

# One Mediation of Christ and the Saints

## Introduction

Referring to 1 Timothy 2:5, Loraine Boettner in his anti-Catholic book, *Roman Catholicism*<sup>1</sup>, writes: "When this verse is understood the whole system of the Roman Church falls to the ground, for it invalidates the papacy, the priesthood, and all Mary worship." To his list he could also have added, "honoring the saints." He then cites other passages which support Christ's singular role as mediator, namely, Jn 14:6; Acts 4:12; Heb 7:25; 9:15; 1 Jn 2:1; and Rom 8:31. This leads him to draw the following conclusion.

"Thus Christ, because He is both God and man, is the only Savior, the only Mediator, the only way to God. Not one word is said about Mary, or a pope, or the priests, or the saints, as mediators. Yet Romanism teaches that there are many mediators, and the great majority of Roman Catholics, if asked, would say that our primary approach to God is through the virgin Mary, and that only as she begs for us can we enter the presence of God"<sup>2</sup>

Before evaluating 1 Timothy 2:5 it will be profitable to discuss the meaning of term, mediator, and then clarify the teaching of the Catholic Church on the subject. A **mediator** is a person who intervenes between estranged parties to effect a reconciliation. In regard to the distance between God and fallen humanity Jesus Christ, true God and true man, was the only person capable of mending this breach. This is a belief that Protestants and Catholics share.

However, neither the singular place nor importance of the mediator, Jesus Christ, is in any manner diminished by the use of subordinate mediators. A **subordinate mediator** is someone delegated by the mediator to act in his name and with his authority. The effectiveness of the subordinate mediator derives his influence exclusively from the mediator. This is precisely what the Catholic Church teaches regarding the saints and anyone else empowered to act in a role of subordinate mediation.

"Being more closely united to Christ, those who dwell in heaven fix the whole Church more firmly in holiness... [T]hey do not cease to **intercede** with the Father for us, as they proffer the merits which they acquired on earth **through the one mediator between God and men, Christ Jesus**. ... So by their fraternal concern is our weakness greatly helped."<sup>3</sup>

## Sacred Scripture

Before examining specific texts that support Catholic teaching, it is important to clarify the issue. The Catholic Church has no conflict with Protestants regarding the particular mediation of Jesus Christ. However, does St. Paul's teaching in 1 Timothy 2:5 exclude any role of subordinate mediation? That's the question.

The key passage is as follows: "For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, the testimony to which was borne at the proper time" (1 Tim 2:5). Notice the emphasis on "one." There is "one God" and "one

mediator." When this passage is considered in itself it would appear to negate the Catholic position. However, the passage is not by itself.

The same Holy Spirit who inspired verse 5 also inspired verses 1-4. Let's see what these verses teach. "First of all, then I urge that **supplications, prayers, intercessions**, and thanksgivings be made for all men, for kings and for all who are in high positions, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life, godly and respectful in every way" (1 Tim 2:1-2). "Supplications, prayers, [and] intercessions" are all acts of mediation. Why does Paul "urge" Timothy to act as a mediator between God on the one hand and "all men, for kings and for all who are in high positions" on the other hand? "This is good and it is acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim 2: 3-4).

Paul clearly sees a connection between these acts of mediation and assisting the beneficiaries to attain their eternal salvation. What? Does Paul think that the "supplications, prayers [and] intercessions" made by Timothy derives a potency from Timothy, himself? Of course not! Paul gives the theological foundation for his entreaty of subordinate mediation in verse five.

"For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, the testimony to which was borne at the proper time" (1 Tim 2:5). In other words the very verse that St. Paul used in its context to support subordinate mediation, is the same verse that Protestants use apart from its context to reject Paul's teaching!

As a practical matter, I know of no Protestant church which uniformly rejects subordinate mediation. Intercessory prayer, missionary work, preaching, evangelizing, crusades, and Bible studies are all forms of subordinate mediation. They are widely employed by Protestant churches. It is also an admirable practice among Protestant churches to have active prayer lines. Are we to believe that these same brothers and sisters are no longer concerned with those struggling and suffering on earth once they are in heaven? Therefore we shouldn't pray to them, asking them to intercede for us. Where does the Bible teach that?

In reality the teaching of the Catholic Church does not in any way lessen the singular mediation of Jesus. Consider, for example, the Church's teaching regarding the role of Mary. "Mary's function as mother of men in no way obscures or diminishes this unique mediation of Christ, but rather shows its **power**. But the blessed Virgin's salutary influence on men . . . **flows forth from the superabundance of the merits of Christ, rests on his mediation, depends entirely** on it, and **draws all** its power **from it**."<sup>4</sup> "No creature [no exceptions, including Mary] could ever be counted along with the Incarnate Word and Redeemer; but just as the priesthood of Christ is shared in various ways both by his ministers and the faithful, and as the one goodness of God is radiated in different ways among his creatures, so also the unique mediation of the Redeemer **does not exclude but rather gives rise to a manifold cooperation which is but a sharing in this one source**."<sup>5</sup>

## Communion of Saints

Subordinate mediation is rooted in the New Covenant that uniquely unites all Christians to each other in Jesus Christ. In Catholic theology it is given the name of the Communion of Saints. This

union with Christ is so close that we form one body with him.<sup>6</sup> St. Paul stressed this matchless unity among Christ's members: "that there may be no discord in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it" (1 Cor 12:25:27; also Rom 12:4-16).

Christians are bound by mutual love.<sup>7</sup> St. Paul frequently asks fellow Christians to pray for him.<sup>8</sup> The saints are alive and with God.<sup>9</sup> Death can't separate Christians from Christ or from one another (Rom 8:35-39).<sup>10</sup> The prayers of the saints arise to God. Clearly, there is no biblical objection to praying to the saints.

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1. Loraine Boettner, *Roman Catholicism* (Phillipsburg: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, c. 1962), p. 148. Boettner's book is particularly offensive to Catholics because it is dishonest in presenting what the Catholic Church says about itself, for example, his claim that Catholics "worship" Mary. For an able response to Boettner's work see Karl Keating's *Catholicism and Fundamentalism: the Attack on "Romanism" by "Bible Christians"* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, c. 1988).
  2. *Ibid.*, p. 148.
  3. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, # 956.
  4. Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, 60.
  5. *Lumen Gentium*, 62.
  6. Jn 15:1-5; 1 Cor 10:16; 1 Cor 12:12-27; Gal 3:28; Eph 1:22-23; 4:4, 15-16; 5:21-32; Col 1:28; 3:15.
  7. Rom 12:20; 1 Thess 5:11; Gal 6:2.
  8. Rom 15:30; Col 4:3; 1 Thess 5:25; 2 Thess 3:1; Eph 6:18-19.
  9. Mk 12:26-27; Lk 23:43.
  10. Tob 12:12; Rev 5:8; 8:3-4.
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