



Devotion as a Form of Veneration for the Mother of Jesus: A Systematic Review of the Literature

Agustinus Abraham

Universitas Sanata Dharma, Indonesia

*Corresponding Author: agustinusabraham3@gmail.com

Abstract. This study examines Marian devotion in the Catholic Church as a form of veneration (*dulia*) rather than worship (*latria*), addressing persistent misconceptions that equate Catholic devotional practices with idolatry. The research aims to identify the forms of Marian devotion practiced by Catholics in Indonesia and to analyze the challenges encountered in living out these practices. A descriptive qualitative approach was employed using a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) guided by the PRISMA framework. Two hundred articles were initially identified through Google Scholar and screened according to relevance, recency, geographical context, and methodological criteria, resulting in four eligible studies for analysis. The findings reveal four principal forms of devotion: the use of statues as aids to prayer, pilgrimages to Marian sites, Montfort-style Marian consecration, and the rosary emphasizing praise, imitation, and prayer with Mary. These practices deepen faith and lead the faithful closer to Christ without replacing divine worship. Challenges include external religious intolerance toward devotional symbols and limited theological understanding among believers. Therefore, sound catechesis grounded in Scripture and Church Tradition is essential to ensure authentic and balanced Marian devotion.

Keywords: Catholic Church; *Dulia*; Marian Devotion; Systematic Literature Review; Veneration.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Catholic Church is closely associated with various types of devotions. According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, devotion is defined as an act of prayer or personal worship (*Definition of DEVOTION*, 2026). Etymologically, the word devotion comes from the Latin *devotio*, which is rooted in the verb *devovēre*, a combination of *de-*, meaning completely, and *vovēre*, meaning to promise or vow. Literally, this term refers to the act of surrendering or offering oneself completely through a pledge. In its development of meaning, devotion is understood as an attitude of dedication, loyalty, and deep surrender to God. In Christian tradition, devotion refers to the practice of piety or expressions of prayer as a form of love and respect for God, the Virgin Mary, or the saints (Donobakti dkk., 2023).

The Catholic Church has various types of devotions, such as devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus (Waruwu dkk., 2024), devotion to the Blessed Sacrament (Tukan, 2020), devotion to saints (Soge, 2022), Way of the Cross devotion (Hardjono & Hananto, 2024), devotion to divine mercy (Girsang & Stanislaus, 2024), and many other devotions. However, this study focuses on devotion to the Virgin Mary. The author chose devotion to the Virgin Mary because this devotion is very familiar to Catholics themselves and is also known to many non-Catholics. In addition, the choice of research topic was due to the many misconceptions among the laity. The problem arises when people believe that the Catholic Church worships statues of the Virgin Mary and other saints. This view is clearly incorrect. The Catholic Church

never worships statues or anything other than the Holy Trinity. In general, what is problematic for many people is the distinction between “veneration” and “worship.”

To answer the question of worship, it is necessary to make a theological distinction between the types of honor given to God and to creatures. According to St. Thomas Aquinas, adoration or *latria* is a form of worship that is only appropriate for God, as an expression of human submission and recognition of total dependence on Him as Creator and Almighty God (Sun, 2024). Although in English the word “adoration” is sometimes used more broadly to mean ordinary love or admiration, theologically the term most appropriately refers to the exclusive worship of God (Miravalle, 2006).

Veneration or *dulia* in classical theology is the respect and appreciation that should be given to a being for their excellence or achievements (Wilk, 2020). Recognition of the excellence of creatures, such as the awarding of academic honors or sports medals, is a natural form of respect. This action does not contradict worship of Allah, because it is different from adoration, which is directed only toward God (Miravalle, 2006).

In theological tradition, the term “worship” has historically been used as a general term covering two forms of reverence, namely adoration and veneration. Therefore, a distinction is made between ‘adoration’ for God and “veneration” for Mary and the saints. This term does not always mean divine worship. Misunderstanding of the use of this word has led some people to believe that Catholics worship Mary. In fact, adoration of Mary is contrary to the Christian faith and has never been part of the authentic teaching of the Catholic Church (Miravalle, 2006).

Devotion to Mary can only be considered authentic and bear spiritual fruit if it is rooted in sound teaching, namely the Word of God entrusted to the Church. This devotion becomes a means of grace and leads the faithful to a deeper union with Jesus Christ when it is practiced in a balanced manner, without excess or deficiency, and based on a solid understanding of the faith regarding Mary. The true teaching about Mary comes from Sacred Scripture and Tradition, which are preserved and safeguarded by the Magisterium. Therefore, the truth about Christ and His Church is the only valid foundation for proper veneration of the Mother of Jesus. Thus, true devotion to Mary must always be based on the true teaching about her (Miravalle, 2006).

This study presents a novelty, namely the assertion that devotion to Mother Mary is a form of reverence, not worship. This novelty is a compilation of previous studies. The author uses the Systematic Literature Review method by adopting the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses system. Another novelty of this study is the

presentation of forms of devotion to the Virgin Mary that can be practiced by the Catholic Church in Indonesia. This study is also urgent because many people are still confused about the meaning and purpose of devotion. This study offers theoretical academic evidence that can be used as a reference. Based on the background description above, this study aims to answer the following questions. (1) What are the forms of devotion to Mother Mary practiced in Indonesia? (2) What are the challenges in living out devotion?

2. METHOD

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method. SLR is a systematic research procedure for collecting, identifying, assessing, and critically analyzing various relevant study results to answer focused research questions (Pati and Luroso, 2018; Paul, 2021; Paul, Khatri, and Duggal, 2023). This method was chosen because it provides a comprehensive understanding through a structured, transparent, and accountable synthesis of previous studies. In addition, this approach is considered appropriate for examining and exploring the inclusive communication practices carried out by the Church to increase the participation of people with disabilities. The research population included all articles indexed in Google Scholar, with a total of 200 articles used as sources for the study. To ensure the completeness and accuracy of the data collection process, this study referred to the *Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses* (PRISMA) guidelines.

PRISMA is an evidence-based guideline developed to improve transparency and completeness of reporting in systematic reviews (Sarkirs-Onofre, 2024). Through this framework, the characteristics of various studies can be organized and summarized systematically, making it easier for service providers and policy makers to assess the relevance of findings in accordance with their respective contexts (Page et al., 2021). In this study, PRISMA was applied as a reference for searching and selecting articles that met the criteria, so that the analysis process could be carried out in a more focused, in-depth, and structured manner. In addition, the use of PRISMA also strengthened the data synthesis stage, so that the results of the study were based on a strong scientific foundation (Howard et al., 2019). The research procedure included three main stages, namely identification, screening, and inclusion of selected articles. The flow of the procedure is presented in figure 1.

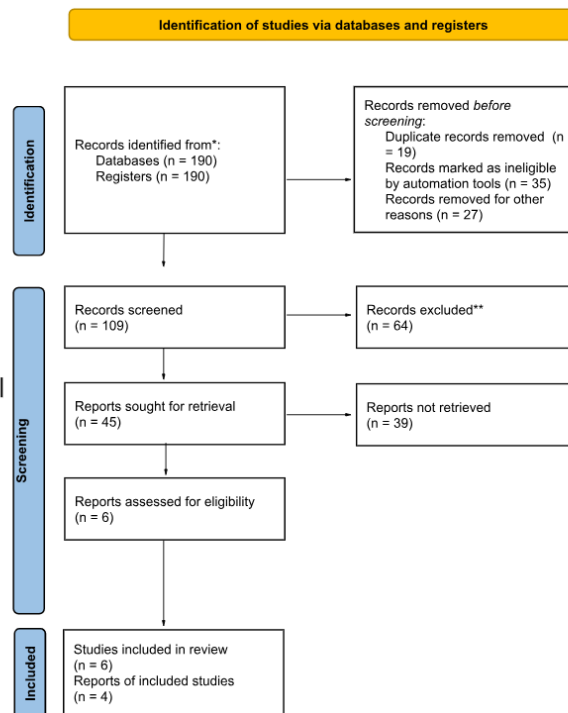


Figure 1. PRISMA Model

Identification

The first stage in applying the PRISMA method is the identification process. At this stage, researchers search for and compile various literature relevant to the research focus. This step plays a crucial role in the overall review process, as the collected literature forms the main basis for formulating answers to research questions.

To obtain appropriate, relevant, and reliable sources, researchers apply a search strategy using Boolean operators (AND, OR, NOT) (The Open University, 2014) on the Google Scholar database. Keywords were used selectively to ensure that the articles obtained were truly relevant to the research topic. This database is considered to have a broad and comprehensive range of sources, thus supporting various research needs (Zhu and Liu, 2021; Pranckute, 2021). The search process was conducted using several keywords, such as “*devosi*,” “*Bunda Maria*,” “*devosi kepada Bunda Maria*,” and “*penghormatan Bunda Maria*” Through this strategy, 190 articles were identified from Google Scholar, as summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Search term on Google Scholar

Database	Search Term
Scholar (n=190)	TITLE (“ <i>devosi</i> ” OR “ <i>Bunda Maria</i> ”, “ <i>devosi kepada Bunda Maria</i> ”, “ <i>penghormatan Bunda Maria</i> ”))

Screening

During the identification stage, researchers obtained several articles related to the study topic. However, not all articles found could be directly used as research sources. Therefore, a further selection process was necessary to ensure the suitability of the literature with the objectives and focus of the study. The selection of articles was based on three main criteria. First, articles had to be published within the last five years (2020–2025) to ensure that the data analyzed was current and relevant. Second, articles had to contain research conducted in Indonesia. Third, sources were limited to articles in Indonesian so that data analysis and interpretation could be carried out accurately and maintain consistency of understanding in accordance with the national context.

This language restriction is also intended to facilitate access to scientific literature specific to the Indonesian context. This consideration is in line with the objectives of the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method, which is to systematically and transparently synthesize scientific evidence to answer specific research questions (Greenhalgh & Peacock, 2005). In addition, SLR serves to integrate various published research findings related to the topic under review (Lame, 2019; Moher, 2009).

After the identification process, the collected articles were screened again. In the first screening stage, 109 articles were deemed irrelevant, leaving 81 articles. In the second screening, another 64 articles were excluded because they were not relevant to the research objectives. 109 articles minus 64 equals 45. The 45 articles were screened again, and 39 articles were excluded because they did not match the research objectives. Thus, 6 articles that met the eligibility criteria for further analysis were obtained. The selected articles were also relevant to the Asian context, so that the scope of the study remained proportional and able to provide a more comprehensive picture of inclusive communication practices in education. The flow of the article identification and selection process is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. screening criteria

Journal Criteria	
Year of Publication	Last Five Years (2020 to 2025)
Study Geography	Indonesia
Discovery Focus	Devotion as a veneration to Mother Mary
Language	Indonesian
Type of Discovery	All

Included

The next step is to evaluate the 6 articles that have passed the screening process. This evaluation serves as an additional screening stage to ensure that the articles to be analyzed in the systematic literature review have a high level of relevance, validity, and accuracy. At this stage, each article is carefully and thoroughly reviewed to minimize potential bias, identify research limitations, and assess its suitability for the study objectives.

The analysis process is carried out by reviewing the title, abstract, research findings, and discussion section of each article. This step aims to ensure that only articles that meet the established academic standards and criteria can proceed to the next stage of analysis. From the 6 articles resulting from the screening, a final selection was made at the inclusion stage. After going through this process, 4 articles were retained for further analysis. These selected articles focus on studies of devotion as a form of respect for the Virgin Mary, the mother of Jesus.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Forms of Devotion to Mother Mary

Table 3. Form of Devotion

1. The use of statues of Mother Mary as a means of prayer
2. Pilgrimage to a cave or statue of Mary and praying the rosary
3. Marial devotion taught by Montfort
4. Praise, imitate Mary, and pray together with Mother Mary

This study provides accurate results. The introduction explains that there are many forms and types of devotion in the Catholic Church. The focus of this study is devotion to the Virgin Mary as the mother of Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world. This study found four forms of devotion to Mary that are practiced and experienced by Catholics in Indonesia. The first form of devotion is praying using statues of the Virgin Mary. The function of these statues is as a means to bring oneself closer to God, not as objects of worship (Ampun dkk., 2024). The Church encourages Christian believers to honor Saint Mary, Mother of God, who was chosen by Christ to be the Mother of all people, with the respect of a child, as well as to honor the saints, whose example builds and supports the people of God, making them a holy people. In Catholic churches, statues of the Virgin Mary and Jesus, as well as other saints, are always displayed. The placement of these statues is the same as that of the Virgin Mary.

The second form of devotion found in this study is pilgrimage to caves and/or statues of the Virgin Mary. This devotion is practiced not only in Indonesia but wherever the Catholic Church is present. In this study, the pilgrimage referred to as “pilgrimage with the Virgin Mary.” The center of this pilgrimage is in the parish of Pakem, Yogyakarta. The uniqueness of the Pakem parish lies in the strong faith of the congregation through their devotion to the Virgin Mary. This uniqueness became even more prominent during the ministry of Father G. P. Sindhunata, SJ as parish priest, when together with the congregation he “dug” and “discovered” a small well inside the church in 1985. The well became known as *Sumur Kitiran Mas* (SKM) or *Sumur Kitiran Kencana*. The terms “digging” and “discovering” are not only meant physically, but also symbolically as an expression of the congregation's spiritual journey and penance. This process reflects a long pilgrimage of faith, which involves deepening the social and economic situation of the congregation, strengthening faith in Jesus through devotion to the Virgin Mary, appreciating the Javanese traditions and culture that are alive in the community, and recognizing the full potential of the parish. This shows that pilgrimage is also closely related to local culture (Dwiatmaja, 2023).

The third devotion practiced by the Catholic Church in Indonesia is the Marian devotion taught by Monfort. This devotion is practiced specifically by members of the Legion of Mary, but it is also open to others outside the Legion. This devotion emphasizes the dedication of Legion members. Its purpose is to glorify God. By maintaining the holiness of the Legionnaires, God is glorified. The name Monfort here refers to the saint who is known as the teacher of the Legionaries (Pasi dkk., 2024).

Fourth is the devotion of the rosary, but more than that, the faithful who pray this devotion experience three things: praising Mary, imitating Mary, and praying with Mary. The context of this research is the Catholic faithful in the Parish of St. Pius X Tenggarong. This devotion is extraordinary because it is unlike what people generally do. The emphasis on these three things is an added value that supports the spiritual life of the faithful. The purpose of this devotion is to increase the piety of the faithful. The faithful praise Mary because of their love for the mother of God. Mary is emulated in the social life of the faithful to foster tolerance in diversity. Therefore, the faithful choose to pray together with Mother Mary, jointly presenting their petitions to God (Musi dkk., 2021).

The challenge of devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary

This study also found several challenges faced by Catholics in their devotion to the Virgin Mary. Based on the findings of this study, the first challenge faced by the faithful is the rejection by other religions of the installation and use of statues. Statues that are rejected include statues of the Virgin Mary. Based on research conducted by Ampun, the rejection faced by Catholics is not limited to arguments or narratives but extends to the destruction of rejected statues. Several factors cause other religions to reject statues. The first is differences in views and beliefs (theology). Second, Catholics themselves sometimes find it difficult to explain the Church's beliefs and teachings regarding the use of statues. Third, Catholics lack knowledge about the teachings and do not have a critical attitude to learn more deeply (Ampun et al., 2024). These challenges can be said to be external challenges because the roots originate from outside the Church.

The second challenge is the lack of meaning in devotional acts, especially pilgrimages. The context of this challenge stems from research conducted by Dwiatmaja at the Catholic Church of Pakem Parish in Yogyakarta. Dwiatmaja first presented the results of his research showing that Catholics in Pakem are very enthusiastic in their devotion to Mother Mary through pilgrimages. This devotion is more deeply felt because it is rich in symbols and integrated with Javanese culture. However, the congregation's understanding needs to be deepened by correctly interpreting each symbol and action. Dwiatmaja suggests this so that the congregation does not misunderstand the meaning (Dwiatmaja, 2023). This challenge is more internal in nature because it does not involve people outside the Church.

Discussion

Based on the results of this study, there are still many topics or aspects that can be explored further. However, the most interesting and relevant topic is the acceptance of other religions regarding the use of statues in the Catholic Church. The fundamental question is why other religions reject statues when the existence of statues has no effect on other religions. There are no elements that are harmful, let alone dangerous to others, in the installation of these statues. One fact that can be seen is the rejection of a statue of the Virgin Mary in the prayer house of a Catholic believer in Kulon Progo, Yogyakarta (Ngardi, 2023).

Rejection of the statue of Mother Mary, as in Kulon Progo, Yogyakarta in 2023 (Nur, 2023; Nurfadilah dkk., 2023) This is a case of intolerance. It is a problem deeply rooted in excessive fanaticism. The statue does not threaten anyone's safety or comfort. This issue appears to be a political problem that is sometimes considered inappropriate, even though the goal of politics is to create the common good (Abraham, 2025a). Indeed, for Catholics,

devotion is not just prayer but can be said to be a form of spreading the good news to many people, not only to Christians but to anyone we meet, just as Paul preached to both Jews and non-Jews (Abraham, 2025b). Devotion also demonstrates the existence of Catholicism as well as other religions with their respective existences.

4. CONCLUSION

This study confirms that devotion to the Virgin Mary in the Catholic Church is a form of veneration (veneration/dulia), not worship (latria). Through a PRISMA-based Systematic Literature Review of articles in the Indonesian context, four main forms of devotional practice were found, namely the use of statues as a means of prayer, pilgrimages to caves or places associated with Mary, Montfort-style Marian devotion, and the rosary prayer which emphasizes praise, emulation, and prayer together with Mary. All these practices serve as a means of deepening faith and introducing the faithful to Christ, not as a diversion of worship from God. This study also identified external challenges in the form of rejection and intolerance from other religious groups towards devotional symbols, as well as internal challenges in the form of a lack of theological understanding among the faithful regarding the meaning of devotion. Therefore, catechesis and a deeper understanding of faith are needed so that devotion is carried out correctly, in a balanced manner, and rooted in Scripture and Church Tradition. Thus, Marian devotion becomes a means of spiritual growth, strengthening of faith identity, and Christian witness in the context of Indonesia's diverse society.

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