

# Catholic Conversations

Discovering the  
Supremacy of Grace





## Last Week – Scripture and Tradition

“If the Bible is God’s word, by definition no human authority or human institution can serve alongside the Bible with equal authority. Neither the pope nor any human counsel or any scholar or priest or pastor or human tradition has the authority of the Bible if it is God’s word.”

- John Piper



# Catholic Conversations

- Week 1: Scripture (How does God speak to the world?)
- **Week 2: Sin (How are we made in the image of God?)**
- Week 3: Sacraments (What is the church?)
- Week 4: Salvation (Why are people accepted by God?)

# Made in the *Imago Dei*

“Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.'”  
Genesis 1:26

## Agreements between Catholics and Protestants

- *Imago Dei* is unique to humans alone and granted at conception
- Enables personal relationship with God
- Expresses immutable gender identity, equality and dignity
- Includes responsibility to reflect and represent God
- Magnifies relationships and the capacity to love



## Catholic Distinction

### **IMAGE of God**

*Natural* gifts  
of reason and  
free will

### **LIKENESS of God**

*Supernatural* gifts  
of righteousness  
and everlasting  
life

**Genesis 2:17** (literal translation):

“ . . . in the day that you eat of it, dying you shall die.”

# Protestant Perspective

No distinction between *Image* and *Likeness* of God

- Terms are used interchangeably in the OT
- Reveals a common OT writing style (poetry/prose)
- *Image* cannot be restricted to reason and freedom, but must include human function and dominion
- *Image* and *Likeness* should be understood to refer to human beings in their wholeness (i.e. salvation)

## What about the consequences of sin?

Both Catholics and Protestants agree that because of the fall, sin and its consequences spread to the entire human race that would come from them (see Romans 5:12-21). This condition is referred to as “**original sin.**”

Original sin is the condition into which every person is born, bringing **guilt** before God and **corruption** of human nature. As St. Augustine wrote:

*Posse peccare, posse non peccare* (pre fall)

*Non posse non peccare* (post fall)

# Different Perspectives on Original Sin

## Catholicism

Original sin results in:

- **EXTENSIVE Depravity:** fall destroyed the Likeness of God but only damaged the Image of God
- **EXTENSIVE Inability:** original sin does not include the inclination to sin; people only have a tendency that lures them toward sin.

## Protestantism

Original sin results in:

- **TOTAL Depravity:** extensiveness of original sin. All aspects of human nature are subject to the devastation of sin.
- **TOTAL Inability:** intensiveness of original sin. People are incapable of reorienting their basic disposition from self-centeredness to God-centeredness.



# Catholic categories of Sin

## MORTAL Sin

- Not to be confused with the 7 Deadly (or Capital) sins
- A serious violation of God's law
- Committed deliberately and with full knowledge and complete consent
- Destroys love and forfeits grace
- If not forgiven through the sacrament of Penance, eternal condemnation in hell results

## VENIAL Sin

- A less serious violation of God's law
- Or may be serious but committed without full knowledge or consent
- Wounds the heart but doesn't destroy it
- No forfeiture of grace
- May be forgiven through confession and repentance, but not necessarily the sacrament of Penance
- Does merit temporary punishment in Purgatory



# Biblical Response

- **Romans 3:23** – “For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”
- **Romans 6:23** – “For the wages of sin is death, ...”
- **James 2:10** – “For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it.”



## The Effects of the Fall on Nature

- ▶ Catholic Church affirms that nature (e.g. water, oil, bread, wine, and other natural objects) is capable of receiving, cooperating with, and transmitting the grace of God.
- ▶ This *nature-grace interdependence* hinges on the view that sin has not utterly devastated nature.
- ▶ Nature is tainted by original sin but retains its capacity to receive, cooperate with and serve as a conduit of grace.



## Biblical Response

1. The earth is cursed because of human sin (Genesis 3:17-19, and Romans 8:20-22)
2. Adam and Eve were banished from the garden to live in a world of their own making (Genesis 3:24)
3. The creation of a new heaven and new earth underscores re-creation through grace (2 Peter 3:7; Revelation 21:1)



## There's something about Mary, right?

Agreement in relation to Mary's role in the incarnation of Christ

- ▶ Both Catholics and Protestants agree that Mary is the *theotokos* – “the one who bears the one who is God.”
- ▶ Catholics and Protestants affirm Mary's outstanding model of faith and obedience (see Luke 1:38).
- ▶ Catholics and Protestants are united in calling Mary “blessed” (see Luke 1:48)



## What is the Immaculate Conception?

“The most Blessed Virgin Mary was, from the first moment of her conception, by a singular grace and privilege of the almighty God and by virtue of the merits of Jesus Christ, Savior of the human race, preserved immune from all stain of original sin.”

- Pope Pius IX, *Ineffabilis Deus*, 1854

## Understanding the natural relationship between Mary and Jesus

- ▶ Catholic Tradition: Jesus was preserved from original sin by Mary's immaculate conception
- ▶ (Most) Protestants: Jesus was preserved from original sin through the virgin birth and the absence of a human father

“It seems likely that the influence of the Holy Spirit was so powerful and sanctifying in its effect that there was no conveyance of depravity or guilt from Mary to Jesus.”

- Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*

## Could Jesus have sinned?

If we affirm that Jesus was born without a sin nature (original sin), then we must ask if it was possible for him to sin at all.

Biblical contexts: Matthew 4:1-11; Hebrews 4:15; 7:26; 9:14

The answer: **YES** (but why?)

Only two other people without a sin nature: Adam and Eve

Paul draws a comparison between Jesus and Adam:

- 1) Romans 5:19
- 2) 1 Corinthians 15:45 (“last Adam”)





## The Perpetual Virginity of Mary

The Catholic Church also affirms the perpetual virginity of Mary and hence, her complete sinlessness.

Mary's virginity was *ante partum, in partu, et post partum* – “before, in, and after birth.” Jesus somehow passed through Mary's uterine wall and was not born vaginally.

## Biblical Response to Mary's Perpetual Virginity

- ▶ The idea of Mary's perpetual virginity is extra-biblical
- ▶ Joseph did not know Mary *until* she had given birth (Matthew 1:24-25)
- ▶ Luke describes Jesus as Mary's "first born son" (Luke 2:7)
- ▶ Jesus had *brothers* and *sisters*: Matthew 13:55-56; Mark 6:3
- ▶ Brothers: James, Joseph, Simon, Judas (yes, Judas!)
- ▶ Sisters (from tradition): Mariam, Martha, and Ruth



## The Bodily Assumption of Mary

“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.”

- Pius XII, *Munificentissimus Deus*, 1950

This means that Mary alone has participated in her son's resurrection and is therefore the only believer in heaven with a glorified body.

## Mary as Mediator: Why Catholics pray to Mary

- Theological Development: Some Catholic theologians affirm that just as there is a second “Adam,” there is also a second “Eve” (e.g. Pope John Paul II). cf. 1 Cor. 15:22. *Mary became co-redemptrix.*
- Historical Development: As Christianity became more cloistered in the Middle Ages, people began to look for other “mediators.” Since Christ didn’t seem approachable, people shifted their affections and prayers to Mary (and to Anne, Mary’s mother)



## Mary as Mediator: Biblical Response

“For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.” – **1 Timothy 2:5**

“And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” – **Acts 4:12**

“And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom.” – **Matthew 27:51a**

# Catholic Conversations

## Next Week: **Sacraments**

What is the Church?

What is Papal succession and infallibility?

What are the sacraments?

Baptism/Lord's Supper