More Questions About Mary

Questions addressed to a Catholic Priest. From “Radio Replies”.

By Rev Dr Leslie Rumble, M.S.C.
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Mary.

Why do Catholics believe that Mary prays for them and helps them?

Because they believe that she is their spiritual Mother, and that she has not lost her interest in those for whom her Son died, merely because she is in heaven. It is the Christian law, according to Saint James, that we should pray for one another. The Saints in heaven pray for us who are on earth and still endeavoring to work out our salvation. And Mary is the greatest of the Saints. It is but an application in practice of our belief in the Communion of Saints, a doctrine we profess every time we say the Apostles' Creed.

Why do they pray to her instead of to God, as Protestants do?

We do not pray to Mary instead of to God, but we pray to her as well as to God. And those who retain devotion to Mary are in the habit of offering more prayers directly to God than those who have repudiated devotion to Mary. Moreover, prayers to Mary are prayers to God through her intercession. And you cannot deny that at times it is good to have our Lady praying with us rather than to pray alone to God. Two prayers are better than one, above all when the other whom I have asked to join in my petition is the very Mother of Christ.

To my Protestant mind, your worship of Mary is little short of idolatry.

That can only be because you have not understood Catholic doctrine on the subject. The Creator alone is God. Mary is as much a creature as any other human being. But whilst she is as much a creature as we are, we have not been honored by God nearly as much as she.

Does not the elevation of Mary, Mother of Jesus Christ, to a rank quasi-divine, find an illuminating analogue in the ancient Egyptian cult, which gave Isis the divine rank of Mother of Heaven?

Firstly, Mary has not been elevated by the Catholic Church to a rank quasi-divine, or even remotely divine. In Catholic theology, she falls as far short of divinity as I do, and that's infinitely. Secondly, there is no true analogue between the historical Mother of Christ and the purely mythological Isis, and still less can any illumination be derived from a comparison of the two.

Catholicism says Mary is omnipotent in power and infinite in mercy.

It does not say that Mary is omnipotent in power and infinite in mercy. It says that her prayer and intercession have a special efficacy in winning for us the protection of the Omnipotent power of God and His infinite mercy.

"Since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection." Nowhere in Scripture do we find that by man and woman came the resurrection.

The resurrection was but the complement of the redemptive work. Essentially that work was accomplished on Calvary by the death of Jesus on the Cross. And Mary was there, standing at the foot of the Cross, identifying herself with the offering of her Son. By man and woman came our death. Both sexes co-operated in our downfall, and both sexes co-operated in our redemption. God Himself predicted that this would be so. After the sin of our first parents, God said to Satan, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and you shall lie in wait for her heel, and she shall crush your head." Genesis 3:15. Mary is the second Eve as Christ is the second Adam. And both repaired the evil of our first parents, Christ principally and Mary secondarily and subordinately to Christ.

I have even read in a Catholic book that Mary is co-redemptress of mankind!

Mary's work was to be our co-redemptress, and to mediate for us together with Christ, but of course in subordination to Him. He is the one principal Mediator to whom we owe all. Do not be disturbed by this association of Mary with the redemptive work of Christ. If all Christians are members of Christ, and are called upon, as Saint Paul says, to fill up what is wanting to the suffering of Christ, then you can be sure that as Mary, His Mother, was more closely associated with Christ than we are, so she is more closely associated with His redemptive work. By a special title, therefore, we call her co-redemptress. We call her "Our life, our sweetness, and our hope." For, in bringing forth Christ she brought us forth to life; she is the model of every virtue, and above all should be the glory of all women; and she is our hope, as Eve was our despair. All this tells us what she is for. She is our spiritual Mother in heaven, and she fulfills the duties of a Mother, winning for us by her intercession that grace of Christ which is life to our souls and which, please God, will mean eternal life in the end.

What do you mean by her Immaculate Conception?

The Immaculate Conception does not mean that Mary was conceived miraculously, or that there was anything abnormal in her physical origin. It simply means that her soul was preserved from that taint of original sin, which all others inherit from our first parents. It was really an anticipated baptism, a redemption of Mary's soul by prevention of sin's contamination and through the merits of Christ. The Eternal Son of God would not enter this world through a defiled doorway.

Mary said, "My spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior." Luke 1:47. Would Mary have said this if she were already immaculate, and in no need of a Savior?

She owed her preservation from sin to the anticipated merits of Christ. Christ, therefore, was her Savior by prevention as He is ours by subsequent cleansing.

Mary also said, "He has regarded the lowliness of His handmaiden." How could she be lowly if she were the highest person ever in existence since Adam before his fall from grace?

Mary was not the highest person in existence since Adam. Christ was infinitely higher than Mary. But sin is not the only motive of lowliness or humility. The purest and most innocent of creatures, by the mere fact of being a creature, is infinitely lowly before the Creator. Adam, before his fall from grace, was the lowly servant of God. Jesus Himself, in virtue of the limitations of His created human nature, said, "Learn of Me, that I am meek and humble of heart." Our Lord was certainly without sin, and if He described Himself as lowly of heart, the use of the same expression by Mary is no argument against her sinlessness.

If Mary was free from sin and immaculate, how could she die? Death is the wages of sin.

Death is the wages of sin in a very special sense. Sin or no sin, it is natural to man to die. The human body, just as the bodies of animals, has a natural process of growth to maturity followed by age, decay, and death. Naturally, therefore, even Adam and Eve, had they never sinned, would have encountered a natural physical death if no other provision had been made for them. But God promised them a supernatural exemption from any natural process of death if they remained faithful to Him. They fell, forfeited their supernatural immunity from physical death, and nature was allowed to have its way. Therefore death is the wages of sin not as if death were abnormal, but as a normal conclusion of earthly life from which men had lost their exemption. Since Mary was human, it was not unnatural that she should die. But you will ask, "If she was supernaturally preserved from sin, why was she not supernaturally preserved from death?" That we shall see when soon we examine her leaving this world.

No one except Christ could possibly be without original sin, and yet see death, unless he or she were God.

I am afraid your thought is here a little obscure. Christ was without original sin, yet saw death, not because He was God, but because He was man. In His Divine Nature, He could not die. In His human nature, He could. Keep in mind that death is natural to a human nature, quite apart from original or any other sin. A human nature could not be God, and it could, and normally should die, quite apart from sin. By a special privilege, God had exempted man from the normal process of death on the condition that he refrained from sin. Man sinned, and lost the privilege. Mary was preserved from all taint of sin, and by that, at least, deserved to be preserved from the natural process of death. But her life and her vocation were so intimately blended with the life and vocation of Christ, that both she and He endured an undeserved death. As when mankind fell, both sexes were represented in Adam and Eve, so both sexes were represented in our redemption. Mary, the second Eve shared death with Christ, the second Adam. The death of Christ was our redemption, but included in the redemptive work of Christ, though subordinate to it, was the death of Mary. The primitive traditions, which tell us of the assumption, also tell us of the "falling asleep of the Virgin Mary," an expression used to denote the transitory character of her death.

Why does the Catholic Church maintain that Mary was "ever a virgin," when Scripture clearly states that she was a virgin only until the birth of Christ?

The Catholic Church has defined as an article of faith that Mary remained always a virgin. Every Catholic in the world is obliged under pain of serious sin to believe that on the very authority of God's knowledge and veracity. Now cannot you see that the Catholic Church would be very, very foolish to define such a doctrine, if the opposite were clearly stated in Scripture? Anyone can get hold of a copy of Sacred Scripture. If the opposite of the Catholic dogma were clearly stated there, one would only have to quote the passage to refute the defined doctrine, and the whole case for the Catholic Church would collapse. Should you not suspect that if the Catholic Church has defined that Mary remained ever a virgin, then, to say the least, there cannot be anything in Scripture against it? Don't you think the Church would have made sure of that, before defining what otherwise could so easily be proved to be erroneous?

If Joseph was not His father, why do they trace His descent from David through him?

Because the Jews always kept their genealogies in the male line, and since Mary was of the same tribe or clan as Joseph, his line of ancestry was also hers.

You say Jesus was descended from David through Mary, but the Bible says He is descended from David through Joseph.

The Bible does not say that. Saint Matthew says, "Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus." That says no more than that Joseph was related by marriage to Mary, who, as a matter of fact, gave birth to Christ. Saint Luke says at the beginning of his account, "Jesus, being (as it was supposed) the son of Joseph." He knew quite well that Jesus was not the son of Joseph in reality, though Joseph was the legal head of the Holy Family.

Did Jesus or Mary ever deny that Joseph was His father?

The whole of the New Testament is the written Word of God, and as Jesus is the Eternal Word, every utterance in the New Testament is His. When Saint Luke writes, "Jesus, being (as it was supposed) the son of Joseph," Jesus accepts full responsibility for those words. No direct utterance (about Joseph and his fatherhood) from His own lips whilst on earth is recorded, though that is not proof that He never spoke of it. Not every word Jesus ever said was written down. Indirectly His words in John 8:14-23, certainly indicate an origin differing from that of ordinary men. "I know whence I came," He said, "but you know not whence I come. You are from beneath; I am from above." Mary certainly spoke of the fact that Jesus was not the son of Joseph, for all scholars admit that Saint Luke got his account of the birth and infancy of Jesus from Mary. But Matthew 1:19-25, shows clearly that Joseph knew that he was not the father of Jesus. Mary being found with child, Joseph being a just man was minded to put her away privately. But the Angel appeared to him and said, "Joseph, son of David, fear not, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost." Reassured that the child of which he knew he was not the father had been miraculously conceived, Joseph did as the Angel of the Lord commanded him.

The Sinaitic Code, or maybe one of the Neutral Texts, is that "Joseph begat Jesus." How reconcile this with the Catholic concept of a Virgin Birth?

That reading does not occur in what are known as the Neutral Texts, nor in the Codex Sinaiticus. It occurs in a Syrian translation found on Mount Sinai some few years ago (at the beginning of the twentieth century), and which has been called the Sinaitic Syriac. Now as regards the wording you quote, that is, "Joseph begat Jesus," I reply that whether it is correct or not it would not necessarily affect the Catholic concept of the Virgin Birth. But also, I say that, whilst it would not affect the doctrine whether correct or not, it is not correct. Firstly, even if it were correct, it would not affect our doctrine. For such an expression would be quite normal even when referring to legal paternity as opposed to real and natural paternity. And parallel passages compel the acceptance of legal paternity only. Secondly, however, it is not correct. This isolated Syrian translation must yield to the Codex Sinaiticus and the Codex Vaticanus. Hermann Von Soden admitted the reading you quote into his edition of the Greek text, and met with protests from scholars the world over. His action was against all the principles of Biblical textual criticism, and Marie-Joseph Lagrange did not hesitate to call it a "critical enormity." The reading, therefore, cannot be accepted as correct, and even if it were, it would not affect the Catholic doctrine of the Virgin Birth.

From the medical standpoint, a virgin birth is impossible.

The medical standpoint is that children normally result from the activities of both a father and a mother. And with that standpoint, I am in full agreement. But then, we have never said that the birth of Christ was a normal event. And no medical standpoint demands the admission that God is bound always to observe normal procedure according to the natural laws we usually observe. Once we

assert a miraculous birth outside the normal teachings of medical experience, there is no medical standpoint left. There is a philosophical standpoint, as to whether an Infinite Creator could do immediately what He usually does mediately by secondary causes of His own making. And, granted the philosophic possibility of His doing so, there arises the historical standpoint as to whether He did so. And the Virgin Birth is an historical certainty.

If Joseph was not the father of Jesus, then Jesus was illegitimate.

That is not so. What is an illegitimate child? An illegitimate child is one born as the result of unlawful relations between two people not married, and who is not legally accepted in the eyes of the state as belonging to a lawfully married couple. But the Child Jesus was not the result of any unlawful relations on Mary's part with any person to whom she was not married. The very Bible, which says that Saint Joseph was not the natural father of Jesus, also makes it clear that no other created human being was the father. Saint Joseph was told that God Himself had miraculously caused Mary to be with child; and it is as legitimate for God to dispense with the need of a human father as to allow normal processes of generation. So, from the viewpoint of His conception Christ was certainly not illegitimate. Secondly, Joseph and Mary were lawfully married, and the Child born of Mary was legally accepted by the State as belonging to a lawfully married couple. In the external order, therefore, Jesus was legitimate also in civil law. Both by origin and public acceptance, then, He was quite legitimate.

In what category would you place the Gospel of Nicodemus?

The author of that uncanonical Gospel was orthodox in his faith, and in no way intended to discredit that faith.

He mentions that the Jewish contemporaries of Jesus chided Him with being of illegitimate birth.

It is not improbable that the Jews thus slandered Christ. And the author mentions it as a slander. If the Gospel of Nicodemus has any value for you, you can get nothing more out of it than that the enemies of Christ made a charge against Him and that the charge was false. But you, apparently, wish to accept the record of a false charge as sufficient evidence that the charge was true.

Is not such a matter supported by a second century writer, Celsus, who enlarges this into the charge that Joseph divorced Mary for adultery because she had borne a child to a certain soldier named Pantheras?

The matter is not supported by Celsus. Celsus, the pagan, and the bitter enemy of the Christian Church, repeated and amplified whatever slanders he could find. And the fact that Celsus slandered Christ in the second century no more militates against the historical character of the Gospels than the fact that you approve of those slanders in the twentieth century. Origen refuted Celsus centuries ago in the year 248, showing the obviously fictitious nature of his calumnies. No reputable scholar attaches any weight to the utterances of that bitter pagan.

Further, was not this charge also carried into Jewish writings, from quite an early date, which state that Jesus was actually the son of a Greek officer in the Roman Army named Pantheras?

It was. And such was to be expected. Bitter enemies of the Church in those days no more hesitated to indulge in the propaganda of lies and calumnies than they do in these days. But, as Origen points out, the enemies of the Church had no sources of information against Jesus save the Gospels themselves. The very name of your Greek officer, Pantheras, was probably no more than a

corruption of the Greek word for Virgin, "Parthenos." The attacks of these early opponents of the Christian religion have but one real value only. In their own perverted way they furnish important evidence of how essential to the Christian Faith was the doctrine of the Virgin Birth in the estimate of all the early Christians. But you repeat very old charges when you fall back on the objections of early Jewish and pagan enemies of Christianity. Do you really think that, after surviving those for nearly two thousand years, the authenticity of the Gospels is going to collapse under them now?

What is there that is essential in a belief in the Virgin Birth?

For a Christian it is essential to believe all that God has revealed. To deny the truth of what God reveals is to accuse God of not knowing what He is talking about, or of being a deliberate liar, surely not a very Christian attitude towards God! In the Apostles' Creed, Christians for centuries have professed their faith that Jesus Christ was "conceived by the Holy Ghost, and born of the Virgin Mary." The Gospels very clearly state God's promise to Mary that her Child would be due to the immediate operation of the Holy Ghost and the Divine Omnipotence without the necessity of any relations with the opposite sex. They also show that Saint Joseph knew quite well that he was not the father of Jesus, and that he was told that the Child to be born of Mary was "of the Holy Ghost." To repudiate the fact that Jesus was born of a Virgin Mother is, therefore, to repudiate the direct teaching of Sacred Scripture.

Is it possible that the holding of such a belief can strengthen one's character?

It would not matter in the least if it could not! What is true does not cease to be true, merely because it does not prove useful for every purpose. The truth that there are other planets besides this earth does not serve to strengthen one's character. But men do not deny the truth because of that. However, belief in the Virgin Birth of Christ does strengthen one's character, for it is due to one's faith in God, and the man of deep faith in God is strong where others are weak. To deny what God has revealed to be true is the rebellion of pride, and pride is the beginning of all sin and corruption of human character.

Can the belief encourage one to stronger Christian living?

Most decidedly. For if indeed Christ be God coming to seek us, instead of our merely seeking God, then an impetus is given to our love of God which cannot rest content without reciprocal generosity. It may be said that the doctrine of the Divinity of Christ could be independent of that concerning the Virgin Birth. But not so. Is it not significant that attacks on the Virgin Birth come from those who reject all the supernatural and miraculous aspects of Christ? True Christians have ever held fast to the doctrine of the Virgin Birth, not only as a fact revealed by God, but as a guarantee of the real humanity of Christ because born of a human mother, yet not less decisively as a guarantee of His super-human dignity because born without the agency of a human father. The conviction that Jesus is my God is the greatest possible encouragement to Christian living. And His supernatural Virgin Birth, having for its end the founding of a new and regenerated humanity, and the introduction of a Redeemer with the divine forces needed for the world's salvation, is the normal corollary of the doctrine of Christ's Divinity. Natural generation has never resulted in a truly human, yet at the same time, a super-human being. Therefore, those who have lost faith in the super-human character of Christ, attack the Virgin Birth, and insist that His was a merely natural generation by an ordinary father and mother in the ordinary way. But their rejection of the Virgin Birth is a mutilation of Scripture, a contradiction of the Christian Faith from Apostolic times, and a surrender of Christian

teaching into the hands of advocates of a non-miraculous, purely humanitarian Christ who may be ranked only with Buddha, or Confucius, or Mahomet, as each may wish.

How do you know the Virgin Mary is yet in heaven?

I will reply to that question as Christ replied to His adversaries on another matter. Do you remember how the chief priests said to Him one day, "Tell us by what authority You do these things?" and He replied, "Answer Me one question, and then I will tell you. The baptism of John, whence was it, from heaven or from earth?" They would not answer. Now let me ask you a question. If the Virgin Mary is not yet in heaven, where is she? Will you suggest that our Savior did not save His own Mother, and that she is in hell? Or, if you won't admit that, will you suggest that she is not in heaven yet because she is still in purgatory?

Please explain fully the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

The doctrine merely says that, after the Blessed Virgin Mary died, her body was not allowed by God to corrupt, as is the case with others. This was prevented by the resurrection of her body before corruption could set in. Reunited with her soul, her body was spiritualized and glorified; at once being assumed into heaven. In other words, God anticipated for the Blessed Virgin Mary what is going to happen to all the saved on the last day.

What reasons are there for her bodily assumption?

Death and corruption are penalties of original sin. But Mary, by her Immaculate Conception, was preserved free from all taint of original sin. You may ask, "Why, then, did she die?" Though innocent, she died in union with her innocent Son. She shared in the whole work of redemption, identifying herself with Jesus in all His sorrows and sufferings. And she accepted death as He accepted death. But, as she shared in His redemptive work, so also she shared in the privilege of His resurrection and glory. After all, it was just as easy for God to take her glorified body to heaven at once as it will be to take the glorified bodies of all the saved at the last day. The rosary. Why is the Rosary so necessary in the Roman Catholic religion?

The Rosary is not a necessary part of the Catholic religion. It is a very useful form of devotion, which Catholics are free to adopt or not. Most Catholics are wise enough to adopt it, and the Church makes use of it in her evening devotions very often.

For what reasons are Rosary Beads used by Catholics?

In what is known as the Rosary, one undertakes to meditate on each of several aspects of the life and sufferings of Christ, each meditation lasting as long as it takes to recite one Our Father and ten Hail Marys. To save us from the distraction of counting these prayers we quietly allow beads, divided accordingly, to slip through our fingers, our lips repeating the prayers, our minds pondering over the significant mysteries of our Lord's life on earth.

Why do they count Rosary Beads?

They don't. They know just how many beads there are in a Rosary, without having to count them. To save any attention to the counting of their prayers they use Rosary Beads, so that they can attend to their meditation on the Gospels during the time it takes them to say the usual prayers proper to the Rosary. The beads are thus a help to avoid distraction. They also symbolize a spiritual garland of prayers to be laid at our Lord's feet just as one would place a garland of flowers on the Cenotaph for

lesser and merely natural reasons of reverence and gratitude. Just because you don't do things, or because they are strange to you, you must not think them foolish, or that there is nothing in them.

The "Rosary symbol" was borrowed from the Hindus and Moslems, and it symbolizes the name of Mahomet.

No "Rosary symbol" exists among the Hindus or Moslems. The use of beads for the counting of their prayers may exist, and they may attach a symbolical meaning to their beads. But they have not the symbolism of the Rosary. The Catholic Church attaches no symbolism to beads. They have a purely utilitarian value, as a help to completing a certain number of prayers without the distraction of counting them. The Rosary is a series of vocal prayers counted on the beads, accompanied by meditation on the mysteries of the life of Jesus Christ. Its symbolism is that of a garland of spiritual roses offered to God, and this symbolism refers to the prayers, not to the beads. The beads as such stand for nothing. I might point out that the Rosary did not come into existence until the twelfth century, though beads for purposes of other prayers undoubtedly existed before that. But if the Rosary did not exist until the twelfth century, it is not correct to speak of "Rosary symbols" prior to that date.

The Roman Catholic Christians took over this fetish from the Moslems 560 B.C.

Firstly, the Rosary is not a fetish. A fetish is an object with a spirit inhabiting it, whose services are at the disposal of the one who possesses that object. Now no Catholic has ever believed Rosary Beads to be inhabited by any spirit or spirits; nor are the beads worshipped in any way at all. Therefore, the Rosary cannot be a fetish. Secondly, how could Catholics take over the Rosary from the Moslems in 560 B.C. as you say? No Christians existed before Christ Himself existed. But perhaps you mean 560 A.D. Yet here again you will be in no small difficulty. For no Moslems existed before 622 A.D., and the Rosary was unknown to Catholics until 600 years after that. Lourdes water.

What is Lourdes Water? And can it cure people anywhere?

What is known as Lourdes Water, is quite ordinary water, except that it has been brought from Lourdes, in France, being taken from the flowing spring there where God has wrought so many undoubted miracles. Lourdes Water, therefore, contains no naturally curative or medicinal properties. The waters do not cause the cures. It is God who does so, on certain occasions when the waters are applied to sick people. Now God is everywhere, and just as present to people here in our country as to people who actually go to Lourdes. It follows that God could certainly cure people who make use of Lourdes Water here, just as He has cured them there. But is God likely to do so? The answer is — Not as a rule. Why not? Because any cure will be due, not to natural causes, but to a miraculous interference of God's Omnipotence with the ordinary course of nature, and the ordinary course of nature is ordinary, whilst a miracle is extraordinary — and the extraordinary is necessarily rare. I do not say that miracles are unlikely in general. They occur too often and in every age, for us to say that. But a miracle in some particular case is more likely not to be granted than to be granted.

But it is not impossible and one is justified in making use of Lourdes Water, not superstitiously as if expecting some magical effect, but with faith in God, sincere devotion, and complete resignation to whatever His Holy Will may be. In such a case God could, if He thought fit, grant our desire, in order to honor our Blessed Lady, from whose shrine the waters came. And even if God did not grant the actual cure, He may grant some alleviation, and will certainly grant spiritual graces and

blessings proportionate to the faith, piety and devotion of those who manifest such belief and confidence in Him and in the dear Lady Mother of Christ. Catholics understand these principles. When they make use of Lourdes Water with fervent prayer and devotion, they would be overjoyed if God granted a cure. But knowing that miracles are necessarily rare, they are not in the least surprised or disappointed if He does not. In this case, they find consolation in the thought that God knows their faith and piety and that He will grant them other spiritual graces and blessings much more precious than any temporal favor. And their love of God brings to their lips at once the words of Christ, "Not My Will, but Yours be done," whatever God may decree.

The Scapular.

I read in a Catholic paper that those who wear the brown scapular of our Lady will not go to hell and will be released from purgatory the first Saturday after their death.

Your difficulties show that this brief statement was given without the explanation with which Catholics are familiar.

Now I ask you, do you believe, as a man and a priest, that a scapular has such magic power?

I certainly do not believe that a scapular has any magic power. Nor does any Catholic. Nevertheless, I myself wear a brown scapular, and hope to benefit by its blessings.

Why prayers for the dead, if a scapular, valued at 10 cents, releases the soul automatically from purgatory on the Saturday after one's death, merely provided you wear it?

No Catholic believes that the mere wearing of the scapular has that effect.

All a Catholic needs to do is to wear the scapular!

Again, no Catholic believes that that is all that is needed. Now let me explain, briefly. The scapular is a small piece of cloth, which is part of the religious habit of the Carmelite Order. Those who join the Confraternity of the Scapular are in a certain degree affiliated with that Order and share in all their prayers and good works. And as the Carmelite Order is established in honor of the Mother of Christ, those who wear the scapular in a spirit of true devotion and love have a special claim to her intercession and protection. Historical documents tell us that our Lady appeared to Saint Simon Stock, an English Monk, and promised a special protection of all who would wear the badge known as the scapular. But the promise that one's soul would be preserved from hell supposes sincere dispositions and excludes absolutely the sin of presumption. If anyone were to wear the scapular and presumptuously think that enough, and that despite any and every sin salvation would be secure, such a one would certainly not be preserved from hell. And every Catholic knows this. But granted sincere devotion to our Lady and sincere efforts to live a life worthy of Christ her Son, the scapular does give the well-founded hope that Mary will obtain for one the privilege of death in God's grace and friendship, and consequently preservation from hell, even though the soul must yet endure purification in purgatory.

The additional promise of release from purgatory on the Saturday following one's death — it is called the Sabbatine Privilege — supposes additional conditions of prayer and Christian mortification throughout life, conditions not easily fulfilled. However, it is enough to say that all presumption is excluded; that no magic power attaches to the scapular or the wearing of it; and that the spiritual privileges are strictly dependent upon the dispositions of soul with which one adopts the scapular and tries to live a good Christian life.

I would be surprised if you could show me where this is mentioned in Scripture.

You would have more cause for wonder if I could, since the scapular devotion arose in the Church some thousand years after the Scriptures were written. But there is nothing in the idea of scapulars which in any way contradicts any principle in Scripture. It is in perfect harmony with Gospel principles. A piece of cloth worn with piety and devotion is just as able to convey a blessing to the wearer as clay made from earth and spittle was able to be an agent of blessings to the blind man cured by Christ, or as the handkerchiefs and aprons which had touched the body of Saint Paul were able to heal the sick and convey spiritual benefits. See Acts 19:12. Was not the Sabbatine Indulgence granted by our Lady through Pope John XXIII, to whom she is said to have appeared?

You have got the wrong Pope. The report attributes the apparition of our Lady, not to Pope John XXIII (1410-1415), an anti-pope, but to Pope John XXII (1316-1332), who was said to have published a Papal Bull proclaiming the Sabbatine Privilege, popularly believed to mean that the soul of one faithful to certain conditions would be released from purgatory through our Lady's intercession on the first Saturday after death. [Note: No reference is being made to Pope Saint John XXIII, pope from 1958-1963.]

Was not John XXIII, an anti-Pope? If so, would our Lady grant an Indulgence through an imposter?

John XXIII was an anti-Pope. But he is not connected with this matter. As I have said, the Bull was attributed to Pope John XXII, who certainly was not an anti-Pope. So even if all were historically true, there would be no question of our Lady appearing to an anti-Pope. But, as a matter of fact, all is not historically true. It is certain that the supposed Papal Bull was never issued even by Pope John XXII. He was said to have issued the document in 1322. But the document is first heard of in the collected works of Leersius, who lived 100 years after Pope John XXII and died in 1483. Some unknown author, over-endowed with imagination, probably ascribed the vision of our Lady, and the Sabbatine Privilege to Pope John XXII; and Leersius, coming across it, embodied it in his work without critical examination, and taking it for granted. So, not only is there no question of our Lady appearing to an imposter, she did not even grant the Sabbatine Privilege to her people through the lawful Pope, John XXII.

Why is this Indulgence of doubtful origin commended today by the Congregation of Indulgences and modern Popes?

The Papal Bull attributed to Pope John XXII., is not of doubtful origin. It is certainly not authentic. It did give rise to the popular idea of release from purgatory on the first Saturday after one's death. Later Popes never asserted the Bull to be genuine. But, owing to the widespread belief of so many people in good faith, they decided on their own proper authority to grant certain indulgences, and to sanction the devotion to a limited extent.

To get an idea that is really authentic we must go, not to the spurious document attributed to Pope John XXII, but to the authentic decrees of later Popes, and above all, to the decree issued by Pope Gregory XIII in 1577. That decree has been ratified by the Congregation of Indulgences, and by several modern Popes. And it makes no mention of any certain release of the soul from purgatory on the first Saturday after death. It simply says that people who manifest a special devotion to Mary, the Mother of Christ, by wearing the Brown Scapular of Mount Carmel, by ever observing chastity according to their state, by reciting daily the Office of our Lady, or, alternatively, by abstaining from meat on Wednesdays and Saturdays, may reasonably hope for her special protection, and a particular share in her merits both in this life and the next, above all on Saturdays. Whether the

departed soul would be released from purgatory in virtue of these special favors is not stated, though it would not be an unreasonable hope, were the conditions I have mentioned fulfilled throughout life.

— In view of later literature on the subject, we add this to the above answers. In 1923, P. E. Magennis, O. Carm., Prior General, published "The Sabbatine Privilege" New York: Connolly, 1923. And there have been several articles in the "Analecta Ordinis Carmelitarum," and the "Analecta Ordinis Carmelitarum Discalceatorum," both official organs. Leersius wrote in 1483 — therefore some 161 years after 1322. He refers to copies of the Bull of John XXII—, these are apparent forgeries, and some were found claiming a date about 1575. In them, John XXII gives the Sabbatine Bull on March 3, 1322. The anti-pope Alexander V (1409-1410) in 1409 is said to have repeated its contents and confirmed it. A forged copy of Alexander's Bull was made in 1421, it was claimed, and was sealed and signed by public notaries and Carmelite officials. In 1430, a copy of the 1421 forgery was made, signed and sealed, and other copies of the forgery have been discovered in the Vatican archives. If such official copies cannot be trusted, then “actum est de historia” (it is all about the story). Another document, again a forgery, written in 1461, has also been discovered recently — so Leersius is not the first to mention the Sabbatine Bull. Although no original copy of John XXII's Bull is extant, there are unquestionable many duplicates. It is no wonder that Leersius believed them to be legal documents.

When Pope Pius XI allowed the Medal to be worn in place of the Scapular, he specified that all the indulgences of the Scapular "that which is called the Sabbatine, not excepted" could be gained with the Medal.

For more information on the Church in Her Worship, see also Radio Replies, Volume 1, Question Numbers 1335-1440. [This is available at http://www.radioreplies.info/]
