



Why Don't We Pray to
Mary and the
Saints?

Part 1 & 2

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Chapter 1 - Mary and the Saints in Scripture

The question we will address in this booklet is whether or not the Virgin Mary and the Saints (those humans called saints by the Catholic and Orthodox Church) should be worshipped and/or venerated. For some believers in Mary and the Saints, we could consider what these Christians do as worship. The Catholic and Orthodox Church would use the word veneration to distinguish respect and

admiration of the Saints from worship of God. Even some Protestants, like the Anglican Church, promote veneration of Mary and a belief in her Immaculate Conception (born without original sin) and Assumption to heaven. In order to address this matter, I want to begin with a focus on any scriptural evidence that would indicate that these individuals should be worshipped or venerated. Our primary focus in the Church of God International is to rely on scriptural evidence for our practices and beliefs. The Catholic and Orthodox Church believe Scripture is equal to their tradition in determining doctrine and belief. Hopefully this booklet will help you make up your mind as to which method makes more sense on this subject.

Let us begin by focusing on the relevant scriptures pertaining to the Virgin Mary. Below I will cite the New Testament scriptures addressing Mary, and we will summarize what each scripture is saying. Please look up the scriptures for yourself to see if you agree with

our assessment. We will be looking for any scriptural evidence that supports the concept of worship or veneration being due to Mary. Many Catholics and Orthodox Christians pray to Mary and believe she can answer their prayers. But does Scripture provide evidence for this?

Matthew 1:16–20. Mary is mentioned in reference to her husband Joseph; Mary is mentioned as the mother of Jesus and as being with child through the Holy Spirit.

Matthew 2:11. The Magi visit the young Jesus in His house and worship Him. Mary is just mentioned as being there.

Matthew 12:48–50. Jesus puts no special emphasis on His mother.

Matthew 13:55. Mary is merely mentioned as the mother of Jesus here, and it is also mentioned that Jesus has brothers and sisters.

Mark 3:31–35. Same as Matthew 12:48–50.

Mark 6:3. This scripture is very similar to the preceding scripture in Matthew.

Luke 1:27. Mentions that Mary was a virgin when she was betrothed to marry Joseph.

Luke 1:30. An angel informs Mary that she has found favor with God (this scripture will be addressed a little later).

Luke 1:34. Mary asks a question of the angel.

Luke 1:38. Mary says she is the Lord's servant.

Luke 1:39. Mary hurries to a town.

Luke 1:41. Mary greets Elizabeth.

Luke 1:46. Mary says her soul glorifies the Lord.

Luke 1:56. Mary stays with Elizabeth three months.

Luke 2:5. Mary is Joseph's espoused wife.

Luke 2:16. Shepherds find Mary and Joseph.

Luke 2:19. Mary ponders.

Luke 2:34. Simeon blesses Mary.

Luke 8:19–21. Same as Matthew 12:48–50 and Mark 3:31–35.

Luke 11:27–28. Jesus does not offer Mary any special praise when He had opportunity to do so.

Acts 1:14. Mary prays with the disciples.

Carefully reading each of these scriptures we find no support for the idea that Mary the mother of Jesus has any special power or

position. Mary was a righteous woman, for God to choose her, but should we be praying to her? There is no scriptural support for the special veneration or adulation or even worship of Mary by Christians. If the Bible does not support veneration or worship for Mary, how did this practice come to take root within a major part of Christianity? We will now begin to look at historical evidence to find the answer, but let us first turn to any biblical evidence to support veneration or worship of “saints.”

In the Old Testament there are four words translated “saint” or “saints.” The words are qadowsh, qaddiysh, qodesh, and chaciyd. These four words are used 38 times in the Old Testament. In none of these 38 occurrences are the saints ever addressed as being prayed to or worshipped. The saints are not mentioned as being aware of anything in death or residing in heaven. When we turn to the New Testament, one word is used for “saint” or “saints” and that word is hagios in the Greek.

This word is used 62 times in the New Testament, and once again there is no mention of anyone praying to the saints or the saints having any special powers after death to answer prayers.

One scripture that causes some confusion is found in Revelation 6:9–11, which speaks of the souls under the altar in heaven crying out to God. We must remember the book of Revelation is a vision that John is seeing. The book is highly symbolic and most of it is not to be understood literally. Notice in verse 11 these “souls” are told to rest a little while longer. We understand this to mean these souls are asleep awaiting the Second Coming of Christ when they will awaken out of their graves. Please see a literature and audio recording list at the end of the next section that will provide numerous resources to prove this point.

There is one scripture in Jude 14 which could cause some confusion in regard to where the saints reside. We will show in the next section of this booklet that the dead saints (Peter,

Paul, Moses, etc.) are asleep in death. But some believe Jude 14 addresses saints like Peter and Paul coming out of heaven with Jesus. We must remember that hagios means “holy ones” in Greek and can refer to true believers in Jesus (Peter, Paul, etc.), or it can also refer to God’s angels. Jude is referring to a prophecy made by Enoch about Jesus returning to the earth with His angels. “Enoch’s ‘holy myriads,’ ten thousands of angels, are found throughout Scripture: Deut. 33:2; Dan. 7:10; Matt. 25:31; II Thess. 1:7.”¹ Holy ones not only refer to “saints” in Scripture, but also to “angels.”

Chapter 2 - Where are Mary and the Saints Now?

Many Christians today are taught that the dead go to heaven to be with God. Many are also taught the wicked people go to hell and burn forever or live in separation from God. Many in the Christian professing world continue to believe these basic teachings. But does the Bible teach this? First, let us begin by

looking at the Word of God on what the state of the dead is. This needs to be understood before we begin to look at what the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church teach about prayer to the saints and the Virgin Mary. We will also address how this false teaching infiltrated the Christian Church.

Let us begin by looking at scriptures in the Old Testament dealing with death.

Genesis 2:7. God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life.

Genesis 3:19. Man is dust and to dust he will return.

Genesis 7:21–22. Animals have the same breath of life that man has.

1 Kings 2:10. Death is likened to sleep.

1 Kings 11:21, 43. Death likened to sleep.

1 Kings 14:20, 31. Death likened to sleep.

2 Kings 8:24. Death likened to sleep.

2 Kings 10:35. Death likened to sleep.

2 Kings 16:20. Death likened to sleep.

2 Kings 24:6. Death likened to sleep.

2 Chronicles 9:31. Death likened to sleep.

2 Chronicles 16:13. Death likened to sleep.

2 Chronicles 21:1. Death likened to sleep.

2 Chronicles 27:9. Death likened to sleep.

2 Chronicles 33:20. Death likened to sleep.

Job 4:17. Man is mortal not immortal.

Ecclesiastes 3:19–20. Men and beasts die alike. A man has no preeminence over a beast when it comes to death. They both return to the dust.

Ecclesiastes 9:5–10. The dead know nothing. They are not aware of anything in death.

Psalms 6:5. There is no remembrance of God in death.

Psalms 115:17. The dead don't praise God, they are silent.

Psalms 146:4. When you die your thoughts perish.

Daniel 12:1–4. The dead will sleep until the time of the end.

Here are some New Testament scriptures that support the contention that in death man is asleep.

1 Timothy 6:15–16. God only has immortality.

1 Timothy 1:17. God is immortal (incorruptible).

1 Corinthians 15:53–54. Man is corruptible and mortal, but he can attain incorruption and immortality (only through God).

1 Corinthians 15:14–18. If Christ did not rise from the grave then all those who have died would have no chance for life.

1 Corinthians 15:23. The resurrection of the righteous dead occurs at Christ's second coming.

1 Thessalonians 4:16. The dead in Christ don't wake up until the second coming of Christ.

John 11:11–14. Jesus called death sleep.

1 Corinthians 15:51–53. Death is likened to sleep and we overcome death when we are resurrected.

1 Corinthians 11:30. Death likened to sleep.

Revelation 20:5. The rest of the dead are resurrected at the end of the millennium.

Two major views of human nature are held in Christianity. One is called classical dualism and the other is called biblical wholism.

Dualism maintains that human nature

consists of a material, mortal body and a spiritual, immortal soul. The soul survives death and goes to heaven, hell, or purgatory. At the resurrection the soul is reunited with the body. The wholistic view holds that body and spirit are part of one indivisible organism. At death man is unaware until a future resurrection when God will reanimate the dead being.

Many scholars are in agreement with the Church of God International's take on the state of the dead, which is wholistic. Some noted Protestant theologians who counter their own denominations dualistic perspective include Oscar Cullmann, Clark Pinnock, and John R. W. Stott.

Professor Phillip Cary is Professor of Philosophy at Eastern University and Scholar-in-Residence at the Templeton Honors College. He holds a Ph.D. in Philosophy and Religious Studies from Yale University. He says this about the state of the dead: "The Christian hope was not the hope of going to heaven with Jesus, but the hope of Christ

coming from heaven to earth to establish the Kingdom of God on earth and restore all things and redeem the world and raise everyone from the dead. The hope was resurrection from the dead.” He goes on to say, “It’s in that interval or interim between death and resurrection that the Christian notion of the immortality of the soul ended up developing. I mentioned that the immortality of the soul is not an idea that turns up in the New Testament...”² If the immortality of the soul concept did not come from the Bible, where did it come from? Cary has this to say about that: “It’s Greek philosophy, and in particular, the great philosopher Plato...of the 4th century B.C. who taught us that human beings are made of body and soul, that body and soul together make us human. This is rather different, it turns out, from biblical ways of thinking.... It’s Plato who defines death as separation of the body and soul in a treatise called the *Phaedo*.... It’s also Plato who, at great length, argues that the soul is immortal, imperishable,

and cannot die.... That is not a doctrine taught anywhere that I know of in the New Testament.”³

Finally, Cary has one more thing to say that will be important for us to recognize as we move forward in this booklet: “Another Platonic concept is the notion that good souls ultimately go to heaven. Plato has that picture of souls going up to heaven. It’s a picture that gets into the Western tradition through writers like Cicero, who also wrote philosophical stuff imitating Plato. You’ll never see anywhere in the New Testament or the Old Testament a picture of souls going to heaven.”⁴ For further proof on this see our free booklets and CDs at the end of this section. Plato and Cicero helped influence the early Christian thinkers, but these ideas predate even ancient Greece.

We know that the Greeks from very early times believed, as all primitive peoples do, that each man had a soul which inhabited the body as its life-spirit, and that this soul survived the dissolution of the body and either departed to

a shadowy realm where it passed a mournful existence or still hovered about the tomb.⁵ Many scholars agree the Israelites of the Old Testament did not have this belief until they began to be influenced by the religions around them. The same thing occurred with the early Christians.

Some of you may be in disagreement with the first few pages of this booklet. You may be thinking of scriptures like Lazarus and the rich man or the thief on the cross. We do not have the time or space in this booklet to deal with some scriptures that can appear confusing. But we do have other resources that address these scriptures. We have a number of other booklets on this subject that you can order free of charge. Just go to our website at cgi.org and order these titles under our literature section or read them online: Immortality: God's Gift to the Saints; Hell, You Say?; and The Rich Man and Lazarus: Where Are They? You can also order these CDs from our website (cgi.org): "Where Are Enoch and Elijah?" and "What About Heaven?"

Chapter 3 - Pagan Survivals in Christianity

Before we move into the details of the veneration of Mary and the saints, we first need to recognize how the Christian Church, in the first few centuries of its existence, took over and “Christianized” pagan practices. This is a well-known fact for anyone who has done some research on the early Christian Church. Perhaps the two greatest examples of “Christianized” pagan customs are the two most prominent holidays in Christianity, Christmas and Easter.

Today December 25 is celebrated as the birthday of Jesus, although this celebration did not take place until the fourth century, A.D. The celebration of Christmas did not take root in Christianity until 300 years after Christ’s ascension to heaven. Scripture and history make it clear the early Christians continued to observe the biblical holy days mentioned in Leviticus 23 (Acts 2:1; Acts 20:6, 16; 1 Corinthians 5:7–8). Slowly, as the

Church began to take on more pagan converts, it took on the Roman celebration date for the Sun god and claimed the date of December 25 for Christ. In ancient Greece, there had been a Sun-festival known as the Helia celebrated on December 25.⁶

Lent might better be compared with the fast which preceded the celebration of the Eleusinian mysteries, commemorating Demeter's period of abstinence from food during her search for her ravished daughter Persephone.⁷ Growing up Greek Orthodox, I had always assumed we fasted for 40 days because Jesus did so prior to His temptation by Satan. I came to learn there is no mention of a fast preceding Christ's resurrection in Scripture. Christ's encounter with Satan also takes place at the beginning of his ministry rather than a few years later, at the end.

What about the holiest day in the Christian year, Easter Sunday? A little research into the word Easter will reveal it derives from the name of an ancient pagan goddess, Ishtar or Astarte. Hard to believe, but truth is

sometimes stranger than fiction.

In some cases, Christian churches were erected

on the same locations where previous pagan temples stood. Saints took on the attributes of previous pagan gods. And as we have just seen

above, pagan festivals were repackaged into Christian holidays and festivals. The people were taught that the saints were not to be worshipped like Christ, but that they were merely mediators between God and men; but the people, polytheistic in their nature, were sure to regard them as they regarded Christ the great Mediator.⁸ Greek religion was not obliterated by Christianity, but that the two were fused, and after the process was complete

many of the older forms and beliefs reappeared.⁹

In its veneration of the Virgin Mary, not only did Roman Catholic Christianity absorb many elements of the cults of Greek and Roman goddesses, but Mary in effect replaced these

deities and continued them in a Christian form.¹⁰ Even Mary's mother Anne is a saint with many followers. There is no historic or archaeological evidence to suggest Anne was real—other than the apocryphal writings that mention her. How, then, did she become so important in the cultic practice of the church? The veneration of "St. Anne" may also be due to pagan survivals. Pagans dating back to the first century knew of a goddess named Anne. As Anne Perenna, she is mentioned by the Roman poet Ovid as a provider of provisions.¹¹ Romans also associated her with the figure of a water nymph in whose honor cups were emptied, and in Celtic pagan traditions she appears as Dana.¹² All these pagan traditions have been added to the cult of St. Anne in various Catholic countries.¹³ Those who worship in the many festivals for St. Anne are not aware that they participate in rites much more ancient than Christianity, ceremonies with pagan origins in which Anne, or a Roman goddess, or Dana, the goddess of the Celts, was religiously venerated.¹⁴ Neither

the name nor the development of the festival has changed much through the centuries.¹⁵ In his book, *The Myth of Mary*, author Cesar Vidal addresses ten similarities between Marian devotion and the worship of pagan mother goddesses:

- Both were honored through visual means (sculptures, paintings, or icons).
- Mary and the goddesses were the mother of all.
- Both were worshipped with a child.
- Both are associated with the sun and the horns of a cow (since the lower Middle Ages the crescent moon over Mary's head looks similar to the cow horns of pagan goddesses).
- Both are associated with the harvest—it is common to associate agricultural work in Catholic countries with some particular virgin who is seen as the patron of those specific people.
- Mary and the goddesses are both associated with the possibility of influencing lives beyond the grave.
- The worship of stones or litholatry

- Both venerated in grottos or in caves.
- The connection of Mary and goddesses to the mountains or mountain ranges
- The sacrifice of sexuality

Again, a couple of the items on this list (images) are condemned in Scripture (Exodus 20:4–5; Deuteronomy 5:8–10). Artemis, also in her assimilation with Hecate, was venerated at crossroads. This tradition is obvious in the case of Marian veneration in countries such as Spain or Greece, where it is easy to find hermitages and shrines where roads cross each

other.¹⁶

Schmidt also tells of a ceremony which takes place in Arachova on the evening before the festival of the “Presentation of the Virgin” on November 21.¹⁷ “A porridge...is eaten by the family for the purpose of asking the Virgin for a favorable harvest the following year.”¹⁸ This ceremony also appears to be a survival of the offerings of the first-fruits, which were originally made to Demeter or to some agrarian goddess, and which now have been

transferred to the Virgin.¹⁹

In its theology and ethics, Christianity has been profoundly influenced by its contacts with Greek philosophy; in its ritual and hagiology (literature dealing with the lives and legends of the saints) it owes an equal debt to ancient Greek religion, which has also handed over an enormous mass of superstitious beliefs.²⁰ In the resultant blend, Christianity has incorporated pagan beliefs and usages, which, though modified, have remained essentially Greek to this day.²¹ A great amount of original Christianity has been lost to mainline Christianity. The living legacy of ancient Greece to the Christian Church of today includes theological and ethical concepts, rites and ceremonies, and, also, alas a great body of unworthy superstitions.²² Another connection between Mary worship and paganism is the Rosary. In a number of Marian apparitions, Mary tells the seers that praying the Rosary can help save the world from its dire situation. The Church dedicates October 7 on its liturgical calendar to

celebrate the Rosary. For Catholics, the Rosary became a popular tool in Marian veneration in the Middle Ages. The Rosary is a set of meditative prayers that recall events in the lives of Jesus and Mary. It is also the string of beads Catholics use to count the prayers. The Rosary gets its name from Mary's association (in the Middle Ages) with the sign of the rose. The origin of such a connection has been sought out in the apocryphal book of Ecclesiasticus (24:14) which says, "I was exalted like the Rose of Jericho," although the passage obviously has nothing to do with her.²³

The earliest use of prayer beads, like the rosary, can be traced back to Hinduism. The Hindus used prayer beads similar to the rosary to pray to Vishnu and Shiva. Buddhists and Sikhs used similar prayer beads. Even within Sufi Islam prayer beads can be found in the ninth century. In all the cases mentioned, the rosary (prayer beads) served as an instrument to exalt the respective divinities of each religion through a constant repetition of the

divine name.²⁴

Besides its origins in paganism, the Rosary is not a valid tool for prayer because of various biblical scriptures. First of all, the Bible teaches us not to pray in vain repetitions (Matthew 6:7–8). The “Hail Mary” prayer is used over and over again in the Rosary. The Bible also teaches there is one mediator between man and God (1 Timothy 2:5–6), which is Jesus Christ. By praying to Mary we are praying to another mediator. If you doubt that Catholics think of Mary as a mediator, notice what they said at the Vatican II Council: “Because after her assumption into heaven she has not set aside this saving function, but continues to obtain for us, with her multiple intercession, the gifts relative to eternal salvation. With her maternal love, she cares for the brothers of her son that still journey and move among dangers and distresses until they reach the happy homeland.”²⁵

Vatican II went on to use the titles of Advocate, Assistant, Helper, and Mediator.

This title Mediatrix, however, applied not only to Mary's place in the history of salvation but also to her continuing position as intercessor between Christ and humanity—so that it was possible to “demand salvation of thee [Mary].”²⁶ In fact, God had chosen her for the specific task of pleading the case of humanity before her Son. Mary was addressed as the one who could bring cleansing and healing to the sinner and as the one who would give succor against the temptations of the devil; but she did this by mediating between Christ and humanity.²⁷ This sounds great, and Catholics can believe whatever they want, but there are no Bible verses that can back up this kind of belief. Religious leaders should be leery of establishing beliefs that are not rooted in the Bible (Matthew 15:9).

But getting back to the Rosary, there are other ideas as to how the practice moved into Christianity. In 1041, Lady Godiva of Coventry left in her will a circlet of gems on which she used to say her prayers.²⁸ It was, she specified, to be hung round a statue of the

Virgin.²⁹ Although the exact point of entry of the Rosary into Western Christendom is not known, the Crusaders are generally given the credit for spreading a habit picked up from their Moslem adversaries.³⁰ But as the legacy of Lady Godiva shows, the practice of counting one's prayers was known in England before the First Crusade and may therefore have arisen spontaneously, or it may have been

imported by pilgrims to the holy land.³¹

By the end of the sixteenth century, Pope Pius V pushed for the use of the Rosary with a bull, or proclamation. He also instituted a feast for Mary in 1573 to commemorate a victory over the Turks in 1571. The battle had been given to God's side, said the Pope, through the intercession of the Virgin obtained by the Rosaries offered to her on earth by confraternities of Rome.³² The Pope's evidence for devotion to the Rosary was a vision by St. Dominic of the Madonna. According to tradition, Dominic, while conducting the Inquisition against the

Albigensian heretics at the beginning of the thirteenth century, had been given the Rosary in a vision by the Virgin herself, who told him that Christian men and women should invoke her aid on the beads.³³ This story helped popularize the use of the Rosary. A number of popes after Pius V encouraged the use of the rosary based on this story.

If Dominic did see a vision, was God the source of it? Many religious figures throughout history have claimed visions from God, but God is not always the source of visions. It is interesting that the Catholic Church would promote this story knowing what the Church did to the Albigensians. The Catholics perpetrated a genocidal crusade against this group.

We will discuss apparitions of the Virgin a bit later, but many of the apparitions in the nineteenth and twentieth century had some connection to the Rosary. Let us keep this in mind when we begin to investigate the Marian apparitions.

There are many other similarities between

Marian devotion and the ancient worship of a mother goddess, suggesting that the more ancient forms of worship survived through the veneration of Mary. Keep in mind that, as we address these survivals, there is no biblical admonition for veneration of Mary. One example is the large number of monuments from ancient Babylon which depict the mother goddess Semiramis with her child Tammuz in her arms. Another example is the plethora of images of goddesses suckling their infant divine offspring. Mary with the baby Jesus on her lap or suckling is a common theme in Catholic and Orthodox depictions. The theme of the nursing Virgin probably originated in Egypt, where the goddess Isis had been portrayed suckling the infant Horus for over a thousand years before Christ.³⁴ One writer goes as far to say that “the ancient portrait of Isis and the child Horus was ultimately accepted not only in popular opinion, but by formal episcopal sanction as the portrait of the Virgin and her child.”³⁵ Some of the same statues that were

worshipped as the mother goddess and her child were renamed as Mary and the baby Jesus. “When Christianity triumphed,” says one writer, “these paintings and figures became those of the Madonna and child without any break in continuity: no archaeologist, in fact, can now tell whether some of these objects represent the one or the other.”³⁶

In the Greek Orthodox Church, at the end of some liturgies on Sunday, there is a special short memorial service for loved ones who have recently died. Again, there is no biblical basis for what we are about to describe. A cake like item is placed on a table symbolizing the lost loved one. The priest prays over the cake symbolizing the departed family member, who is believed to be with God. At the end of this service, the family members of the dearly departed receive a small bag of Kolyva (what the cake-like item is made of)—a mixture of wheat and grain. Such cake offerings can be traced to the sixth century in connection with the Assumption, and seem to be the survival

of first-fruit offerings, such as those offered the Syrian goddess of agriculture, and now transferred to Mary.³⁷

These cake-like offerings have their roots in antiquity. Another example comes from the Greek island of Zante. The peasants bring such a cake, there called sperma, or vesper offerings, to the church in a basket at the celebration of the “Holy Transfiguration of Christ” on August 6, and at the “Assumption of the Virgin” on August 15.³⁸ It is put in the middle of the church on a stand with a candle burning nearby. During mass, the priest blesses it and strews the chancel with a portion of it broken into crumbs, and distributes the rest among the people, who eat it and make a wish.³⁹ This ceremony recalls the “first-fruit” offerings at certain old Athenian festivals.⁴⁰

Even when Christianity came to the new world we find examples of a syncretism between the mother goddess of the indigenous Mexican people and Mary. The female deities of the Mexican people were powerful symbols

of staple foods, fertility, and sexuality.⁴¹ Mary came to be identified with the fruit of the maguey plant—a large cactus—the fermented juice of which produced the alcoholic drink pulque.⁴² Pulque was drunk at festivals, was offered to the gods, and was associated with fertility and plenty, the domain of the goddess Mayahuel.⁴³

The Franciscan missionaries who converted the first indigenous Mexicans to Christianity were concerned with the Christians they were creating. They adhered ardently to Mary in her immaculate purity but could not easily trust the indigenous priests, who served the vast majority of new parishes throughout the land, to do so.⁴⁴ It was too easy to merge Mary with indigenous deities, and this is what the bearers of Christianity feared most.⁴⁵ The primary Feast days dedicated to the Virgin Mary in Orthodoxy and Catholicism are March 25 (Annunciation) and August 15 (Assumption). The Annunciation commemorates the announcement of the coming birth of Jesus and the Assumption

commemorates the bodily taking up of Mary into heaven. Both of these dates are on the exact dates of pagan celebrations to mother goddess figures. Hera, the queen of the Greek gods, presided over the spring season which begins at the spring equinox (March 25). In pagan Rome, March 25 was a holiday celebrating the annunciation of the virgin, in honor of Cybele, the mother of the Babylonian messiah.⁴⁶ The Romans had a three-day festival for the goddess Diana. On the first day, the goddess allegedly came to earth, and on the third day, August 15, they apparently celebrated her assumption into heaven as the queen of heaven.⁴⁷ But like many of the mother goddess stories, there are also connections that go further back in history.

Five thousand years ago, in southern Mesopotamia, during the month of August, when nature's anger was most pitiless and the scorched earth and relentless drought held the farmer captive, a chant went up as the priests invoked the life-giving powers of the new

season and recited the annual liturgies to Dumazi, the shepherd, and Inanna, the queen of heaven, his mother and his bride.⁴⁸

Dumazi had been sacrificed to the underworld, tortured and afflicted by demons, just as Christ suffered the tortures of His passion and then descended into hell.⁴⁹ Well, not exactly—the idea that Christ descended into hell to free the dead prior to His death and resurrection is taught in both Catholicism and Orthodoxy. The scripture used to support that belief (1 Peter 3:18–20) pertains to Christ preaching to “spirits in prison.” These are undoubtedly fallen angels who are in some manner confined to certain boundaries, and whose disobedience was evident in the time of Noah, but it is doubtful that Christ’s proclamation to them occurred in the preFlood period. For a full explanation of this scripture please order our booklet *The Questions and Answers Book* from our website at cgi.org or read the booklet there online.

According to the church fathers, as early as the

second century A.D., the purpose of the harrowing of hell was the liberation of the righteous dead like Abraham, David, and John the Baptist.⁵⁰ But the problem for Catholics is that the belief implies souls can be delivered from hell, which has been considered heresy since Augustine laid down the firm distinction between purgatory and hell.⁵¹ The Council of Trent decreed the harrowing should simply be seen as a metaphor of Christ's victory over death and evil.⁵²

In order to accommodate the problem, another region of the afterlife, limbo, a shadowy world of neither pain nor joy, has been accepted since Aquinas.⁵³ There, according to contemporary teaching, the righteous who died before Christ (or some of them—John the Baptist definitely in heaven) and the innocent who have not been redeemed, like unbaptized babies, spin out eternity in a kind of numb nirvana.⁵⁴ But only one papal document mentions limbo and belief is not mandatory.⁵⁵

Perhaps the origins of the story of Christ's

descent into hell also come from paganism. The harrowing of hell recalls other gods' epic tussles with the forces of destruction: the underworld raided by Herakles and Orpheus; the victory of Osiris over Set and his triumph as judge over the living and the dead.⁵⁶ We are not saying the Catholics and Orthodox consciously used these stories, but the early church fathers were perhaps spiritually influenced to misinterpret Scripture (Ephesians 6:12).

But getting back to Innanna and Dumazi, notice some more connections to Christ and Mary. In the religion of Sumer, Inanna was the "lady of heaven," and Dumuzi was the guardian of flocks, a shepherd. His name means "true son," and in some Sumerian laments he is called Duma, the child.⁵⁷ Yes, this sounds like Christ and Mary, and this and other similarities between the ancient mother goddess and son have led some to believe the story of Christ was just a myth originating in ancient pagan stories. But further study of the pagan "christs" and the true Messiah will

reveal some important differences. Finally, let us not forget that Satan has made an effort to deceive the whole world (Revelation 12:9). One of the ways he does this is by casting doubt on the truth of Jesus Christ and influencing people to misinterpret His Word. Now some will argue Mary is a biblical figure and not a pagan goddess. No doubt this is true, but the degree to which some Christians go in their devotion to Mary is not consistent with what Scripture has to say about her. In my view, this excess devotion gets into the realm of idolatry. I grew up in the Greek Orthodox Church and witnessed the excess and gratuitous devotion to Mary, which is not supported by Scripture. As society has gotten more sophisticated, so has Satan's deception. He has created a figure and inserted it into Christianity rather than outside Christianity—to take some of the focus off of Christ. In my mind, this is not much different than the apostasy of the ancient Israelites who mixed the worship of the true God with other gods. In Judges 2:13 we read about Israel forsaking

the worship of Yahweh and worshipping Baal and Ashtaroth. Ashtaroth was the name of the mother goddess figure at that time. Later, in the time of Jeremiah, Israel is rebuked for worshipping the “queen of heaven” (Jeremiah 44:17–19).

Mother goddess worship was very popular in the ancient Roman Empire into which Christianity began. Inscriptions prove that the two (the mother and child) received divine honors, not only in Italy and especially at Rome, but also in the provinces, particularly in Africa, Spain, Portugal, France, Germany and Bulgaria.⁵⁸

One of the best examples of the carryover from paganism to Christianity is mother goddess worship. Many pagans were drawn to Christianity, but they were not willing to give up all their prior beliefs. Just as ancient Israel mixed the worship of the true God with false gods, Christianity began to mix with prior pagan beliefs. As we have seen and will further see, the parallels between mother goddess worship and Marian veneration is striking.

Did this just happen by coincidence? Were churchmen looking for more converts? Or is there something more sinister afoot?

Hopefully this booklet will answer those questions.

As we noted earlier, no great emphasis was placed on Mary in the early centuries of the Church. This point is admitted by the

Catholic Encyclopedia also: "Devotion to Our Blessed Lady in its ultimate analysis must be regarded as a practical application of the doctrine of the Communion of the Saints.

Seeing that the doctrine is not contained, at least explicitly, in the earlier forms of the Apostles' Creed, there is perhaps no ground for surprise if we do not meet with any clear traces of the cultus of the Blessed Virgin in the first Christians centuries," the worship of Mary being a later development.⁵⁹

By the early part of the fourth century we begin to see evidence of Marian worship influenced by the goddess worship of the pagans. At this time such worship was frowned upon by the church. This is evident

by the words of Epiphanius (bishop of Salamis 315–403 A.D.) who denounced the Collyridians (Christian heretics) for worshiping Mary as a goddess and offering cakes to her.⁶⁰ She should be held in high honor, he said, “But let no one adore Mary.”

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At the beginning of the fifth century the Roman Empire was experiencing changes. Emperor Theodosius’s ban on pagan worship and his destruction of statues and temples to gods and goddesses were keenly felt by the country people, now forced into the cities for safety from the invading barbarians.⁶²

Historian Pamela Berger observes that “The exclusion of any female images from the Christian concept of deity was particularly hard on agricultural people whose experience with the growth and life-producing forces had been connected with the female principle for millennia. At the same time, Christian doctrine was becoming devoid of all imagery incorporating a female aspect into the divine.”

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Approximately thirty years later at the Council of Ephesus (431 A.D.) the church provided Mary with the title “Theotokos,” the “Godbearer” or “Mother of God.” A number of commentators today attribute the enthusiasm for this decision to the city’s having long been the seat of worship to Diana; a new church dedicated to Mary would soon rise over the old temple to the goddess which had been destroyed in 400.⁶⁴ Another example that Marian worship developed from pagan goddess worship pertains to the names given to Mary. For example, Mary is often called “the Madonna.” According to Hislop, this phrase is the translation of one of the titles for the Babylonian goddess. In deified form, Nimrod was known as Baal. The title of his wife, the female divinity, would be the equivalent of Baalti. In English, this word means, “My Lady,” in Latin, “Mea Domina,” and in Italian, it is corrupted into the well-known “Madonna.”⁶⁵ Isis, the Egyptian goddess figure, was known as the “mother of god.”

This same title was applied to Mary at the Council of Ephesus, which was presided over by St. Cyril of Alexandria (Egypt). Among the Phoenicians, the mother goddess was known as “The Lady of the Sea.” Mary also is known by a similar title, “Our Lady, Star of the Sea,” among certain sea faring locations. This could just be a coincidence, or it could be some type of syncretism among those who passed on the old beliefs.

Chapter 4 - The Immaculate Conception

The doctrine of the Immaculate Conception is a Roman Catholic doctrine that refers to Mary the mother of Jesus. The doctrine states that Mary was born without “original sin.” Original sin stems from the disobedience of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Since that first sin in the garden, all of humanity is born with this predilection to sin due to our original parents Adam and Eve. The Orthodox Church believes Mary was sinless from birth, but was not born without original (or

“ancestral”) sin. The Church of God International does not believe in original sin (as defined by the Catholic Church) but believes that all humanity, including Mary, are born with a carnal nature that leads us to sin during our physical life.

To better understand this Catholic doctrine we need to understand their dualistic view of life. According to the dualistic view, at conception a body is formed in the womb of a mother as a result of insemination of a father.⁶⁶ At the moment of the conception of the body, a soul is created and infused into the body.⁶⁷ This process is called animation, that is, the implantation of an anima (which is the Latin term for the soul) into the body.⁶⁸ Each soul is infused into the body with the stain of the original sin.⁶⁹ Under normal circumstances, such a stain is supposed to be removed at baptism soon after the birth of the child.⁷⁰ In the case of Mary, however, the stain of original sin was not removed at baptism, but was excluded altogether from her soul at the time of conception.⁷¹ Thus, the

conception of Mary was immaculate because she was exempted from the presence of original sin in her soul and from inherited sin in her body.⁷²

To understand how some Christians came to believe in Mary's Immaculate Conception, we need to understand early Christian views on virginity. The roots of the dogma of Mary's perpetual virginity may have multiple sources. Some thought the end of the world was near, so they chose not to have children. Others thought renouncing sex would make them holier. Beginning in the second century, small groups of Christian men and women committed to sexual renunciation scattered throughout the eastern Mediterranean as missionaries of celibacy.⁷³ As the enthusiasm for permanent sexual renunciation grew, it won over bishops like Athanasius, Basil, and Augustine.⁷⁴

Some within Christianity thought sexual intercourse was sinful in some way. Augustine, an early influencer in Catholic dogma (354–430 A.D.), taught that original sin was

transmitted by the act of procreation.

Augustine suggested that either the hereditary taint was transmitted through the male genitals themselves during intercourse, and that the body itself, not the soul, was genetically flawed by the fall of man, or that because a child cannot be conceived outside the sexual embrace, which necessarily involves the sin of passion, the child is stained from that moment.⁷⁵ Ambrose (340–397), the Bishop of Milan, and Jerome (347–420), an influential priest and theologian, also thought the celibate life was more spiritual. Jerome even wrote a treatise against the Stoic philosopher Helvidius defending the perpetual virginity of Mary. But the views of these influential Christian leaders are in opposition to the God-ordained creation of sex in marriage (Genesis 1:28; Hebrews 13:4).

To better understand Augustine's theology of original sin we need to understand Augustine's thinking before he became a Christian. Prior to becoming a Christian, Augustine was influenced by both Manichaeism and by the

writing of Plotinus. Both Mani and Plotinus had a distaste for the world, a profound sense of a breach between things of the flesh and things of the spirit, and a restless quest for spiritual fulfillment through detachment from earthly concerns and pleasures.⁷⁶ Plotinus wrote, “The soul has become ugly, by being immersed in what is not itself, by its descent into the body.”⁷⁷

The Eastern Church (Orthodox) also had influential leaders that mirrored the teaching of the Western Church with a negative perception of the female. John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople, warned: “The whole of her bodily beauty is nothing less than phlegm, blood, bile, rheum, and the fluid of digested food.... If you consider what is stored up behind those lovely eyes, the angle of the nose, the mouth and the cheeks you will agree that the well-proportioned body is merely a whitened sepulcher.”⁷⁸

It was therefore essential that the Son of the Highest should not be contaminated by any of this sinfulness, inherent in the whole human

species but more pronounced in the female.⁷⁹ Thus during the ascetic revolt of Christianity's first centuries, the need to exempt the mother of Christ from tainted sexuality and to proclaim her virgin purity exerted an overwhelming pressure on definitions of doctrine and on scriptural commentaries.⁸⁰ Many Christian theologians were influenced by Neo-Platonism (Plotinus was an early adherent). When that happened, Christian asceticism expressed itself in a rejection of the body that appeared to deny that God had created it, and therefore in a revulsion at sexuality that equated it with immorality.⁸¹ Because most writers on the subject were men, and unmarried men at that, the revulsion easily became a misogynous contempt for women as the devil's snare to corrupt the *vita angelica* of the ascetic or celibate man.⁸² The idea that sex was sinful helped influence some that Mary had to be virgin in order to be the "God-bearer." Finally, in 451 A.D. at the Council of Chalcedon, the concept of Mary's perpetual virginity was recognized by the

Church.

This poses a problem when we investigate scriptures that clearly teach Jesus had brothers and sisters (Matthew 13:55–56; Mark 6:3; John 2:12; John 7:3; Galatians 1:18–19; 1 Corinthians 9:5). The Eastern Church Fathers taught that these “brothers” were step-brothers from a previous marriage Joseph possibly had. The Western Church Fathers taught these “brothers” were first or second cousins of Jesus. These reasons are used due to the Orthodox (East) and Catholic (West) teaching that Mary remained a virgin for her entire life. There are some problems with the idea that Jesus did not have younger siblings. Tertullian, Hegesippus, and John Chrysostom, among other fathers of the Church, denied the perpetual virginity of Mary and affirmed that the “brothers and sisters” of Jesus which the Gospels mention (Matthew 13:54–55; Mark 6:3) were Mary’s children.⁸³ Another problem is the census of Caesar Augustus addressed in Luke 2. If Joseph had at least six children from a previous marriage, we would expect them to

travel with him as a family, especially since every family member was expected to register.⁸⁴ Luke 2:5 only mentions Mary and Joseph registering. Another problem is Matthew 1:24–25. Here it mentions that Joseph “knew her not, till she had brought forth her firstborn son.” The implication here is Joseph and Mary had not been together sexually until after Jesus was born. Some argue

the Greek wording does not have to mean they did come together sexually afterward. But why would they not, since they were married and there is nothing wrong with sexual relations in marriage (Hebrews 13:4). As we have already seen there was an anti-sexual theme in early Christianity.

Before we can understand the development of the perpetual virginity of Mary we must understand what came before this notion.

There is only one direct mention of Mary in New Testament texts pertaining to the period following the death of Jesus (see Acts 1:14). We do not find reference to Mary or her

family in material dating from the late first or early second centuries.⁸⁵ Tradition tells us Mary's parents were Joachim and Anne. There is no reference of these people before the apocryphal writings known as the Protoevangelium of James (140–170 A.D.), the Gospel of Pseudo Matthew (seventh–ninth century) and the Book of the Birth of Mary (second century).⁸⁶ It is doubtful we can trust these sources. They were written long after the events they describe. In the first two cases, the authors tried to deceive the reader, falsely attributing the work to Matthew and James, important figures in the primitive church.⁸⁷

Taking a closer look at the Protoevangelium of James, we begin to see why the idea that Mary was “ever Virgin” begins to take shape. It's depiction of Saint Joseph as an elderly widower made Mary's virginity more secure in the minds of many and provided a handy way of explaining that the “brothers and sisters of the Lord” were children from Joseph's first marriage.⁸⁸ The book also states Mary was

conceived without sex due to the infertility of her mother Anna. Scholars believe the book was written sometime between 140 and 170 A.D. The book also asserts Mary was a virgin before, during, and after the birth of Christ. We must remember this Protoevangelium of James (also called the Gospel of James) is an apocryphal book. It is not accepted as a valid biblical book, and for good reason. Scholars believe the book may have been written by the Ebionites. The group was a sect within early Christianity. They also fell into a praise of sexual asceticism, to the point of considering virginity to be something morally superior to matrimony.⁸⁹ Even Catholic scholars admit the idea of Mary's virginal childbirth does not come from Scripture. Catholic priest, J.M. Carda has noted: "The Holy Scriptures do not mention the historical origin of Mary; nor do they expressly allude to any privilege in her conception."⁹⁰

The idea of Mary's perpetual virginity began to gain traction in the fourth century. The Second Council of Constantinople

proclaimed her perpetual virginity in 381 A.D. Later, in 649 A.D. Mary's perpetual virginity becomes a dogma of the church. During the Middle Ages, other famous theologians supported the concept of Mary's perpetual virginity. On the Catholic side, Thomas Aquinas was a proponent of Mary always being a virgin. For example, he argues that if Mary had intercourse with Joseph after the birth of Jesus, that would be "an insult to the Holy Ghost, whose shrine was the vaginal womb wherein he had formed the flesh of Christ; wherefore it is unbecoming that it should be desecrated by intercourse with man."⁹¹ On the Protestant side, Martin Luther wrote, "It is an article of faith that Mary is Mother of the Lord and still a virgin.... Christ we believe, came forth from a womb left perfectly intact."⁹² Calvin referred to Mary as "Holy Virgin."⁹³ and Swiss reformer Ulrich Zwingli (1484–1531) said, "I firmly believe that Mary, according to the words of the Gospel, as a pure Virgin brought forth for us the Son of God and in childbirth and after

childbirth forever remained a pure, intact Virgin.”⁹⁴

One scripture that is sometimes used to set Mary apart from the rest of humanity is Luke 1:28. The verse states that Mary was “highly favored,” which could be translated “full of grace.” Once again, Catholic J.M. Carda makes it clear that the word for grace and favor here, *kekharitomene*, does not equal the grace bestowed on Christ. Carda states that *kekharitomene*, “does not indicate itself a fullness of grace, as indicated by, on the other hand, the expression *pleres kharitos* that is applied to Christ (John 1:14).... The word addressed to her by the angel meant simply blessed.”⁹⁵ In fact, the same word used to describe Mary’s grace in Luke 1:28 is also used to describe Christian’s in Ephesians 1:6. The point being, the grace bestowed on Mary is no greater or lesser than the grace bestowed on other believers. This verse also mentions that Mary is blessed among women. Some take this to mean she is above all women. That is not the case. In Judges 5:24, Jael receives a

similar blessing among women. No one is saying Jael is set apart like Mary.

The idea that Mary was ever-Virgin goes hand in hand with the idea that she was sinless.

Both of these ideas eventually meld as the Catholic Church developed its concept of the “Immaculate Conception” of Mary. For the first couple centuries of Christianity, none of the writers mention that Mary was without sin. The first reference to a sinless conception of Mary is from Julian of Eclanum, during the fifth century A.D.⁹⁶ Julian was a Pelagian and did not believe in Augustine’s concept of “original sin.” Augustine did believe Mary was born with original sin, but her new spiritual birth, due to the grace of God, had freed her from it.⁹⁷ As paradoxical as it seems, close to a millennium later, the Catholic Church would embrace the heretic’s position and reject that of Augustine.⁹⁸ Even Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), another giant in the Catholic Church, believed Mary had sinned. In the last work written by Aquinas, *Brevis Summa de Fide*, Aquinas states: “Certainly

[Mary] was conceived with original sin, as is natural.... If she would not have been born with original sin, she would not have needed to be redeemed by Christ, and this being so, Christ would not be the universal Redeemer of men, which would abolish the dignity of Christ.”⁹⁹

Through the efforts of Duns Scotus, the doctrine that Mary was born without original sin began gaining ground in the heart of Catholicism near the end of the thirteenth century.¹⁰⁰ In the fifteenth century the claims of Mary’s Immaculate Conception were causing division. In 1439, the Council of Basel, which was not considered an ecumenical council, stated that belief in the “Immaculate Conception” was in line with the Catholic faith. The Council of Trent, in 1546, marked an advancement in immaculatism by affirming: “We do not wish to enclose in the decree in which original sin is dealt with, the blessed and immaculate Virgin Mary, Mother of God.”¹⁰¹ In other words Mary had no original sin. In the same way, it was insisted

that in all her life she never committed any sin, not even a trivial one.¹⁰² Two other separate decisions of the Council (Trent 1545-1563) were much more momentous in Mariology, however: that the unwritten traditions of the Church and its members were to be held in equal honor as Scripture; and that the Vulgate Bible was the only canonical text.¹⁰³ Regarding the first of these decisions, Owen Chadwick has pointed out that “It is clear that some of those who framed it were thinking not of an unwritten heritage of doctrine, but of certain practices, like the keeping of Sunday or the baptism of infants.”¹⁰⁴ But whatever the intention of the councilors, the decree gave traditional beliefs, like the legends and miracles that fleshed out Mary of Nazareth, a claim to canonical authority.¹⁰⁵

The ideas of Duns Scotus were being attacked by those who looked to Scripture as to what to believe in. Scripture makes it clear (Romans 3:23) that all have sinned, and that includes Mary. Only Christ is without sin (2

Corinthians 5:21; 1 John 3:5; Hebrews 4:15). In the sixteenth century in England, men at Oxford actually tore up folios of Duns Scotus and used them as waste paper.¹⁰⁶ Belief in the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception “did not crumble, but built new foundations that it formed according to sixteenth century principles, in the Bible, interpreted allegorically in the patristic tradition.”¹⁰⁷ During the eighteenth century the Church was abandoned altogether for the first time by the intellectual elite of Europe. “Belief in the Immaculate Conception became an act of defiance against rationalism.... [W]hen Pope Pius IX proclaimed *Ineffabilis Deus*, he was announcing that the Pope’s authority to command the beliefs of Christendom had not been shattered by the philosophical and political turmoil of the age of skepticism.”¹⁰⁸ The official dogma of the Immaculate Conception (*Ineffabilis Deus*) was proclaimed by Pope Pius IX on December 8, 1854. Pius defined the dogma by saying: “We declare, pronounce and define that the doctrine which

asserts that the Blessed Virgin Mary, from the first moment of her conception, by a singular grace and privilege of Almighty God and in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, Savior of the human race, was preserved free from every stain of original sin is a doctrine revealed by God and, for this reason, must be firmly and constantly believed by the faithful.”¹⁰⁹ “The intent of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception...is revealed in the encyclical *Ubi Primum*...that through her are obtained every hope, every grace, and all salvation. For this is His will, that we obtain everything through Mary.”¹¹⁰ With language like that no wonder Mary is such a powerful figure in the Catholic Church. “By proclaiming dogma a belief that had been stormily discussed since the twelfth century, he also asserted the position of the pope as the single, divinely inspired head of the Church and implied that the Church alone was the true spiritual guide and not the individual conscience as the men of the Reformation and their heirs had maintained.... It was only logical that Pius IX

followed up the Bull of 1854 with another, in 1870, proclaiming the infallibility of the pope a dogma of the church.”¹¹¹ According to Justo Gonzales, a “respected Church historian...Pius IX was the first pope ever to define a dogma on his own, without the support of a counsel.”¹¹²

As we can see, the concept that Mary was born without sin and that she lived a sinless life is not based on Scripture. Even the Catholic Encyclopedia makes this clear: “no direct or categorical and stringent proof of the dogma [Immaculate Conception] can be brought forward from Scripture.”¹¹³

Chapter 5 - The Assumption of the Virgin Mary

Another major Marian doctrine of the Catholic Church is the Assumption of the Virgin Mary. This doctrine states that Mary ascended into heaven body and soul. This doctrine was officially stated by Pope Pius XII on November 1, 1950 in the Papal Bull *Munificentissimus Deus*. The Orthodox

Church does believe in the bodily assumption of Mary, but does not proclaim it as a dogma. Pope Pius XII cited many ancient texts in support of the belief, but none of them came from the apocryphal stories of the passing of the Virgin.¹¹⁴ He referred the faithful to the eighth-century homilies of Germanus of Constantinople, Modestus of Jerusalem, Andrew of Crete, and John Damascene, who had themselves used the Apocrypha as sources,

but he omitted all mention of this or of the legend.¹¹⁵

Some scholars believe that the apocryphal tales

of the Virgin's death, in which she is spared mortal decay, originated among the Christian community in Egypt.¹¹⁶ A long tradition existed there that viewed incorruption as a privilege of true greatness.¹¹⁷

For the first few hundred years of Christianity there is no mention on how Mary died. The first mention of her demise comes from Epiphanius, the Bishop of Salamis in the

fourth century. He stated that nobody knew what happened to Mary. By the end of the fifth century an apocryphal gospel called, The Journeys of the Blessed Mary (Transitus Beatae Mariae), had gained popularity.¹¹⁸ This apocryphal Gospel gave rise to a score of Transitus accounts in Coptic, Greek, Latin, Syriac, Arabic, Ethiopic, and Armenian.¹¹⁹ Some of the roots of the Assumption doctrine also can be found in the apocryphal Gospel of John (end of the fourth century).¹²⁰ These apocryphal works contain heretical elements. For example, Jesus is seen as an angelic being and not divine. Another example is Paul not being considered an apostle in the same category as the Twelve (pointing again to the Ebionites).¹²¹ Finally, the believer appears subject to complicated rituals designed to free him from the wiles of demons at the moment of his death.¹²²

Some scholars believe that the apocryphal tales

of the Virgin's death, in which she is spared mortal decay, sometimes even given a

“garment of incorruptibility” by Jesus originated among Christians in Egypt.¹²³ The Catholic and Orthodox tradition around Mary has been to define her as someone of true greatness. But the scriptural record does not back their tradition. In fact, as we saw in the first section of this booklet, Scripture looks at Mary the same as other believers. Evidence for this can be found in Matthew 12:46–50 where Jesus states that only those who do the will of His Father should be considered His brother, sister, or mother. Here Jesus is equating His mother with any other believer.

Gregory of Tours was the first church figure to explicitly state his belief in the Assumption of Mary. He based his belief on the apocryphal work, *The Journeys of the Blessed Mary*.

Many serious scholars believe that and the other apocryphal works on Mary’s life were made up. Contrary to the claim of Pope Pius XII that the Assumption of Mary is a “divinely revealed truth dogma,” the historical reality is that the Catholic Church has developed this

teaching on the basis of heretical writings that were officially condemned by the early Church.¹²⁴ Sometime between 494 and 496 A.D. Pope Gelasius issued a decree entitled *Decretum de Libris Canonicis Ecclesiasticis et Apocryphis*, in which he officially set forth the distinction between canonical writings to be accepted and the apocryphal writings to be rejected.¹²⁵ Among the apocryphal writings to be rejected, Gelasius includes *Liber qui appellatur Transitus*, id est *Assumptio Sanctae Mariae*, Apocryphus (the apocryphal book called *Transitus*, which is the Assumption of Holy Mary).¹²⁶ This entire decree and its condemnation was reaffirmed by Pope Hormisdas in the sixth century, around A.D. 520.¹²⁷

Another issue that arises with the dogma of the Assumption of Mary is the question as to whether or not she died. This is a debated point among Catholics due to the Pope Pius XII statement, "Having completed the course of her earthly life, [she] was assumed body and soul into heavenly glory." Pope Paul VI's

Constitution is equally circumspect: “the immaculate Virgin was taken up body and soul into heavenly glory upon the completion of her earthly sojourn.”¹²⁸ Most Catholic theologians would probably admit that Mary had to die before going to heaven, but many Catholics do believe she did not experience death. Once again, these ideas fly in the face of Scripture. Hebrews 9:27 tells us that all men (and women) die. In John 3:13 we read that only Christ has ascended into heaven. Doctrines like the Assumption do a disservice to the Word of God. The doctrine gives Mary a goddess-like position and place. Notice how the words of St. Bernard on Mary further this goddess-like concept. Addressing Mary, Bernard says: “Since you have heard joyous and glad tidings, let us hear the joyous reply we long for.... The angel is waiting for your reply. It is time for him to return to the one who sent him.... The price of our salvation is being offered you. If you consent, we shall immediately be set free.... Doleful Adam and his unhappy offspring, exiled from Paradise,

implore you, kind Virgin, to give this answer.... For it the whole world is waiting, bowed down at your feet.”¹²⁹ Falling at someone’s feet implies we are worshipping them, the Bible is clear we should only worship God (Revelation 19:10).

Furthermore, notice how the Catholic Catechism expands on the meaning of the doctrine, saying: “Taken up to heaven she did not lay aside this saving office but by her manifold intercession continues to bring us the gifts of eternal salvation.... Therefore the Blessed Virgin is invoked in the Church under the titles of Advocate, Helper, Benefactress and Mediatrix.”¹³⁰ This dogma is giving Mary god-like status. Scripture makes it clear only Christ can save our souls from death (Acts 4:12). Is there a danger in giving Mary this lofty status? Yes, remember Satan is trying to diminish our relationship with Christ, the only One who can save us. By building up the presence of Mary many sincere Christians are focusing on Mary, who has no power to do anything. What is even more sinister is the

deception in focusing on a Mother goddesslike figure.

In his article, "Mary and the Pope: Remarks on the Dogma of the Assumption of Mary," Professor Hermann Sasses clearly acknowledges that "The Marian cult was the Christian replacement for the cults of the great female deities, which played such a great role in the life of pre-Christian pagan humanity, the holy virgins and divine mothers, the Babylonian Ishtar, whose cult had already forced its way into Israel, the Syrian Queen of Heaven, the great mother of Asia Minor, the Egyptian Isis, whose favor in the West is testified to by the long use of the name 'Isidor' among Jews and Christians. But unfortunately it was not only a Christian replacement for a pagan religion, it was likewise a pagan religion in Christian guise. The Marian cult is the last of the great cults of a female divinity, which made its way from the Orient into the Roman world, since in the second Punic War Rome had adopted the cult of the Magna Mater of Asia Minor."131

In closing this section I'd like to reiterate the importance of going to Scripture to determine what we are to believe. As we have already seen the idea that Mary was bodily assumed into heaven comes from sources that are not biblical. These sources have an unknown author or the given author is false. These sources contain errors in comparison to the Bible, and they were written hundreds of years after Mary died. The Bible gives us no support to put Mary in the position the Catholic and Orthodox churches do.

Chapter 6 - Apparitions and the Virgin Mary

One of the arguments made by those who believe Mary is in heaven and can answer our prayers has to do with the supposed apparitions of Mary throughout history. Those who believe in venerating Mary argue Mary has spoken to believers in these apparitions, and the fact she is seen and speaks is evidence she is conscious and alive in heaven where she

can petition her Son for us. No doubt, some of these experiences are real to the people who experience them, but there are many other explanations (than the belief that it is Mary who died 2,000 years ago that they are experiencing).

Before discussing some of these famous incidents, I'd like to make sure we are all aware of some scriptures that are important when we discuss the phenomena of apparitions. It's important to recognize that Satan deceives the whole world (Revelation 12:9). He is out to devour us (1 Peter 5:8) because he knows we can become part of God's family (Hebrews 2) and acquire a position greater than he ever had (Hebrews 2:5–8; Revelation 12:7–9; Isaiah 14:12–16). God allows this warfare (1 Timothy 1:18; Ephesians 6:12) between the forces of the devil and the followers of God to take place because it helps refine us (1 Peter 1:7). Notice that the Bible tells us Satan speaks lies and is the father of lies (John 8:44). He can blind the minds of unbelievers (2 Corinthians 4:4), but

he can also deceive believers in Jesus. Notice carefully 2 Corinthians 11:13–15. Here we read Satan can be disguised as an angel of light and his servants can be disguised as servants of righteousness. I believe this can happen even among people who say they believe in Christ. Notice there will be wolves in sheep's clothing (Matthew 7:15). Acts 20:29–30 says they will not spare the flock, and truth will be distorted. These sheep must be seen as part of the flock in order for these statements to be made. Finally, we read in 2 Thessalonians 2:9 that Satan will provide power to the Beast or False Prophet at the end of the age to perform signs and lying wonders. Many speculate that if the anti-Christ can manifest false miracles at the end of the age, obviously Satan has the power to produce these lying wonders now, too. Matthew 24:24 confirms this.

One famous Catholic story about the power of Satan comes to us from the Middle Ages. In the sixteenth century a Sister Magdalena of

the Cross was a Franciscan nun who lived in Spain. Throughout her life she performed various miracles, which included stigmata (wounds on the body similar to the nail wounds of Christ), public levitations, and a decades-long fast. Prior to her death the nun admitted that it was all a hoax. The stigmata were self-inflicted, and the fasting was a hoax. Her levitations, like her ability to know the future, were real, the nun said, but far from divinely inspired; these powers, Magdalena said, had been granted her by Satan in exchange for her soul.¹³² Before she died, the church administered the rite of exorcism. So far we have established the ability for Satan to deceive, and make the bad look good. Now let's take a closer look at the apparitions of the Virgin Mary.

According to Father Peter Gumpel, the Vatican had never officially recognized any apparition of Mary. This was something, the priest added, that even most Catholics did not know.¹³³ Those who study these phenomena provide five possible explanations. First of all,

the apparitions could be real manifestations of the Virgin Mary. Second, the experience could be due to hysteria or mental illness in those who experience this sort of thing. A third scenario is these events could be hoaxes. Fourth, the experiences could be some type of experience that is occurring in the mind or brain of those who are seeing something. Many of the seers of the apparitions were teens or children, at least in the last two hundred years. Child psychology tells us young people's visions could be unconscious imaginative projections. To children this would seem like reality. Finally, the fifth possibility is these experiences are the work of the devil and his demons. Other theories about apparitions that could fall into category two or four above include Recurrent Spontaneous Psychokinesis (RSPK) and Altered State of Consciousness (ASC). RSPK is due to seizures in the nervous system, which can bring on visions. An ASC can occur through training or drugs, but others have the ability to naturally bring it about. Let's take a

closer look at some of the more famous apparition incidents that have occurred over the past couple hundred years.

When you begin to do some research on the various visionaries over the years you find some striking similarities. Emotional loss and unhappy families provide a common thread linking their lives prior to the apparitions.¹³⁴ It is also striking how many nineteenth-century apparition sites were surrounded by places of Marian devotion and pilgrimages, without themselves having previously attracted much attention.¹³⁵

Nineteenth-century Marian apparitions occurred in clusters at times of exceptional political or social stress.¹³⁶ The same was true of the period that began in 1914, as war, political upheaval, and economic crisis formed the backdrop to new apparitions across Europe.¹³⁷ The 1980s brought another wave of new apparitions of the Virgin Mary. The majority of these were reported outside Europe, in Africa and Central and Latin America.¹³⁸ Just like earlier European

apparitions, the more recent apparitions developed in a climate of economic issues, political problems, and fears.

In an Orthodox Church in Queens, for example, an icon of St. Irene began weeping during the 1989 Gulf War.¹³⁹ Indeed publicity surrounding St. Irene's seemed to trigger a mini flood of weeping icons across the mid-Atlantic region.¹⁴⁰ But miraculous events also occur in other religions. Some Hasidic Jews in New York claim that their religious leader can effect miraculous cures; a group of Muslim tariquas are said to perform mystical healings; and an eighty-four year old Buddhist nun in Thailand is believed to have cured a range of illnesses from cancer to paralysis by touch and herbal medicines.¹⁴¹ Let's not forget even in nonreligious contexts there are experiences of paranormal phenomena.

Apparitions of the Virgin Mary can be traced back at least to the third century. St. Gregory the Wonderworker stated that Mary had appeared to him with John the Baptist. In

1491, a group of Alsatian villagers reported that God's wrath was about to come down. This was the first apparition that was endorsed by a pope. Possibly the most important apparition in history occurred near Mexico City in 1531. In this encounter, Juan Diego said he met a beautiful young woman who claimed to be the "eternal virgin, holy Mother of the true God." The apparition told Juan to tell the bishop of Mexico she wanted a church built at the spot he saw her. The bishop wanted some sort of proof that it was truly the Virgin. He asked for roses that would bloom in mid-winter. Juan Diego found the roses and wrapped them in his cloak. Later Juan Diego produced an image of the Virgin that was miraculously produced on his cloak. About 10 million people a year visit the church at Guadeloupe to view the image on the cloak.

The most popular visions of Mary over the last two hundred years or so have occurred in the following locations: La Salette, France (1846); Lourdes, France (1858); Pontmain, France

(1871); Fatima, Portugal (1917); Beauraing, Belgium (1932–1933); Banneux, Belgium (1933); Garabandal, Spain (1961–1965); and Medjugorje, Bosnia-Herzegovina (1981–). All of the visionaries in these incidents were children and teens ranging in age from 7 to 18. The average age of them all is only 9. In many of these incidents it is the community, not the seers, that makes the initial identification of the phenomena as an apparition of the Virgin Mary.¹⁴² Following La Salette, people expected Mary to bring news and issue commands, and there was intense pressure on seers to deliver messages.¹⁴³ People asked the kids to tell them what the apparition said and wanted. In response, some of the messages may have been produced, albeit unconsciously, in order to satisfy community expectation.¹⁴⁴ This view is supported by the fact that in all cases of visions with messages it takes time, frequently several separate experiences, for the message or

messages to emerge.¹⁴⁵

Let's take a closer look at the apparitions at Lourdes, Fatima, and Medjugorje, which are three of the most famous. The visions at Lourdes, France began on February 11, 1858. The seer was 14-year-old Bernadette Soubirous. She claimed to have had visions on all but three of the days between February 18 and March 4. On February 11, Bernadette and her sister and a friend went out to gather some firewood. They said they came upon a small beautiful lady at the Massabielle grotto. On the first visit the lady did not reveal who she was, but told the girl to come back. On return visits the lady revealed herself as the "Immaculate Conception."

Interestingly enough, the Pope defined this dogma only four years before. Bernadette reported all this to her parish priest, who was skeptical until he heard that the lady referred to the "Immaculate Conception," of which Bernadette was not knowledgeable. The lady also informed Bernadette to dig in the ground at a certain spot and to drink from the water

that would bubble up there. Cures were reported from drinking the water there. Many miracles have said to have been documented there.

Thousands of people have traveled to Lourdes looking for a miracle. Some have attested to having been healed. But is this evidence that God or the Virgin Mary did the healing? In his book *Cured: The Life-Changing Science of Spontaneous Healing*, Jeffrey Rediger examines numerous examples of spontaneous healing. In many of these cases the people who experience the “miracle” are not seeking help from God or a higher power. Rediger’s theory is that healing may occur for a variety of reasons, chief among them is the idea these people make a major change in their life. For someone who has been suffering from a longterm

disease, planning and traveling to Lourdes could be a trigger to reengage their immune system in such a way as to activate it to fight the disease.

Another astonishing fact is that no one who

lives in and around Lourdes has been “cured” since the first healings in 1858.¹⁴⁶ Another possibility Rediger addresses is how many times belief is enough to help the mind heal the body. This is not to disallow the fact that God can heal, but why would God want people to believe the Virgin Mary is involved, when Scripture is clear that she is sleeping in her grave (1 Corinthians 15:22–23, 52)? The tension here comes about due to the idea that Satan would not heal people. So how could these apparitions be a deception from Satan? This will be addressed at the end of this section, but we need to get into some background information on this incident. Central to Bernadette’s message about the apparitions was the ceremonies and bathing that many pilgrims perform at the Lourdes water source Bernadette found. But throughout this region of France (Pyrenees), villagers were known for celebrating the festival of Saint John the Baptist (and the summer solstice) by rolling in the dew and worshipping at local fountains.¹⁴⁷ Bernadette

was likely to have known such tales of miraculous discovery and healing fountains, especially those of Betharram and Garaison, the pilgrimage sites nearest to Lourdes and the most famous of the region.¹⁴⁸ Betharram is only a few miles from the grotto at Lourdes. In its (Betharram's) founding legend, shepherds were guarding their flocks at the base of the mountain when a ray of light in the bushes showed them the way to a statue of the Virgin.¹⁴⁹ Bernadette reportedly visited Betharram, and stories tell how her treasured rosary was probably bought there.¹⁵⁰ While in the imposing seventeenth-century church she presumably prayed before an altar, which showed a rendering of the Virgin appearing to shepherds in the mountains.¹⁵¹ Most important of all was the story of Angleze de Sagazan, a 12-year-old shepherdess who saw the Virgin at Garaison in the early sixteenth century.¹⁵²

Here was a tale of an innocent, ignorant pious girl, who spoke nothing more and successfully petitioned the authorities to

undertake a costly religious venture.¹⁵³ Just like what happened with Bernadette. Angleze went to live in a convent while Garaison became a pilgrimage center.

The smallness of the apparition is less surprising if one considers that, across the Pyrenean chain, the most sacred and ancient representations of the Virgin were generally tiny.¹⁵⁴ By first calling the apparition *uo petito damizela*, Bernadette chose the term used to describe fairies, the little women of the forest.¹⁵⁵

The people of Lourdes were unsure of what Bernadette may have seen. It could have been a fairy queen, because Bernadette's repeated requests for the vision's identity were reminiscent of fairy queen's reticence to reveal her name.¹⁵⁶

Another interesting point with Bernadette pertains to her response to the question about which paintings of the Virgin Mary looked most like the apparition she had seen.

Bernadette insisted the local statue of the Virgin was most like her.¹⁵⁷

The Fatima apparition occurred in Fatima, Portugal between May and October of 1917. On May 5, 1917, just eight days before the first apparition, Pope Benedict XV publicly called for a renewal of prayer life, and he especially mentioned that prayers be directed “to the great Mother of God.”¹⁵⁸ Three young children, Lucia Santos and her two cousins, claimed to have been visited by the Virgin Mary six times. In the vision that occurred in July the Virgin Mary gave three secrets to the children. The final vision occurred in October 1917 and the Virgin promised a miracle on that day. Somewhere between 30,000 and 100,000 people showed up for this event. According to some accounts, after some rain the sun broke through the sky and appeared as a spinning disc. Not everyone saw the same thing; some saw the sun “dance,” others witnessed bright colors, and some saw nothing at all. There were a lot of reporters and photographers there, too, but no authentic picture of what the sun did is

available. A handful of skeptics, nearly all the newspapermen, would concede only that the sun had seemed to radiate an unusual heat.¹⁵⁹ Lucia stated she saw the Virgin on this day with St. Joseph and the baby Jesus. Following the October 13, 1917 vision, the children claimed that the apparition told them that World War I would end that very day.¹⁶⁰ The war ended in 1918. In her 1924 account, Lucia said that she was not paying full attention during this apparition and may have confused the dates.¹⁶¹ In later accounts, Lucia simply admitted she made a mistake.¹⁶²

The children were also told three secrets in the apparitions that were later revealed. The first secret pertained to a vision of hell that Lucia said occurred on July 13, 1917. In her memoir, Lucia stated they saw a great sea of fire which seemed to be under the earth. In the fire were demons and souls in human form. They heard shrieks and groans of despair. The demons were said to look like unknown animals, all black and transparent.

The Virgin told them that they had seen “hell where the souls of poor sinners go.”¹⁶³ “To save them God wishes to establish in the world the devotion to my Immaculate Heart. If they do what I tell you, many souls will be saved, and there will be peace. The war is going to end but if they do not stop offending God another and worse one will begin in the reign of Pius XI.”¹⁶⁴ “When you see a night illumined by an unknown light, know that this is the great sign given you by God that He is about to punish the world for its crimes, by means of war, famine, and persecutions of the Church and of the Holy Father. To prevent this, I shall come to ask for the consecration of Russia to my Immaculate Heart, and the communion of reparation on the First Saturdays. If my requests are heeded, Russia will be converted, and there will be peace; if not she will spread her errors throughout the world, causing many wars and persecutions of the church. The good will be martyred; the Holy Father will have much to suffer; various nations will be annihilated. In the end my

Immaculate Heart will triumph. The Holy Father will consecrate Russia to me, and she will be converted, and a period of peace will be granted to the world.”¹⁶⁵

Since this was supposedly said in 1917, some believe Mary foretold the end of WWI and the start of WWII, because Pope Pius reigned as Pope from 1922 to 1939. The unknown light could be interpreted in many different ways, so I will leave that alone. More specifically, she mentions Russia spreading her errors, which could be understood as the Cold War era when Russian hegemony spread over a great part of the world. Could Russia have been consecrated by Pope John Paul's influence in helping to pull Poland away from the Soviet Union? Some could look at it that way. Was the end of the Cold War, the “peace” described above? Hard to say, but let us not forget, Scripture does not allow for the dead to speak to us. If this apparition did not come from God, could Satan know and influence future events? Maybe not to the degree God can, but perhaps enough to be close to

predicting future events.

Recall the scripture in Daniel 10:13, 20, where the angel was held up by the Prince of Persia. A Prince of Greece is also mentioned. This provides evidence that demonic powers hold sway over individual nations. If these demonic powers have sway over nations isn't it possible they can determine future outcomes in these nations? Remember, Satan is called the "god of this world" (2 Corinthians 4:4).

There is a spiritual battle being waged on the earth that will not hinder God's ultimate plan, but may work against it for a time. I believe Satan and his demons can influence political and religious leaders to do his bidding for as long as God allows it.

The second secret pertained to the ending of World War I along with a prediction of another worse war to come during the reign of Pope Pius XI, if men did not stop offending God and if Russia did not convert.

Interestingly enough, the first two secrets were not revealed until 1941, "when the Second World War had already begun and the spread

of Russian-style communism was a fait accompli.¹⁶⁶

The third secret supposedly pertains to the persecution of Christians during the twentieth century and the failed assassination of Pope John Paul II in 1981. Here is the third secret: “And we saw in an immense light that is God: something similar to how people appear in a mirror when they pass in front of it, a Bishop dressed in White, we had the impression that it was the Holy Father. Other Bishops, Priests, men and women religious going up a steep mountain, at the top of which there was a big Cross of rough-hewn trunks as of a cork-tree with the bark; before reaching there the Holy Father passed through a big city half in ruins and half trembling with halting step, afflicted with pain and sorrow, he prayed for the souls of the corpses he met on his way; having reached the top of the mountain, on his knees at the foot of the big Cross he was killed by a group of soldiers who fired bullets and arrows at him, and in the same way there died one after another the other Bishops, Priests, men

and women religious, and various lay people of different ranks and positions. Beneath the two arms of the Cross there were two Angels each with a crystal aspersorium in his hand, in which they gathered up the blood of the martyrs and with it sprinkled the souls that were making their way to God.” After reading the secret I find it difficult to agree with the assessment of the church on the meaning of the third secret. For me, it reads like a Nostradamus prophecy composed in such a way that almost anything could be read into it.

Another prediction Lucia received from the Virgin dealt with the second half of the twentieth century. There would be a big, big war, the Virgin said, in the second half of the twentieth century.¹⁶⁷ This seems to imply a bigger war than WWII, which never occurred, but once again it’s difficult to pin that prophecy down.

During one of the apparitions Lucia asked the woman she saw where she came from. The woman was said to respond, “I come from

heaven.”¹⁶⁸ Another interesting thing the Virgin told the children pertained to two young women who lived in the village. The women had recently died and Lucia was informed one of the women was in heaven and the other was in purgatory until “the end of the world.”¹⁶⁹ Again, the Bible does not teach heaven as the reward of the saved. The Kingdom of God is coming to this earth (Revelation 5:10). Purgatory is not even mentioned in the Bible.

Most Christians believe they go to heaven when they die, but Scripture teaches that the dead are asleep until one of two future resurrections (Revelation 20). John 3:13 also states no one has ascended into heaven except

Christ. So what was providing false information to the children? Based upon Scripture, the most plausible explanation is the messages are being used by a spiritual force

to confuse people away from God’s truth. In Lucia’s memoirs she describes at some

length how she and her cousins attempted to follow, so far as they understood them, Mary's instructions to perform penance for sinners.¹⁷⁰ One of the forms of penance was for the children to beat themselves around the legs with nettles. This requirement from Mary only makes sense in a Catholic context. There is nothing at all in God's Word that would lead one to think little children should be responsible for redeeming sinners through acts of penance.

Another interesting piece of information on Fatima was the reaction of Lucia's mother to her story. Should we overlook the fact that Lucia's mother initially insisted that Lucia, a gifted storyteller, was fantasizing.¹⁷¹ There also seemed to be some friction between Lucia and her mother. In one vision, Mary told Lucia she must learn how to read not long after her mother forbade it.¹⁷² Others reported Lucia had a great memory and had the ability to entertain people. Being the youngest of seven children, Lucia was doted on by her older siblings and would entertain

them. She also learned the Catholic catechism by age five, which was very unique. When she turned seven her mother told her to tend to the sheep in the field like the other kids. This ended the special status she had up until that time. Within a year of working in the fields the other girls working in the fields started to report unique experiences. In 1915, one group of girls reported seeing a figure like a “statue made of snow.”¹⁷³

Could any of this background information have played a part in what occurred? We can't say for sure, but it is interesting to see what we learn when we take a closer look at reports of extraordinary occurrences.

As a footnote to the Fatima story, we note the fact that Fatima had a significant impact on the Vatican. The significance accorded by the Holy See to the apparitions at Cova Da Iria (Fatima) was formally acknowledged on October 29, 1950, when amid much fanfare, the “Pilgrim statue” of the Fatima Virgin arrived in Rome after traveling through Europe for almost three years.¹⁷⁴ The very

next day at a meeting with over 400 bishops, Pope Pius XII announced his intention to define the dogma of the Assumption, holding that the Virgin Mary had been assumed not only spiritually into heaven but bodily as well.¹⁷⁵

I will spend a bit more time with the apparitions at Medjugorje since this is the most recent and most studied of all the apparitions. The apparitions began here in June of 1981. At the time Medjugorje was part of Yugoslavia, but since the country disintegrated in the 1990s the town now exists in Bosnia-Herzegovina near the Croatian border. The visionaries here were six children: Mirjana Dragicevic Soldo, Ivanka Ivankovic Elez, Jacov Colo, Vicka Ivankovic, Marija Pavlovic, and Ivan Dragicevic. The visions continue to occur on a monthly basis for two of the seers. Numerous miracles and conversions have also reportedly occurred. The earliest vision was first seen by Ivanka, whose mother had died one month before the first vision. Ivanka asked Mirjana to take a

look at something at the base of a hillside. Ivanka immediately described it as the Madonna, but Mirjana was not sure what she was seeing. What she thought she had seen, Ivanka said, was a “bright figure” or “outline” that for some reason she felt certain was the Virgin Mary.¹⁷⁶

The two girls then came upon a third girl named Milka. Milka was gathering her sheep, and all three girls looked back at the location the apparition had appeared. This time Ivanka saw a shining young woman who seemed to hover. Mirjana saw a young woman holding a baby in a blanket. A fourth girl came on the scene, a 16-year-old named Vicka, and she noticed that the other three girls were staring at something. Frightened, she ran away and came upon two young boys who accompanied her back to the other three girls. The youngest boy ran away, but Vicka now saw the woman holding the baby about 200 yards away. The older boy recalled seeing something “white and turning.”¹⁷⁷ All of the children related their story to other villagers, but most did not

believe them. Vicka's grandmother told her it could have been the devil disguising himself as an angel of light to fool people.

In a later interview on the incident, Mirjana was asked about the distance between where she stood and where she first saw the Virgin and the baby. Estimates of the distance were about 1,000 feet. The interviewer then asked: "You couldn't have seen details of the Blessed Mother's face; you couldn't have seen the baby Jesus from that distance. They would have been a mere speck upon the mountain."¹⁷⁸ Mirjana responded, "No, I saw her very clearly as if she was right by me."¹⁷⁹

The girls returned the next day at about the same time. This time a small crowd had gathered at the site with them. Once again, they saw a shining light that later manifested as the young woman they had seen the day before. The seers ran closer to the apparition and according to witnesses ran and jumped through rocks at such an incredible speed that other young men in the group could not keep up. Similar reports were made of the

visionaries at Garabandal, Spain. In fact, the girls in Spain also reportedly moved backwards in an upright position or on their knees.¹⁸⁰

In this encounter, Ivanka spoke to the apparition and asked where her mother was. “She is with me,” the smiling young woman answered.¹⁸¹ Mirjana also asked how her grandfather was who had died earlier that year. “He is well,” was the answer, audible to only the children.¹⁸² The apparition was also asked at this encounter who she was. She stated she was the Virgin Mary.

There are many reasons here for doubting this was the Virgin Mary. We have seen earlier that Scripture makes it clear the dead are asleep until a future resurrection. Here, whatever it was that was responding to Ivanka gave her the impression that her dead mother was in the heavenly realm with the Virgin. The same with Mirjana’s grandfather. This goes against what the Word of God teaches (Psalm 6:5; Ecclesiastes 9:5). All six visionaries explain that the Blessed Mother promises those who

abandon themselves to the will of the Eternal Father, who pray (particularly the rosary) shall be taken by the hand after death to the throne of God—that is, they shall reenter paradise.¹⁸³

At one point during the visions during the first year, the seers asked the Virgin how they should pray. “Continue to recite seven Our Fathers, seven Hail Marys, and seven Glory Bes....”¹⁸⁴ This is curious when you think of the fact that Scripture does not connect proper prayer to reciting Hail Marys and Glory Bes (Matthew 6:7).

None of the six young visionaries had known about the story of Lourdes and Bernadette, but just a few days after their first apparition the children were reading a book about Lourdes to each other. After learning that the Virgin had appeared to Bernadette on a total of nineteen occasions, the Medjugorje seers agreed among themselves that it was likely they also would see the Madonna nineteen times.¹⁸⁵

As the apparitions continued during the first

year in Medjugorje some other people began to witness things. The apparitions began to occur inside a local church once the communist authorities grew concerned with the popularity the visionaries were receiving. In the fall, during one of the apparitions in the church, something strange occurred. Father Luka Susac saw a white pillar of bright light that gradually became the “outline” of a woman who stood with her arms extended, gazing toward the church.¹⁸⁶ He summoned three other priests, who all would testify that for half an hour they had witnessed the same phenomenon.¹⁸⁷ On October 28, 1981, more than five hundred people who were praying near the local church swore they saw flames ignite in the hill area where the first vision had occurred. When the area was investigated there was no sign of any fire or the remains of a fire.

Some other reports from the seers not only shocked me, but they shocked the priests who heard about them. The children asked the apparition if all religions were good at an

apparition in October. “All religions are similar before God,” said the Virgin, a statement that more than a few priests found shocking.¹⁸⁸ The Virgin’s reply to a question about reincarnation had been unusually lengthy and detailed: “We go to heaven in full conscience; that which we have now. At the moment of death, we are conscious of the separation of body and soul.”¹⁸⁹ This reply from the supposed Virgin flies in the face of the Holy Bible, which is clear that the dead are asleep when they die. The supposed Virgin Mary went on to explain more about what happens at death: “The body drawn from the earth decomposes after death.... Man receives a transfigured body. Whoever has done very much evil during his life can go straight to heaven if he confesses, is sorry for what he has done, and receives communion at the end of his life.”¹⁹⁰ Once again, this could not be an apparition from God if the vision claimed the dead go to heaven (John 3:13). This is a deception Satan has foisted on humans for thousands of years.

The first commission to investigate the apparitions was established in January 1982. The local Bishop Zanic formed the commission with four theologians. All of the theologians believed the children were frauds and said so before investigating. Only one of the four eventually met the visionaries. After he did meet the children he changed his mind and concluded that the apparitions were authentic. Zanic berated the man.¹⁹¹ Mirjana also suffered through some police interrogations, and teachers were instructed (by communist authorities) to taunt and mock her. Yet she still held to her stories. The seers were also investigated by Dr. Ludvik Stopar, a professor of psychiatry. Dr. Stopar was flabbergasted by the way the visionaries went absolutely silent in the same instant at the beginning of the apparitions. The professor ended his report thusly: "I had the impression coming into contact with a supernatural reality in Medjugorje."¹⁹² One of the more outlandish claims of the children came from first Vicka and Jakov, then

Mirjana—they claimed the Virgin had transported them physically to visit heaven, hell, and purgatory. While visiting a friend's house in November of 1981, Vicka and Jakov told a story of the virgin transporting them to heaven, hell, and purgatory. To Vicka, heaven appeared as a "huge endless tunnel filled with an unearthly kind of light."¹⁹³ She could see countless people who seemed to wear robes of a luminous yellow and gray. All he could remember of heaven, Jakov said, was "many people praying, all speaking together."¹⁹⁴ After seeing heaven, they said they were showed purgatory. Jakov saw only "a cloud" with people moving inside.¹⁹⁵ Vicka gave a much more detailed description. She had viewed purgatory as a "dark chasm," suspended between heaven and hell. She heard

"moanings and lamentations, and the sound of countless fingers knocking, as though they want to get out."¹⁹⁶ The Virgin had told them that Purgatory was "the place where souls are purified, and that much prayer is

needed for the people there.”¹⁹⁷

Hell turned out to be a bad trip for the kids.

Jakov said, “Hell exists; I have seen it. Perhaps before, I had some doubts, but now I know it really exists.”¹⁹⁸ Vicka described hell as a vast

pit with “an ocean of raging flames” at its

center.¹⁹⁹ She said the lost approached the fire of hell naked, then they throw themselves into the fire. “Before they went into the fire

they looked like normal people. The more they are against God’s will the deeper they go, the more they rage against Him.”²⁰⁰ When

they came out of the fire they had blackened skin. Vicka said, “They don’t have human

shapes anymore; they are more like grotesque animals, but unlike anything on earth.”²⁰¹

Soon after Vicka and Jakov reported this,

Mirjana stated she had also been transported by the Virgin Mary. But she only wanted to

glimpse heaven with the Virgin. She related she would not describe her view of heaven

because it was too amazing, but she did report happy and healthy men and women. The grass and flowers there were too beautiful to

describe. She gave a fuller description of what she saw in purgatory with the Virgin. She described it as a place where she could see only “people shivering, thrashing, writhing in pain.”²⁰² The Madonna explained to her why such a place was necessary: “Since nothing can

live in the sight of God but pure love, God’s justice cleanses.”²⁰³ The Virgin described purgatory as a series of “levels” that stretched all the way from the gates of hell to the portal of paradise.²⁰⁴ Souls in purgatory who prayed frequently were permitted occasionally to communicate with the living, the Madonna said; because the dead no longer have free will,

they cannot atone for their sins and are completely dependent upon the prayers of those still living.²⁰⁵

Later in 1988, Vicka confided to a Father Bubalo about Purgatory. According to Vicka, the Virgin had said that many souls were stranded there without anyone on earth to pray for them, and “invited me to suffer for

these abandoned souls.”²⁰⁶ Since accepting this assignment, Vicka explained, during what appeared to be periods of unconsciousness, she had been “traveling” with the Virgin.

There are two problems here with purgatory. The first is, the dead know nothing (Psalm 6:5), and, the second is, there is no mention of purgatory in the Holy Bible. A third issue is Vicka’s claim that she can perform a role for lost souls who are already dead. Christ is the only mediator (1 Timothy 2:5).

Mirjana also stated, “I asked Our Lady how God can be so unmerciful as to throw people into Hell to suffer forever.”²⁰⁷ The Virgin Mary told Mirjana the people in hell went there because of their own choice. She went on to explain to Mirjana that people in hell blame God for everything. Mirjana also asked Mary if many people go to hell. She was told, “Today, most people go to Purgatory, the next greatest number go to Hell, and only a few go directly to Heaven.”²⁰⁸ Once again, the idea that people are suffering forever in hell is contrary to what the Bible teaches. The Bible

makes it clear that the wicked dead will be burned up (Malachi 4; Isaiah 66; Romans 6:23) and that will be the end of them.

Later, in 1983, the Blessed Mother reportedly said the following: "In purgatory there are different levels: the lowest is close to hell and the highest gradually draws near to heaven. It is not on All Souls Day, but at Christmas, that the greatest number of souls leaves purgatory. There are in purgatory, souls who pray ardently to God, but for whom no relative or friend prays on earth.... The majority of people go to purgatory. Many go to hell. A small number go directly to heaven."209

These stories of the young seers visiting heaven, hell, and purgatory were too much for Bishop Zanic. He did not believe the Medjugorje visionaries were honest in large part because of these far-out stories about observing these locations. Zanic was also suspicious due to the fact Ivanka was the first one to see the Virgin, and she had been interested in what had happened to her mom since her death only a few months before.

Despite Zanic's skepticism, there were others who investigated the seers who provided support that something strange was going on. One interesting example occurred when a Father Nicholas Bulat a professor of dogma at the seminary in Split came to Medjugorje to investigate. Bulat appeared to be praying along with the visionaries as their ecstasy began. Suddenly, the professor lunged forward and plunged a long leatherworking needle into Vicka's left shoulder blade.²¹⁰ Vicka showed no reaction and continued to pray. Bulat reportedly plunged the needle in a second time with the same results. Bulat's "assault" on Vicka would be celebrated among some Franciscans (an order of priests who believed in the apparitions) as one more piece of compelling evidence that the children were neither frauds nor hysterics.²¹¹

A neuropsychiatrist, Dr. Enzo Gabrici, examined Ivan, Jakov, Marija and Vicka for four days. In his report he ruled out the possibilities of "hallucinatory phenomena, epilepsy or post-hypnotic suggestion."²¹²

Speaking of Vicka, Gabrici wrote: “The apparition does not tire her as is the case with hysterical trances; on the contrary she feels more invigorated.”²¹³

Dr. Lucia Capello, a neurologist, wrote that she had been not only impressed but deeply shaken by “the three synchronizations” in the seers’ behavior: First the visionaries dropped to their knees and their voices became inaudible in the same instant, without even a split second of separation; second, without any observable awareness of one another, their voices again became audible at exactly the same moment, on the third word of the Our Father; finally, the head and eyes of each visionary were raised in the same instant at the end of the apparition (when the Madonna ascended), as all five uttered the word “Ode.” There was “no natural explanation” that could account for such perfect simultaneity, Dr. Capello wrote.²¹⁴

During one of the visions in 1985, Ivanka reported the Virgin had asked her what she wished for. Ivanka asked to see her mother

who had died. According to Ivanka, the Virgin smiled and nodded her head in agreement, and her mother suddenly appeared to her. Her mother was smiling, and she embraced and kissed Ivanka and said, "My child I am proud of you!" She then kissed her and disappeared.²¹⁵ Once again, from a strictly biblical perspective, this makes no sense. Ivanka's dead mother is not aware or awake and could not have really been what Ivanka saw that day. Could this have been a trick by the devil? I do believe that is one possibility. Another interesting report pertained to a time in 1982. At this time the visionaries were submitting questions to the Madonna from the Franciscan friars in the town. One friar had asked Mirjana to ask if Croatia would ever be free. The Virgin's answer, Mirjana reported, was: "Yes, after a small war."²¹⁶ Now we need to remember this was when Yugoslavia was still a country. It would later break into Slovenia, Macedonia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia by 1995. The wars for separation began in the

early 1990s. Someone could have made an educated guess that Croatia would become a nation due to the animosity that existed between the various ethnic groups in the Balkans. But reports like this helped lend credence to the apparitions that occurred there.

Due to the length of the apparitions (still occurring) and the modern times, the seers of Medjugorje were the most scientifically studied in the history of Catholicism. One of the most thorough investigations of the children was conducted by a team of doctors from the University of Montpellier. The group conducted numerous observations of the children during the apparitions. One interesting observation included simultaneity of eyeball movement among the visionaries of less than one-fifth of a second at both the beginning and end of their apparitions; this was so far beyond the capacity of normal human functioning that no form of collusion or manipulation could account for it.²¹⁷ The leader of the doctors on this scientific team

was Dr. Henri Joyeux, an internationally renowned cancer researcher. In the spring of 1985, Dr. Joyeux submitted a report that concluded: "The ecstasies are not pathological, nor is there any element of deceit. No scientific discipline seems able to describe this phenomena."²¹⁸

Dr. Joyeux agreed to an interview with Paris Match, a French language weekly newspaper. Joyeux was quoted in the periodical thusly:

"The phenomena of the apparitions at Medjugorje cannot be explained scientifically.... In one word, these young people are healthy and there is no sign of epilepsy, nor is it a sleep or dream state. It is neither a case of pathological hallucination nor hallucination in the hearing or sight faculties.... It cannot be a cataleptic state, for during the ecstasy the facial muscles are operating in a normal way."²¹⁹ The doctor added: "It is more like a state of deep, active prayer, in which they are partially disconnected from the physical world, in a state of contemplation and sane encounter

with a person whom they alone can see, hear and touch. We cannot reach the transmitter, but we can ascertain that the receivers are in a state of sane and good working order.”²²⁰

In 1988, Dr. Marco Margnelli, a neurophysiologist and avowed atheist, came to Medjugorje “looking for any evidence that would contradict it [the apparitions] or expose it as a fake.”²²¹ Margnelli concluded the seers did pass into “another state of consciousness” during their visions. Margnelli also mentioned something startling about his experience. He described a number of things he witnessed from the “synchronous movements” of the visionaries to the apparently miraculous healing of a woman with leukemia.²²² What had affected him most deeply were the birds: During the late afternoon, they would gather in the trees outside the rectory where the seers shared their apparitions, chirping and cooing and calling by the hundreds, at times deafeningly loud, until “they suddenly and simultaneously all go silent as soon as the apparition begins.”²²³ This “absolute silence

of the birds” haunted him, the doctor admitted.²²⁴ A few months after returning to Milan, Dr. Margnelli became a practicing Catholic.²²⁵

Some other confusing things the children heard from the Virgin pertained to Islam. The Virgin insisted that Islam must be respected. This was a challenge to some Catholic theologians. These writers were particularly offended by Mirjana’s report that the Virgin had instructed her to respect the Islamic faith of her neighbors in Sarajevo, saying, “In God there are neither divisions or religions. It is you in the world who have created divisions.”

²²⁶ This sounds like something the Devil would say when we think about the inconsistencies in the Koran relating to biblical figures. God makes it clear there is only one path to salvation through Jesus Christ (Acts 4:12). Islam does not recognize Jesus as the Son of God.

In the late 1990s, Jakov reported that during one of his apparitions the Madonna informed him she would no longer be visiting him on a

regular basis. According to Jakov, the Virgin stated to him she would only visit him moving forward on the birthday of her Son, meaning Christmas. The problem is Christmas is not the true birthday of Jesus. The Catholic Church would even admit to this fact. But a young man living in a small town might not be aware of this truth. This is another reason to doubt the Virgin Mary as the source of the apparitions.

Like other apparition sites, Medjugorje claims to be a site of numerous miracles. There may be some unexplained healings that occurred here over the years, but that does not prove God or the Virgin Mary was the source of the healing. Many of the recorded healings were for multiple sclerosis or some other disease that attacks the nervous system. Difficult to diagnose and impossible to cure, such illnesses also are remarkably resistant to scientific study, making it very difficult to prove that a healing has been miraculous.²²⁷

By 1990, more than three thousand apparitions had been reported by the six

Bosnian Croat seers, compared to a total of twenty-four at Lourdes and Fatima combined.²²⁸ What are we to make of all this? Let us allow the reflections of one Catholic priest involved with translating the Virgin's messages from the seers from Croatian into English weigh in. Father Philip Pavich answered like this when he was asked what he thought was going on in Medjugorje. "Well, I exclude hallucination and human invention. Absolutely. After eight years here, I feel certain that the visionaries are in touch with a spirit entity. But is it the Mother of God? There is some testimony I find difficult to deny. Rita Klaus, she's a remarkable miracle story, wonderfully healed, and a very powerful presence. But then, on the other hand, there's the story of Agnes Heupel who also received a miraculous healing and has turned into the leader of a cult. With the fruits it's sort of a pick-and-choose situation.

"A lot of people hold that it was Mary in the beginning, but somewhere she checked out and the visionaries have carried on without

her. There's also the theory that visionaries are only human and make mistakes. And then the other possibility is that it's a dark spirit disguising itself as the Mother of God. Which is not uncommon; it has happened frequently in the past. In his second letter to the Corinthians, Paul writes that Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. The Vassula [Vassula Ryden, who claims to channel messages from Christ] thing sort of points this way.

"I know I haven't spoken clearly about what I believe it is. It's almost like I'm afraid to say it out loud. To say I believe that this entity is not the Mother of God but an evil spirit, one that comes as though benign but leaves a bloody mess on the ground."229

So what do the experts say on visionaries? In this case we will consult some Catholic experts. According to the Catholic Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, only eleven of the 295 alleged apparitions that were investigated by the Church between 1905 and 1995 had been approved, meaning

that “fewer than one in twenty-five are believed to be authentic,” said Father Augustine Di Noia, who had been assigned to the Congregation.²³⁰

Father Gabriel O'Donnell was not impressed by numerous studies conducted on the Medjugorje seers. When O'Donnell was a young priest he was part of one of the earliest brain studies on mystical experiences. “It was at Yeshiva University in New York,” he recalled.²³¹ “They hooked us up to these machines, then asked us to meditate or pray. Some of us were Catholic, some Jewish, some Buddhist, some Muslim—every religion you can imagine. And of course it registered that we went into an altered state as we prayed, and that the deeper we went, the more it registered. There clearly is physiologically something that happens to you, but that isn't evidence of the supernatural. In fact, it conforms entirely to the laws of nature.”²³²

The French Jesuit Augustin Poulain (1836–1919) wrote a famous work that addresses visions in *Graces of Interior Prayer*, which was

also published under the title Revelations and Visions. Poulain breaks down authentic visions into Exterior Visions (seen by the eyes) but also Imaginative Visions (seen without eyes) and Intellectual Visions (seen by the mind alone). Poulain believed Exterior Visions could be of divine or diabolical origin and come in four varieties. Those of the first manner involve perception of the true heavenly bodies of Jesus or Mary, while those of the second manner involve seeing the “borrowed body” of a heavenly being “formed by the ministry of angels.”²³³ In cases of the third manner, the visionary did not perceive a true body, but rather saw the “luminous rays” of a body in heaven with the assistance of angels who “produce these undulations as they would produce sound waves.”²³⁴ In the fourth manner, which was “purely subjective, angels imprint the image of the object directly upon the retina.”²³⁵ It’s interesting that Poulain believes some of these manners of visions are the work of angels. There is possible scriptural evidence of this in Ezekiel 1

and the book of Revelation. If Scripture reveals that angels can manifest visions of the divine, Satan (a fallen angel) or his demonic minions (fallen angels) may be able to do the same.

Poulain's idea that some of these other visions are just perceptions is also illuminating. In Ephesians 6:10–12, we read about our “struggle” or “wrestling” not against flesh and blood, but against spiritual forces (Satan and demons). This spiritual struggle occurs in the spiritual component of man, his or her brain. The spirit in man manifests itself in the brain. The brain is also how we see and perceive the world around us. Scripture confirms the spirit of this world can manifest false visions into the minds of unsuspecting humans (2 Thessalonians 2:9; 2 Corinthians 11:14). In each of the three cases we discussed (Lourdes, Fatima, and Medjugorje), the seers were able to see things that other witnesses who were present were not able to see. Another legendary Catholic priest with

knowledge of this subject is Father Benedict Groeschel. Groeschel provides some interesting comments on Bernadette's apparitions at Lourdes. "Bernadette is the best because she makes the least possible subjective

interpretation," he explained.²³⁶ "Even when told that the words 'Immaculate Conception' referred to the Virgin Mary, Bernadette continues to say simply, 'I saw a young lady who told me she was the 'Immaculate Conception.' Neither the priests who believed nor the priests who disbelieved could influence her. And Bernadette never added a syllable to what she was told during her apparitions."²³⁷

I was struck by this tidbit from Groeschel. In many of the other apparitions, initially the seers are not quite sure what they are seeing. In some cases the seers influence each other in

regard to what they see, or people they tell the story to seem to have some influence on what exactly they think the seers see. Eventually the

Virgin Mary becomes the obvious answer and the seers agree. But not with Bernadette. She just reports the exact facts presented to her. So what's the big deal? Well in Bernadette's case the vision said she was the "Immaculate Conception." Which everyone assumes means she is the Virgin Mary. But in truth we have seen Mary was not immaculately conceived. That concept, as we have noted earlier, is found nowhere in the Bible, and it comes from dubious sources. Would Satan and his minions want to confuse people about the nature of the dead? They have done it before. Notice the story in 1 Samuel 28:7–20, where Saul consults a witch to bring up the dead priest Samuel for Saul the King, who is wearing a disguise. Saul is wearing a disguise because he gave an edict that all mediums and spiritists should be expelled from the land. The witch falls into this category. Saul feels he has to go to her because he is worried about what will happen in a battle with the Philistines.

Now the question is how the "spirit" the witch

saw could be Samuel if he was dead.

Remember the Bible teaches the dead know nothing and sleep in their graves until a future resurrection (Ecclesiastes 3:19; Ecclesiastes 9:5–10; Psalm 146:4; Psalm 115:17; Psalm 6:5).

The word “spirit” here is a bad translation.

The actual Hebrew word in 1 Samuel 28:13 is *elohim*. The word *elohim* is translated “god” or “gods” in Hebrew. So what does it mean that she saw “gods,” or a “god-like being” (as the Complete Jewish Bible translates it) coming up from the ground? Let’s not forget the Bible refers to Satan as a “god” in 2 Corinthians 4:4. If a demon or Satan can impersonate a dead priest (Samuel), why not the Virgin Mary?

One final point to make about the apparitions has to do with the attention that apparitions generate. For example, notice how the number of pilgrims increased for Medugorje during the first nine years of the apparitions. In 1983, there were 50,000; 1985, 462,000; 1987, 857,000; and in 1989, 1.1 million. All of the

major apparition sites continue to generate new visitors every year. Some will say that is to the glory of God, but is it? Is it to the glory of God when the focus is on the Virgin Mary rather than God (especially when the Virgin Mary is not even awake or alive at this time)? Is the great deceiver (Revelation 12:9) creating a bright shiny object to pull people away from God's Word and truth (John 17:17)? If this is the case, the Virgin Mary is not the only bright shiny object pulling faithful people away from God's Word.

Chapter 7 - The Saints

Mary is not the only person many Catholics and Orthodox Christians pray to; they also pray to the saints. The original Christians used the term "saint" to signify members of the faith. Scriptures like Romans 1:7, Romans 15:25, and Ephesians 1:1 make it clear the saints are all the believers and followers of Christ. They are not a special class of Christians. But over time the term "saint"

came to mean a really good Christian—a special Christian. Just like with Mary, the veneration of the saints has mixed the worship of pagan gods with the veneration of the various saints. Christianity grew up in a Roman Empire that was influenced by Greek thought. The thinking of Hellenism reigned supreme from Alexander through the Roman Empire (300 BC–300 AD). Greek religion was influenced by the paganism that came before it. The Babylonians had thousands of gods and goddesses, as did the Greeks and Romans. Today, Catholics and the Orthodox pray to thousands of saints. When we look at the practices of the Greek culture of the time we will see how it influenced what became Christianity.

Christianity would find it difficult to rid the Greek culture of their gods and goddesses. These had been intimately connected for many centuries with every phase of life and were destined to survive the victory of Christianity, for belief in them was ingrained in the very nature of the people.²³⁸

History provides direct evidence of ancient pagan temples becoming Christian church buildings. Disciples prayed to Mary and the saints for the same benefits the ancient pagan peoples sought to receive by praying to their gods and goddesses. Festivals for pagan gods and goddesses were taken over as feast days for

the Virgin and various saints. Now, obviously, today's Catholic and Orthodox worshipers think of the saints and Mary when they pray, but the point is there is only one Mediator between God and man, Jesus the Christ (1 Timothy 2:5). Let's take a look at some of the many examples where pagan worship became saint worship.

Hera the Queen of Heaven and the guardian of women had marriage functions associated with her. These functions have been transferred over to St. Catherine, who is not only the patroness of love, but of marriage.²³⁹ St. Nicholas has largely replaced the functions of Poseidon.²⁴⁰

Before making a trip, sailors will pray to him.

St. Pelagia of Antioch, whose festival falls on October 8, has been connected by Usener with Aphrodite.²⁴¹ St. Venere, invoked by Albanian girls as patroness of marriage, is connected with the Roman Venus.²⁴² The modern Greeks, more than any other Christian people, have retained pagan festivals, for many of the Eastern Church celebrations are merely the survivals of ancient ones, and are often held at churches or monasteries whose saints have taken the place of the old gods.²⁴³

While I was growing up, my grandfather lived out his remaining years at my house after my grandmother died. He would tell me numerous stories about life in the old country (Greek island of Ikaria). One story I recall pertained to prayers he and another young man prayed to the Virgin Mary in a church. An icon of the Virgin was used to affix coins to when people prayed. If the coin stuck to the icon the prayer would be answered; if not, the prayer would not be answered. My grandfather informed me he prayed that he

would receive safe passage to the United States. Obviously he made it, and the coin did stick. But imagine my surprise when I found a book showing this practice was drawn from pre-Christian Greek religion.

What my grandfather was actually getting involved in (without his knowledge) was a form of divination. The ancient Greeks were known for their oracles, who supposedly could foretell the future. Before I address the example my grandfather was involved in, I will cite an example from the island of Amorgus.

On this island, the Church of St. George Balsamites is located. The priest from this church was supposed to be able to divine the future. The church was built over a stream. The priest would pray to the saint the church was named for and then draw some water from a receptacle with a plug that was full of water. Different items such as hair, insects, leaves, etc., may appear on the surface of the water from the stream. Each of these items was believed to have a special meaning. The

presence of hair, for example, meant illness or trouble.²⁴⁴

Another example that mirrors my grandfather's experience concerns a shrine to the Panaghia (Virgin Mary) at Cremasto on the island of Rhodes. Here, the person asking for an understanding of the future places a coin on the icon of Mary. If it sticks, his wish is granted; but, in any case, the priest gets the coin.²⁴⁵ My grandfather's friend's coin fell off, but his stayed on. He made it to America and his friend did not.

On Zante, near the village of Callipado, Schmidt found an icon of Mary in a rockgrotto. The icon was revered by the peasants, who placed copper coins against it; when a coin stuck, the answer was favorable.²⁴⁶

A similar example comes from the Church of St. John of the Column in Athens. The church was built around a Corinthian column. The column was found right where the church was built. Some believe the column was part of a structure dedicated to Asclepios, the Greek god of medicine and healing in the fifth

century B.C. The church is sacred to John the Baptist, the patron saint of fevers. A legend about John states that when he was near death he tied all diseases to the base of a column with silk threads—a yellow thread for fevers, a red one for measles, etc. He then said, “When I die, let any sick come and tie a silk thread to the column and be healed.”²⁴⁷ Sick Greek Orthodox believers come to this location to pray. They affix colored threads or bits of rags or even locks of hair to the column with wax in the belief that their disease will be transferred to it.²⁴⁸ Even silver pieces are placed on it, in order to get oracular responses; if they adhere a cure is promised.²⁴⁹

The Greeks also would put money on the icons of saints affixed with wax. Lucian mentions a statue of Pelichus, to whose thigh silver coins were affixed with wax, since it was believed to have the power of curing fevers.²⁵⁰ It is still the custom in Greece, as it was in antiquity, to hang up models in wax or silver of the parts of the body cured by the

saint—arms, hands, feet, eyes, breasts, etc.²⁵¹

Great numbers of votive offerings—
anathemata—were brought to the shrines of
the old healing gods, especially models of
parts of the body.²⁵²

Eastern Orthodox and Catholic officials
recommend their adherents pray to the
various saints. The actual wording of the
Council of Trent helps explain this. “The
saints who reign together with Christ offer up
their own prayers to God for men. It is good
and useful suppliantly to invoke them, and to
have recourse to their prayers, aid, and help
for obtaining benefits from God.”²⁵³

In ancient Babylon, the birthplace of many
pagan beliefs that passed to other religions,
there were thousands and thousands of gods
and goddesses. Every month and every day in
the month was under the protection of a
particular deity.²⁵⁴ When Rome ruled the
world, the same Babylonian ideas were
transferred to the Empire. Converts from
paganism were reluctant to part with their old

beliefs, and some of the old gods began to morph into Christian saints. The old idea of gods associated with certain jobs and days has continued.

The Orthodox Church also has a saint for venerating on each and every day of the calendar year. The Bible says there is only one mediator between man and God, so why do the Orthodox and Catholics pray to Mary and the saints? Catholics and the Orthodox are taught that the saints can intercede to God for us. According to the Catholic Encyclopedia, they are told to worship God and then to “pray, first to Saint Mary, and the holy apostles, and the holy martyrs, and all God’s saints...to consider them as friends and protectors, and to implore their aid in the hour of distress, with the hope that God would grant to the patron what He might otherwise refuse to the suppliant.”²⁵⁵ The Orthodox Christians believe the same.

According to Father Anthony Coniaris, “Even after their [saints] deaths they perform works of love as intercessors in heaven who pray for

us.”²⁵⁶ But wait a minute! The dead are asleep. Mary and the saints can’t hear or respond to prayers.

Considering all the data, one conclusion we could draw is the Orthodox and Catholic system of saint veneration developed to some degree from the earlier beliefs in the various gods.

The Catholic Encyclopedia even says these “legends repeat the conceptions found in the pre-Christian religious tales.... The legend is not Christian, only Christianized.... In many cases it has obviously the same origin as the myth.... Antiquity traced back sources, whose natural elements it did not understand, to the heroes; such was also the case with many legends of the saints.... It became easy to transfer to the Christian martyrs the conceptions which the ancients held concerning their heroes. This transference was promoted by the numerous cases in which Christian saints became the successors of local deities, and Christian worship supplanted the ancient local worship. This explains the great

number of similarities between gods and saints.”²⁵⁷

Some of the syncretism between pagan gods or goddesses and saints is beyond a shadow of a doubt. People in the Roman Empire were used to the worship of the Greek and Roman pantheon and to the worship of local gods. It was an easy step for Christian congregations rooted in paganism to replace the customs of local cults with the worship of dead martyrs.²⁵⁸

According to the Catholic Encyclopedia, “Churches or ruins of churches have been frequently found on the sites where pagan shrines or temples originally stood.... It is also to some extent true that sometimes the saint whose aid was to be invoked at the Christian shrine bore some outward analogy to the deity previously hallowed in that place. Thus in Athens the shrine of the healer Asklepios... when it became a church, was made sacred to the two saints whom the Christian Athenians invoked as miraculous healers, Kosmos and Damian.”²⁵⁹

We see evidence of this in medieval Europe also. One such account is a letter from Pope Gregory the Great, by way of Abbot Miletius, to Saint Augustine of Canterbury, who was spreading the gospel among the Angles of England at the beginning of the eighth century.²⁶⁰ The letter tells us about church policy for converting people to Christianity. “We wish you to inform him that we have been giving careful thought to the affairs of the English and have come to the conclusion that the temples of the idols among that people should on no account be destroyed. The idols are to be destroyed, but the temples themselves are to be aspersed with holy water, altars set up in them, and relics deposited there. For if these temples are well built, they must be purified from the worship of demons and dedicated to the service of the true God. In this way, we hope that the people, seeing that their temples are not destroyed, may abandon their error and, flocking more readily to their accustomed resorts, may come to know and adore the true God. And because

they have a custom of sacrificing many oxen to demons, let some other solemnity be substituted in its place, such as a day of dedication or the festivals of the holy martyrs whose relics are enshrined there. On such occasions they might well construct shelters of boughs for themselves around the churches that were once temples and celebrate the solemnity with devout feasting.”²⁶¹

By trying to appease the customs of the pagan converts the church allowed the “saints” and their stories to morph into the old gods the pagans worshipped. One big source of the stories is the *Legenda Aurea* (The Golden Legend), an account of the lives of many saints, compiled by Jacobus de Voragine in 1260.²⁶² It becomes unthinkable to take literally such accounts of saints’ lives after we have read the profane literature (especially the romances and epics) of the same era.²⁶³ In both genres there appear the same motifs, the same narrative sequences, and sometimes the same names.²⁶⁴ There are many examples we could cite, but I believe these few examples

will suffice.

Saint Hubertus (Hubert) is the patron saint of hunters, and his feast day is on November 3. His legend tells us he loved hunting so much he was even out on Good Friday hunting. As he is chasing a large stag the deer turns around

and faces Hubertus with an image of Christ between its antlers. The image had an inscription which said, “How long will you allow this vain passion to lead you to neglect the salvation of your soul?” Hubertus sought to repent through a life of mortification at a monastery. Hubertus became the bishop of Tongres and Masstricht. He was said to be a healer of rabies in men and animals.

The legend of Saint Hubertus appears as the Christian rewriting of a tale that can be corroborated countless times in the medieval literature of Celtic origin.²⁶⁵ These tales concern the encounter of a human and an animal (a white doe or stag) that is the animal guise of a creature from the Otherworld—that is, a fairy.²⁶⁶ The young knight Guigemar

goes to the forest to take part in his favorite hobby, hunting. He notices a doe impersonating a stag with antlers on her head. He shoots an arrow that hits the animal, but the arrow comes back and seriously wounds him. The animal then speaks, saying she is sorry, while warning Guigemar of the fate that awaits him.²⁶⁷

The words “horn” and “stag” are related to the Celtic god Cernunnos. On the Gundestrup Cauldron, a veritable condensed iconographic index of Celtic mythology, we find this horned god surrounded by various animals and numerous fertility and wealth symbols.²⁶⁸ The date of Hubertus’ feast day is significant because of its proximity to Samhain (November 1). This is the time when the beings of the Otherworld have temporary permission to visit the living and is also the moment when the living gain furtive access to the Otherworld.²⁶⁹

Saint Brigid is another famous figure. Her feast day is February 1, which was originally the pagan festival of Imbolc, marking the

beginning of spring. There is debate over whether she was a historical figure. Her name, associations and feast day are the same as the Celtic goddess Brigid.

The golden legend of St. Brigid is rich with marvelous tales involving birds and other flying creatures.²⁷⁰ In fact, Saint Brigid was credited with magically creating a bird to console a young girl after she lost a small silver chain.²⁷¹ Celtic mythology does in fact have bird-goddesses who did not vanish with the Celts.²⁷²

July 25 is the feast day of the dog-headed Saint Christopher. According to the legend, the barbarian Reprobis, who stood about seven and one-half feet tall, was born with a dog like face in the third century AD. In his most famous story he carries a little boy across a river and later finds out the little boy was Christ. His name is then changed to Christopher. The tradition of cynocephalic deities proves that the dog's head is a feature that undoubtedly belongs to a long series of gods.²⁷³ The dog is also associated with "the

Beyond” in Celtic folklore.²⁷⁴

The Celts even worshipped a greyhound named Guinefort that became a saint up until 1930. Jean-Claude Schmitt showed that the worship of Saint Guinefort was situated at the heart of an entirely pagan belief that Christianity attempted to eradicate.²⁷⁵

Basing his work on the testimony of Etienne de Bourbon (thirteenth century inquisitor), Schmitt relates the following: “Women with sick children would carry their offspring to the supposed site of the sepulcher of a sacred dog. They followed a custom of offering it salt and other things. On the bushes that surrounded the site they would hang swaddling clothes of the ill child and stick nails in the trees that grew in this spot. They would then pass the naked child between the adjacent trunks of two trees, imploring the fauns to take this child, who they said was in their care, and return him fat and safe and sound.”²⁷⁶

This belief in the dog saint originated from a legend of a dog that saved a child from a snake. His master came home and found the

dog with blood around his mouth and his child missing. The man killed the dog later to discover his child safe near a dead snake. A cult formed where the dog was buried and women brought their sick children to the site. The Catholic Church never officially canonized the dog, but the cult persisted into the twentieth century.

Another interesting legend is that of St. Denis whose feast day is October 9. The legend tells us that Denis was a third century bishop of Paris who was decapitated for his faith. One of the things you are told to pray to Denis for is headaches! In the sixth century, Gregory of Tours first mentioned the decapitation of Denis. In the seventh century, an anonymous writer, who declared his version was based on an oral tradition, added a detail to the decapitation: after having been parted from the martyr's body, the head continued to move and give praise to God.²⁷⁷ In the ninth century the legend was completed.²⁷⁸ Denis was born to a wealthy family in Athens not long after the death of Christ. He was

converted by Paul the apostle and left home to preach in Europe, ending up in Paris. He was later arrested by the Roman governor Fescennius and subjected to various forms of martyrdom. After refusing to renounce his faith thru scourging, burning, lions, and crucifixion, he was decapitated. After being decapitated, he picked up his head and carried it north of Paris to a town that is now known by his name.

This pretty legend has every appearance of a pious invention intended to shroud the relics of a tenacious pagan myth that preceded Christianity.²⁷⁹ Indeed, the cellar of the Basilica of Saint Denis has yielded remnants of pagan worship that are much older than the founding of the monument.²⁸⁰

Celtic lore is full of decapitations. The Irish mythological texts that constitute the best conservatory of the Celtic tradition in this regard offer the example of the feast of Bricriu, during which there takes place a decapitation similar to that of Saint Denis.²⁸¹ In her book titled *Dieux et Heros Celtes*, Marie-Louise

Sjoestedt summarizes this important text, which is itself the adaptation of an older Celtic myth in which the rite of the severed head is invested with a sacred value: the giant Curoi, seeking to challenge the heroes of Ulster, shows up in the middle of a feast holding a chopping block in one hand and an ax in the other.²⁸² Curoi asks that a hero cut off his head and agree to have his own head chopped off the next day. When the challenge is accepted the head is cut off, but the giant gets right up picks up his head and goes to the lake he lives in. Indeed, the theme of the severed head plays an essential role in the whole Celtic religion.²⁸³

As paganism began to die away vestiges of it began to live again in the Christian Church.

The use of statutes is another example.

Statues

were used to worship the gods and goddesses in Greek and Roman religion. It's interesting the Catholic Church uses statues to venerate their saints. The Orthodox Church uses icons. The Catholics argue the images are allowed

because they merely represent Christ and the saints. The Orthodox argue that their icons are merely windows to the divine which can help in prayer. But these reasons are difficult to reconcile with scriptures like Exodus 20:4–5, Deuteronomy 7:25, and Numbers 33:52. Another vestige of paganism is the placement of a circle or aureole around the heads of those who were venerated. This continued in the Western and Eastern Christian Church. Christian art in the West and icons in the East sometimes picture saints with a circle around their heads. The aureole (disk) was used in ancient days by Babylonian artists or sculptors, when they wished to represent a being, apparently human, as a god.²⁸⁴ The disk, and particularly the circle, were the well-known symbols of the Sun-divinity, and figured largely in the symbolism of the East.²⁸⁵ The Romans depicted Circe, the pagan goddess of the sun, with a circle surrounding her head.²⁸⁶ Apollo, as the child of the sun, was often thus represented.²⁸⁷ Christ, Mary, and the saints are all depicted

with these circle symbols in iconography. I also recall in the Greek Orthodox Church the frequent kissing of icons by the believers. You could buy a candle at the back of the church when you entered and plant it in a sandbox and kiss a nearby icon. The kissing of icons also recalls the ancient custom of kissing statues.²⁸⁸ Cicero speaks of a bronze Heracles

at Agrigentum, whose mouth and chin were worn away by kissing.²⁸⁹ During Church festivals the icon is adorned with myrtle and laurel, as statues were frequently garlanded in antiquity.²⁹⁰ The carrying of the icon in procession also has its counterpart in antiquity.²⁹¹ Thus the cult statue of the Eleutherian Dionysus at Athens was carried forth on fixed days each year from the city shrine of the god.²⁹²

Again, the Catholic and Orthodox believers today would argue they are not venerating the old pagan gods, but the point is the veneration of the saints puts emphasis on something that should not be emphasized.

Saints are sleeping in the dust of the ground awaiting a future resurrection. Only the Father and Son should be prayed to.

Chapter 8 - Co-Redeemer

As we have seen how the veneration of Mary has evolved through history could there be a further evolution in the future? To analyze this question we will go back to a movement that began in the Catholic Church in the eighteenth century. A movement for Mary began at that time promoting the idea that veneration for Mary was lacking. With the motto “Nunquam satis” (never enough), this movement, led by Alfonso Maria de Liguorio (or Liguori) (1696–1787), greatly influenced popular Catholicism as well as the contents of pontifical documents.²⁹³ According to Liguori, who was later canonized by the Catholic Church, “there are things that one requests of Jesus and are not received, but if one requests them of Mary, they are granted.” In his classic work, *The Glories of Mary*,

Ligorio says, “If my redeemer should reject me, I will throw myself at Mary’s feet.”²⁹⁴ The book also makes these outrageous claims: “...the way of salvation is open to none otherwise than through Mary.” “At the command of Mary all obey—even God.”²⁹⁵ Ligorio also said that the sinner who comes directly to Christ needs to be fearful of His wrath. But if he will pray to the Virgin, she will only have to “show” that Son “the breasts that gave him suck” and His wrath will be immediately appeased.²⁹⁶ But that reasoning conflicts with Scripture. Notice Luke 11:27–28: “Blessed is the womb that bare thee,” a woman said to Jesus, “and the paps that thou has sucked!” But Jesus answered, “Yea, rather blessed are they that hear the word of God and keep it.” Liguori might have missed that scripture. Besides, the Word of God is clear; Mary can’t do anything for anyone right now. She is resting in her grave. Perhaps these ideas influenced other Catholics. The seers at LaSalette, France (1846) reported the Virgin telling them that

the arm of her Son was “so heavy and pressing that she could no longer restrain it, that only her unceasing entreaties had thus far held back the chastisement, and that people would never be able to repay her for this.²⁹⁷ Repay Mary? I’m sorry, but this sounds a lot like Mary taking the role of a mediator with her Son. The bigger problem is the lack of scripture to confirm this role.

Mary plays an oversized role in both the Catholic and Orthodox churches. Prayers to Mary play an important part in the regular worship ceremonies of both the Catholic and Orthodox churches. She is even called the “Queen of Heaven.” But we need to remember Mary is not in heaven and she is not a queen. So why use this phrase for her which is the name the pagans gave to their mother goddess?

What Liguori began and others helped build here is the concept of Mary being a Co-Redeemer along with Christ, and in my mind that is a heresy (1 Timothy 2:5). In 1894, Pope Leo XIII wrote that when Mary “offered

herself to God as a servant for the office of Mother, and when she made a complete surrender of herself with the Son in the temple, she became associated already with Him in the painful expiation on behalf of the human race.”²⁹⁸

Ten years later, Pope Pius X noted that Mary “was associated with Christ in the work of human salvation.”²⁹⁹ In 1918, Benedict XV said: “Not without divine design, she was present, suffered and almost died with her Son who was suffering and dying, she abdicated her maternal rights over the Son for the salvation of men, as far as she could, immolated Him to satisfy the justice of God; therefore, it can be said with good reason that she redeemed, with Christ, the human race.”

³⁰⁰

Pius the XI, as he brought the celebration of the redemption to a close in 1935, called on Mary in the same manner, remembering her at the foot of the cross “suffering as coredeemer.”

³⁰¹ The new Catechism of the

Catholic Church speaks of Mary as cooperating “in the Savior’s work of restoring supernatural life to souls. For this reason she is a mother to us in the order of grace.”³⁰² The problem with this Mary veneration is that Scripture is clear that Mary has nothing to do with restoring our lives (Acts 4:12); it is done in Christ and Him only!!

Further evidence of the prominent role Mary plays for Catholics can be found in the words used in some of their prayers to Mary. In the “Hail Mary” prayer the last line says this: “Holy Mary, Mother of God. Pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death.” In a popular Catholic prayer book, *Novena Prayers in Honor of Our Mother of Perpetual Help*, one prayer says: “We have no greater help, no greater hope than you, O most pure Virgin...for we hope in you....” Another prayer from this same book states: “Come to my aid, dearest Mother, for I recommend myself to thee. In thy hands I place my eternal salvation, and to thee I entrust my soul.... For if thou protect me, dear Mother, I fear

nothing: nor from my sins, because thou wilt obtain for the pardon of them; nor from the devil, because thou art more powerful than all hell together; not even from Jesus, my Judge, because by one prayer from thee, He will be appeased.” The notion that one prayer from Mary has the magic power to appease Jesus makes Mary into a wonder working woman and denigrates Jesus into a punitive Judge who needs to be softened by His compassionate mother.³⁰³ Such teachings are blasphemous, to say the least.³⁰⁴

Could the Catholic Church be moving toward proclaiming a fifth major Marian dogma after the Motherhood of God (431), the Perpetual Virginity of Mary (649), the Immaculate Conception (1854), and the Bodily Assumption to Heaven (1950)? The fifth dogma would be Mary’s universal mediation as Co-Redemptrix (Co-Redemptress), Mediatrix of all grace, and Advocate for the people of God.³⁰⁵ Some believed this dogma was near when Pope John Paul II was Pope. John Paul had said of Mary: “Mary, though

conceived and born without the taint of sin, participated in a marvelous way in the sufferings of her divine Son, in order to be Co-Redemptrix of humanity.”³⁰⁶ To say that Mary is a Co-Redeemer with Christ is verging on blasphemy. Scripture is clear (Acts 4:12; John 8:36).

Conclusion

Some will argue, “Why does it matter. Today we don’t worship the false gods.” This is true, but Scripture teaches we need to worship in “spirit and truth” (John 4:23–24). The teaching that Mary and the saints are in heaven and can hear prayers is not truth. It takes away from biblical truth, which is what our faith stands or falls on. The teaching on Mary and the saints also takes emphasis away from God, even if that is not the desired outcome. This moves people close to idolatry even though that may not be the intention. First Corinthians 10:19–22 says the pagan idols of the past were demons being worshipped. If Satan is an arch-deceiver, could he not use his guile to focus our attention

onto Christian saints and Mary to take away from the worship of the true God? Remember Satan appears as an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14). He will use any means necessary to limit our relationship with the true God.

Something interesting occurred back in 1981 when the latest Marian apparitions began in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Spain. While “Mary” was appearing in Medjugorje and El Escorial, the Hindu and Ceylonese goddesses made similar showings in India and Ceylon (Sri Lanka).³⁰⁷ But also, in November 1981, six teenage girls and a boy in Rwanda reported seeing “the Mother of the Word,” warning of horrors to come and pleading for repentance before it was too late.³⁰⁸ The funny thing about Bosnia and Rwanda being visited at the same time in 1981 is that both of those places became war torn regions in the early 1990s at roughly the same time. Both of those regions experienced mass genocide the likes of which had not been seen since World War II. Is that just a coincidence or does the “god of

this world” pull some strings behind the scenes of world events? We read earlier about the scripture in Daniel pertaining to the influence of the Prince of Persia over that nation. Could Satan have been trying to influence the mind of Catholic believers to believe in these apparitions, especially when the linkage could be made to drama that would occur in both of these countries in the future? After all, the Virgin did reveal secrets of things to come in both places. In Bosnia she predicted that war would come. In Kibeho (Rwanda) the seers reported early on that the Mother of the Word had asked that a chapel be built in the village and be called “the Gathering of the Displaced.”³⁰⁹ This prophecy or prediction was on target because by 1994 there were 2.2 million refugees in Rwanda due to the war and genocide. The village of Kibeho became an epicenter for many of these displaced.

But not all the Virgin’s predictions have been accurate. In Kibeho the apparition reported three things: the Virgin Mary had come to

prepare the world for her Son; two, the world is coming to an end; three, the end of the world is not a punishment.³¹⁰ Now we could debate the first two pronouncements, even though it's been forty years since the vision and Christ has not returned. But the third prophecy (prediction) can be evaluated. The Bible is very clear that the end of the world will be a punishment (Revelation 19:11–21) on the world. When you research these various visions, it seems like the messages from “the Virgin” are sometimes on target, but not always. We have seen there are some confirmed miracles, but not many. Some of these events have been frauds and hoaxes, but not all. In our estimation something “other worldly” does happen in some of these cases. But we must not lose sight of the fact “other worldly” can be coming from a good source or a bad source. Remember that Satan is the “father of lies” (John 8:44). And one other caution for our Catholic and Orthodox friends out there:

In Deuteronomy 13:1–5, God warns us about

prophets who predict the future or show a sign or wonder. The warning is even if that prediction is correct and they offer information on following another god we should not follow them because the true God could be using it to test us. We have shown you how Mary is not capable of answering prayer or hearing prayer. Don't forget what deception is. Deception is not obvious or apparent. It is hidden and sometimes difficult to ascertain. The only thing you can count on to determine if something is or is not of God is through God's Word. God's Word makes it very clear the Virgin Mary and saints cannot speak, talk, or communicate at this time. If Mary and the saints aren't talking, who is? If you have read this entire booklet you have seen the scriptures that address the enormity of Satan's deception. There is no doubt Satan and his minions have the power and the motivation to lead Bible believers astray. One of the more modern apparitions we have not spent any time with occurred in Scottsdale, Arizona in 1988. Here nine young

adults at St. Maria Goretti began experiencing apparitions of Mary and Jesus. The primary and first seer was Gina Talone. Gina was a very talented child and later adult. You can find more about this story from many sources, but I do want to conclude with some comments from a reporter who spoke and researched these apparitions. He said the following: "The only thing about Gianna that seemed in the least peculiar was her claim that Satan had appeared to her one evening during the summer of 1981. She had been napping when she opened her eyes and saw the Devil himself standing at the foot of her bed. He had the lower body of a beast, but from the waist up appeared to be a man, an imposingly handsome one...."311

Finally, in the summer of 1988 in Meadville, Pennsylvania at a Greek Orthodox summer camp called Camp Nazareth, something strange happened. I mention this story because I know one of the priests and one of the camp counselors who were there. An icon began to weep one night and a sweet smelling

aroma wafted up from the tears that were falling. The priest used cotton balls to swab the liquid from the icon onto other icons at the camp and other pictures of saints and Mary. The other icons and pictures then began to develop more droplets of the sweet smelling liquid. Now the priest and counselor I know would not lie about this. Up to 200 other campers and priests witnessed this. I know my friends in the Orthodox and Catholic Church are seeking God. I know they are good people. But I also don't believe God created this wonder. I'll let you make up your own mind about how this happened, but I hope this booklet will help inform your decision.

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