

Marian Dogmas

“Mariology”

- Mariology is the theological study of Mary. It seeks to relate the doctrinal and dogmatic truths about Mary to other doctrines of the faith, especially those concerning Jesus, His incarnation, and his work of redemption. By understanding more clearly who Mary is and her role in salvation history, we come to understand more clearly salvation and the Savior himself.
- Ideally, all theology (including mariology) *corroborates* faith; it makes it easier to believe, and it provides insight and spiritual refreshment through the integration of rational intelligence with faith. By knowing and understanding more clearly what we believe, we gain confidence in and love for the faith. We see for ourselves that God and His revelation *really is* as trustworthy as He says he is. But theology is not the *warrant* or *justification* for faith: faith is a spiritual grace, a gift received through Baptism which is accepted (or rejected) by an act of the will.
- Mariology is *not* the history or biography of Mary—although historical study can inform theological study.
- Studying mariology is *not* the same as having a meaningful devotion to Our Lady or to Our Lord—although if pursued with a devotional intention it can be a way of honoring her, strengthening one’s relationship with Christ, and even leading one to true worship and grace.

Dogma versus doctrine versus opinion

- The Church ranks its teachings roughly as follows, from highest, surest, and absolutely binding to least sure and non-binding:
 - dogmas (revealed by God and infallibly taught by the Church);
 - infallible doctrines (not revealed by God, but infallibly taught by the Church and therefore unchangeable);
 - other doctrines (potentially fallible and therefore changeable);
 - theological opinions (relatively more or less commendable based on the authority of the individual or body rendering the opinion; thus a synod of bishops is *prima facie* more commendable than an individual theologian);
 - other statements.
- In general, people say "doctrine" or "teaching" informally to refer to any of these, but each kind of teaching makes different demands on the conscience of individual Catholics -- what we must believe, versus what is recommended to us by authoritative teachers, versus what is just food for thought that we can take or leave.
- Not all teachings of the Church are divinely revealed (e.g. teachings regarding the validity of non-Catholic priests), and not all are "binding" (aka infallible, e.g. the opinion that the "fire" of Purgatory is Christ himself).

- The dogmas are those doctrines that are [1] part of divine revelation, [2] have been officially defined by the Magisterium (i.e. bishops, popes, and councils, past and present) as such, and so [3] are necessary for belief. All dogmas are doctrines, but not all doctrines are dogmas.
- For more, here's a good article: [How to Weigh Church Teachings](#)

Dogma and Morality/Ethics

Dogma is the province of the "theoretical truths of Revelation concerning God and His activity (doctrina credendum: what is to be believed)." In many cases, dogmatic truth exceeds the bounds of human reason precisely because it concerns God and His divine action. Dogma does not directly concern human action, i.e. ethics, morality, or the "practical teachings of Revelation (doctrina faciendum: what is to be done)." In many cases, it is not clear how or whether a dogmatic truth affects how we human beings should act -- except insofar as our purpose is to know and be more like God in both His being and His action. With deeper prayer and contemplation, however, knowledge of God and His divine action can and will change how we live and act.

Marian Dogmas

There are four dogmas pertaining to Mary.

1. **Mary is the Mother of God.** This dogma is expressed by the title Theotokos ("God-Bearer") in the Eastern Church. Rationale: To deny that Mary is the true Mother of God involves the denial of the union of the true humanity and true divinity in the person of Jesus Christ.
2. **The Immaculate Conception of Mary:** Mary was conceived without sin. This refers to *her* conception in *her* mother's womb, not to Jesus' Incarnation. Rationale: To be worthy of the unique dignity of being the Mother of God, Mary was set apart from humanity's inborn inclination to sin (original sin), and was herself detached from sinful inclination (personal sin). The Church interprets Gabriel's salutation ("Hail, full of grace!" Luke 1:28) and Elizabeth's greeting ("Blessed are you among women!" Luke 1:41) as implicitly referring to her Immaculate Conception.
3. **The Perpetual Virginity of Mary:** Mary was a virgin before, during, and after the birth of Jesus. [See discussion and rationale below]
4. **The Assumption of Mary:** Mary was assumed body and soul into heaven. The Church teaches that she underwent a bodily death ("expleto terrestri vitae cursu"): "Mary's body, which was by nature mortal, should be, in conformity with that of her Divine Son, subject to the general law of death." The dogma of the Assumption teaches that Mary did not suffer the corruption of death. Theologians generally interpret this to mean that the Assumption is Mary's transfiguration or glorification, such as all the Saints (baptized) will enjoy after final resurrection of the dead at the Second Coming -- but she enjoys it already. From this perspective, God accords Mary the privilege of being second only to Jesus Christ in living eternally in a glorified body.

What is "virginity"?

Mary's virginity is affirmed in the earliest Christian creeds (as far back as the 2nd cen.). In the tradition of the Church, there are three aspects to Mary's virginity:

- *virginitatis mentis* (virginity of mind), that is, a constant virginal disposition,
- *virginitatis sensus* (virginity of sense), that is, freedom from inordinate motions of sexual desire (i.e. freedom from lust or concupiscence, NB not freedom from all sexual desire),
- and *virginitatis corporis* (virginity of body), that is, physical integrity.

The modern, colloquial definition of virginity focuses solely on bodily aspects, leading to confusion, because in ancient times bodily virginity was understood in a way that is inadequate from a modern natural-scientific point of view. At the same time, the virginity of mind and sense received more emphasis in the ancient world than they do in modern times.

The dogma merely asserts *the fact* of Mary's virginity without determining more closely how this is to be physiologically explained. In light of the dogma of Mary as the true Mother of God, many church Fathers supposed that the birth of Jesus must have been miraculous in some way. Modern theologians instead emphasize that Mary's virginity is not inconsistent with her having given birth to Jesus the natural way. (Both of these are examples of non-binding, potentially fallible theological opinions -- two possible ways of many of developing a theology based on the dogma.) Again, the dogma does not specify the physiological aspects of her virginity or motherhood. The answers to the physiological questions are not so important for the "average Christian"; but if you are interested, I have attached a relevant excerpt from a standard dogmatic theology textbook.

Perhaps the most important aspects of the dogma of Mary's perpetual virginity are the psychological and spiritual aspects of virginity, which are usually overshadowed by physiological questions. In this context, we should bear in mind that the ancient cultural concept of virginity included not only virginity of body, but also of mind and sense and therefore was frequently applied to both young and old women who exhibited virtues of wisdom and prudence.

Can men be virgins?

- Short answer: Yes, but male saints are not formally given the title of "Virgin" (capital V).
- Long answer: Saints are given titles according to their vocation. One of the oldest such titles is Martyr, and can apply to men or women. The title Confessor was developed to describe men and women who suffered pain and torture, but not to the point of death; they were known as "companions of the Martyrs." Likewise, clerical and pastoral roles have associated titles: e.g. St. Ignatius of Antioch is remembered as "Bishop and Martyr"; St. Augustine is "Bishop, Confessor, and Doctor." Doctor (meaning "teacher" or "giver of doctrine") is someone whose writings are deemed authoritative.

- In the fourth century, and in parallel to the establishment of the dogma of Mary's perpetual virginity, the ritual consecration of (female) virgins developed, and the ritual was modeled on the ritual of ordination of (male) clergy. (In some medieval monastic orders, consecrated virgins even wore some of the vestments of consecrated clergy, though they did not perform their sacramental functions.) Women who were consecrated virgins and then remembered as saints after their death were given the title Virgin. As a saintly title, applying the term Virgin solely to women is parallel to applying the clerical titles (e.g. Pope, Bishop, Priest) solely to men: only men can be clergy, and likewise only women can be ritually consecrated virgins. Around the same time, the title Confessor began to be reserved for male saints; Virgin and Confessor began to refer respectively to female and male saints who exhibited extraordinary, heroic virtue and spiritual sacrifice (albeit associated with stereotypically gendered virtues of chastity for women and fortitude for men).