

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

717 North Stapley Drive, Mesa, AZ 85203 Phone: (480) 833-7500

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SOLUS CHRISTUS

I made the point in our study of *sola fide* that the Roman Catholic Church's rejection of the Reformation's doctrine of justification meant a rejection of *all* of the solas as well. Solus Christus, in particular, is rejected due to the role of Mary.¹ "The Mary of Roman Catholicism is no longer the Mary of the Bible. Rome has its own Mariology, namely the doctrine of Mary, but has lost the biblical Mary. Mariology is the theme of two recently promulgated dogmas (i.e. binding beliefs): the 1854 dogma of the immaculate conception and the 1950 dogma of the bodily assumption into heaven. Mariology impinges not only on the doctrine of revelation (the whole Mariological doctrine is founded on tradition rather than the Bible) but also on the doctrine of the Trinity (she receives prayers and petitions, obscuring the work of Christ and the Spirit), salvation (she has a role in the work of salvation) and so on. In nations and cultures dominated by Roman Catholicism, intertwined with lofty dogmatic definitions, it is the practice of devotional and popular Marianism that largely defines the religious experience of many Roman Catholic faithful who pray to her and are devoutly committed to her. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* goes so far as to say that *the Church's devotion to the Blessed Virgin is intrinsic to Christian worship* (971). To say it is *intrinsic* means that it is inherent to Christian worship; there can be no proper worship without the devotion to Mary. It also implies that when dealing with Marian devotion, one touches a central nerve of the whole of Roman Catholic spirituality, not something that can be dealt with independently."² How did this develop? Webster writes: "From the early years of the Church, some writers such as Irenaeus began to stress Mary's humble obedience to God as the antithesis between Christ and Adam. At a time when there was the growing veneration of martyrs, Mary also began to be viewed as one who should be specially honoured because of her unique relation to the Lord, and slowly she became more and more exalted in the consciousness of the people. She was therefore accorded *hyperdulia*, the highest degree of veneration, as opposed to mere *dulia*, which belongs to all saints and angels, and *latria*, which is due to God alone. Yet there is not the slightest evidence that there was a cult of Mary or a worship of her person in these early centuries. The real turning point in the doctrine of Mary came with the Council of Ephesus in 431 A.D., when Mary was declared to be the *Mother of God* (*theotokos*). This was not initially intended to exalt Mary so much as to exalt the Lord Jesus Christ and preserve the truth of his divinity. However, just as the portrayal of Mary as being antithetical to Eve was distorted by the unbiblical way in which Mary was seen to contribute to our salvation, so this changed emphasis opened up the possibility of a growing exaltation of Mary herself. The veneration became so great that eventually she was believed to have been immaculately conceived. The next step was for her to be exalted to the position of co-redemptrix and co-mediatrix with Christ. Mariology had clearly led to Mariolatry."³

- I. **WHAT IS A MEDIATOR?** The term, as Hendriksen points out, is a derivation of the word that indicates someone who stands *in the middle*. “The purpose for which he takes this in-between position must be derived, in each single case, from the context, or from parallel passages. In the present case it is not open to legitimate doubt that the apostle takes his *point of departure* in the fact that Christ is the One who has voluntarily taken his stand between the offended God and the offending sinner, in order to take upon himself the wrath of God which the sinner has deserved, thereby delivering the latter.”⁴
- II. **WHAT THIS IMPLIES AS IT APPLIES TO CHRIST.** The great Puritan preacher John Flavel wrote, “Christ being a Mediator betwixt God and man, implies as *the fitness of his person, so his authoritative call to undertake it*. And indeed the Father, who was the wronged person, called him to be the umpire and arbitrator, trusting his honour in his hands. Now Christ was invested with his office and power *virtually*, soon after the breach was made by Adam’s fall; for we have the early promise of it, Gen. iii. 15. Ever since, till his incarnation, he was a virtual and effectual Mediator; and, on that account, he is called, *the Lamb slain from the beginning of the world*, Rev. xiii. 8. And *actually*, from the time of his incarnation.”⁵
- III. **WHY CHRIST IS THE ONLY MEDIATOR.** Luther declared forcefully, *Nolo Deum absolutum*, “I will have nothing to do with an absolute God, i.e., a God without a Mediator.” He proclaimed, **Without Christ No Access to God.** Without this God, who died and rose again, let every man fear and hesitate, nor presume to draw near to God or to come to Him, no matter how pious and holy or full of good works he may be. For God the Father cannot tolerate anyone who wants to go to Him or approach Him unless he brings His beloved Son Christ with him. And so indeed the Son Himself says in John 14:6. Here, then, all saints and all their merits are utterly excluded so that nothing is to rate in the presence of God, except Christ. That is why Jews, Turks, and the pope, who despise this Son of God with His suffering, death, and resurrection, and propose to come to God in a different way, stand condemned.”⁶ Hendriksen observed: “There is not one God for this nation, one for another; one God for slaves and one for free men; one God for rulers, one for subjects. Paul is his own best interpreter: *For in one Spirit were we all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether bond or free; and were all made to drink of one Spirit* (1 Cor. 12:13). Again, *or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also: if it be true (and it certainly is true) that God is one . . .*” (Rom. 3:29). That the apostle is actually thinking of the distinction *ruler . . . subject* follows from the immediately *preceding* context (1 Tim. 2:2a). That he has in mind the distinction *Jew . . . Gentile* is apparent from the immediately *following* context (1 Tim. 2:7b). Not only the realm of creation but also that of redemption is united under *one* Head. Hence, not only is there only *one* God; there is also only *one* Mediator *of* (here in the sense of *between*) *God and men*. The present is the only passage in which Paul speaks of *Christ as Mediator*. However, in Gal. 3:19, the apostle also uses the term, with probable reference to Moses, who as mediator transmitted God’s law to the people. In Gal. 3:20 he speaks in general about *a mediator*. It is the author of the epistle to the Hebrews who discusses at some length the position of Christ, our heavenly High Priest, as Mediator (Heb. 8:6; 9:15; 12:24), *the Mediator of a new covenant*. . . the entire context speaks of *salvation* (verse 4), and of Christ as a *ransom* (see verse 6). A striking explanation is found in Gal. 3:13, *Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for* (or *over*) *us*. In that passage the Savior is pictured as standing *over* us, that is, *between* us and the curse of the law, so that the curse falls on him, and we are saved. However,

it is clear that in the present passage (1 Tim. 2:5), the concept *Mediator* is even slightly broader. Not only does Christ in this capacity restore sinners to the right legal relationship to God, but he also brings them to *the knowledge of the truth* (verse 4); and causes *the testimony* of this glorious truth to be borne to them (verse 6). Hence, *he both establishes peace and reveals it to men*, persuading them to accept the good news. He stands revealed as Mediator in this *twofold* sense. Note the manner in which the identity of this Mediator is revealed: *one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus*. To think of *men* in this connection means to think of *man*, the man Jesus Christ. Hence *men* and *man* are juxtaposed. Had salvation been intended only for one particular group – say, only for the Jews – the apostle would have written, *the Jew Christ Jesus*. Since it was intended for both Jew and Gentile, that is, for men in general, without distinction of race or nationality, he writes *the man Christ Jesus*. (By no means is this a denial of Christ's *deity*. That he is the object of faith and worship is clear from 1 Tim. 3:16. The word *man* here in 1 Tim. 2:5 is not contrasted with *God* but with *Jew* or *Gentile*.)”⁷

CONCLUSION: “Thus Christ, because He is both God and man, is the only Saviour, the only Mediator, the only way to God. Not one word is said about Mary, or a pope, or the priests, or the saints, as mediators. Yet Romanism teaches that there are many mediators, and the great majority of Roman Catholics, if asked, would say that our primary approach to God is through the Virgin Mary, and that only as she begs for us can we enter the presence of God. The priests detract from the glory of Christ when they teach that Mary is a mediator. Humanly speaking, that must grieve her who would want all honor to go to Christ. The priests have no right to place her in such an unscriptural position. Mary is presented in Scripture as a handmaiden of the Lord who fulfilled her office in the church according to promise, just as did John the Baptist and others, but whose work has long since ceased. The great antithesis is not between Eve and Mary, as Rome sets it forth, but between Adam and Christ (Rom. 5:12-21; 1 Cor. 15:21, 22, 45-47). Roman tradition has so altered the picture of Mary that the Mary found in the New Testament and the Mary found in the Roman Catholic Church are two different and conflicting persons. Any fair-minded Roman Catholic knows that his church gives first place to Mary and that Christ is kept in the background. The reason that Mary, the saints or angels cannot act as our priest or mediator is because they have no sacrifice, nothing to offer in behalf of our sins. Only a priest with a true sacrifice can serve as mediator between God and men. Christ alone has a true sacrifice, and He alone can act as our priest. In this connection Calvin says: *I deem it indisputable that the papal priesthood is spurious; for it has been formed in the workshop of men. God nowhere commands a sacrifice to be offered now to Him for the expiation of sins; nowhere does He command that priests be appointed for such a purpose. While then the pope ordains his priests for the purpose of sacrificing, the Apostle (Paul) denies that they are to be accounted lawful priests.*”⁸

ENDNOTES

¹Mary is the embodiment of *natura pura* (pure nature), immaculate with regard to original sin, and the idealized projection of every human being. The Roman Catholic epistemological openness, its trust in human abilities and its overall reliance on the possibility of human cooperation all converge in the Roman Catholic account of Mary. She is the quintessential expression of the Roman Catholic view of the relationship between nature and grace. Roman Catholicism needs a mediating subject to relate grace to nature and nature to grace – namely, the Roman Church – and thus Allison speaks of the *Christ-church interconnection*. The church is considered a prolongation of the incarnation, mirroring Christ as a divine-human reality, acting as an *altera persona Christi*, a second *Christ*. It is therefore impossible for Roman Catholics to cry with the Reformers *Solus Christus!*, for this would be seen as breaching the organic bond between Christ and the church. The threefold ministry of Christ as King, Priest and Prophet is thus transposed to the Roman Church – in its hierarchical rule, its magisterial interpretation of the Word and its administration of the sacraments. There is never *solus Christus* (Christ alone) only *Christus in ecclesia* (Christ in the church) and *ecclesia in Christo* (the church in Christ). Leonardo DeChirico, *Same Words, Different Worlds* (IVP, 2021), p. 106.

²*Ibid.*, p. 77.

³W. Webster, *The Church of Rome At The Bar of History* (Banner of Truth, 1995), p. 72.

⁴Wm. Hendriksen, *I II, Timothy: New Testament Commentary* (Baker, 1957), p. 97.

⁵*The Works of John Flavel* I (rpt. Banner of Truth, 1968), p. 112.

⁶*What Luther Says: An Anthology* I (Concordia, 1959), p. 187.

⁷Hendriksen, op. cit., p. 97.

⁸L. Boettner, *Roman Catholicism* (P&R, 1962), p. 148.