



Throughout the history of the Church, numerous heresies have arisen. Some denied the divinity of Christ. Others rejected the Trinity. Some distorted the doctrine of grace or the sacraments. Yet few are as striking as **Collyridianism**, a doctrinal deviation that led certain groups to render to the Blessed Virgin Mary a form of worship proper to God alone.

It may seem like an exaggeration or even a legend, but historical testimonies indicate that communities really did exist that went so far as to offer sacrifices to Mary, treating her practically as a deity.

Paradoxically, this ancient heresy remains relevant today. Not because organized Collyridian groups still exist, but because it raises a fundamental question for the spiritual life: **how can we deeply love the Virgin Mary without falling into doctrinal error?**

The Catholic Church has answered this question for centuries by developing a Mariology that is solid, balanced, and profoundly biblical.

Understanding Collyridianism helps us better appreciate who Mary is, what role she plays in salvation history, and why authentic Marian devotion always leads to Christ and never replaces Him.

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## What Was Collyridianism?

The name comes from the Greek word *kollýris*, which referred to a kind of small cake or loaf.

The Collyridians were groups, mainly composed of women, that appeared in certain regions of Arabia and neighboring areas during the fourth and fifth centuries.

According to historical sources, these women offered small cakes or ritual breads to the Virgin Mary as an act of religious devotion.

This was not simply an exaggerated form of popular piety.

The concern was that these offerings appeared to have a sacrificial character reserved exclusively for God.

In other words, Mary was beginning to be treated as a divinity.



The principal source of information about this heresy is Saint Epiphanius of Salamis, who described and refuted it in his famous work *Panarion*, an extensive compilation of heresies.

Epiphanius observed that some women organized ceremonies in honor of Mary, offering these ritual cakes and attributing to her a veneration incompatible with the Christian faith.

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## The Historical Context: When Paganism Mixed with Christianity

To understand Collyridianism, we must place ourselves in the early centuries of the Church.

Christianity was spreading rapidly through territories that had been dominated for centuries by pagan religions.

Many of these cultures worshipped female deities.

Among them were:

- Isis
- Astarte
- Artemis
- Cybele

When some people converted to Christianity, they did not always immediately abandon all of their pagan mental frameworks.

The human heart tends to retain old customs.

Thus, some began transferring to Mary elements that had previously belonged to the worship of ancient goddesses.

Mary was seen as a maternal, pure, and powerful figure.

Without proper doctrinal formation, some eventually elevated her to the rank of a deity.

This was a phenomenon of religious syncretism.



It was not the teaching of the Church.

It was a distortion of the faith.

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## The Church's Response

The Church responded with clarity.

The Catholic position has always been twofold:

1. Mary deserves extraordinary veneration.
2. Mary is not God.

These two affirmations must be held together.

If we deny the first, we fall into errors that minimize the role of the Mother of God.

If we deny the second, we end up in deviations such as Collyridianism.

Saint Epiphanius wrote forceful words:

*“Let Mary be honored, but let the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit alone be adored.”*

This sentence perfectly summarizes Catholic doctrine.

Mary occupies the highest place among all creatures.

But she remains a creature.

She is the masterpiece of divine grace, not a goddess.

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# The Difference Between Adoration and Veneration

One of the most important aspects of understanding this subject is the classical distinction between:

## Latria

This is the adoration owed exclusively to God.

No creature can receive latria.

Not the saints.

Not the angels.

Not even the Virgin Mary.

## Dulia

This is the veneration offered to the saints.

It recognizes the work of God in them.

## Hyperdulia

This is the unique veneration reserved for Mary.

It is not adoration.

It does not make her divine.

It simply acknowledges that she occupies a unique place in the history of salvation.

This distinction was developed with great precision by Catholic theology precisely to prevent errors such as Collyridianism.



## What the Bible Teaches About Mary

Scripture presents Mary with extraordinary dignity.

The angel Gabriel greets her saying:

“Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee” (Lk 1:28).

Likewise, Saint Elizabeth exclaims:

“Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb” (Lk 1:42).

And the Virgin herself prophesies:

“All generations shall call me blessed” (Lk 1:48).

The Bible therefore clearly teaches that Mary should be honored.

However, nowhere is she presented as a goddess.

She herself declares:

“My spirit hath rejoiced in God my Savior” (Lk 1:47).

These words are fundamental.

Mary acknowledges that she needs God’s salvation.



She is not a divinity.

She is the first of the redeemed through Christ.

She is the most perfect creature.

But she remains a creature.

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## The Spiritual Danger Behind Collyridianism

Although Collyridianism disappeared many centuries ago, the temptation that gave rise to it still exists.

Human beings have a tendency toward extremes.

Some minimize Mary.

Others exaggerate her role.

Authentic Catholic spirituality avoids both errors.

True love never needs to distort the truth.

Loving Mary deeply does not mean attributing to her what belongs to God alone.

On the contrary.

The more we understand who Mary is, the more we admire the greatness of God who worked in her.

Every authentic Marian devotion is Christ-centered.

Mary does not keep glory for herself.

She directs it toward Christ.

Her final recorded words in the Gospel remain a permanent guide:



“Do whatever He tells you” (Jn 2:5).

Mary’s entire mission consists precisely in this.

To lead souls to Jesus.

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## Can Collyridianism Reappear Today?

Formally speaking, it is very rare.

Catholic doctrine is clearly defined.

However, attitudes can arise that indirectly resemble this ancient error.

For example:

- When someone thinks Mary acts independently of God.
- When powers are attributed to Mary separately from Christ.
- When one forgets that every grace comes from God.
- When devotion becomes mere sentimentalism without doctrinal foundation.

The Church has always insisted on maintaining balance.

The great Marian saints never fell into Collyridianism.

On the contrary, the more they loved Mary, the more they loved Christ.

We can see this in figures such as Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, Saint Louis-Marie Grignon de Montfort, Saint Maximilian Kolbe, and Saint John Paul II.

None of them turned Mary into a goddess.

All of them contemplated her as the safest path to Christ.



## The Pastoral Lesson for Our Time

We live in an age marked by doctrinal confusion.

Many Catholics know little about the faith they profess.

For this reason, it is especially important to understand true Marian doctrine.

A healthy devotion to Mary involves:

- Praying the Rosary.
- Imitating her virtues.
- Seeking her intercession.
- Consecrating oneself to Jesus through her.
- Meditating on the mysteries of Christ alongside His Mother.

But it also means always remembering that adoration belongs to God alone.

The Virgin never competes with Christ.

She never takes His place.

She never diminishes His glory.

Quite the opposite.

Mary reflects the light of Christ just as the moon reflects the light of the sun.

Her greatness consists precisely in the fact that everything in her points toward God.

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# Mary: The Most Perfect Creature, Not a Goddess

Collyridianism reminds us of an essential truth: authentic love must be united to truth.

The Church has never been afraid to exalt Mary.

She proclaims her Mother of God, Ever-Virgin, Immaculate Conception, and Queen of Heaven.

But at the same time, she affirms with absolute clarity that Mary is not God.

She does not receive adoration.

She is not part of the Trinity.

She is not a Christian female deity.

She is the humble handmaid of the Lord who answered:

“Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done unto me according to thy word” (Lk 1:38).

Precisely because of that humility, God raised her above all creatures.

The history of Collyridianism constitutes a permanent warning for Catholics of every age.

It teaches us that true Marian devotion does not consist in exaggerating Mary’s role, but in contemplating her exactly as God willed her to be: Mother of the Savior, perfect model of discipleship, and a sure path to Jesus Christ.

And when we contemplate her in this way, we understand that every authentic Marian veneration always ends where she herself points with her hand: to the Heart of Christ, the one Lord, the one Savior, and the one God worthy of adoration.