

2. The Theological Relevance of Our Lady of All Nations and the Amsterdam Apparitions

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The theme of Mary as Coredemptrix and Mediatrix, that is of the Mother of God as the most intimate human collaborator in the work of our redemption and as the chief dispenser of the grace of the redemption after Jesus himself, has occupied theologians from the very dawn of the twentieth century. Indeed, it seems that the first English writer to use and defend the term Coredemptrix was Father Frederick William Faber in the last chapter of his classic work **The Foot of the Cross** which first published in 1858. Further, prior to the Second Vatican Council not a few Bishops expressed a desire for the Council to make a declaration -- some even wished a definition -- about Our Lady as Coredemptrix and/or Mediatrix. In his general audience address of 13 December 1995 Pope John Paul II made a graceful reference to the Council Fathers who "wished further to enrich Marian doctrine with other statements on Mary's role in the work of salvation" without criticizing them in any way. He simply commented that "The particular context in which Vatican II's Mariological debate took place did not allow these wishes, although substantial and widespread, to be accepted."

The present campaign which continues to generate worldwide attention, adherence and much theological debate has added another term to those interrelated titles of Coredemptrix and Mediatrix: that of Advocate. This title has profound roots in the Catholic tradition going all the way back to Saint Irenaeus in the second century. It occurs in the Hail, Holy Queen where we pray: "turn then, most gracious Advocate, thine eyes of mercy towards us." Indeed, the great Marian document of the Second Vatican Council readily recognized that Mary is rightly invoked as Advocate.

Linking together the titles Coredemptrix, Mediatrix and Advocate enables us to grasp Mary's role in our salvation in a logical and coherent way: It is precisely because of Our Lady's unique and intimate participation in the work of the redemption (as Coredemptrix) that she is able to be the distributor (Mediatrix) of all graces and the great intercessor (Advocate) for her children after Jesus himself (cf. Heb. 7:25; 1 Jn. 2:1) and the Holy Spirit (cf. Jn. 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7).

When was the call first issued for a definition of Mary's role in our salvation as Coredemptrix, Mediatrix and Advocate? As far as I am able to determine, this appeal comes from a series of revelations made in Amsterdam to a humble and simple Dutch woman, Ida Peerdeman (1906-1996), from 25 March 1945 to 31 May 1959. In the course of these Our Lady disclosed that she wished to be known as "The Lady of All Nations". She asked that a picture should be painted according to her indications (somewhat similar to the popular image on the miraculous medal) and that this should be diffused along with a prayer which she dictated to the seeress. After the dogmatic definition of the Assumption by Pope Pius XII on 1 November 1950, Our Lady told Ida that this definition

had to precede "the last and greatest dogma": that of Mary Coredemptrix, Mediatrix and Advocate, for which the picture and prayer were meant to prepare the way.

What is particularly interesting is that in the course of the apparitions to Ida Peerdeman not only did Our Lady elaborate on and illustrate the meaning of these titles in various ways, but she repeatedly asserted that they could be corroborated by theologians. At Amsterdam on 4 April of the Marian Year 1954 she said:

Listen well! From the outset the Handmaid of the Lord was chosen to be Coredemptrix. Tell your theologians that they can find it all in their books! ... I am not bringing a new doctrine. I am now bringing the old ideas.

Repeatedly in these revelations Our Lady addressed herself to the theologians through Ida and told them to work for this doctrine. Several points should be noted in this regard.

1. In those days and up until the time of the Second Vatican Council the doctrine of Mary's role in the work of our redemption was commonly treated under the general title of "mediation" in all the standard textbooks in Mariology. Some Mariologists restricted the title of "Mediatrix" to the second phase of mediation (to the cooperation of Mary in the distribution of grace), reserving the title "Coredemptrix" to the first phase (collaboration in the work of our redemption), but even this first phase, it may be argued, is a true and proper mediation since it is a participation in the mediatorial work of Christ. This topic was the object of a great deal of discussion and debate among theologians. I have already indicated some of the factors which contributed to the suppression of the discussion after the Council [cf. earlier essays by Msgr. Calkins in this anthology].
2. It was only after the four major dogmas about Mary's person [that she is (1) Mother of God and (2) Ever Virgin; that she was (3) Immaculately Conceived and (4) Assumed into Heaven] were solemnly proposed by the teaching authority of the Church that the scene would be set for a dogma about Mary's function or role in the work of salvation under the threefold designation of Coredemptrix, Mediatrix and Advocate.
3. According to these revelations received by Ida Peerdeman, the Virgin herself effectively asserted that "the last and greatest Marian dogma" is already a part of the Church's doctrinal patrimony. It needs to be drawn out and further clarified by the work of theologians and appropriated by the entire Church. Our Lady further indicated that there would be a struggle in this regard, but she never suggested that the dogma should be defined on the basis of a private revelation, however worthy of credence. This is entirely in keeping with the Church's millennial wisdom. For example, in his masterly encyclical on the Sacred Heart of Jesus *Haurietis Aquas*, Pope Pius XII was at pains to point out that the Church's doctrine on the Heart of Jesus does not originate from the revelations to Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque, even if these provided the greatest impetus for the devotion in modern times. Rather, he firmly maintained that the Church's doctrine and devotion are based on the fundamental founts of revelation: Scripture and Tradition.

Now an important question must be asked: What is the Church's judgment on the revelations received by Ida Peerdeman? On 31 May 1996 Bishop Hendrik Bomers, C.M. of Haarlem (the Diocese which includes Amsterdam) and his Auxiliary, Bishop Joseph Punt, issued a notification which made a distinction between the apparitions/messages received by Ida Peerdeman on the one hand and the title "The Lady of All Nations" on the other. They further specified:

At the moment the Church cannot make a pronouncement about the supernatural character of the apparitions and the content of the messages. One is free to make a personal judgement according to his or her own conscience.

The prayer "Lord Jesus Christ ..." which includes the title "The Lady of All Nations" has since 1951 enjoyed Church approval by Msgr. Huibers, who was Bishop of Haarlem at the time. It is our judgement that there is no objection against the public veneration of the Blessed Virgin Mary under this title.

What is of further interest is that less than a month after this declaration, on 17 June 1996, the seeress died at the age of ninety. Her funeral Mass was celebrated by Bishop Bomers who began his homily on that occasion by stating that "We are gathered here as people who have loved, admired and esteemed Ida Peerdeman". Last year the first International Day of Prayer in honor of The Lady of All Nations was held in Amsterdam on 31 May 1997. Even with minimum publicity it attracted 5,000 persons and filled the auditorium where it was presided over by Bishop Bomers. The second such Day of Prayer was held in Amsterdam on 31 May 1998 with 12,000 people representing 60 different nations in attendance. On that occasion Bishop Bomers announced that he had recently constituted a theological commission to study the revelations received by Ida Peerdeman. (Very significantly, after having officially permitted devotion to the Lady of All Nations and after having opened the way to a theological investigation of the message, on the Feast of the Holy Name of Mary, 12 September 1998, Bishop Bomers was called to his eternal reward.)

Of course the above related facts do not amount to the approbation which the Church has accorded to the apparitions of Our Lady at Fatima in 1917, but on the other hand the recent developments may be viewed as decidedly positive.

In such a relatively short sketch it is impossible to discuss in detail the many features of the messages received by Ida Peerdeman. We can say that they deal with a period of great crisis in the Church and in the world. It would seem that many elements of these prophetic words, which at times are illustrated in an apocalyptic way, have already been verified. Here I must confine myself to the two most important elements of these revelations which are given as particular means to bring about the proclamation of the dogma: the prayer and the picture.

The prayer was given on the Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes, 11 February 1951:

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the Father, send now Your Spirit over the earth. Let the Holy Spirit live in the hearts of all nations, that they may be preserved from degeneration, disaster and war. May the Lady of all Nations, who once was Mary, be our Advocate. Amen.

Like the prayer composed by Pope John XXIII for the Council, it is a prayer for a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit. One need hardly comment upon the appropriateness of begging to be "preserved from degeneration, disaster and war". These characterize our modern world torn from its divine moorings in so many ways.

What is almost always initially jarring to Catholic sensitivities is the seemingly strange reference to "the Lady of all Nations, who once was Mary". The visionary herself found the words strange and the Church authorities to whom she had to go to obtain approval of the prayer initially gave permission only with the words "who once was Mary" omitted. This led Our Lady to insist on 28 March and 2 July 1951 and again on 17 February and 6 April 1952 that permission should be given for the publication of the prayer in its entirety. This was finally conceded and on 5 October 1952 Our Lady told Ida to tell the Bishop that she was satisfied.

But why this insistence? On 2 July 1951 (then observed as the Feast of the Visitation) Our Lady said:

The words "who once was Mary" mean: many people have known Mary just as Mary. Now, however, in this new era which is beginning I want to be the Lady of All Nations. Everybody will understand this.

On 6 April of the following year she further explained that she became the Lady of All Nations at the foot of the cross when Jesus asked her to accept John as her son (cf. Jn. 19:26), that "it was at the Sacrifice of the Cross that the change came about." The wording of the prayer in no way denies that Mary is always Mary, but appropriately underscores the universal motherhood conferred on her by Jesus.

The persistence of Our Lady with regard to the wording of the prayer seems particularly significant to me in the light of the tendency of many Mariologists since the Council to place great emphasis on the historical "Mary of Nazareth" while effectively downplaying the exalted position to which God raised her. This so-called "low Mariology" is to be found in many revisionist approaches to Mary such as those proposed by radical feminists and liberation theologians.

Shortly after giving the prayer, on 4 March 1951 Our Lady called attention to the way in which she appeared to the seeress and asked that a picture be painted which should be diffused with the prayer. She stands on the globe surrounded by sheep and before a cross

with her hands extended (as on the miraculous medal) and emitting the three rays of Grace, Redemption and Peace. On the palms of each hand there is the scar of a wound, a mute testimony to her intimate collaboration in the work of our redemption. It is a graphic illustration of the Coredemptrix as Pope John Paul II described her on 31 January 1985 at Guayaquil, Ecuador, "crucified spiritually with her crucified son". The sash is also meant to be a reminder of the loincloth of Jesus on the Cross. On 31 May 1951 the Lady said:

Through the grace of My Lord and Master, and for the love of mankind, the Father sent His only-begotten Son as Redeemer of the world. Together they now want to send the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth, Who alone can bring Peace. Hence: "Grace, Redemption and Peace." In this era the Father and the Son want to send Mary, "the Lady of All Nations" as Coredemptrix, Mediatrix and Advocate. Now I have given you a clear and lucid explanation of the image.

Further information on the Lady of All Nations may be obtained from The Lady of All Nations Action Center, P. O. Box 31481, St. Louis, MO 63131, U.S.A.; phone: (314) 965-2863; fax: (314) 965-3806 or Action, The Lady of All Nations, Diepenbrockstraat 3, 1077 VX Amsterdam, Netherlands; phone: (0031) 20-662-0504; fax: (0031) 20-471-1333.