

# **A Response to the Declaration of the Commission of the Pontifical International Marian Academy**

## **Msgr. Arthur B. Calkins**

I am very grateful for the opportunity to respond to the declaration of the commission of the Pontifical International Marian Academy regarding the advisability of a dogmatic definition by the Pope of Mary as Coredemptrix, Mediatrix and Advocate and to the article published as a commentary on that declaration [both articles appeared in the 4 June 1997 issue of *L'Osservatore Romano*].

### **Part One**

#### *I. Not Official Documents of the Holy See*

The first and most important fact to be kept in mind about these two documents is that they are not official documents of the Holy See, even though they were published in the daily Vatican newspaper, *L'Osservatore Romano*, as well as in the weekly English and other language editions of that paper. They do not represent a broad spectrum of the opinion of the members of the Pontifical International Marian Academy, of which I also am a member, nor, insofar as I am aware, was there an open, fair and honest consideration of the issues involved. The initial polling was taken without any representation by those who are in favor of the definition or any serious debate. Subsequent commentaries were written as propaganda with little concern for the facts of the issues at stake. I am afraid that these documents are classic instances of the manipulation of the media and numerous other sectors in the Church by special interest groups to interpret the magisterium exclusively from their perspective, an exploitation which has been going on since the time of the Second Vatican Council and which needs to be exposed for what it is.

#### *II. A Clarification on the Meaning of Coredemptrix*

The term Coredemptrix usually requires some initial explanation to the English-speaking public because often the prefix "co" immediately conjures up visions of complete equality.

For instance a co-signer of a check or a co-owner of a house is considered a co-equal with the other signer or owner. Thus the first fear of many is that describing Our Lady as Coredemptrix puts her on the same level as her Divine Son and implies that she is "Redeemer" in the same way that he is, thus reducing Jesus "to being half of a team of redeemers". In the Latin language from which the term Coredemptrix comes, however, the meaning is always that Mary's cooperation or collaboration in the redemption is secondary, subordinate, dependent on that of Christ -- and yet for all that -- something

that God "freely wished to accept ... as constituting an unneeded, but yet wonderfully pleasing part of that one great price" paid by His Son for world's redemption. As Dr. Mark Miravalle points out:

The prefix "co" does not mean equal, but comes from the Latin word, "cum" which means "with". The title of Coredemptrix applied to the Mother of Jesus never places Mary on a level of equality with Jesus Christ, the divine Lord of all, in the saving process of humanity's redemption. Rather, it denotes Mary's singular and unique sharing with her Son in the saving work of redemption for the human family. The Mother of Jesus participates in the redemptive work of her Saviour Son, who alone could reconcile humanity with the Father in his glorious divinity and humanity.

Clearly, then, what those who favor a papal definition want is not a dogmatic statement that Mary is the fourth person of the Blessed Trinity or that she is equal to Jesus (this obvious nonsense has already been ascribed to them in the secular and Catholic press!). What they seek is an official recognition that Mary has participated in the redemption of the world in a way that has no parallel with any other human creature. Classically in theology and in the teaching of the Popes this is expressed by the word Coredemptrix.

### *III. Marian Coredemption and the Second Vatican Council*

The first line of the commentary gives away one of the key strategies of the opponents of the definition: make those who favor the definition look like enemies of the Second Vatican Council:

From whatever perspective it is considered, the movement that is petitioning for a dogmatic definition of the Marian titles of Coredemptrix, Mediatrix and Advocate is not in line with the direction of the great Mariological text of the Second Vatican Council, chapter eight of *Lumen Gentium*.

In response to this gratuitous misrepresentation I would like to make four points.

1. Chapter eight of *Lumen Gentium* clearly teaches the doctrine of Mary as Coredemptrix in numbers 56, 58 and 61. Here is a very important text from #58:

The Blessed Virgin Mary ... faithfully persevered in her union with her Son unto the cross, where she stood, in keeping with the divine plan, enduring with

her only begotten Son the intensity of his suffering, associated herself with his sacrifice in her mother's heart, and lovingly consenting to the immolation of this victim which was born of her.

This text clearly uses language from earlier papal teaching on Mary's intimate collaboration in the mystery of the redemption as does the following quotation from #61:

In the designs of divine Providence she [Mary] was the gracious mother of the divine Redeemer here on earth, and above all others and in a singular way the generous associate and humble handmaid of the Lord. She conceived, brought forth, and nourished Christ, she presented him to the Father in the temple, shared her Son's sufferings as he died on the cross. Thus, in a wholly singular way she cooperated by her obedience, faith, hope and burning charity in the work of the Savior in restoring supernatural life to souls.

In both of these texts we can see the strong emphasis on Mary as the most intimate collaborator in the work of our redemption.

2. Why did the Council not use the word *Coredemptrix*, even though many Bishops came to the Council seeking a statement on Mary as *Coredemptrix* and *Mediatrix*? This comes from a debatable strategy meant to favor ecumenical dialogue. In the prologue of the first draft document which would eventually become chapter eight of *Lumen gentium* we find this statement:

Certain expressions and words used by Supreme Pontiffs have been omitted, which, in themselves are absolutely true, but which may only be understood with difficulty by separated brethren (in this case Protestants).

Among such words may be numbered the following:

"*Coredemptrix* of the human race" [Pius X, Pius XI]

...

These were the ground rules which the Council Fathers were constrained to follow. A number of theologians would argue that such an approach has led to a "lowest common denominator" kind of ecumenism. Monsignor Brunero Gherardini, a distinguished professor of ecumenical theology, points out that, with or without the use of the term *Coredemptrix*, the Protestant observers at the Council recognized just as readily the Catholic position on Mary's participation in the redemption. They see any human participation in the work of man's salvation, however secondary and subordinate, as contrary to Luther's principle of *solus Christus* [Christ alone] and thus "a robbery from God and from Christ". Hence in elaborating the Church's teaching on Mary's collaboration in the redemption, we are dealing with more

than just the possible justification of the term Coredemptrix, but a fundamental datum of Catholic theology, a matter which will not be facily dealt with in ecumenical dialogue by simply substituting one word or phrase with another which seems more neutral.

3. Pope John Paul II, a Father of the Second Vatican Council, spoke on 13 December 1995 of the desire of some of the Council Fathers for a more explicit treatment of Mary as Coredemptrix and Mediatrix in a way that is not at all negative, as is the declaration made in the commentary stating that "The current movement for a definition is not manifestly in line with the direction of Vatican II". Here is what the Pope said:

During the Council sessions, many Fathers wished further to enrich Marian doctrine with other statements on Mary's role in the work of salvation. The particular context in which Vatican II's Mariological debate took place did not allow these wishes, although substantial and widespread, to be accepted, but the Council's entire discussion of Mary remains vigorous and balanced, and the topics themselves, though not fully defined, received significant attention in the overall treatment.

Thus, the hesitation of some Fathers regarding the title of Mediatrix did not prevent the Council from using this title once, and from stating in other terms Mary's mediating role from her consent to the Angel's message to her motherhood in the order of grace (cf. *Lumen gentium*, n. 62). Furthermore, the Council asserts her co-operation "in a wholly singular way" in the work of restoring supernatural life to souls (*ibid.*, n. 61).

This is an astute observation made by one who has continued to meditate on and develop these very themes. To my knowledge, it is the first official public acknowledgement on the part of a Pope of the currents at the Council which shaped the writing of chapter 8 of *Lumen Gentium*. It makes graceful reference to the 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. It also refers to Mary's role as Coredemptrix (cooperation in the work of restoring supernatural life to souls) and Mediatrix.

4. It is clear that the author(s) of the commentary would like to make it appear that the Second Vatican Council carved a position in granite from which the Church may never deviate in the future. First of all, no Council has the right to bind the faithful in matters that do not compromise faith or morals. But, secondly -- and even more importantly -- the Council Fathers

explicitly stated in #54 of *Lumen Gentium* that the Council:

does not intend to give a complete doctrine on Mary, nor does it wish to decide those questions which the work of theologians has not yet fully clarified.

Those opinions therefore may be lawfully retained which are propounded in Catholic schools concerning her, who occupies a place in the Church which is the highest after Christ and also closest to us.

Interestingly, up until the very vigil of the Council the intimately related questions about Mary's active role in the work of our redemption as Coredemptrix and Mediatrix were reaching an ever higher level of clarity and maturity among both theologians and members of the faithful. At the same time, however, opposition was beginning to emerge. We have already noted that "ecumenical sensitivity" would be presented as a prime reason for avoiding this topic or dealing with it obliquely and there was also emerging among various influential Bishops and their periti (experts) distaste for the general language of mediation as it had been traditionally been applied to Mary.

Given this conflict which came out into the open on the Council floor, the above declaration is particularly significant.

It makes it clear, beyond any doubt, that the Council Fathers went on record as not wishing to close any doors on the free discussion of Marian theology, even if they were not ready to make explicit declarations on some matters which had been largely "in possession" and then subsequently became contested, such as Mary's active collaboration in the work of our redemption.

## **Part Two**

In continuing to respond to the declaration by select members of the Pontifical International Marian Academy regarding the advisability of a dogmatic definition of Mary as Coredemptrix, Mediatrix and Advocate and to the subsequent commentary supporting that statement, I am well aware that it requires much more time and patience to correct misleading impressions than to make them.

In order to make the case for the definition, one must proceed carefully and give his sources so that they may be judged independently. I know that this will also require a certain concentration on the part of the reader as well. But I believe that such application on my part and yours is important because what is at stake is very important. It is not just a matter of conferring new titles on the Mother of God as if offering her new "jewels for her crown", but of coming to grips with the magnitude of the role which God has given her in our salvation and what He expects of us as well. May the Holy Spirit guide those who ponder the following facts after the example of Mary herself (cf. Lk. 2:19, 51)!

### *IV. "Term not used by Papal Magisterium"?*

The unsigned commentary printed on 4 June 1997 in the daily Italian edition of *L'Osservatore Romano* informs us that "from the time of Pope Pius XII, the term Coredemptrix has not been used by the papal Magisterium in its significant documents". This statement raises some important and legitimate questions.

1. Was the term used by the papal Magisterium before the time of Pius XII? Yes, it was. The word "Coredemptrix", which has a five hundred-year-old history in theology as a way of speaking about Mary's unique collaboration in the work of our Redemption, made its preliminary appearance in official pronouncements of Roman Congregations during the reign of Pope St. Pius X (1903-1914). These may be found in the **Acta Apostolic Sedis** [referred to as AAS, the official publication of the Acts of the Apostolic See]. While St. Pius X did not sign these documents, they were promulgated on the basis of his authority. Pope Pius XI did explicitly refer to Mary as Coredemptrix in allocutions to pilgrims and in a radio message on 28 April 1935 for the closing of the Holy Year at Lourdes. On the foundation of this usage the term and the exploration of its meaning became ever frequent among theologians and Mariologists up to the eve of the Second Vatican Council.
2. Has the term been used by any subsequent Pope? Yes, the word "Coredemptrix" or "coredemptive" has been used at least six times by Pope John Paul II in speaking of Mary's intimate cooperation in the work of our Redemption. He has also used the word "coredeemer" or "coredemption" at least three times in speaking of the on-going collaboration of Christians in the work of Redemption.

#### *V. "Marginal and Devoid of Doctrinal Weight"?*

The unsigned commentary states that "the term Coredemptrix has not been used by the papal Magisterium in its significant documents" and then goes on to admit that it may be found "here and there, in papal writings which are marginal and therefore devoid of doctrinal weight". Before going further, let's have a look at paragraph 25 of the Second Vatican Council's Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, a capital text on the Pope's Magisterium or teaching office:

This loyal submission of the will and intellect must be given, in a special way, to the authentic teaching authority [magisterium] of the Roman Pontiff, even when he does not speak *ex cathedra* in such wise, indeed, that his supreme teaching authority be acknowledged with respect, and that one sincerely adhere to decisions made by him, conformably with his manifest mind and intention, which is made known principally either (1) by the character of the documents in question, or (2) by the frequency with which a certain doctrine is proposed, or (3) by the manner in which the doctrine is formulated.

On the basis of a careful analysis of this text I have argued in my book **Totus Tuus** that the Pope's teaching on consecration or entrustment to Mary forms an important component of his "ordinary magisterium" and that he has brought this doctrine to a new level of importance. I believe that a similar case may be made for his teaching on Mary as Coredemptrix, Mediatrix and Advocate.

I hope to be able to develop this idea and illustrate it in subsequent articles.

Now does it not seem somewhat ironic -- not to say arrogant -- that an anonymous writer in the Vatican daily newspaper should cavalierly dismiss the Pope's daily exercise of his teaching office and that of his predecessors as "marginal and devoid of doctrinal weight"? Could this incredible exercise in undermining papal teaching be more plausibly explained by the fact that the declaration and two commentaries on it were published while the Holy Father was in Poland?

The question which I would like to pose here is simply this:

What should we more likely consider to be "marginal and devoid of doctrinal weight" -- the Pope's exercise of his ordinary magisterium or the supposed superior wisdom of an author or authors who hide behind the cover of anonymity?

[In his essay in the first section, **The Proposed Marian Dogma: The 'What' and the 'Why'**, Msgr. Calkins goes on to present significant expositions of the doctrine that Mary is Coredemptrix, Mediatrix and Advocate in the teaching of Pope John Paul II and other popes of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. With respect to the homily of Pope John Paul II at the Marian shrine of Nuestra Senora de la Alborada (Our Lady of the Dawn) in Guayaquil, Ecuador on 31 January 1985, Msgr. Calkins asks: "I would like to ask the anonymous author or authors of the commentary in question how this splendid papal homily, of which I have only been able to present a small part and which summarizes so well the Church's classic teaching on Mary's collaboration in the work of our redemption, can be cavalierly dismissed as "marginal and therefore devoid of doctrinal weight"? My conclusion is rather that the verdict rendered by this supposedly authoritative commentary is, in fact, totally "devoid of doctrinal weight" and unworthy of serious consideration." The doctrine of Marian coredemption, he adds, "has been clearly and repeatedly enunciated by the Roman Pontiffs of the 19th and 20th centuries. If it cannot be found in the 20 manuals of Mariology published over the past ten years and referred to in the anonymous commentary, it is because they do not adequately reflect the Church's ordinary magisterium."]



