

## ...from the desk of Steve Wood

You probably know more about astronomy than I do. I know hardly anything about it, but I've heard that it's a rare and special occasion when the planets come into alignment.

I'm writing you this letter because something quite similar is happening at this time. It's a circumstance that focuses attention on a person who's important to you – your mother.

I'm not talking about the mother who gave you birth but the mother Jesus gave to you and me as he hung from the cross: Mary.

It's not planets that are coming into alignment but a cluster of monumental events that are converging. These events shine a bright spotlight on Mary.

Consider this. The Pope recently canonized Juan Diego, the humble Mexican Indian to whom Mary appeared in 1531 – a miracle that led to the rapid conversion of 9,000,000 other Indians. Last month we celebrated the Assumption of Mary. And September is the month of Mary's birthday (the 8<sup>th</sup>). But I can't resist pointing out that September 8<sup>th</sup> also happens to be America's birthday – an important fact that hardly anyone knows.

You see, on September 8, 1565, Catholics planted the Cross and celebrated Mass at St. Augustine to establish the first mission in what is now the United States of America. It's an amazing and inspiring story.

And next month we'll honor Mary yet again by celebrating the feast of the Holy Rosary on October 7<sup>th</sup>, the anniversary of the Battle of Lepanto. On that historic date in 1571 Catholic naval forces, though badly outnumbered by a militarily superior Turkish fleet, out-maneuvered and defeated the Turks in the Gulf of Corinth. As a result, 12,000 Catholic rowers who were slaves on the Turkish galleys were set free. The military commander of the Catholic fleet attributed the miraculous victory to the Rosary.

I love to write about Mary now. But it wasn't always that way. It seems strange to look back on my agonizing conversion process when theological issues about Mary seemed like such obstacles.

### **I looked for sympathy, but Scott just laughed**

In despair, I called my old friend from my seminary days, Scott Hahn. I told him that I was having serious difficulties with Mary. I was expecting a sympathetic response from him.

Instead, Scott just laughed and told me, "The hardest is the best."

Scott was right.

But there's another reason I had to write to you about your mother. I can barely contain my enthusiasm over Catholic convert Steve Ray's new video in the "Footprints of God" series: *Mary the Mother of God*.

A few months ago I wrote to you about the first video in this series, *Peter, Keeper of the Keys*. That video was a home run.

*Mary the Mother of God* is a grand slam.

Let me tell you how my family spent August 15<sup>th</sup>, the Feast of the Assumption. We all watched the new video *Mary the Mother of God*. My family loved it. It's wonderful for all ages.

As I watched the video in amazement, I kept asking myself, "Why hasn't this been done before?" No one thought of doing this before the idea popped into Steve Ray's fertile imagination.

Steve explained his inspiration when I had him as a guest on my radio show.

He woke up in the middle of the night with an idea for a grand, sweeping 10-part video series on the story of salvation from Abraham to Augustine. He couldn't get it out of his mind, and he was too excited about it to go back to sleep. So he got up and sketched an outline of the entire series. He saw the entire panorama "as clear as a bell."

Armed only with his outline and his enthusiasm, Steve explained his vision for the 10-part video series to Fr. Joseph Fessio, S.J., at Ignatius Press. So impressed was Fr. Fessio that he immediately replied, "How soon can you start? We'll fund the entire project!"

Steve was flabbergasted.

Within 6 weeks, Steve was renting helicopters in Egypt and elsewhere, taking spectacular aerial footage of key biblical sites.

You may be familiar with Steve Ray because of his books *Crossing the Tiber* and *Upon this Rock*, which he wrote to explain how he overcame his objections to various Catholic teachings including Marian doctrines and contraception.

### **Birth control teaching was a hard 'pill' to swallow**

Steve has a gift for making difficult concepts understandable to ordinary people. And his enthusiasm for the Faith is contagious. He accepts all of the teachings of the Church including the teaching that contraception is a mortal sin – though that teaching was a hard "pill" for him and his wife to swallow.

My radar is always on for good, solid, easy-to-use Catholic educational materials for the whole family. I endorse the new video *Mary the Mother of God* without reservation. It's a first-class teaching tool.

Consider this. A father has many obligations, but one of the most important is to teach the Faith to his kids. What could be easier than to poke a video into the VCR and hit the "PLAY" button?

The video is exciting and fun to watch. Even if you've been to the Holy Land, you probably haven't seen all the sites Steve covers in his video. And if you've never been to the Holy Land you may be reluctant to make a pilgrimage there now because of the recent wave of violence. Steve's video is the next best thing to making a pilgrimage to the holiest sites.

The new video is a magnificent travelogue that will virtually transport you to places like these from the comfort of your armchair:

- The grotto of the Annunciation, in which the Word became flesh
- The house in which Mary lived
- The Church of the Dormition, built on the site from which Mary was bodily assumed into Heaven.
- The Church of the Nativity, built over the cave in which Jesus was born
- Golgotha, the place of the skull where Mary stood and watched her son die

You'll appreciate the way Steve uses his sense of humor to explain theological concepts. I don't want to ruin your surprise and enjoyment by spilling the beans.

### **Are you prepared to answer these false arguments?**

If a Bible-believing Protestant hasn't yet challenged you about your Catholic faith, sooner or later it will happen. Will you be prepared to answer a Protestant who challenges you?

Here are some of the glib and specious Protestant arguments you can expect to hear about Mary:

"The Bible says that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. That proves that Mary sinned."

"There's no point in praying to dead saints."

"The Bible clearly says that Jesus had brothers. So how can you say that Mary was always a virgin."

"If Mary didn't sin, then she wouldn't need a savior. But everybody needs a savior, so Mary must have sinned."

"The Bible says we should avoid vain repetitions when we pray. That's why it's a waste of time to pray the Rosary."

### **Steve Ray pulverizes the Fundamentalists' arguments**

Of course, these arguments don't hold water. You'll easily be able to answer these fallacious arguments with confidence after you've heard Steve demolish them in his new video about Mary.

It's amazing how essential Mary is to the Catholic faith. If fathers teach just two basic facts to their children, they'll be well on their way to a solid grasp of the Catholic faith: God is your father, and Mary is your mother. Once children grasp these two facts, the other doctrines of the Church fall into place perfectly. So there's no need whatsoever to struggle over Mary the way I did during my agonizing conversion process. It's so much better to embrace our true mother than to ignore or snub her.