

*Fr. Perozich comments —*

*Not having read the book, I am not endorsing it; rather I find Anne Barbeau's review very helpful to me to assist me in contemplation, discipleship, clarifications to those who denigrate Mary and the rosary, and assistance to me to continue with Jesus as Mary did on this journey from the "vale of tears" to the beatific vision which she now enjoys.*

*For those suffering the post 2020 election fears and suffering ambiguous and changing teaching from church hierarchs, I find this helpful:*

***From these chapters we learn that the Rosary is a way of engaging the world from a position of strength, while keeping free of its Zeitgeist, all its tempting "pagan solutions to moral questions."***

*While I still live in this world and must engage it in all aspects of my life, the rosary puts my focus on why I am here: "*

*Baltimore Catechism Question 3. Why did God make us?  
God made us to show forth His goodness, to know, to love and to serve Him in this world so as to be happy with Him forever in heaven.*

# The Virgin Mary's Unique Privilege

September 2001



The Mysteries of the Rosary: Mirror of Scripture and Gateway to Prayer

By Roy Barkley  
Publisher: Alba House  
Pages: 203  
Price: \$16.95  
Review Author: Anne Barbeau Gardiner

*Anne Barbeau Gardiner is Professor Emerita of English at John Jay College of the City University of New York.*

This book is the result of 20 years of devotion to the Virgin Mary and is intended to help make the Rosary, after Mass attendance, the core of a Catholic prayer life. This work is undeviatingly Christ-centered, for, as the author says, Mary herself “would abhor any near-sighted devotion that failed to focus on Christ.” The writing style is vigorous. Nothing is drawn from private revelations; all is grounded in sacred Scripture, sacred Tradition, and magisterial writings of the popes.

The Rosary has long been regarded as a shield over Christendom. Deacon Barkley cites numerous declarations made by past vicars of Christ that underscore its protective role. For example, St. Pius V instituted the Feast of the Rosary in 1571 out of gratitude to the Virgin for the great naval victory at Lepanto over the massed forces of the Ottoman Empire. Other popes have praised the Rosary as a sword against “pernicious heresiarchs and heresies,” and have urged Catholic families to pray the Rosary together to guard the unity and faith of their “domestic church.” Should some allege that the Rosary is a devotion suited

only to pious old ladies, this book will readily confute them.

Barkley sees the Rosary as a way of making real for ourselves the chief mysteries of our salvation history: “These mysteries are nothing but the heart of the New Testament, which resounds with echoes of the entire Bible.” All but the last two mysteries of the Rosary are taken directly from Scripture, and even the Assumption and Coronation are “veiled” there in the Prophets and have been “elaborated in authoritative Sacred Tradition, which reflects the contemplative and Spirit-guided mind of the Church.” In the Rosary all the great truths of the Gospel are presented simply as facts — facts to be contemplated and revered, not doctrines to be critiqued. About existential prayer like this, Aquinas said that “to be on one’s knees before the cross is better than any amount of clever observation or talk of any sort.”

To the question of why we should contemplate these sacred mysteries from Mary’s point of view, Barkley gives a cogent answer: “If we wish to be there in contemplation, to witness his coming, we will be in the presence of his Mother. If we wish to find him in the Temple, to watch him turn water into wine, to share the anxious pain of his disciples during his final night of trial, to stand at the foot of the cross, we will be in the presence of his Mother. If we wish to see his empty tomb we will be with his Mother, for she is there. If we want to witness the descent of the Paraclete on Pentecost, we will wait with Mary and the apostles. No other biblical person is with the Lord

throughout his life, and mission. Mary alone had this privilege.”

The author does not envision Mary as at all “passive.” Rather, he sees her as giving her consent at the Annunciation “with a determined will to cooperate actively,” her fiat embracing all the obligations that will come with having “this particular Son.” And she gives this consent, too, in the name of the Church, since she is mystically the Mother of the Church, and as a new Eve incorporates us in her Christ-centered vocation. Later on Barkley returns to this point about Mary’s strength of mind, insisting that “her purity of mind and her devotion to the will of God are not emotions, but habitual acts of will.” In his depiction of her, Mary resembles more than ever the Bride of Canticles, who is as strong as the “Tower of David,” awesome as “an army in array.”

Barkley sees the Rosary as a school not only for contemplation, but also for discipleship. Since Mary is the “first and best disciple of Christ” and the sum of all Christian virtues, we learn from her, from pondering her part in these holy mysteries, how to give a joyful, prompt, ungrudging, and joyful obedience to Christ. The Rosary is both a way of “praying without ceasing,” as the Bible commands, and an “eloquent invitation” to Christ to enter and transform our wills and lives.

After a rousing Introduction, each chapter is devoted to a single mystery of the Rosary and follows the same sequence — the author first examines the mystery’s literal meaning in Scripture and relates it to the rest of salvation history; next, he applies it to our spiritual life and to the

hungers of the modern world; and last, he reflects on Mary's role in it and offers an intention for the ensuing decade of the Rosary. This sequence is more or less inspired by St. Augustine's fourfold way of contemplating passages in Scripture. **From these chapters we learn that the Rosary is a way of engaging the world from a position of strength, while keeping free of its Zeitgeist, all its tempting "pagan solutions to moral questions."** Barkley cites an unforgettable passage from Leo XIII, penned in 1893 yet expressing perfectly what is most tragic about the Western world today: *"We may doubt if God could inflict upon man a more terrible punishment than to allow him to waste his whole life in the pursuit of earthly pleasures, and in forgetfulness of the happiness which alone lasts forever. It is from this danger that they will be happily rescued who...keep before their minds the Glorious Mysteries."*

The Virgin of the Assumption is the "prototype" of those "victorious Christians" who will have kept themselves to the end from this tragic hedonism.

In the subtitle of this book are the words, "Mirror of Scripture." Hence, it is appropriate that in writing about the Rosary as the epitome of salvation history, the author should utter a few sharp words about today's biblical scholars who "consider belief in the reportorial nature of the Gospels to be naïve." At one point he turns the tables on them by calling them naïve for imagining that the Gospels could have been simply composed by a community. Later, in a chapter on the Resurrection, he mounts a spirited defense of the credibility of the

witnesses of the risen Christ: “Do the Gospel writers and those of whom they speak seem credible? Yes! All of Christendom is raised on their sober testimony. The Gospel writers never sound crazy, and their accounts never look calculated to promote a lie. They don’t describe the moment of the Resurrection itself.... This fact itself lends credibility to their account.... Likewise, the Gospel writers use no superlatives in claiming the reality of the Resurrection. Their tone is, rather, that of calm reportage.” In a chapter on the Ascension, Barkley notes that some Scripture scholars nowadays scorn as “naïve” and “childish” the Gospel report that “Jesus actually ascended.” They complain that Heaven isn’t actually “up,” except in a metaphorical sense. Barkley gives these “sophists” the coup de grâce when he observes that they “don’t escape their own critique,” because, as C.S. Lewis pointed out, “all language, except about objects of sense, is metaphorical through and through.” Impossible, then, to avoid figurative language in describing “the indescribable,” though we may try, as by speaking of “the transition (this is a metaphor, too) of the Lord from our three-dimensional world into a ‘world’ (another metaphor) so different that human language can’t capture it.”

A final note: The book contains 16 original illustrations, one for the cover and one for each of the mysteries. Painted by Serge Nouailhat, of the Communauté des Béatitudes, these have a quiet, mystical effect. The mainly blue and white complex backgrounds suggest how the eternal is breaking into the temporal and making it seem like a multifaceted gem in sunlight. Yet,

the central figures, who appear almost to levitate, are solidly, colorfully, and beautifully realized.