

## **Explaining Mary to an Evangelical, Part Two**

**By Jim Penrice**

Two Marian dogmas often attacked by Evangelical Christians are the Immaculate Conception and Mary's perpetual virginity. Both Catholics and Evangelicals can cite Scripture verses that seem to uphold their side of the argument. In fact, these two topics accentuate the limitations of a "Bible-only" approach to faith, for Scripture does not explicitly proclaim one side or the other definitively to be right (If it did, there would be no on-going debate.) So one has to necessarily accept the limitations of Scripture to address these questions—it only takes us so far.

An Evangelical may respond to this by saying: "The reason Scripture does not explicitly confirm or deny these dogmas is because they focus on Mary instead of Jesus—the Gospel is concerned with the Lord, not his mother, so ultimately these so-called dogmas don't matter." A Catholic would counter with: "They matter because they don't stop with Mary—they ultimately point to Jesus, and who He is and what He means for us. And for that we have to go beyond the limitations of Scripture."

Rather than dive into the perpetual whirlpool of these eternally circling arguments, we should pose this question to Evangelical Christians: What is it about these two Catholic dogmas that strikes such a raw nerve? When you contemplate Mary's unique relationship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, are either of these dogmas really that outrageous or out of sync with basic Christology? And if so, why?

Let's first take a look at Mary's unique relationship with the Holy Trinity with these excerpts from my article "Explaining Mary to an Evangelical, Part One":

"No Bible-believing Christian can deny that Mary is the only woman in history to conceive a child with the Holy Spirit instead of with a man. Nor would a Bible-believing Christian belittle or diminish the sacred relationship between any two persons who conceive a child in a covenant of love, or deny that this most intimate interaction between persons involves a permanent commitment of love and trust, and a distinct role to play in and for the duration of the lives of each other and the child.

“The conception of Jesus established Mary in a spousal relationship with the Holy Spirit, an exclusive relationship to which no other woman has ever been privileged. To deny that Mary enjoys this uniquely intimate relationship with the Holy Trinity—that the Holy Spirit conceived the Father’s only Son with and within her, and through her consent—is first of all to deny a basic Christian truth. To deny this also reduces Mary to merely the ‘ovum donor’ for the Son of God; yet this is what the Evangelical treatment of Mary implies....

“Evangelicals imply that despite the Scriptures’ declarations of Mary as “favored one” and her exclusive spousal union with the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:28, 30, 35), that she is blessed among women (Luke 1:42), that all ages will call her blessed (Luke 1:48), that Mary shares in Jesus’ suffering [which the Scriptures tell us is for the redemption of the world] (Luke 2:34-35), that Jesus was obedient to her as he grew in wisdom and age and favor (Luke 2:51-52) and responded to her intercession (John 2:1-5), that Mary’s role was simply to provide the ovum and the womb, because anyone who does God’s will is Jesus’ mother—there is nothing unique or efficacious about the motherhood of Mary.

“In fact, to reduce Mary to merely an ‘ovum donor,’ one must still acknowledge that the Savior of the world came to the world through her. To then claim that her role in giving Jesus to the world stopped there, that God just used her body parts and had no use for her from there on, is to put God in the same place as a man who uses a woman for a temporary purpose and then lets her go.”

Given all this, is it really that outrageous that the woman chosen for this unique, spousal relationship with the Holy Spirit, the Spirit who would penetrate the most intimate part of her to unite divinity and humanity fully and completely—flesh, blood and spirit—would first be preserved from original sin in preparation for this unique union of God and man? That the God who created the first woman in a state of original, sinless justice at the first creation would create another in the same state to begin His re-creation of mankind? That God would first create an undefiled temple for His only Son to be conceived, gestate and be born to the world?

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Or that Mary, having given birth to the Son of God, would remain a virgin the rest of her life, that the gate of the temple through which the Lord passed would remain eternally shut for that reason (Ezekiel 44:2)? That Joseph, her earthly spouse, out of reverence for Mary's Heavenly spouse would not honor the sacredness of that relationship and refrain from entering the intimate sanctuary where divinity and humanity joined in a unique and all-sacred manner?

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