) applies just as much to Mary as to the rest of humanity. As a sinner, she needed a Savior as do fallen human beings in general. Apart from the death of Christ, there would have been no more hope for Mary than for any other godly person in history. All were born under condemnation to eternal death (Romans 5:18), because all were born with sinful natures alienated from God (Psalm 51:5). Every human being except Jesus has been guilty of sin (1 John 1:8; Isaiah 53:6), and the righteousness of none is sufficient to recommend him or her to God (Isaiah 64:6). Only as Mary believed in Christ and received His presence into her heart by the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 3:16-17) could she be forgiven for sin and qualified for heaven (John 3:36; 1 John 5:10-14). Only in that way could she be a truly righteous woman (Romans 8:9-10).

When Gabriel came to Mary announcing that she would be the mother of the Messiah, he said, "Hail, thou that art highly favored" (Luke 1:28). The verb used in Greek is *charitoō* which means "to bestow favor upon, favor highly, bless." The corresponding noun (*charis*) is used in verse 30: "Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favor with God." *Charis* means "grace, favor, goodwill." Mary had received the favor or grace of God. The same verb and noun are used by Paul in reference to Christian believers generally. "... to the praise of his glorious grace [*charis*] which he freely bestowed [*charitoō*] on us in the Beloved" (Ephesians 1:6). Hence, the same favor granted to Mary by God is available to every believer in Christ.

Jesus consistently refused to acknowledge any spiritual status for His mother above that of other believers. When a woman spoke a word of blessing for Mary, Jesus responded: "Yea rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God and keep it" (Luke 11:28). On another occasion when Jesus was teaching, He was told that His mother and brothers were waiting outside hoping to speak to Him. He responded: "Who is my mother? and who are my brethren? And he stretched forth his hand toward his disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother." (Matthew 12:48-50). Jesus refused to place his mother and family above believers generally.

Relevance: There is no evidence at all in the Bible that Mary was born sinless and remained sinless throughout her lifetime. The only evidence we have is that, like the rest of fallen humanity, she needed the saving grace of Christ for forgiveness and acceptance of God.

V. Is Mary An Assistant Mediator In Heaven?

As we have already discovered, there is only one "mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5). In fact, there is no evidence that Mary is in heaven.

The Word

19. Who only has immortality? 1 Timothy 6:14-16.
20. When are the righteous dead raised, given immortality, and taken to heaven? 1 Corinthians 15:51-54; cf. John 14:1-3.
21. Can you mention one Bible text that teaches Mary is already in heaven?
22. Please give one Bible text that says we should pray to Mary.
23. Who gives us mercy and forgiveness? Hebrews 4:15-16; Ephesians 2:4-5; 1 Timothy 1:2.

Explanation: Comparing human beings on earth with the Lord, only the Lord has immortality (1 Timothy 6:16). There is no indication in Scripture that human beings have immortal souls that go on living in heaven, hell, or purgatory after death.

Death is asleep from which the righteous will be awakened at the second advent of Jesus (1 Corinthians 15:51-54), given immortality, and taken to be with the Lord. As a believing Christian, Mary will be raised at the second coming of Christ and will then be taken to heaven (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; cf. John 14:1-3). No passage of the Bible teaches that Mary is in heaven now or that we should pray to her. Grace, mercy, and forgiveness come to us directly from the Lord Jesus Christ when we accept Him as Lord and Savior and, in faith, ask for His blessing. He has been tempted as we are tempted and so is able to understand our struggles (Hebrews 4:15-16). God is "rich in mercy" (Ephesians 2:4) and does not need to have any other Mediator to represent our case apart from Jesus Christ. "Grace, mercy, and peace" come from "God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord" (1 Timothy 1:2).

Relevance: The idea that Mary is in heaven functioning as a mediatrix is quite unscriptural. This doctrine was not given by divine revelation at any stage of history; it resulted from the acceptance of the Greek philosophical idea of the immortality of the soul, along with concepts held by pagans in regard to their deities.

The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary correctly explains: "The Catholic exaltation of Mary has no basis in Scripture but is founded entirely upon the fantastic legends of the apocryphal gospels, which even Catholics themselves deny a place in the sacred canon. In the early Christian centuries these legends were combined with pagan myths concerning the Oriental 'queen of heaven' (see Jer. 7:18; 44:17, 18; etc.), consort of the gods, and the Magna Mater, or Great Mother, of Asia Minor. The Catholic concept of Mary as the 'Mother of God' is basically little more than this pagan female deity clad in Christian terminology, made dogma at the Council of Ephesus in A.D. 431." (Volume 5, p. 680).

As your Mediator in the heavenly sanctuary, Jesus Christ is waiting for you to come directly to Him for forgiveness and spiritual life. Have you received Him into Your heart and life by the Holy Spirit? Have you approached Him in prayer, asking for His mercy and love? He is waiting to receive you now.

Review Questions

1. True or False
 - a. A Bible saint is sometimes a human believer in the Lord and sometimes an angel.
 - b. There are some redeemed human beings now in heaven.
 - c. There is no evidence that Mary is in heaven now.
 - d. Mary is a mediator between Christ and humanity.
2. Discuss: Does any religious leader have the right to declare doctrines that are not taught in the Bible? What is the basis of Christian truth, the authoritarian declarations of a church, or the Word of God? (See Isaiah 8:20; Revelation 22:18).