

Mary, Saints, Worship and Salvation

By Steve Ray

I received your package today and read through the material. I was struck by several things in the correspondence which I will comment on in the course of this letter. But first I must say that you did a masterful job of addressing the issues of Mary, worship, Catholics, and the Gospel in your responses. I am also impressed with the kind and gentlemanly tone of the correspondence between the two of you. It demonstrates the level of charity and godliness on the part of both participants. We as Catholics are indebted to you for representing us so well in so many forums. I have little to add to your letters but as I read I became inspired and wrote some of my own thoughts on the matter with a bit of background which may or may not be helpful.

I will use the word “Protestant” frequently, so it appropriate to explain what I mean. With so many different denominations and sects within Protestantism, I want to point out that I am usually referring to my own heritage –American Evangelicalism –best exemplified by Billy Graham and Francis Schaeffer, two men who had a tremendous impact on my early Christian formation; the first in my younger years, the latter in my early adulthood. I may critique Evangelical doctrine and practice, but I have a great love for my Evangelical past and for my brothers and sisters in Christ who live within its tradition. I owe much in my own spiritual life to my Evangelical past: my love of Jesus, Scripture, and the pursuit of holiness.

What is Worship?

Catholic are often accused of “worshipping” Mary, the Saints, icons, statues and the like. Your friend mentions several example which he assumes, based on his Protestant tradition, his lack of familiarity with the ancient Christian traditions and customs, and his *Protest*-ant reading of the Bible, that these actions are inherently acts of worship and therefore idolatry. “Bowing before a statue must *certainly* be worship,” says the Evangelical who has not only abandoned the idea of images (only of a certain kind, as we shall see later) and is very inconsistent in his own practice, but has never taken the time to understand Catholic and liturgical Christianity.

Have the vocal opponents of statues, icons and the like ever asked the little old lady in her babushka if she is actually worshiping the statue in front of which she kneels? Does this holy, and wrinkled woman in Poland believe she is worshiping the icon of the Black Madonna? Does the Mexican mother surrounded by her kneeling children consider her veneration of our Lady of Guadalupe the same as her worship of God? Of course not. It would only take a few such questions, should the wondering Protestant care to learn the truth, to find out that these common folks would be shocked at such a thought.

Veneration, though it may easily be misunderstood by the misinformed and noninquiring Protestant, is certainly not confused with worship or adoration in the eyes of the simple peasant woman or the highly educated lawyer of canon law. Catholic teaching has always taught, and has been understood by the lowliest adherent of the faith, that worship is due to God alone and any transference of such adoration to a creature or inanimate object is

pure and unadulterated idolatry. Does a Protestant who judges the simple actions of the peasant bear false witness against his brother or sister? I think our Protestant brethren have a long way to go before they can judge and speak unadvisedly about their Catholic brethren and their acts of spiritual sacrifice and praise. Bearing false witness and judging unjustly and out of ignorance are not virtues praised by our Lord and the watching angels.

But let's get to the bottom of the issue from several different perspectives: biblical, historical, and cultural, all of which play an important part in understanding how the Catholic understands God, the Saints, images, veneration, worship, Mary and the communion of saints.

Worship is a word that needs to be understood if we are to delve into this topic in any meaningful way. Understanding that there are differing "levels" of respect to be given to others and to God, the Catholic has carefully defined their terms. One is to honor God but also honor their father and mother. Leviticus 19:32 "You will stand up in the presence of gray hair, you will honour the person of the aged and fear your God." The Israelites who worship God alone are commanded to show a level of honor by rising to their feet in the presence of gray-haired and aged men. This "standing up" is a sign of respect and honor but is not confused with the command in the same verse to "fear your God". They also fall down on their faces in front of the king. Consider David and King Saul: "David arose and went out of the cave and called after Saul, saying, "My lord the king!" And when Saul looked behind him, David bowed with his face to the ground and prostrated himself" (1 Sam 24:8).

The average American may assume, if they are not aware of ancient customs and protocol that David might actually be worshipping Saul. But far be it from the heart of David to worship a man, even though he calls him "Lord" and prostrates himself on the ground before him. One falls on their face before God, but also before the King but the actions of the heart are quite distinct in either case.

In order to make this differentiation clear, Catholic doctrine has explained the distinction with the terms *latria*, *dulia*, and *hyperdulia*. *Latria* is the "worship" and "adoration" allowed to God alone; whereas, *dulia* and *hyperdulia* are forms of respect and veneration given to worthy creatures. I cannot explain it better than F. M. Jelly, O.P., in his article "Marian Devotion". He writes,

"In more technical terms used by the Tradition to draw this important distinction, devotion to Mary belongs to the veneration of *dulia*, or the homage and honor owed to the saints, both angelic and human in heaven, and not to *latria*, or the adoration and worship that can be given only to the Triune God and the Son incarnate. Because of her unique relationship to Christ in salvation history, however, the special degree of devotion due to Mary has traditionally been called *hyperdulia*. While *latria* is owed to her Son by reason of unity of his divine and human natures in the Person of the Word made flesh, *hyperdulia* is due to Mary as truly his Mother (cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 103, a. 4; III, q. 25, a. 5) (Shaw, ed., *Encyclopedia of Catholic Doctrine* [Huntington, IN:

Our Sunday Visitor, 1997], pg. 401).

If some Catholics fail to follow the Church's teaching on these matters it certainly doesn't impinge on the teaching of the Church. It merely means that some in the Church are uncatechized and not understanding or practicing what the Church teaches. As you mentioned, many in Protestant circles fail to live up to the full official teaching of their own denominations or sects. This does not necessarily minimize the teaching; rather, it simply demonstrates that some don't fully understand or practice what their group teaches.

Unfortunately, Protestants just split and divide when they find people not following their denomination's teaching or practice and they start a new, more vital group. This group usuallys last one generation before another split is necessary to restore purity. Catholics don't have this option and must live with ancient and biblical teaching that the Church is one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church and as such cannot be divided.

What is Prayer?

Having made that important distinction, I would like to make a further observation To an American Protestant, *prayer* or *kneeling* is synonymous with worship. Prayer *is* worship. The English know better for they live in a monarchy (more on this later). For a Catholic prayer *can* be worship but it also can be an act of communication and imploring, without any element whatsoever of being worship. It can be worship but is not by its very nature, worship. The Protestant doesn't understand this. When a Catholic mentions "praying to Mary" the Protestant mind processes that as "worshipping Mary". This is simply a problem of semantics. Protestants would do well to understand Catholic terminology before assuming too much or judging too harshly.

Prayer, as to it etymology simply means, "to ask". Prayer is not "to worship" at its heart, but "to ask". I can, in the old English, from which we get the word, pray to anyone for a favor. Such usage has passed out of favor in America, but in England one still *prays* to the court for leniency or favor. Thus, to pray to Mary is no different in its essence from me asking a brother in Christ for a favor or intercession. The only difference is one has gone on to heaven, whereas the other is sitting with me at table. However, believing in eternal life and the communion of saints makes this distinction less than trivial to a Catholic. I have been asked many times, "Where does the Bible say we should pray to dead saints?" to which I usually reply, "Where does the Bible say that saints are dead?"

When I ask a brother in Christ to pray for me am asking him to mediate for me to God. I am often asked, "If I can pray directly to God, why should I pray to Mary?" Good question, but it is very simple. If I can go directly to God, why do I ask my brother in Christ to pray for me? Can't I just pray to God directly? I am asking a brother to be a mediator for me—to pray to God for me. This is simply what a Catholic does when asking Mary to intercede for him. Some may go too far and say that one must go through Mary to get to Jesus. This of course is a misunderstanding of Catholic teaching. But misunderstandings happen in more than just Catholic circles. We say Christians who die are now in heaven and can intercede (mediate) for us just as living folks on earth can do.

Are Saints Involved in our Lives?

In fact, the Scriptures are quite clear that the saints are not dead. One needs only read Jesus' rebuke to the Sadducees for their denial of the resurrection. They ask about those supposedly raised from the dead in heaven—taunting him—and Jesus replied, much as I do when I'm asked about prayer to Mary or the Saints,

“Jesus replied, ‘You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God. At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven. But about the resurrection of the dead—have you not read what God said to you, “I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob”? He is not the God of the dead but of the living’ [present tense]. When the crowds heard this, they were astonished at his teaching [as are many Protestants with Catholic teaching on ‘the communion of saints’]” (Mt 22:29–33).

There are many other such passages which make it clear that eternal life is a reality and that saints are even now standing before the throne of God, aware and concerned about life on earth and able to make supplication to God on their behalf. There is even a description in the New Testament of a “great cloud of witnesses surrounding us” (Heb 12:1) as we run the race. This is picturesque language borrowed from the coliseums and theatres of ancient Greece and Rome where spectators cheered for those running the race. Paul (presuming he is the author of Hebrews) reminds us that the Saints are surrounding us, cheering us, involved in our struggles here on earth—the Church Militant. Finally, consider the following in relation to the reality of our mystical union with the heavenly throngs:

“But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, *to the spirits of righteous men made perfect*, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel” (Heb 12:22–24).

The Hebrews and Graven Images:

Having commented only briefly on the meaning of worship, prayer, and the communion of saints, let's go back to the Old Testament and look at the making of images, idols, and the commands of God about “graven images”. Often, since there are several legitimate ways of dividing the “Ten Words” (commandments) of God, Catholics are accused of eliminating the second command about the making of graven images. The Catholic Church subsumes this command within the first commandment. (By the way, Jews, Catholics, Reformed, Lutherans, and Orthodox have various divisions for the commands. There are actually thirteen or fourteen imperatives than must be broken down into “ten words”.)

In Exodus 20 the Jews were strictly forbidden from making “graven images” with the purpose of worship. This distinction is implied and obvious since the contrast is between gods. Will you have one God, the God of Israel, and worship Him alone, or will you have other gods, in the form of graven images, which is the kind of gods worshiped by the surrounding nations? Images are not forbidden, as we shall soon see, but images that are gods like the surrounding nations. It is obvious that God is referring to idols, not simply images. Idols = gods. This was the pagan way. It was not to be the way of the Hebrews. God tells Moses,

“I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol [graven image] in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments” (Ex 20:2, 3).

After this strict command to make no idols [graven images] in the form of things in heaven or on earth, God turns around five chapters later and commands that the Israelites hammer graven images of cherubim out of gold—for the Tabernacle no less!

“You shall make a mercy seat of pure gold, two and a half cubits long and one and a half cubits wide. You shall make two cherubim of gold, make them of hammered work at the two ends of the mercy seat. Make one cherub at one end and one cherub at the other end; you shall make the cherubim *of one piece* with the mercy seat at its two ends. The cherubim shall have *their* wings spread upward, covering the mercy seat with their wings and facing one another; the faces of the cherubim are to be *turned* toward the mercy seat. You shall put the mercy seat on top of the ark, and in the ark you shall put the testimony which I will give to you. There I will meet with you; and from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim which are upon the ark of the testimony, I will speak to you about all that I will give you in commandment for the sons of Israel (Ex 25:17–21).

So, God commands them to make graven images out of gold, replicating His description of a heavenly angelic creature—cherubim.

Next he commands them to make another graven image, this one of bronze. It was to be looked upon for healing. Not only was it made of hammered bronze but it was placed on a pole and had to be gazed upon by the Israelites to gain healing. You can read this story in Numbers 21. The bronze serpent was a good thing, commanded by God, to be looked upon by the Israelites, to serve a God-given purpose in their midst.

Graven images are obviously not synonymous with idols; statues are obviously not necessarily the objects of worship. In Numbers 21 the Jews did not worship the statue of

the bronze serpent, but when they had a change in heart and *did* begin to worship and offer it sacrifices due only to God alone (2 Kings 18:4), it was torn down and destroyed. It is the *worship* of images that is forbidden. God hates the making of living or inanimate objects which serve as *gods*.

Images of God

Images of God were strictly forbidden by the Israelites for God was spirit and no one could see God and live. Moses made bold one day, being alone with God on the mountain and asked to see His Glory.

“Then Moses said, ‘Now show me your glory.’ And the Lord said, ‘I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the Lord, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. But,’ he said, ‘you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live.’ Then the Lord said, ‘There is a place near me where you may stand on a rock. When my glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft in the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by. Then I will remove my hand and you will see my back; but my face must not be seen’” (Ex 33:18–23).

Such a strict prohibition of creating an image of God can be sympathetically understood, both because no one had ever seen God and so, wouldn’t know how to represent Him, and second because to see Him was to die.

However, the Incarnation changed all that. It changed a lot of things. Jesus was with God, “and the Word was God” and “He became flesh and tabernacled among us” (Jn 1:1, 14). Such an amazing thing changed the world. It also changed theology, liturgy, and the arts! Jesus, though being God, was now able to be seen. “No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him [and revealed Him]” (Jn 1:18). God, who could not be seen, is now seen in Jesus—He is revealed.

Paul tells us that “God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him” (Col 1:19) and that “in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form”. The world has changed! 2 Corinthians 4:4 tells us that Christ is “the image of God” and Colossians 1:15 informs us that “He is the image of the invisible God”. So, the invisible God has now become visible in Christ. God has now given us an image of Himself.

In an extended portion of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (paragraph numbers 1159–1162) we read a marvelous description of the change that has taken place and how we are to understand and appropriate it.

Holy images: 1159 The sacred image, the liturgical icon, principally represents Christ . It cannot represent the invisible and incomprehensible God, but the incarnation of the Son of God has ushered in a new “economy” of images:

Previously God, who has neither a body nor a face, absolutely could not be represented by an image. But now that he has made himself visible in the flesh and has lived with men, I can make an image of what I have seen of God ... and contemplate the glory of the Lord, his face unveiled.

“1160 Christian iconography expresses in images the same Gospel message that Scripture communicates by words. Image and word illuminate each other:

“We declare that we preserve intact all the written and unwritten traditions of the Church which have been entrusted to us. One of these traditions consists in the production of representational artwork, which accords with the history of the preaching of the Gospel. For it confirms that the incarnation of the Word of God was real and not imaginary, and to our benefit as well, for realities that illustrate each other undoubtedly reflect each other’s meaning.

“1161 All the signs in the liturgical celebrations are related to Christ: as are sacred images of the holy Mother of God and of the saints as well. They truly signify Christ, who is glorified in them. They make manifest the “cloud of witnesses” who continue to participate in the salvation of the world and to whom we are united, above all in sacramental celebrations. Through their icons, it is man “in the image of God,” finally transfigured “into his likeness,” who is revealed to our faith. So too are the angels, who also are recapitulated in Christ:

“Following the divinely inspired teaching of our holy Fathers and the tradition of the Catholic Church (for we know that this tradition comes from the Holy Spirit who dwells in her) we rightly define with full certainty and correctness that, like the figure of the precious and life-giving cross, venerable and holy images of our Lord and God and Saviour, Jesus Christ, our inviolate Lady, the holy Mother of God, and the venerated angels, all the saints and the just, whether painted or made of mosaic or another suitable material, are to be exhibited in the holy churches of God, on sacred vessels and vestments, walls and panels, in houses and on streets.

“The beauty of the images moves me to contemplation, as a meadow delights the eyes and subtly infuses the soul with the glory of God.” Similarly, the contemplation of sacred icons, united with meditation on the Word of God and the singing of liturgical hymns, enters into the harmony of the signs of celebration so that the mystery celebrated is imprinted in the heart’s memory and is then expressed in the new life of the faithful.”

It is intriguing to me that one hand Evangelicals will condemn Catholics for their use of statues, icons, and images, and on the other hand the Evangelical does not blink an eye at their own rampant use of religious images in the form of pictures, crèche scenes, Bible picture books, statues of the “Praying Hands”, Christian flags, the Cross, fancy steeples, and the even the Bible. I have seen the Bible used at the pulpit as a “prop” for over an hour without once being opened or read from. Are little images of Mary, Joseph and baby Jesus images or statues? I was raised to understand the Gospel while reading Bible

picture books with 2-dimensional pictures of God, angels, Jesus, Mary, etc. while at the same time learning about how sinful and idolatrous the Catholics were for having images of the same. The contradiction never hit me until I stepped back to fairly consider Catholicism.

Your friend sees a person kneeling in front of a statue or image and draws the conclusion that the person is worshiping the statue or icon. Jumping to conclusions in such a manner is not a good idea. Kneeling before a king does not prove king-worship. I have spent many hours kneeling in front of an open Bible, but I doubt your friend would jump to the conclusion that I was worshiping the Bible, as inconsistent as that conclusion may be.

I have been challenged repeated about the crucifix since my conversion to the Catholic Church. "Why," it is asked, "do you worship that crucifix with Jesus still on it? Don't you know He is risen? We worship a risen Christ, not a statue of Him still on the cross." How does one answer such nonsense? Christ was on the cross and is now in heaven, but to have the image of Him suffering on the cross for our sins in no way implies that we *deny His resurrection* and keep Him dead on the cross. What about the same Protestant with their crèche scene of Jesus in the manger? Does the baby Jesus in the manger deny that Jesus ever grew up? Jesus is no longer in the manger and no longer on the cross, but the mystical reality of both are ever present with us and it behooves us to keep them ever before our forgetful minds.

Why It's Hard for Americans to Understand

Worship of anything but the Trinity is idolatry. This is the teaching of the Bible and the Catholic Church. But there are many nuances that are missed on Americans and modern Evangelical Protestants which have happily been retained in the Church.

Weakness in language, lack of knowledge of history (especially of hierarchies and kingdoms), leveling of our social consciousness, lack of respect for elders, nobility, and heroes, reflected in the fact that most "heroes" today are not the kind of heroes venerated in generations past, those moral and principled folks who stood for goodness, truth, and beauty even at the expense of their own lives at times. Heroes today are simply those who are famous for being well known, such as sports figures, rock stars, and the like. This shameless lack of heroes and a sense of respect and homage due those who truly deserve it lends to the Protestants' lack of understanding the ancient Catholic tradition. Protestant tradition, especially that born out of the Pietist movements and free church schisms, flowered in the United States (e.g., Pilgrims, Puritans, Baptists, etc.) held to an anti-monarchical creed as almost equal to the dogma of the Trinity. Thus, this abhorrence of royalty, nobility, and monarchy led to a leveling of humanity.

We have learned to hate kingdoms and love nations, to despise monarchy and promote democracy, to abhor hierarchies in favor of "the people". This is not all bad, but in the violent overthrow of such time-honored institutions and protocols, we in America have taken on somewhat of a beggarly component and a discontinuity with our past, both European and Christian. We have forgotten our history and have been disconnected with language and practices, leaving us culturally illiterate.

Jesus, as a good Jew and one who understood the economy and government of God, frequently talked of “the Kingdom of God” or the “Kingdom of heaven”. Jesus never intended to establish a democracy—the “democracy of God”. In fact, the word “kingdom” is mentioned seventy-six times in the gospel of Matthew alone and the word “democracy” is nowhere found.

The very thing that makes it difficult for an Evangelical Protestants to accept the hierarchical authority in the Church is also their to hinder them from understanding such things as Saints with a capital “S”, veneration of Mary, kissing of icons, or honoring the leaders and heroes of the faith with means and gestures forgotten by Americans but well and alive in more “ancient and civilized” societies.

Unhappily, we Americans are at a great disadvantage. We don’t think like Jews, we don’t have a Jewish or early Christian “literacy”, we have forgotten about kingdoms and honor, we have jettisoned the protocol or respect and veneration long cherished by other lands and times. We have blurred all the distinctions and the language of worship, veneration, honor, respect, homage, and the bodily and mental actions due in a more biblically-likened society. Ours is a brand new experiment on the governmental scene and we have forgotten our past and the customs that were inherent in it. And so, we have been handicapped in understanding the faith. We have been blinded to the beautiful nuances and customs of our Christian forbears. We have turned a blind eye to what was clearly understood in ages past, and with our new Evangelical Protestant fervor to be loyal to the Bible alone (though we have been cut off from its culture and life), we have cursed and denounced the customs of wiser and more ancient traditions. It is too our shame (and I speak as an Evangelical for my first thirty-nine years).

The Catholic Church is an amazing society. It has retained the best of the ancient cultures, including Jewish ideals and the early Church, as well as adapting to modern democratic societies. It has the wisdom that comes from age and the vitality that comes from youth. She is forever old, yet always young. She understands the language and culture of the past with its nobility and monarchy, yet thrives in the modern age of democracy. But we differ from the Protestant in that we retain the Apostolic Tradition in all its riches and depth, with all its language and practice, without trashing it for modern concepts of what worship should be and what language and actions are accepted by our limited American, democratic, Bible-only, newly invented Protestant tradition.

Contrasting our limited American and Protestant cultures, I am all the more impressed with the tenacity and duration of the Mosaic tradition and later, the Apostolic Tradition which has lasted in the first case for 3500 years and in the second case is still strong and uncompromised in the Catholic Church after 2,000 years. Whereas in America, with only two hundred years under our belts, we have already forgotten our monarchical history and we have been victims in many cases of a revisionist history. Even our “Protestant tradition” has fragmented and split into thousands of competing schemes and sects.

Worshipping Statues, Saints, and Living Apostles

Your friend, in his last letter to you, commented on how he might understand the distinction made by Catholics between veneration and worship, but then objects with the following words:

However,, I would tend to define worship a bit differently. When an individual bows down to a graven image of a dead person, communicates with that person (presumably with a spirit of the dead), expects that person to answer prayers and petitions, pledges love and allegiance to that person, kisses the statue representing that person, offers gifts to that person, burns candles and incense to honor that person, this seems to me to be just as much authentic worship as we see among the priests of Baal in the Old Testament or the followers of Maxim6n in Guatemala today.

Here we have a classic example of someone cut off from the traditions and customs of historic Christianity. It is often alleged by Protestants that the Church in her initial pristine state was quickly fallen off the tracks and rolled down the embankment sometime in the first centuries. It wasn't until Martin Luther that genuine Christianity was restored. However, when looking back at history it is obvious (as I brought out in *Crossing the Tiber*) that the Catholic Church is the one that stayed loyal to the teaching and tradition of the Apostles and it was the Protestants that jumped off the track in the 16th century and rolled down the hill. They are the ones who have broken with historical Christianity.

Here we find your friend arbitrarily defining worship. What is his criterion? He wants to define worship differently that it has been defined for 2000 years but rather according to his own finite and limited experience. His short experience of the faith (short in light of Jewish/Christian history and tradition) supercedes all the "definitions" of the Fathers, the Councils, the East and West and numerous and greater minds that his or mine. Yet he, following the recent traditions of his *own* sect of Protestantism finds it easy to throw off the combined wisdom of the Church for his own subjective sentiments. "I would tend to define worship a bit differently," he says. He then proceeds to prove my earlier point that he neither understands Catholic teaching nor is he able, with his American, democratic, non-sacramental mindset, to understand what is going on other than to dismiss it as worship. Sad indeed.

"A graven image of a dead person"?? This simple sentence belies a profound ignorance of Scripture. A graven image is defined as an *idol* that has been made with the express purpose of making it a *god*. This is even implied in various translations of the Old Testament which interchange the two terms. Yet, as we have seen a statue or image made of hammered gold (or plastic, or bronze, or wood) is not necessarily, by its very nature, an *idol*. His comment is ill-advised biblically. And "a dead person"? We have already discussed this. We are Christians and believe in eternal life. One who dies in God's friendship is not dead; they are very much alive and in His Presence. Your friend sounds like a Sadducee here knowing neither the Scriptures nor the power of God (Mt 22:32).

He then gives his litany of "abuses" which he thinks proves his suppositions that Catholics worship Mary and the Saints: "pledges love and allegiance to that person, kisses the statue representing that person, offers gifts to that person, burns candles and

incense to honor that person, this seems to me to be just as much authentic worship as we see among the priests of Baal.” Granted, these actions *might*, depending on the mental intent of the person involved, constitute worship, and if so it is condemned and discouraged.

However, these actions in and of themselves do not prove or even imply worship. They only do in your friend’s mind because he is culturally illiterate (in light Catholic history). He has cut himself off from historic Christianity and arbitrarily set himself up as a umpire to act as judge over peoples’ actions and intent—and even the meaning of Scripture. If I see him weeping or praying on his knees in front of his open Bible, or kneeling to propose to his fiancée, or adoring and kissing a grandchild, or laying flowers at the grave of a grandparent, or caressing a lock of hair from a deceased child, looking up to heaven to remember a lost loved one, or keeping a picture of grandpa prominently placed on the mantle, or kissing a picture of a sweetheart or prostrating himself before the Queen of England or calling a judge “Your honor” or “Your highness”, would it be inappropriate for me to assume he is worshipping—according to his own standards and criteria? If not, why not?

There are passages in Scripture that clearly remind us to never worship anything or anyone but God alone. The passages I am about to discuss are often misused by non-Catholics in an attempt to prove that Catholics practice idolatry (e.g., bowing to the Pope, venerating Mary, or kissing the Bishop’s ring), but they need to be understood in the fuller context and with the carefulness of interpretation that Catholics expect. They should not be used as a clumsy and uninformed cudgel against Catholics practicing the ancient faith and customs, by those who have accepted newly created customs. Let’s take a look at a few of them.

Acts 10:24–26 “Cornelius waited for [Peter and his entourage], and had called together his kinsmen and near friends. And as Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him, and fell down at his feet, and worshipped him. But Peter took him up, saying, Stand up; I myself also am a man.” And Revelation 19:9–10, “And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he saith unto me, These are the true sayings of God. And I fell at his feet to worship him. And he said unto me, See thou do it not: I am thy fellow servant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus: worship God: for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.”

In these passages we see someone bowing with the express intent of *worshipping* first a man, Peter the apostle, and second an angel. Both times the “worshiper” was rebuked for worshipping a creature and not God alone. Doesn’t this mean that if as Catholic bow to a statue or to the Pope that we are violating Scripture and worshipping these creatures and creations? Of course not. Such would do a great violation to Scripture and to the Ancient Christian faith as embodied in Catholicism.

These passage use the word *worship* which is used in the New Testament seventy-two times (according to a root word search done with Logos Software) and every time it is

used of worshiping God (or of false worship of a false god) save these two instances and one other (Rev 3:9). It is clear that this action of proskunevw is reserved for God alone. It would correspond to the Latin word *latria*, an action of adoration and worship reserved for God alone.

Such worship is never afforded Mary or the Pope in the Catholic faith. One may want to attribute an act of prostration, bowing, prayer, or love as a certain proof that Catholics worship Mary and the Pope. But, such is not the case and any attempt to slander the Catholic person or the Catholic teaching to imply such is simply that: slander. It is also a betrayal of an ignorance of Catholic teaching and practice and an oversimplification of a rather important and complex aspect of human existence—confusing the various levels of which humans show respect, veneration and worship to God and men. Catholics don't make such mistakes for they are still grounded in the ancient tradition and have not forgotten their cultural and historical literacy.

Kings and Queens demand respect and some sign—usually a visible, bodily action—to demonstrate that proper respect and homage is being given. It is not usually required in democratic societies such as the United States where a simple handshake with the President seems to suffice. But in a monarchy, even in England today, the intelligent and cultured Evangelical Protestant would not refuse to bow to the Queen saying, “Oh no. To bow is to worship; to kneel is to worship and I certainly can't do that!” Heavens no, no more than great Christian men and women in ancient times would not fail to bow to the Queen with no fear of committing the internal sin of idolatry—no more than Israelites failed to bow or prostrate themselves before their human king without ever once confusing it with worship.

Going back for a moment to the passage in which Cornelius falls down at Peter's feet and worships him, I would make a few more comments. There is nothing in this sentence that equates the act of bowing or “falling down at” one's feet with “worship”. Bowing or falling at one's feet are elements that *accompany* worship, but are not necessarily identical with it. The fact that Luke continues with “and worshipped him” seems proof of this. What Cornelius *did* while he was at Peter's feet constituted worship, not merely the act of “falling down” by itself. We have shown earlier that David prostrated himself—fell at the feet of King Saul and never in his wildest imagination we he or those with him suspected he was worshipping King Saul.

Again, there is no necessary and formal equation of “falling at his feet” and “worship”. The two are clearly connected, but obviously not identical as it appears some Protestants would like to make it appear. Just as prayer is an *element* of worship, it is *not* worship in and of itself (such as prayer to the saints, etc). Also, as a matter of Catholic practice, I don't see any occasions of “falling at the Pope's feet” as a required etiquette. Bowing or kneeling (on the left knee vs. the right), yes. If I recall correctly, kneeling on the right knee (genuflecting) is traditionally reserved for God alone (as in the Holy Eucharist).

Hey, how many of us men kneeled to ask our wives to marry us? I did. No one would accuse me of worshipping her (although she *is* really terrific and I often say I adore her).

People have been known to throw themselves at people's feet and ask for mercy or forgiveness. Is that worship? I remember a sister in the Lord who offended our family once and several years later she came back to apologize. She rose from her chair and approached us, falling on her knees she apologized. We forgave her but it never entered our mind that she was worshiping us.

Implied in Luke's account of Cornelius is that Cornelius had thoughts and an inner disposition toward Peter which was appropriate for God alone. He does not give us specifics as to what those exact thoughts and disposition were . . . that's where the *Catechism* clarifies and expounds upon the Scriptures for us (as we've discussed: *latría*, *dulia*, and *hyperdulia*).

Protestants who make such claims against Catholics, based on observing Catholic practices alone and assuming to comprehend them, might serve themselves, their constituents, and Catholics well by doing a little more research, and by showing a little more charity—and by avoiding the bearing of false witness which is a capital crime in God's eyes.

Mary, Queen of Heaven

Now, as we conclude, let's walk on some real slippery ice when it comes to Catholic and Protestant dialog. The Church has proclaimed Mary the Queen of heaven which is quite a lofty title and quite an important office. How can such a thing be? Isn't that, as some Protestants claim, making Mary part of the godhead, given her an almost divine prerogative? Don't we have one mediator between God and man (1 Tim 2:5)?

Let's take a look at the Scriptures and start at the beginning of this topic. Solomon, who is a type of Christ in the Old Testament, honored his mother in quite a peculiar way to our 20th century minds, but quite normally considering the protocol and practice of ancient Eastern kingdoms. Even the Queen had to respect the king and we know from the story of Esther that a Queen could be killed if she entered the king's chamber without his bidding. Yet, look what happened when Bathsheba, Solomon's mother entered his throne room. This, by the way, is the very first recorded act of Solomon.

“So Bathsheba went to King Solomon, to speak to him on behalf of Adonijah. *And the king rose to meet her, and bowed down to her; then he sat on his throne, and had a seat brought for the king's mother; and she sat on his right.* Then she said, “I have one small request to make of you; do not refuse me.” And the king said to her, “Make your request, my mother; for I will not refuse you” (1 Kings 2:19).

This is a frequently overlooked fact among the kings of Israel. Regarding this action, the *New Bible Dictionary* comments, “Bathsheba seems to have blazed the trail for other queen mothers in Judah, for the author of Kings faithfully records the name of each king's mother (e.g., 1 Ki. 15:2, 10, etc.). Roland de Vaux comments that, “This title [of Queen Mother] implied a certain dignity and special powers. . . . It is possible that the Great lady was accorded her rank on the accession of her son” (*Ancient Israel*, pg 118,

119). That such was also the practice among other peoples in no way denigrates the practice among Israel and later, Judah.

After the Babylonian invasion, there was no king in Israel and for over five hundred years the throne was vacant, even nonexistent. But that was all to change with the arrival of Gabriel.

“In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin’s name was Mary. And he came to her and said, “Hail, O favored one, the Lord is with you!” But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and considered in her mind what sort of greeting this might be. And the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, *you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus*. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and *the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there will be no end*” (Lk 1:26–33).

I provide here a paragraph from my upcoming book with the working title of “A Catholic Study Guide to the Gospel of St. John”.

“In the Old Testament, the kings of Judah, and other Eastern kingdoms, held their mothers in great esteem. In fact the king’s mother was known as the “*gebîrah*”, the “grand lady” or the “queen mother” (1 Kgs 15:13, grandmother in this case; Jer 29:2; 2 Kgs 24:15; 10:13; Jer 13:18).” Solomon’s mother, Bathsheba, was the first Great Lady in Israel. Solomon’s first act as king was to rise from his throne, bow to his mother and place a throne for her on his right hand (1 Kgs 2:19). It was not the king’s wife who held the position of *gebîrah*, rather it was the king’s mother. Jesus, as the new king of Israel, seated on the eternal throne of David (Lk 1:32), of whom Solomon was a figure, would most certainly esteem His Mother at least as much as the earthly kings had esteemed their own mothers. Thus, in part based on this scriptural insight, the Church teaches that Mary has been assumed into heaven as the Mother of King Jesus and has been crowned the Queen of Heaven—this is certainly most fitting! (CCC 966; Rev 12:1). (See Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, 117–18).

Such biblical background, if we as Christians allow Scripture to interpret Scripture and real life, gives quite a sufficient understanding as to the Assumption of Mary as Queen of Heaven near on the heels of her Son’s accession to the throne.

To presume that she might intercede for the Church under these circumstances, and with the understanding of what we’ve said previously, it is not unreasonable. Since Jesus gave the apostles the authority and responsibility to bind and loose and teach the truth, it is incumbent that we heed them and their successors in the Church. If nothing else, the modern day Protestant would be wise to take a look at the teaching of the wider Church, as you said from East to West. I was impressed with a statement by Charles Spurgeon,

the great Baptist preacher of the 19th century when he said he was amazed that many people were so concerned with what the Holy Spirit was showing them, but what little regard they had for what the Holy Spirit had shown others. This is certainly the situation with the Evangelical Christians disregard of 1500 years of Christianity.

In the letter you received from your friend, he seemed to assume that the idea of the Queen Mother came from the ancient pagan religions, especially that of the cult of Dianna of the Ephesians. Don't you think it strange that the Apostle John, living in Ephesus prior to and subsequent to writing the book of Revelation, knowing the cult of Dianna in Ephesus would himself portray Mary in Revelation 12 as the Queen of heaven?

“A great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars; and she was with child; and she cried out, being in labor and in pain to give birth. . . . And she gave birth to a son, a male child, who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron; and her child was caught up to God and to His throne” (Rev 12:1, 2, 5).

I especially liked your paragraphs: “The attack that is being mounted on Mary in your circles as a disguised pagan goddess, could just as well be directed to Jesus himself. The fact that there are parallels in pagan religions to a queen of heaven, a mother and virgin, could be viewed in an entirely different way than this literature views it. All the pagan parallels to both Mary and Jesus can be viewed as a preparation for the gospel, as C. S. Lewis has pointed out when he talks about the “strange dreams” that foreshadow for humanity the fulness of truth revealed in Christ. Just as there are parallels in pagan religions to Mary as queen and mother, so too there are many parallels to Jesus, in story after story of the son of a god dying and rising again. Does that discredit Jesus? Or is it another witness to him? Do the stories of a Great Flood that we find in pagan epics prove that the flood of Noah's time is a pagan counterfeit, or do they witness to the flood of Noah?

“And where do we get the key to correct interpretation of these parallels? Do we get it from a subjective spiritual experience? Or do we get it from the wisdom of the “Great Church” East and West, which has grappled with these issues for centuries, guided, we believe, by the Holy Spirit. It astounds me that modern Americans can throw over 2000 years of living tradition, that witnesses to the gospels and the teaching of the apostles, in favor of theories based on shoddy scholarship and personal, subjective experience.”

I would also add that I would be very wary of categorizing all Marian activity as Satanic, as some are so wont to do. From my own experience of counterfeit actions of Satan (and I was part of a very intense deliverance ministry for many years and saw things I could never describe), Satan usually counterfeits that which is genuine. So to claim that all or some of the Marian activity in our lifetime is a counterfeit of Satan is to almost prove, from my experience anyway, that much of it is therefore genuine. Satan counterfeits the true manifestation. He hopes by such counterfeits eventually obliterate the true work of God by parading false replicas. Unfortunately, your friend George seems to have fallen right into the trap.

The last sentence in the Charisma News Update states that the gathering was intended “to engage in spiritual warfare against the Queen of Heaven”. These are some strong words in light of historic Christian teaching and practice and I would be very reticent myself, even when I was an Evangelical, to say such things. One could find themselves, as you already said, in opposition to God. Better to be cautious as Gamaliel advised many years ago than to find oneself fighting God.

Mary Hinders Salvation?

I was distressed to read the strong words about Catholics going to hell because they pray to Mary, the cult figure of the Ephesians, the goddess Queen Mother Dianna (Artemis to the Greeks). Mr. Your friend complains that many who follow “corrupt” Catholic teaching will go to hell because of a false gospel, yet I am more concerned for the millions of Evangelicals who have been taught that “accepting Jesus as Lord and Savior” gives them a free ticket to heaven regardless of their subsequent actions and life. Many will go to hell because they think they are not required to live a holy life before God.

To tie the Catholic teaching of Mary, the Virgin Mother of God, to the pagan goddess of ancient Rome and Greek is unhistorical at best, foolishness and even wicked at worst. To attribute the teaching of the Church to this pagan goddess belies an ignorance of history. The struggle between the followers of Christ and of Diana (Artemis) continued even after the destruction of her temple in 263 AD. There is a fifth century inscription mentioning the replacement of a statue of the goddess by a cross. Far be it for these early Christians to adopt the very goddess which they fought so long to overturn.

When I hear Evangelical speak about Mary in this way, I wonder how much they have read on the topic and if they are not just the unsuspecting victims of such uninformed writers as Hislop, Boettner, and more recently Hunt, Zins, and the earlier Woodrow, and a host of others. You correctly encourage him to read more deeply and widely in the tradition of the whole Church and not just his small circle.

Do Catholics hear the Gospel? When my wife and I walked out of our first Mass on January 2, 1994, we had to re-evaluate some of our thinking. We had always heard that Catholics never heard the Gospel. In fact, one of my best friends from the early 70’s, the Evangelical pastor that performed our wedding ceremony made the distressed comment to me at our conversion to the Catholic Church, “I am not too worried about your two older children because they have been in good churches and have heard the Gospel; I am sorrowful for your two younger daughters for in the Catholic Church they will *never* hear the Gospel”.

My wife was deep in thought after the first Mass, while I was in talkative jubilation. After some time she said, “I have always been told that Catholics never hear the Gospel at Mass and having never been to one I believed them. However, now that I have attended Mass I wonder if these folks were deaf. I have never heard the Gospel proclaimed more clearly or beautifully than I did this morning!” How so? What is the Gospel? That God created us, loved us and we sinned against Him bringing about our condemnation and just

deserts: hell. God then sent His only begotten Son to die for our sins and through that substitutionary, meritorious death, we can become sons of God by grace. This exudes from the Mass. The Creed lays it out. We say in unison, “Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, have mercy on us.”

Granted, I have not heard an altar call recently while at Mass. A Protestant friend of mine visited Mass with me a few months ago. His comment after the homily was, “Why didn’t he preach the Gospel and give an altar call?” My goodness, where does one begin with such a question? I explained to him that the purpose of the Mass was not to evangelize the lost, but a communal family meal in which the main purpose was to worship God. The Mass is primarily worship, not evangelism. Each has their time and place. Protestants often have the Gospel preached to them every Sunday with an altar call as if they are not “saved” yet, just in case an unbeliever is in the pews. At the Mass it is assumed that the participants are believers, part of the family of God and that is why they are there to share in the family meal.

However, “altar calls” are not out of the question and I think Catholics can learn much from this phenomenon. Recently I spoke to a group of teenagers and challenged them about living for Jesus, repentance of sins, making a decision *today* to live the Gospel. I asked them to stand if they were serious about their Christian life. I gave an altar call and every kid except 2 or 3 got up, many in tears, to give their lives to Jesus and the Church. Altar calls are good things, but that is not the purpose of the Mass.

We may not hear the Gospel in the new format which American Evangelicalism has developed through the Revival periods of early America: using newly developed phrases like “the sinner’s prayer”, “asking Jesus into our heart”, “accepting Jesus as our Lord and Savior”, “eternal security”, and other such language not found in the New Testament—language which would be unfamiliar to Jesus or Paul. Paul did not speak with the jargon of modern Evangelicals. We used to say one should come to the altar after a Gospel message (of which I preached many) to receive Christ. Little did we realize we had pinched (using a good English word) the language from Catholic theology and gutted it historical meaning. There was no altar and the Eucharist (how *receiving* was meant originally) was non-existent as understood by the early Church. The full reality of the Gospel, including the sacraments had been gutted for what is often no more than a message of cheap grace. This new Gospel tried to retain the spiritual aspect but the stripping away of the riches experienced by the historical Church of East and West has left Evangelicalism impoverished at best and that is being discovered by many who are now finding the Catholic Church (and Orthodox) as a bastion of sanity and historical, biblical continuity with the apostolic teaching.

How Does Your Friend Use Scripture?

One other aspect of your friend’s correspondence which gave me pause was the cavalier manner in which passages of Scripture were used with seemingly disregard for their original and literal meaning. Their prophetic words and “mismanagement” of the passages in Revelation seem irresponsible to me. I cannot tell for sure from the limited text provided but it is not unusual for groups like these who have cut themselves off from

the tradition of the Church to have an unwarranted freedom in interpreting Scripture to a point where the Scripture really has no objective meaning but simply becomes a quarry of phrases and gems to arbitrarily use in conjunction with subjective emotions and alleged “messages from God”. I am always very suspicious of a tradition that seems to give prophetic utterances primacy over the literal intent of Scripture.

Don’t get me wrong, I believe in prophecy and the gift of prophets in the Church, but it needs to be properly managed and kept in its place: the distinction between public and private revelation. They are quite free with arbitrary “prophecy from God” yet so quick to uncategorically deny other potential manifestations of God in this age. This is easy to do when a group cuts themselves off from history and the wider Christian experience.

I have written enough, probably too much for you to even read with your busy schedule, but these were a few of my thoughts as I read the correspondence you sent me. Keep up the good work brother and may God’s grace be abundantly yours for your own sanctification and for the work to which He has called you.

I will close with a quote from John Henry Cardinal Newman:

The sun in the springtime will have to shine many days before he is able to melt the frost, open the soil, and bring out the leaves; yet he shines out from the first notwithstanding, though he makes his power felt but gradually. It is one and the same sun, though his influence day by day becomes greater; and so in the Catholic Church it is the one Virgin Mother, one and the same from first to last, and Catholics may have ever acknowledged her; and yet, in spite of that acknowledgment, their devotion to her may be scanty in one time and place, and overflowing in another (*Certain Difficulties Felt by Anglicans in Catholic Teaching, Vol. 11, p. 28*).

In the Lamb,
Steve Ray