

Catholic Culture Site Reviews

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Find more links and check how any Catholic website is rated on fidelity, resources and useability.

Recommended Books⁶

A Biblical Defence of Catholicism by Dave Armstrong

A “rigorous, Scripture-packed analysis” of the Catholic faith by a former Protestant campus missionary turned Catholic apologist.

Early Christian Writings translated by Maxwell Staniforth

Writings of the Fathers known to the Apostles, including Clement, Ignatius and Polycarp.

How the Catholic Church Built Western Civilization by Thomas E. Woods

An eye-opening book outlining how the Church had an indispensable role in every facet of Western civilization, including science, economics, morality, law, and fine arts.

Introduction to the Devout Life by St Francis de Sales

A guide to devout life while in the world. Written by the Saint at a dangerous time & place, where saying Mass was punishable by death, it has never gone out of print in 400 years.⁷

The Imitation of Christ by Thomas à Kempis

One of the greatest Catholic spiritual works, it has been cherished by all Christians. It is said to be second only to the bible in publication, and has been available in over fifty languages.⁷

True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin by St Louis Marie de Montfort

Praised by popes, theologians and mystics, this is perhaps the most celebrated book ever written about devotion to Mary.⁷

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‘Mary’ and ‘Praying to the Saints’ Fictional Dialogues

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⁶ Some of these are available for preview at books.google.com. For purchases, see amazon.com and, in New Zealand, thenile.co.nz and jeromes.co.nz. See also your local library catalogue, which can be found from nzlibraries.com.

⁷ Also available to read online at www.catholictreasury.info

Virgin Mary and the Saints



An Interactive Biblical Exploration

Download, Print, Propagate.
www.TheCatholicFaith.info

Mary

This is a fictional dialogue between a Catholic and a non-denominational Christian, which explores the reasons for the honour Catholics give to Mary.

The Scenario

A Catholic is on an airplane, sitting in the window seat reading a book about Mary, with the Catechism open in his lap as well, waiting for the plane to take off. He's joined by a guy who sits down in the seat next to him, smiles, says hello, and starts listening to a walkman. The Catholic gets out his Bible to double-check a reference, and his companion notices and they start talking.

Non-Denominational Christian: [Loudly] Hey, is that a Bible you've got there?

Catholic: Yep.

NDC: You're a Christian then? Where do you fellowship?

C: Our Lady of the Assumption parish, in town.

NDC: So you're a Catholic?

C: Yep. You?

NDC: I'm a non-denominational Christian. We have "no banner but Christ"! So, ah, what's that book you're reading then?

Mother of God

C: It's called Hail, Holy Queen: The Mother of God in the Word of God¹¹. It's very good.

NDC: Hey, would you mind if I asked you a few questions? I've just come from a Biblical prophecy conference where one of the speakers was an ex-Catholic. He was supposed to talk about current events in Israel and the book of Revelation, but he mainly just went on and on about how the Catholic Church is the, uh, the Whore of Babylon and how you guys worship Mary and how the Pope's gonna lead the coming one-world government and all that sort of stuff. Now, the only Catholic I know is the cleaning lady at work and she doesn't strike me as an evil supporter of the Anti-Christ, so I thought it might be best to get the story straight from the horse's mouth, so to speak.

C: Fair enough.

NDC: So when I came to the airport I told the Holy Spirit that the first Catholic I saw I'd ask about some of that stuff. So here we are. You're an answer to prayer.

Recommended Readings and Resources

Recommended Links

Biblia Clerus

www.clerus.org/bibliaclerus/index_eng.html
The Holy See offers Sacred Scripture in the light of Sacred Tradition and Magisterial teachings, cross-referenced to commentaries, catechisms, councilor pronouncements, etc. Available for online use and as a comprehensive downloadable edition.

Catechism of the Catholic Church: Compendium of the Catechism

www.scborromeo.org/ccch.htm and:

www.vatican.va/archive

The Catechism is *the* reference text for authentic Catholic teachings, with cross-references. The Compendium is a question-and-answer Catechism for reading. Available also as books.

Catholic Education Resource Center

www.catholiceducation.org

Authentic Catholic education resource, invaluable for all Catholics, to engage the secular, relativist and at times anti-Catholic culture and media. It makes available the best in Catholic faith and culture – "the latest, the best, the brightest from outstanding writers, authors and journalists around the globe"

Catholic Answers

www.catholic.com

One of the most comprehensive and indispensable websites for Catholic apologetics (defence of Catholic doctrines). Have a browse, and try the "Quick Search" box on the top left of the page to look up any topic.

Radio Replies

www.iaholicism.net/apologetics/radio-replies.html

The famed anthology of questions and answers about virtually any topic on the faith.

New Advent

www.newadvent.org

A giant resource website which includes the Catholic Encyclopedia, Early Church Fathers' writings, the Bible, and St. Thomas Aquinas' theological masterpiece, Summa Theologica.

¹¹ A book by Scott Hahn who, formerly as a Presbyterian minister, despised Marian devotion. Today, he is one of the foremost apologists for the Catholic faith, having written numerous books including *Lamb's Supper: The Mass as Heaven on Earth*, and *Rome Sweet Home*, which details his conversion to the Catholic faith.

“Show it to Me in the Bible!”

NDC2: Look, you can make this necromancy business sound all fine and dandy, but you show me somewhere in the Bible that says it's OK to communicate with anyone in heaven besides God!

C: Brandon, there's nowhere in the Bible that says something has to be in the Bible for it to be OK. The Bible's not some legalistic contract or something that just creates tiny little pockets of freedom for stuff we're allowed to do. We're free in Christ, and as long as we are consistent with his principles, we're fine. And we are being consistent: the saints are still part of the body of Christ, so we can ask them to pray for us just like we'd ask any other Christian brother or sister to pray for us.

NDC2: You're arguing just like a Jesuit.
C: I'm not finished. You can't show me where the Bible says “everything we're allowed to do must be in the Bible”, so you're the one with a problem in your belief system here. But even though I don't have to, I'll answer your question anyway: you asked where the Bible says it's OK to communicate with someone in heaven besides God - read Psalm 103:20-21.

NDC2: “Bless the LORD, ye his angels, that excel in strength, that do his commandments, hearkenings unto the voice of his word. Bless ye the LORD, all ye his hosts; ye ministers of his, that do his pleasure.”

C: You see? Here we have a Psalm where we ask the angels and the hosts of heaven to worship the Lord with us. The angels and the hosts of heaven are not God, but they're still part of the body of Christ, so we're still in communion with them, through Jesus.

NDC2: You're a Jesuit, no doubt about it.
C: Come on, Brandon. I've shown you that asking the saints in heaven to pray to God on our behalf is no different, in principle, from me asking you to pray for me that I have a safe airplane trip. And I'll tell you what: if we crash, and I die, you just say the word, and I'll pray for you!

NDC2: Thanks. I think. Well, I've gotta go and slap some sense back into my brother. I'll think about what you said, but don't go asking any saints to pray for me, OK? [Gets up and goes back to seat]

C [quietly]: Sorry, too late. [Puts on long black robe, collar, starts reading 'Jesuit Monthly' (headline: “How I Infiltrated the United Nations”)].

C: Well, hey, lucky me. So what can I help you with, Brendan?

NDC: How'd you know my name?

C: Word of Knowledge. It's the Holy Spirit, you know how it is...

NDC: Hey, so you guys actually have the Holy Spirit in the Catholic Church?

C: Sure. Plus you're still wearing your name tag from the conference.

NDC: Hmm. Very funny. OK, here's a copy of the notes from the conference [hands over copy of notes]. Since you're reading a Mary book, maybe that's what we could talk about. It seems to me like you guys give her a whole lot of attention that, to be honest with you, seems very unbiblical. You know, you call her the “Mother of God”, “Queen of Heaven” - all sorts of weird stuff. This guy at the conference said you even worship her. Now, I think he was probably going a little bit overboard - he did seem kind of out there, you know, a few sinners short of an altar call, if you get my meaning. But even if he's only half right, that still leaves a bunch of problems, it seems to me. You guys do believe the Bible, don't you?

C: Sure we do. Catholics wrote half of it.

NDC: Uh, right. Well, whatever, I got a lot of respect for the Catholic Church, you know, how they stand firm against abortion and euthanasia and divorce and stuff - but it would really reassure me if you could give me some sort of insight into this Mary stuff, 'cause it sure looks dodgy to me.

C: Sure, I'd be happy to help. Where shall we start?

NDC: Do you worship Mary?

C: Only in May. Just kidding! Nope, there's rules against that sort of thing. Here, do you know what this is? [holds up Catechism.]

NDC: Well, it's not the Bible.

C: No, it's the Catechism of the Catholic Church.² It's where you look if you want to find out what the Church really teaches about anything. And when we look up what it says about worshipping anything besides God, it says “Idolatry consists in divinizing what is not God. Man commits idolatry whenever he honors and reveres a creature in place of God” (CCC, #2113). Mary's a creature, right, she was created by God? So we're not allowed to worship her. Not that we want to. She's cool, but only God is cool enough to worship.

NDC: Well, what about this “Mother of God” stuff? Isn't that like saying she came before God, or she created God, or something like that?

C: Well, you need to know what we mean when we say “Mother of God”. We are not saying Mary is the mother of the Trinity, or that Mary existed before God did. You know, I was at a seminar once where the speaker was bagging the term “Mother of God”. He said that Mary didn't exist before God, so she couldn't have been the mother of God.

NDC: Maybe it was the same guy!

² See Recommended Links and Resources toward the back of the booklet for more details.

C: Could've been. But what he didn't get was, when we are talking about Mary the mother of God, we are talking about God the Son, the second person of the Trinity, our Lord Jesus Christ. No Bible-believing Christian denies that Jesus is God. So maybe it's best to look at it like this: (a) Mary is the mother of Jesus; (b) Jesus is God; therefore (c) Mary is the mother of God. Simple, really.

NDC: Well, I dunno...

C: Let me put it this way: you believe that Jesus, when he was walking around Palestine healing people and doing miracles and stuff, was God, right?

NDC: Yep.

C: And when he was a kid and he got left behind at the temple, he was God then?

NDC: Yep.

C: And when he was a little baby and the shepherds and wise men came and worshipped him, he was God then?

NDC: Yep.

C: And when he was being born, he was God then?

NDC: Well, yep.

C: And when he was in Mary's womb, he was God then?

NDC: Yep, I guess so.

C: So what would that make Mary?

NDC: Well, yeah, OK, the mother of God. God the Son, not God the Father.

C: Yep, that's exactly it. Way to go.

NDC: Well, OK, that kinda makes sense. But why make such a big deal out of it anyway?

C: Well, there was a reason for it, actually. The title "Mother of God" is really quite important. It comes from the Greek word Theotokos, or "God-bearer", which was used at the Council of Ephesus in 431AD to defend the doctrine of Jesus' divinity against heretics who were saying that there may have been a point in time when Jesus was not fully God and fully man. But the Council sorted it out, and pretty much everyone has believed that Mary is the Mother of God ever since, even the Protestant Reformers. It's only people who haven't really thought about it properly that have a problem with it.

And it's Biblical anyway - we call Jesus "Lord" because he's God, and in Luke 1:41, when Mary visits her cousin Elizabeth, Elizabeth says, 'Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And why is this granted me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?'

Jesus Didn't Treat His Mother Like She Was Special

NDC: All right then, I can go with that. What about this though: something else that this guy said at the conference was that Jesus never made a big deal out of his mother. He quoted Matthew 12, where it says:

do: 1 Corinthians 13:12 - "Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known."

And don't forget, Hebrews 12, we're surrounded by a great crowd of witnesses, who cheer us on in the race that we're supposed to run. These witnesses are the saints in heaven.

NDC2: Look, even if they could somehow hear our prayers - which I still don't believe - your most popular saints would receive way more prayers than they could ever hear and respond to anyway. I mean, take Mary: how many prayers do you think she gets?

C: Hey, we could work it out: uh, 1 billion Catholics, let's say 1% of them say 1 decade of the rosary once a week, that's uh, 10 'Hail Mary's x 1% x 1 billion, that's 100 million 'Hail Mary's a week, which is about, uh, well, it's about 165 prayers a second.

NDC2: 165 prayers a second, huh? Well, maybe God could handle that, but there's no way anything else could!

C: Hey, I get nearly that much spam in my Hotmail account! And just think, plenty of e-mail servers handle more than 165 messages a second; don't you think things in heaven would be at least a little bit more efficient than they are at Microsoft?

NDC2: Very funny. I wonder what Mary's e-mail address is.

C: It's arkofthecovenant@heavenlyjersusalem.com

NDC2: What?

C: Long story. I bet it's not in your address book anyway. Look, even if Mary did get too many people asking her to pray for them, God still knows about them all, so it's no big deal. But even if she couldn't personally pray for you because her in-box was too full, she could still pray for you generally - like "Lord, please help all those who are asking for my intercession."

Besides, I don't think you could explain to me how time works in the afterlife anyway, could you? The saints are in eternity, they're outside of time, so time to deal with prayer requests is not too much of an issue for them, is it?

NDC2: Well....

C: And I don't think the saints in heaven can be overloaded with too many prayer intentions. Their glorified intellects are pretty capable. Think about what happens on Judgment Day. Jesus says "But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken". On Judgment Day we'll see a review of our whole lives, everything that we've done, and we'll understand the significance of it all, and we'll see the same sort of thing in the people around us. Now that is a huge amount of information processing that we'll be able to handle when we're no longer in our current condition.

NDC2: You are a Jesuit, aren't you!

C: Hey, like I said, I'm just this guy on an airplane.

Do the Saints Pray for Us?

NDC2: Yeah, well, you tricked me, which is just what I'd expect from a Jesuit. Of course I agree that we should pray for each other. But what makes you think the saints in heaven are praying for us?

C: Because the Bible tells us. Like in 2 Maccabees chapter 15: Judas Maccabeus has a vision where Onias the high priest shows him Jeremiah the prophet, who died hundreds of years ago and is now in heaven, and Onias says: "This is a man who loves the brethren and prays much for the people and the holy city, Jeremiah, the prophet of God" (2 Maccabees 15:14).

NDC2: Aw, look, that's not even in the Bible. You guys added that book at the Council of Trent in the Middle Ages.

C: No, that's not true: the Protestants ditched that book, but that's a whole 'nother can of worms.⁵ Anyway, there's the same sort of thing in the book of Revelation, where we see the twenty-four elders, who represent the leaders of the saints in heaven, offering to God the prayers of the saints on earth:

⁸ "And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and with golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints" (*Revelation* 5:8).

The elders in heaven are interceding with God by presenting our prayer requests to him.

NDC: I don't know... is that before or after the bit about the Russian attack helicopters?

C: It's definitely before. But that's not all; it's the same thing with the angels in heaven, they offer our prayers to God as well - Revelation 8 says:

³ "And another angel came and stood at the altar with a golden censer; and he was given much incense to mingle with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar before the throne;⁴ and the smoke of the incense rose with the prayers of the saints from the hand of the angel before God" (*Revelation* 8:3-4).

Can the Saints Hear Us?

NDC2: Well, maybe they might pray for us, but how can the saints hear our prayers? You guys make them out to be omniscient, like God.

C: C'mon Brandon, there's a big difference between knowing a lot and knowing everything. The saints don't need to be omniscient to be aware of our prayers - they've got the beatific vision of God, and they can see in God everything they need, so they can see our prayers too; it's through God's omniscience that they can know what's going on. And the saints in heaven do know more than we

⁴⁶ "While [Jesus] was still speaking to the people, behold, his mother and his brothers stood outside, asking to speak to him. ⁴⁷ But he replied ... 'Who is my mother and who are my brothers?' ⁴⁸ And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said 'Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in Heaven is my brother, and sister, and mother'."

So this guy was saying, "See, Jesus was quite rude to his mother sometimes, so there's no way those Catholics should be making such a big deal out of her."

C: Well, the thing that gets me here is that he would actually think that Jesus would be rude to his mother. I mean, that would be a sin, right? He'd be breaking the 4th commandment, which is to honour your father and your mother.

NDC: Isn't that the 5th commandment?

C: Depends on your tradition. But that's a whole 'nother can of worms. The point is, Jesus is not gonna sin by being rude to his mother, so we have to look at what else he might have meant. I mean, Jesus would have fulfilled the Ten Commandments perfectly, right, so he would have honoured his mother perfectly. Right?

NDC: I guess so...

C: So what we've got in this passage is Jesus minimising family ties in favour of commitment to the Father's will. But if being part of Jesus' family means being committed to God's will, then Mary becomes even more of a model for us, because she was totally committed to God's will. She's the one who said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word". Right?

The Assumption

NDC: OK, fair enough. What about the Assumption then? You know what I'm talking about?

C: Yep, here's the official definition, from the Catechism:

"Finally the Immaculate Virgin, preserved free from all stain of original sin, when the course of her earthly life was finished, was taken up body and soul into heavenly glory, and exalted by the Lord as Queen over all things, so that she might be the more fully conformed to her Son, the Lord of lords and conqueror of sin and death." (CCC, #966)

NDC: Yeah, that's it. Now show me that in the Bible.

C: Well, there's no verse that says "And then Mary died and lo! her body was taken up to heaven, and then the disciples went fishing". But there are a lot of clues to have a look at.

NDC: Well, one of those clues would have to get around John 3:13, which says "No one has ascended into heaven but he who descended from heaven, the Son of man"

C: Fair enough. But there's a big difference between "assumption" and "ascension". Ascending into heaven is something that Jesus did under his own power, 'cause he's God and he can do that sort of thing. But being Assumed is different, because that's something God does to someone else. Mary's assumption is not something she had any control over.

Anyway, here's the first thing: have we got any Biblical precedent for this sort of thing, for someone besides Mary being taken up into heaven?

NDC: Gimme a clue.

C: Swing low, sweet chariot, comin' for to carry me home...

NDC: Oh, OK, Elijah!

C: Yeah, 2nd Kings chapter 2, Elijah gets assumed bodily into heaven by a whirlwind. He was with Elisha, and then "behold, a chariot of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them. And Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven."

Can you think of anyone else?

NDC: Nope.

C: Someone who "walked with God" and then "was not, for God took him"?

NDC: Uh, Enoch? Sure, that's a weird disappearance, but it's stretching a bit to call that an Assumption.

C: Maybe, but his disappearance is mentioned in the New Testament too; in Hebrews 11:5 it says that Enoch "was taken up so that he should not see death; and he was not found, because God had taken him". Anyway, that's not all. Have you ever heard of The Assumption of Moses?

NDC: No. Should I?

C: Not really. It's an old book from around the time of the Bible, but it's not Scripture or anything. But in the Bible, Jude verse 9, it says "the archangel Michael, contending with the devil, disputed about the body of Moses". And that refers to the story in this old book, The Assumption of Moses, which was about how the body of Moses was assumed into heaven after he died. And I think it's fair to speculate that Moses was taken up to heaven bodily, since at the Transfiguration on the mountain (Matt 17:1-8), who does Jesus talk to?

NDC: Moses and Elijah.

C: Yeah. And Elijah we know was assumed into heaven, so it seems likely that Moses was too. Can you think of anyone who will be assumed into heaven? In the future?

NDC: No.

C: Ever heard of the "Rapture"?

NDC: Yeah, that's what half the conference was about, when's it gonna happen, who's gonna be left behind, what gonna happen to them...

C: Yeah, well, Catholic teaching on the end times is probably a little different from what they covered at the conference...

NDC: But that's a whole 'nother can of worms, right?

NDC2: Sure I do - I've spoken to a few ex-Catholics in my time, so I know all about you guys. You're worshipping the saints, and that is a blasphemous sin.

C: No we're not. "Pray" just means "ask", when we're talking about praying to the saints. I know that for you, prayer is a big part of the worship you give to God, but the language has changed a little bit since Protestants ditched the really cool parts of worship, like the Eucharist, but just because you use the word "pray" in a modern way that always means "worship" doesn't mean we have to. Got your Bible?

NDC2: Always!

C: Why don't you look at what your Bible says in Acts 27:34 about St Paul asking the guys he was with to have something to eat?

NDC2: "Wherefore I pray you to take some meat: for this is for your health".

C: Yeah, he's asking them to eat. We use the word "pray" in the same sense with the saints - we ask for their intercession. We ask them to pray to the Lord on our behalf.

Our "One Mediator" Jesus, and the Saints

NDC2: Yeah? Well maybe someone should tell you about 1st Timothy 2:5 - "For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus". You should pray straight to Jesus.

C: Of course we should pray straight to Jesus. That's absolutely necessary for the Christian life. But that's not all there is to it.

NDC2: Really? Why would you let saints come between you and Jesus. He's our only mediator. Go straight to the top!

C: Brandon, would you consider yourself a "prayer warrior"?

NDC2: Sure I am. Every Christian should be.

C: So if someone in your family or in your church asked you to pray for them for their needs, you'd help them out?

NDC2: It would be my duty and my pleasure as a brother in Christ.

C: You wouldn't tell them to go away and just pray straight to Jesus would you? If you pray for them, are you coming between them and Jesus?

NDC2: Uh, no...

C: Same with us and the saints. They are the best prayer warriors around, because they are standing in the presence of God. See, right before that verse you quoted, St. Paul tells us to pray for each other: "I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all men... This is good, and it is acceptable in the sight of God our Savior". Then St. Paul says straight after that, "For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus". It's because Jesus is our one mediator that we have a relationship with God that lets us pray for our brothers and sisters. And the saints in heaven have this relationship through Jesus just like we do - except even more closely.

C: Well, ever since the Jubilee 2000, we don't worship statues any more, we worship banners.

NDC2: Well, it's still idolatry, and it's detestable to the Lord.

C: Hey, I was only joking. Look, we don't worship statues, we're not allowed to. We only worship God. I just explained that to your brother before.

NDC2: In that case, why do you pray to dead guys? You do pray to them don't you? And that's worship isn't it? And if you're not worshipping them, then you're consulting the dead, and that's necromancy, that's almost as bad. Here, you've got a Bible - ugh, it's a Catholic Bible - you should use the King James.

C: Hey, I've got a lot of respect for the King James, but it's OK to use a more modern translation too you know.

Praying to the Saints is Not Necromancy

NDC2: Nope, if the King James is good enough for the Apostle Paul, it's good enough for me. Anyway, in Deuteronomy 18:10-11 it says that anybody who does necromancy is an abomination to the Lord.

C: Brandon, there's a big difference between asking a departed brother in Christ to pray for us and holding a seance. Look, have you seen this? It's the Catechism of the Catholic Church, the best official summary of Catholic teaching you can get. Every home should have one. Here's what it says about necromancy:

“All forms of divination are to be rejected: recourse to Satan or demons, conjuring up the dead or other practices falsely supposed to ‘unveil’ the future” (CCC, #2116).

NDC2: So you say. But show me where the Bible says you should pray to dead guys.

The Saints are More Alive than We Are

C: Show me where the Bible says that the saints in heaven are dead! Here's what Jesus says about it, in Luke 20:

³⁷ “... that the dead are raised, even Moses showed, in the passage about the bush, where he calls the Lord the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. ³⁸ Now he is not God of the dead, but of the living; for all live to him”

Christians who have died are still a part of the Body of Christ; they're closer to God, they're more alive than we are!

NDC2: Hey, it doesn't matter how alive they are, you still shouldn't pray to them!

We Ask the Saints to Pray to God for Our Needs

C: Do you even know what we mean when we say we pray to the saints?

C: Yep. But we know what St Paul says: at the Second Coming, “the dead in Christ will rise first; then we who are alive, who are left, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air” (1 Thes 4:16-17). So Mary's assumption is probably something like what will happen to us if we're still around when Jesus returns.

NDC: OK, I never thought of that.

C: And what about the two witnesses of Revelation 11? They must have talked about them at your conference as well. St. John prophesies that three and a half days after they are killed they will be assumed into heaven - he says “And in the sight of their foes they went up to heaven in a cloud” (Rev 11:12).

NDC: You know, that's really interesting. But none of those passages of Scripture are about Mary, are they?

C: No, but the point is, the idea of Mary being assumed into heaven is in no way anti-Biblical, is it? In fact, what you see is that it's not unheard-of for some particularly righteous people to be taken up bodily into heaven. Now on to Mary... First of all, have a read of the book of Revelation, the end of chapter 11 and the start of chapter 12.

NDC: ¹⁹ “Then God's temple in heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant was seen within his temple; and there were flashes of lightning, voices, peals of thunder, an earthquake, and heavy hail. ¹ And a great portent appeared in heaven, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars; she was with child and she cried out in her pangs of birth, in anguish for delivery.”

Then there's a bit about a dragon, then it says,

⁵ “she brought forth a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, but her child was caught up to God and to his throne”.

C: Cool. So first of all we have John seeing a vision of the heavenly temple, and in there, seeing the Ark of the Covenant. Now, are you familiar with Biblical typology?

NDC: Yeah, I think so. That's where we see things in the Old Testament that foreshadow something in the New Testament, like how the Passover lamb in Exodus points toward the real Lamb of God, Jesus Christ.

C: Exactly. Or like how Moses and the Jews passed through the Red Sea and that is a “type”, or a pointer, to baptism, or like how the manna in the desert is a “type” of the real bread from heaven, Jesus.³

NDC: Yep, gotcha there. Are you saying the Ark of the Covenant was another type that points to something in the New Testament?

³ “New Testament lies hidden in the Old and the Old Testament is revealed in the New” - St. Augustine. The fulfillment in New Testament is usually greater or more perfect, more universal, revealing the real meaning of the type in the Old.

Praying to the Saints

C: Yep. A lot of Catholics see the Ark of the Covenant as a “type” of Mary. Now that may sound funny, but let's think about it for a minute: Hebrews 9:4 tells us what was in the ark. So what was it? [Anybody know? Cue slide.]

[The Ark held the tablets with the ten commandments, along with some manna, and Aaron's rod.]

C: The ark held the tablets with the Decalogue, right, the ten Words of God, which were a “type” of Jesus, the incarnate Word of God (John 1:1). It also held the manna, the bread from heaven, another “type” of Jesus, the true bread from heaven (John 6:32). And the ark held Aaron's high priestly rod, which was the symbol of Aaron being the high priest, and that's another “type” of Jesus, who is our Great High Priest (Heb 4:14).

So the ark held stuff that represented Jesus, and since Mary held Jesus himself in her womb, that makes her the New Testament Ark of the Covenant. Cool, huh?

NDC: Yeah, well, I've never really thought about that...

C: Well, there are also some interesting parallels between 2 Samuel chapter 6, which talks about King David's attempt to bring the ark to Jerusalem, and Luke chapter 1, which talks about Mary's visit to her cousin Elizabeth. Get a load of this:

- The ark spent time in the hill country of Judea, and Mary went to the hill country of Judea to visit Elizabeth;
- David said “How can the mother of my Lord come to me?”, and Elizabeth said “Who am I that the mother of my Lord should come to me?”;
- The ark stayed in the house of Obed-edom for three months, and Mary stayed in the house of Zachariah for three months;
- David leaped before the ark when he finally got it to Jerusalem, and the baby John the Baptist leaped in Elizabeth's womb when she heard Mary's greeting.

Now none of that proves anything, but it is interesting, isn't it?

NDC: Well, yeah...

C: Anyway, in John's vision in the book of Revelation, he's looking up into the heavenly temple, seeing the ark, and then that's replaced in his vision by a woman. The woman gives birth to the male child, who will rule all the nations with a rod of iron. That child is Jesus, because the bit about ruling the nations with a rod of iron comes from Psalm 2, a Psalm about the Messiah.

NDC: So you're saying that since the child is Jesus, that would make the woman Mary.

C: Yep. I'm always amazed at how a lot of people can look at the Book of Revelation and see Russian attack helicopters and nuclear weapons and stuff, but they don't see that the woman who gives birth to the Messiah might be Mary.

Anyway, just like the ark of the Old Covenant was taken up to the old Jerusalem, the ark of the New Covenant was taken up to the heavenly

This is a fictional dialogue between a Catholic and a non-denominational Christian, which explores why Catholics consider the saints in heaven to be a very active part of the Body of Christ. It is an adaptation of a presentation given by the author – the cues written into the script may be useful for presentation in parishes and youth groups.

Introduction

NDC2: Hi, my name's Brandon.

C: [confused] Hi Brandon, you look very familiar.

NDC2: I see you've been talking to my little brother, Brendan.

C: Yeah, he's a great guy...

NDC2: What do you think you're doin' filling his head with all those Catholic lies?

C: Hey, he was asking some questions, I gave him the most honest answers I know.

NDC2: Yeah? Well I know all about you guys and your Jesuit philosophies and traditions of men! Trying to make your Romish falsehoods sound like sweetness and light! Trying to sucker everybody in to joining your false religion, so you can set up the New World Order and usher in the anti-Christ. I'm on to you guys!

C: Well, you're on to something, but I don't think it's the Catholic Church.

NDC2: Are you a Jesuit by any chance?

C: Why do you say that? I'm just this guy in an airplane.

NDC2: Yeah, well that's just what you'd say if you were a Jesuit! I've read all about you guys, how you were behind the assassination of JFK and Abraham Lincoln, how the Vatican financed the Nazis - Hitler was a faithful Catholic, you know, and the Pope backed him all the way - you guys are clever, I'll give you that much.

C: I really think you've been reading the wrong sort of books. Look, do you love Jesus?

NDC2: With all my heart!

C: And you've asked him into your heart to be your personal Lord and Saviour? You've repented, you've been baptised, you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead?

NDC2: Amen to that!

C: Good, me too! That makes us brothers. Let's talk. Why don't you sit down?

NDC2: I don't think I want to talk with any statue-worshipping slave of Rome.

C: Hey where have you been all last year? Don't you know we've changed?

NDC2: What do you mean?

go to heaven, or at the Second Coming, if that happens first. See, when we trust in Jesus and get “saved”, it’s not just about what we’re saved from; it’s not just a get out of jail free card that means we won’t burn in hell (although that’s good). It’s about what we’re saved for, which is union with God in heaven. What Jesus did for us is more than rescuing us from the power of sin; it also includes our souls and bodies being glorified with him in heaven. And Mary, she was the first one to say “Yes” to Jesus, and she got to have the full effects of his redemption before anybody else will.

NDC: Sounds good, but I think I’ll just take it easy with this Mary stuff for the time being. But one thing’s for sure, I’ll be taking any anti-Catholic stuff that preacher guy says with a grain of salt from now on.

C: Yeah, I think his focus is a bit wrong. Scripture says that all generations will call Mary blessed, not that we should go around trying to dig up dirt on her. But Mary’s kind, she’ll probably pray for him anyway. See you around!

Jerusalem. This is why in the Vigil Mass for the feast of the Assumption, we say Psalm 132:8 - “Arise, O Lord, and go to your resting place, you and the ark of your might.”

NDC: OK, like you say, that’s all interesting, but I’m not really convinced.

C: You don’t have to be convinced; belief in Mary’s Assumption is basically a matter of faith, and that’s between you and God. But you do have to realise that Catholics aren’t just making this up from nowhere; we do have good Biblical reasons for what we believe. Plus there’s the historical fact that no-one’s ever found her body.

But the Assumption is mainly about the dignity Jesus gives to the people he redeems, and Mary is a great example of what we can look forward to. The Catechism puts it like this: “The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin is a singular participation in her Son’s Resurrection and an anticipation of the resurrection of other Christians” (CCC, #966).

Immaculate Conception

NDC: OK, you’re doing pretty well. I’ll have a think about that. Here’s my next question: the Immaculate Conception. Now, I always thought that was about Jesus, how Mary was a virgin when he was born. But that’s not it, is it?

C: No, the Immaculate Conception is not about the conception of Jesus, it’s about the conception of Mary. What we believe is basically that Mary was preserved, by God’s grace, and because of Jesus, from the stain of original sin, and that she remained free from sin all her life.

NDC: Yeah, well I think you’ve got a whole bunch of problems with this one. You know, Paul says “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”.

C: OK, we’ll get to that in a minute. Lemme set it up for you first. The main thing to remember is that we just believe that God gave Mary gifts that were fitting for her job as Jesus’s mother.

When we talk about this we normally start at Luke 1:28, where the angel Gabriel says to Mary “Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you!”. The Greek word that means “full of grace” is *kecharitomenē*, which is a special kind of word, a perfect passive participle, which indicates that the fullness of grace is perfect and complete and enduring. But when we say Mary is “full of grace”, we’re not saying it’s her grace that she owns herself or anything; we’re saying she’s perfectly full of the grace which she has received from God.

The Ark of the Covenant stuff is important here too. God’s presence makes things holy, like the ground that Moses was standing on when he talked to God in the burning bush. God used to overshadow or cover the ark and occupy the mercy seat on top of it, so everything about the ark had to be made carefully and perfectly, and because it was the site of the presence of God, the ark was so holy that almost no-one could touch it and live. Mary was also overshadowed by God and she became the pure tabernacle of God the Son.

So when you think about it, it's pretty reasonable really.

NDC: You think?

C: Hebrews chapter 12 tells us to strive "for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord." Mary did more than just see the Lord, she was overshadowed by the Holy Spirit and she carried God the Son in her womb. God is perfectly holy, and the closer we get to him, the more we must be holy. And Mary got closer than anyone.

Now, can you think of anyone else who was conceived without sin?

NDC: Jesus.

C: Anyone else?

NDC: Uh, the angels?

C: Hey, that's good! I never thought of that - but that's not what I had in mind. I was thinking of Adam and Eve.

NDC: But it was through those guys that original sin came into the world! I don't think you wanna be saying Mary's just like them do you?

C: Well, good call, but my point is more about the idea of Mary being the "New Eve", which is a theme we see very early on in the Fathers of the Church. St. Irenaeus, writing in the second century, put it like this: "the knot of Eve's disobedience was loosed by the obedience of Mary: What the virgin Eve had bound in unbelief, the Virgin Mary loosed through faith". Eve was conceived without sin but blew it; Mary was conceived without sin and by the grace of God persevered in that her whole life.

NDC: Yeah, well, that's all nice speculative theology, and it sounds pretty good, and maybe I could go along with it if it weren't for the fact that it's obviously unbiblical. I got three big fat problems for you. Here's problem number one: Luke 1:46-47, where Mary says "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior". Now if she needed a Saviour, she must have had something to be saved from, which means she must have sinned.

C: Well, that's not too big a problem, actually. We believe that Mary needed a saviour, just like we do. The classic picture of this is if you think about a big pit of quicksand. If you were drowning in the quicksand and someone threw you a rope and pulled you out, you could say that they saved you, right? But if you were just about to step into the quicksand and someone stopped you, they would also have saved you. In both cases you are saved, but in the second one you are saved without getting dirty. This is what happened with Mary.

NDC: OK, here's problem number two: In the next chapter of Luke, Mary takes a purification offering to the temple after Jesus' birth. But according to you guys, she didn't need to be purified from anything.

C: Well, this is a lot like Jesus' baptism. Jesus was baptised by John the Baptist, and if you read Mark 1:4, you'll see that this was a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. Now Jesus didn't need to repent of anything, but he got baptised anyway, saying "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to

C: Well, not really. The "until" doesn't have to mean a reversal of the situation afterwards. You could just interpret it as "before". I mean, think about this: in 2nd Samuel chapter 6, it says that "Michal the daughter of Saul had no child until the day of her death". Obviously that didn't change after she died, did it? NDC: Well, no, I guess not...

C: There are plenty of other examples like this, which show that the word "until", by itself, leaves the question open.

NDC: Well, maybe, but I don't know if I buy the bit about "brothers" not really meaning "brothers". I mean, you've got real people being named as Jesus' brothers here: James and Joseph and Simon and Judas. This still sounds a lot like the Catholics are wrong. Sorry.

C: Hey, that's OK. But if you look at the women who were by the cross when Jesus died, you see that the mother of those "brothers" was standing there with Mary the mother of Jesus. They're not the same person. The trouble is, you've got to correlate three different Scriptures to figure that out, one from John 19, one from Mark 15, and one from Matthew 27, which is why a lot of people don't see it.

Finally, look at Galatians 1:19. Paul talks about meeting with Peter in Jerusalem for 15 days, then says... "But I saw none of the other Apostles except James, the Lord's brother." So we see that James, the Lord's brother, is an Apostle. But there are only two Apostles called James. Matthew chapter 10 lists the apostles, ...and we see that the two people called James are "James the son of Zebedee" and "James the son of Alphaeus". It doesn't say anything about a James who is the son of Joseph or Mary. So this James referred to as the Lord's brother must be either the son of Alphaeus or the son of Zebedee, and he couldn't be the son of Zebedee, because that James was killed by King Herod before Paul wrote Galatians (see Acts 12:2). So this James the Apostle, the "Lord's brother", is the son of Alphaeus, which means he can't be the direct brother of Jesus, can he?

Conclusion

[Cue stewardess telling NDC he has the wrong seat and should move up to first class with the rest of his family.]

NDC: Well, this has been really interesting, and thanks for clearing up some stuff for me. I still don't believe everything you do about Mary, but at least you guys aren't worshipping her or anything really weird like I was scared of.

C: Hey, it's been a pleasure. Just remember, anything special about Mary comes from Jesus. It's perfectly fitting that the Mother of God should be free from sin. The thing with Mary is, in a lot of ways she's the "prototype" of the Christian life. If anyone had a real personal relationship with Jesus it was her! And what happened to her tells us a lot about what will happen to us when we die and

Perpetual Virginity.

NDC: OK, we're nearly there. I've got one more for you, and I'm really curious to see how you're going to get out of this one. You guys believe that Jesus was an only child, that Mary stayed a virgin her whole life. Is that right?

C: Yep, we call it Mary's "perpetual virginity".

NDC: OK, well what about Matthew 12:46:

"While he was still speaking to the people, behold, his mother and his brothers stood outside, asking to speak to him".

And how about this, from Mark chapter 6:

³ "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?"

What do you guys do with that?

C: Well, the first thing you need to know is that the word used for brother,adelphos, doesn't necessarily mean a strictly biological brother. In Hebrew and Aramaic, which were the language Jesus and the people around him were mostly using, there aren't separate words for "brother", "cousin" or "close relative". So instead of calling your cousin something like "the son of the sister of my father", you'd normally just say "brother". And when the New Testament writers were writing in Greek, they normally just used the Greek equivalent of what the Hebrew or Aramaic would have been. So brother could mean brother, but it could also mean cousin, kinsman, fellow countryman, and so on. Like in the Septuagint, which is the ancient Jewish translation of the Old Testament into Greek, Abraham's nephew Lot is called his "brother" in Genesis chapter 14. Those "brothers" of Jesus are probably some sort of relatives, but not direct brothers and sisters.

There's no sign of them when Jesus was left behind at the temple when he was 12, and there's no sign of them when Jesus was on the cross and he entrusts Mary to John and not to any brothers.

Something else to think about is Luke 1:34, after the angel has told Mary she's going to have a son - Mary says "How will this be, since I am a virgin?". Now there is some evidence that Mary may have actually taken a vow of life-long virginity, and what she says here fits in with that. Otherwise it would have made more sense for her to say "When will this be?" rather than "How?". I mean, she would have known what has to happen before someone can have a child, but she still says, "How will this be?"

NDC: What about this: Matthew chapter 1:

²⁴ "When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took his wife, ²⁵ but knew her not until she had borne a son; and he called his name Jesus".

It says he didn't have sex with her until Jesus was born, which means that the situation changed after the birth of Jesus, right, and they had normal marital relations after that. Doesn't it?

fulfil all righteousness". So he thought it was best if he went through with this sort of thing, because then no-one could say that he was slack in observing the right procedures. It was just like this for Mary. If she didn't do the offering, she'd be breaking the law of Moses, and she wouldn't do that.

NDC: OK, here's problem three (and this is the biggie), Romans 3:23, which says "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God". And not just that, there's the rest of the chapter, like Romans 3:10, "None is righteous, no, not one".

C: OK, "all have sinned" doesn't necessarily mean all individuals...

NDC: Oh, really? "All" doesn't really mean "all"?

C: Hey, it means "all", in the sense of "everyone in general". I mean, babies haven't sinned, have they, or severely retarded people who don't know what they're doing? It's like in Mark chapter 1, where it says John the Baptist baptized all the people of Jerusalem. Or like 1 Corinthians 15:22, where St. Paul says "For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive." But not all people have died (like Enoch, right, or Elijah) and not all will be made spiritually alive by Christ, because some people will choose to go to hell.

But the key thing with Romans chapter 3 is to look at the context. Read chapters 1 and 2 to see where Paul is going with his argument here. He spends the first part of the letter saying that both Gentiles and Jews are equally guilty before God. He's answering the objections of those Jews who think that they are right with God just because they are Jews and have the Law as their guide. He says that both Jews and Gentiles are under the power of sin. That's what he means by "all", he means Jews and Gentiles together; it's not just Jews that benefit from the work of Christ, it's all people, men of all nations.

NDC: Well, what about Romans 3:10, where Paul says "None is righteous, no, not one". Sounds pretty comprehensive to me!

C: Hey, Jesus was righteous, wasn't he? That's a pretty big exception, wouldn't you say?

NDC: Yeah, well, he's the Son of God. That doesn't count.

C: And Mary's the mother of God. Maybe she doesn't count either. The point is, Paul really doesn't mean no one's righteous, with no exceptions or qualifications. If he did, then we've got a problem with a contradiction in Scripture, because Luke 1 verse 6 says that Zechariah and Elizabeth "were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless".

But it makes a lot more sense when you realise what Paul was really doing when he says "None is righteous, no, not one". He's actually quoting from Psalm 14. Maybe we should have a look at that?

NDC: OK.

² "The fool says in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, their deeds are vile; there is no one who does good. ³ The LORD looks down from heaven on the sons of men to see if there are any who understand,

any who seek God. ⁴ All have turned aside, they have together become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one."

C: There's your quote. That Psalm is about people who have turned away from God. It's all of them who are not righteous. And the Psalm is written about Jews, which is why Paul quotes it, because it shows his readers that Jews aren't automatically righteous just because they're Jews. But keep going.

NDC: ⁵ "Will evil-doers never learn – those who devour my people as men eat bread and who do not call on the LORD? ⁶ There they are, overwhelmed with dread, for God is present in the company of the righteous."

C: See, it also talks about God's people, the ones who are righteous. Like Mary was.

So you see once you look at Romans chapter 3 in context, it really doesn't become a problem for the Catholic idea about Mary being kept free from sin by God's grace.

And look, I've got a quote for you, listen to this:

"It is a sweet and pious belief that the infusion of Mary's soul was effected without original sin... thus from the first moment she began to live she was free from all sin."

Guess who said that?

NDC: I dunno. Some pope?

C: Nope, it was Martin Luther⁴, he said it in a sermon in 1527, on the feast of the Conception of the Mother of God.

NDC: All right, you're doing pretty well. I, uh, I still don't agree, but well, that's OK, I can see where you're coming from, and it's not as bad as I thought. It's kinda reassuring to see that you're not saying Mary did it all herself or anything.

C: No, it's all the grace of Christ.

Queen of Heaven

NDC: OK, well that brings us to my next question. You guys call Mary "Queen of Heaven", don't you. I mean, it's right there on the title of your book. But, in the Bible the only time you read about a "queen of heaven" is in Jeremiah chapter 7 and chapter 44, where he rips into people for idolatry - they're offering sacrifices and worship to a "queen of heaven", who is really a pagan goddess. So it seems to me that that's something any good Christian would really want to stay away from.

C: Yeah, well Mary's title as Queen comes purely from the kingship of Jesus.

NDC: Well, sure, Jesus is king. But Mary's his mother - how does that make her a queen?

C: Well, here's the thing: Jesus came to re-establish the kingdom of King David, right, in fulfillment of the prophecies about the Messiah.

NDC: Yeah, I've got no problem with that. But what's your point?

C: My point is that in the kingdom of David, as in much of the ancient Near East, the queen was the mother of the king.

NDC: Ahh...

C: It was an institution known as the Gebirah, which literally means "great lady". The queen in David's dynasty was not the king's wife. Kings often had lots of wives, who were normally called "princesses".

NDC: OK, keep going...

C: The Gebirah had a throne, and a crown, and we see some of the ceremony associated with her in 1st Kings chapter 2. When Solomon was king, his mother Bathsheba was the queen, and what we see is this:

¹⁹ "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."

So the queen mother sat at the right hand of the king.

Part of the job of the queen mother was to intercede to the king on behalf of the people as well. Bathsheba went to Solomon to intercede on behalf of Adonijah, like we just saw. And in Proverbs 31 we read the advice King Lemuel got from his mother, the queen, like "Open your mouth for the dumb, for the rights of all who are left desolate. Open your mouth, judge righteously, maintain the rights of the poor and needy" (Proverb 31: 8-9). This is one of the reasons Catholics ask Mary to intercede for us; it's her job.

The other thing is that the queen mother also guaranteed that the king came from the right bloodline, which is probably why both the king and queen mother are named in the books of Kings whenever a new king takes the throne. So, in Luke Chapter 1, when the angel announces that Jesus will be the new Davidic king, that obviously tells us who the new queen mother will be. And Elizabeth's greeting to Mary confirms it when she says: "And why is this granted me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" (Luke 1:43).

NDC: Hey, that's really interesting. We don't get a lot of sermons on Mary, you know. So I can see how she'd be the queen mother of King Jesus, but what about "Queen of Heaven"?

C: Well, Jesus is the king of heaven, isn't he? And look, remember Revelation chapter 12, and the woman "clothed with the sun", who gives birth to the Messiah? This is obviously Mary. And we are told that the woman has "on her head a crown of twelve stars".

And hey, it's not just Catholics who see Mary as Queen of Heaven. There's a famous church at Wittenberg in Germany which has a burial chamber and on its door there is a sculpture of the Coronation of Mary. The tomb belongs to our friend Martin Luther.

⁴ For more information, see Dave Armstrong's article, Martin Luther's Devotion to Mary, at www.catholicculture.org/library/view.cfm?id=788