

The Proposed Marian Dogma: The "What" and the "Why"

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I. The Mystery of Iniquity

In simple, yet poetic and profound language the third chapter of the Book of Genesis narrates the story of the fall of man. Three creatures play the major roles in this momentous drama: the serpent, the woman and the man. The serpent beguiles. The woman who was given to the man as his helpmate lets herself be beguiled and the man follows suit. The story seems deceptively simple, but it has monumental implications. The man, Adam, is the progenitor and head of the human family. The woman, Eve, is his companion. As partners they are equal, but they have different roles. He is the head of his wife and the head of the human family. "The whole human race is in Adam 'as one body of one man'. By this 'unity of the human race' all men are implicated in Adam's sin."¹

At the same time it must be noted that the role of the woman given to the man as his helpmate was far from negligible. Let us note how it is described by the Venerable Cardinal John Henry Newman:

Eve had a definite, essential position in the First Covenant. The fate of the human race lay with Adam; he it was who represented us. It was in Adam that we fell; though Eve had fallen, still, if Adam had stood, we should not have lost those supernatural privileges which were bestowed upon him as our first father. ...but further, as she thus had her own general relation to the human race, so again had she her own special place as regards its trial and its fall in Adam. In those primeval events, Eve had an integral share. ... She co-operated, not as an irresponsible instrument, but intimately and personally in the sin; she brought it about. As the history stands, she was a *sine-qua-non*, a positive, active, cause of it. And she had her share in its punishment; in the sentence pronounced on her, she was recognised as a real agent in the temptation and its issue, and she suffered accordingly.²

God metes out punishment first to the serpent (Gen. 3:14-15), then to the woman (Gen. 3:16) and finally to the man (Gen. 3:17-19). What is particularly striking, however, is that already the sentence passed upon the serpent heralds the reversal of the fall. The Lord says: "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; she shall crush your head, while you lie in wait for her heel" (Gen. 3:15).³ This text has become famous

¹ CCC #404.

² John Henry Newman, *Mary -- The Second Eve* compiled by Sr. Eileen Breen, F.M.A. (Rockford, IL: Tan Books and Publishers, Inc., 1982) 2.

³ I have followed here the Douay-Rheims version which is a translation of St. Jerome's Vulgate. For a discussion on whether the pronoun in the second part of the verse should be translated as he or she (favored in the Catholic tradition for well over a millennium) cf. Thomas Mary Sennott, *The Woman of Genesis* (Cambridge, MA: The Ravengate Press, 1984) 37-60. For a discussion of whether the verb should be translated as "bruise" or "crush", cf. Sennott

as the *Protoevangelium* ("first gospel") and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains why:

The Christian tradition sees in this passage an announcement of the "New Adam" who because he "became obedient unto death, even death on a cross", makes amends superabundantly for the disobedience of Adam. Furthermore many Fathers and Doctors of the Church have seen the woman announced in the "Protoevangelium" as Mary, the mother of Christ, the "new Eve".⁴

In fact, the Church's magisterium (teaching authority) has grown ever more convinced of the soundness of this insight of the Fathers and Doctors over the centuries and has come to see the *Protoevangelium* as a revelation of the indissoluble bond between Jesus and Mary in the work of our salvation. The Second Vatican Council's Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium* provides explicit corroboration of such an association by stating that Mary "is inseparably linked to her Son's saving work" [*indissolubili nexu cum Filii sui opere salutari coniungitur*] (#103).⁵ This follows logically from a principle of capital importance enunciated by Blessed Pope Pius IX in his Apostolic Constitution *Ineffabilis Deus* of 8 December 1854, namely that "God, by one and the same decree, had established the origin of Mary and the Incarnation of Divine Wisdom".⁶ This follows logically from a principle of capital importance enunciated by Blessed Pope Pius IX in his Apostolic Constitution *Ineffabilis Deus* of 8 December 1854, namely that "God, by one and the same decree, had established the origin of Mary and the Incarnation of Divine Wisdom".⁷

61-80. For an overall treatment of the text cf. Stefano M. Manelli, *All Generations Shall Call Me Blessed: Biblical Mariology* trans. Peter Damian Fehlner (New Bedford, MA: Academy of the Immaculate, 1995) 21-33.

⁴ CCC #411.

⁵ One already finds the description of the "bond" between Jesus and Mary in the work of our salvation as "intimate and indissoluble" [*arctissimo et indissolubili vinculo*] in the Venerable Pius IX's Apostolic Constitution *Ineffabilis Deus* of 8 December 1854 [*Pii IX Pontificis Maximi Acta* (Graz, Austria: Akademische Druck- u. Verlagsanstalt, 1971) I:607; *OL*, trans. Daughters of St. Paul (Boston: St. Paul Editions, 1961; henceforth *OL*) #46]. Vatican II's Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium* uses the same language in #53 when it speaks of Mary's being united to Jesus "by a close and indissoluble tie" [*arcto et indissolubili vinculo unita*]. Likewise Paul VI's speaks of the "close and indissoluble bond" which joined Mary "to the mystery of the Incarnation and Redemption" [*Arcto et indissolubili vinculo mysterio Incarnationis et Redemptionis*] in his *Professio Fidei* or "Credo of the People of God" of 30 June 1968 [*AAS* 60 (1968) 438-439; *TPS* 13:278].

⁶ *Pii IX Pontificis Maximi Acta* I:599; *OL* #34. This principle was repeated by Pius XII in *Munificentissimus Deus* [*AAS* 42 (1950) 768; *OL* #520], *LG* #61, Paul VI in *Marialis Cultus* #25 [*AAS* 66 (1974) 136] and by John Paul II in *Redemptoris Mater* #8-9 [*Inseg* X/1 (1987) 687].

⁷ *Pii IX Pontificis Maximi Acta* I:599; *OL* #34. This principle was repeated by Pius XII in *Munificentissimus Deus* [*AAS* 42 (1950) 768; *OL* #520], *LG* #61, Paul VI in *Marialis Cultus* #25 [*AAS* 66 (1974) 136] and by John Paul II in *Redemptoris Mater* #8-9 [*Inseg* X/1 (1987) 687];

II. The Mystery of Mediation

An attentive study of God's revelation to us in both the old dispensation and the new discloses that God chooses to deal with his people through certain persons whom he designates to act as his representatives to them and as their representatives before him. This may be truly described as the "mystery of mediation". After the sin of Adam and Eve (Gen. 3:6) the first exercises of mediation which we hear about are the offerings of Abel and Cain (Gen. 4:3-5). These offerings comprised an act of worship or sacrifice to God.

What is a sacrifice? Sacrifice, which constitutes the supreme act of external and public worship, may be defined as the offering and immolation to God of something sensible (fruits, liquids, animals) in order to recognize his absolute lordship and in order to atone for sin. Sacrifice, consequently, has two aspects: one material and sensible because it is an external and public act; the other internal and spiritual because in order to have an effective moral value it must be motivated by a spiritual and intimate content. The offering especially of something living such as fruits and, even more, animals and then the consequent immolation or destruction of these offerings is the counterbalance to the creative act of God. As God has given life to all things, man symbolically restores life back to him. Particularly in the immolation to God of a victim such as a lamb, a goat, a calf or a bull through the mediation of a priest, man expresses his total dependence and dedication to God. The ultimate end of the sacrifice is the mystical union of man with his God.⁸ In those early days of the human race, even before the establishment of the priesthood of Aaron, Cain and Abel acted as mediators before God.

While we are not explicitly informed about why the sacrifice of Cain was not acceptable, we may well assume that it had to do with the lack of a proper spiritual disposition on his part. From Cain's slaying of his brother Abel (Gen. 4:8), the sin of our first parents has been subsequently multiplied billions of times over by the personal sins of all their descendants. Consequently the Old Testament shows us numerous instances in which a representative is designated by God himself to intercede on behalf of his people in order that his wrath, stirred up on account of their sins, might be turned away from them and that his people may receive instead his blessings.

The priests, prophets and kings of the Old Testament, each according to his particular office, all shared in this role of mediation. In varied circumstances and with an ever clearer manifestation of God's plan these chosen mediators reveal to us both (1) the divine dispensation of mediation which God established in order to show mercy to his people and (2) at the same time the provisional role of this mediation.

While it was clear that God required an acceptable reparation in order to restore man to his friendship, it also became clear that no mere man could ever definitively "breach the chasm" which sin had caused between God and his creatures. As the inspired author of the Letter to the Hebrews tells us:

St. Paul Editions 14].

⁸ Antonio Piolanti, *Dio Uomo* (Pontificia Accademia Teologica Romana: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1995) 575-577.

Since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices which are continually offered year after year, make perfect those who draw near. Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered? If the worshipers had once been cleansed, they would no longer have any consciousness of sin. But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sin year after year. For it is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins (Heb. 10:1-4).

Sin, an offense against the infinite God, in effect required a reparation which man, left to his own devices, remained incapable of making. No mere human creature could really succeed in mediating between God and his people except in incomplete and partial ways which could, at best, foreshadow the full, complete and definitive mediation which was needed.

III. Jesus the Perfect Mediator

At the very heart of the mystery of our redemption is the fact that Jesus Christ is the "one mediator between God and men ... who gave himself as a ransom for all" (I Tim. 2:5-6). Why is Jesus the unique and perfect mediator? This affirmation from the new *Catechism* provides us with the fundamental elements needed to formulate a response:

No man, not even the holiest, was ever able to take on himself the sins of all men and offer himself as a sacrifice for all. The existence in Christ of the divine person of the Son, who at once surpasses and embraces all human persons, and constitutes himself as the Head of all mankind, makes possible his redemptive sacrifice *for all*.⁹

One with God in his divinity, Jesus is at the same time one with man in his humanity.¹⁰ In his divine person he unites the two natures of the two parties who had become separated by man's sin: he represents God to man and man to God. As the Word who is one with the Father from all eternity, the Son is not a mediator, but he becomes one from the moment he begins to take flesh in the womb of the Virgin Mary. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the inspired author of the Letter to the Hebrews would come to grasp that, even though he was not sprung from the priestly tribe of Levi and never referred to himself explicitly as a priest, Jesus was the perfect high priest who succeeded in bridging the gap between God and his people in a way that no other priest ever could (cf. Heb. 4:14-10:18). He did so by offering the sacrifice of himself on the cross.¹¹

IV. Collaboration in Jesus' Mediation

Now while there can be no dispute that Jesus is the priest and victim of that sacrifice by which we are saved and that he alone by virtue of his death and resurrection (the paschal

⁹ CCC #616.

¹⁰ Cf. *D-H* #301 [*TCF* #613].

¹¹ Cf. CCC #606-618.

mystery) is the Redeemer of the world, the Catholic Church also holds that

because in his incarnate divine person he has in some way united himself to every man, "the possibility of being made partners, in a way known to God, in the paschal mystery" is offered to all men. ... In fact Jesus desires to associate with his redeeming sacrifice those who were to be its first beneficiaries. This is achieved supremely in the case of his mother, who was associated more intimately than any other person in the mystery of his redemptive suffering.¹²

Here is the careful résumé of the Church's teaching on this matter which Pope John Paul II gave in a general audience address of 9 April 1997.

Down the centuries the Church has reflected on Mary's cooperation in the work of salvation, deepening the analysis of her association with Christ's redemptive sacrifice. St. Augustine already gave the Blessed Virgin the title "cooperator" in the Redemption (cf. *De Sancta Virginitate*, 6; *PL* 40, 399), a title which emphasizes Mary's joint but subordinate action with Christ the Redeemer.

Reflection has developed along these lines, particularly since the 15th century. Some feared there might be a desire to put Mary on the same level as Christ. Actually the Church's teaching makes a clear distinction between the Mother and the Son in the work of salvation, explaining the Blessed Virgin's subordination, as cooperator, to the one Redeemer.

Moreover, when the Apostle Paul says: "For we are God's fellow workers" (1 Cor. 3:9), he maintains the real possibility for man to cooperate with God. The collaboration of believers, which obviously excludes any equality with him, is expressed in the proclamation of the Gospel and in their personal contribution to its taking root in human hearts.

However, applied to Mary, the term "cooperator" acquires a specific meaning. The collaboration of Christians in salvation takes place after the Calvary event, whose fruits they endeavour to spread by prayer and sacrifice. Mary, instead, cooperated during the event itself and in the role of mother; thus her cooperation embraces the whole of Christ's saving work. She alone was associated in this way with the redemptive sacrifice that merited the salvation of all mankind. In union with Christ and in submission to him, she collaborated in obtaining the grace of salvation for all humanity.¹³

Both of these texts carefully point out that (1) it is possible for creatures to be "associated with Jesus' redeeming sacrifice" or to be "cooperators in the work of salvation" (2) that Mary was associated or cooperated more intimately than any other person in the mystery of Jesus' redemptive suffering. Pope John Paul II makes two further and very important points: (1) Mary's cooperation differs from ours because it took place "during the Calvary event itself" and (2) her totally unique collaboration in the work of our salvation is "subordinate" to that of Christ and "in submission to him".

¹² CCC #618.

¹³ *Inseg* XX/1 (1997) 621-622 [*ORE* 1487:7; *MCat* 185-186].

Now it must be candidly acknowledged that the Catholic Church's teaching on man's cooperation in the work of salvation became a rock of stumbling for Martin Luther (1483-1546) and subsequently for practically all of the ecclesial bodies that derive from the Protestant reformation. The Catholic Church, however, is convinced that this teaching is rooted in the New Testament and has consistently asserted it, most solemnly at the Council of Trent,¹⁴ more recently in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.¹⁵ Saint Augustine (354-430) may be taken as a major exponent of this doctrine. He said: "He who made you without your cooperation will not save you without it."¹⁶ In the course of 1998 the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity found it necessary to uphold this teaching in responding to the *Joint Declaration of the Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation on the Doctrine of Justification*. The response asserted that

The Catholic Church maintains, moreover, that the good works of the justified are always the fruit of grace. But at the same time, and without in any way diminishing the totally divine initiative, they are also the fruit of man, justified and interiorly transformed. We can therefore say that eternal life is, at one and the same time, grace and the reward given by God for good works and merits.¹⁷

This is a principle of fundamental importance in Catholic theology as well as in the spiritual life.

V. Mary's Collaboration in Jesus' Mediation

With wonderful perspicacity the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council taught that "Mary, having entered intimately into the history of salvation, somehow unites in her person and re-echoes the most fundamental doctrines of the faith."¹⁸ Hence we should not be surprised that these same Fathers recognized Mary as the perfect model of human collaboration with God's grace "in subordination to Christ and with him in the service of the mystery of redemption".¹⁹ They pointed out that the "union of the Mother with the Son in the work of salvation is apparent from the time of Christ's virginal conception up to his death"²⁰ and they further specified that

The Blessed Virgin advanced in her pilgrimage of faith, and faithfully maintained her union with her Son even to the cross where she stood in conformity with the divine plan. There she endured with her only begotten Son the intensity of his

¹⁴ Cf. *D-H* #1545-1546, 1548, 1554, 1559, 1574, 1576, 1581-1582 [*TCF* #1946-1947, 1948, 1954, 1959, 1974, 1976, 1981-1982].

¹⁵ *CCC* #2006-2010, 2025, 2017.

¹⁶ *Sermo* 169, 11, 13 *PL* 38, 293. Cf. Brunero Gherardini, "Qui Fecit Te Sine Te Non Te Iustificat Sine Te," *Divinitas* XL (1998) 3-18.

¹⁷ *OR* 4 luglio 1998, p. 4 (n.3); *ORE* 1549:2.

¹⁸ *LG* #65.

¹⁹ *LG* #56.

²⁰ *LG* #57.

suffering and united herself to his sacrifice in her motherly heart, lovingly consenting to the immolation of the victim born of her.²¹

Let it be well noted that, according to the consistent teaching of the Church, Mary's collaboration in the work of the redemption spans the entire earthly life of the God-man from the Annunciation to Calvary, but that it reaches its summit on Golgotha where Mary is involved in two simultaneous offerings: the offering of her Son and the offering of herself. This has been repeatedly taught by all of the Pontiffs of the twentieth century. Here is a classic expression of the first offering by the Servant of God Pius XII in his Encyclical Letter *Mystici Corporis* of 29 June 1943 to which the above text of *Lumen Gentium* makes explicit reference:

She [Mary] it was who, immune from all sin, personal or inherited, and ever most closely united with her Son, offered Him on Golgotha to the Eternal Father together with the holocaust of her maternal rights and motherly love, like a new Eve, for all the children of Adam contaminated through this unhappy fall ...²²

In his Apostolic Exhortation *Signum Magnum* of 13 May 1967 the Servant of God Pope Paul VI emphasized the second offering by emphasizing Our Lady's

charity, strong and constant in the fulfillment of her mission to the point of sacrificing herself, in full communion of sentiments with her Son who immolated Himself on the Cross to give men a new life.²³

Both of these offerings are magnificently summarized in Pope Benedict XV's Letter *Inter Sodalicia* of 22 March 1918 which has become justly famous:

According to the common teaching of the Doctors it was God's design that the Blessed Virgin Mary, apparently absent from the public life of Jesus, should assist Him when He was dying nailed to the Cross. Mary suffered and, as it were, nearly died with her suffering Son; for the salvation of mankind she renounced her mother's rights and, as far as it depended on her, offered her Son to placate divine justice; so we may well say that she with Christ redeemed mankind.²⁴

Benedict speaks clearly here of our redemption as a joint effort. This, of course, takes nothing away from the fact that Jesus' merits were all-sufficient for our redemption or that Mary, as a human creature, could never equal her divine Son. Rather he recognizes that Mary's presence on Calvary was "according to God's design", that it was willed by God as flowing from the

²¹ *LG* #58.

²² *AAS* 35 (1943) 247-248 [*OL* #383]. Pius XII quoted this text again in his Encyclical Letter *Ad Cæli Reginam* of 11 October 1954, *AAS* 46 (1954) 635 [*OL* #705].

²³ *AAS* 59 (1967) 470 [*St. Paul Editions*, NCWC trans. 6].

²⁴ *AAS* 10 (1918) 182 [*OL* #267].

indissoluble bond between Jesus and Mary in the work of our salvation which was already pointed to in the *Protoevangelium*.

VI. Mary Coredeptrix

The fact that Mary together with Christ redeemed the human race quite naturally led the faithful who continued to meditate on this fact to coin the word Coredeptrix in order to describe her role. The first use of this word of which we are presently aware dates from the fourteenth or fifteenth century.²⁵ The term Coredeptrix usually requires some initial explanation in the English language 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 Coredeptrix 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".²⁶ In the Latin language from which the term Coredeptrix 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"²⁷ 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 *Coredeptrix* 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*.²⁸

From theological usage the word has passed into the vocabulary of the magisterium. It was first used in official documents issued by Roman Congregations at the beginning of the century²⁹ and subsequently by Pope Pius XI in allocutions to pilgrims³⁰ and in a radio message on 28 April 1935 for the closing of the Holy Year at Lourdes.³¹ Although the doctrine of Mary's unique collaboration in our redemption was clearly taught by the Second Vatican Council as we

²⁵ René Laurentin, "Le Titre de Corédemptrice. Étude historique," *Marianum* 13 (1951) 399-402.

²⁶ Eamon R. Carroll, O.Carm., *Understanding the Mother of Jesus* (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1979) 93.

²⁷ William G. Most, "Reparation to the Immaculate Heart," *Cross and Crown* 8 (1956) 139.

²⁸ Mark I. Miravalle, S.T.D., *Mary: Coredeptrix, Mediatrix, Advocate* (Santa Barbara, CA: Queenship Publishing, 1993) xv.

²⁹ *AAS* 1 (1908) 409; 5 (1913) 364; 6 (1914) 108.

³⁰ Domenico Bertetto, S.D.B., ed., *Discorsi di Pio XI* 2:1013; *OR* 25 marzo 1934, p. 1.

have seen, the word Coredemptrix was not used out of "ecumenical sensitivity".³² What is even more significant, however, is that after a period of artificial suppression Pope John Paul II has used the word "Coredemptrix" or "coredemptive" at least six times to describe Mary's intimate cooperation in the work of our Redemption.³³

Now I would like to highlight what I believe to be the most significant instance of Pope John Paul's teaching on Mary Coredemptrix. It comes from a homily which he gave at the Marian shrine of Nuestra Señora de la Alborada [Our Lady of the Dawn] in Guayaquil, Ecuador on 31 January 1985.

On that occasion he said:

Mary goes before us and accompanies us. The silent journey that begins with her Immaculate Conception and passes through the "yes" of Nazareth, which makes her the Mother of God, finds on Calvary a particularly important moment. There also, *accepting and assisting at the sacrifice of her son*, Mary is the dawn of Redemption; ... *Crucified spiritually with her crucified son* (cf. Gal. 2:20), she contemplated with heroic love the death of her God, she "lovingly consented to the immolation of this Victim which she herself had brought forth" (*Lumen Gentium*, 58). ...

In fact, at Calvary *she united herself with the sacrifice of her Son that led to the foundation of the Church; her maternal heart shared to the very depths the will of Christ "to gather into one all the dispersed children of God"* (Jn. 11:52). *Having suffered for the Church*, Mary deserved to become the Mother of all the disciples of her Son, the Mother of their unity. ...

The Gospels do not tell us of an appearance of the risen Christ to Mary. Nevertheless, as she was in a special way close to the Cross of her Son, she also had to have a privileged experience of his Resurrection. In fact, *Mary's role as Coredemptrix* did not cease with the glorification of her Son.³⁴

This excerpt of the Holy Father's homily constitutes a magnificent catechesis on the various ways in which Mary collaborated in the work of our redemption. Let us note how carefully the Pope develops this theme.

³¹ OR 29-30 aprile 1935, p. 1

³² Cf. my article, "The Case for New Marian Titles," *Soul* 49 (January-February 1998) 20-21, 27.

³³ The specific instances may be found in *Inseg* V/3 (1982) 404; VII/2 (1984) 1151 [*ORE* 860:1]; VIII/1 (1985) 318-319 [*ORE* 876:7]; 889-890 [*ORE* 880:12]; XIII/1 (1990) 743:1; XIV/2 (1991) 756 [*ORE* 1211:4]. Cf. Arthur Burton Calkins, "Pope John Paul II's Teaching on Marian Coredemption" in Mark I. Miravalle, S.T.D., (ed.), *Mary Coredemptrix, Mediatrix, Advocate, Theological Foundations II: Papal, Pneumatological, Ecumenical* (Santa Barbara, CA: Queenship Publishing Company, 1997) 113-147.

³⁴ *Inseg* VIII/1 (1985) 318-319 [*ORE* 876:7]; emphasis my own.

1. First he underscores that Mary's cooperation with God's plan for our salvation actually began with Mary's Immaculate Conception. He created her full of grace precisely in view of the role which he had predestined for her. This gift of being totally transformed by grace from the first moment of her existence in her mother's womb was so that her cooperation with God's designs would be unimpeded by the pull of the flesh.

2. Next he points out that her collaboration becomes deliberate and explicit in her response to the angel: "Let it be done to me according to your word" (Lk. 1:38). As Father Richard Foley, S.J. puts it: "Our Lady's consent to God's initiative was the indispensable condition for his redemptive plan to go into operation."³⁵

3. Then the Pope delineates Mary's interior dispositions on Calvary. He describes her as "accepting and assisting at the sacrifice of her son" and cites here the important text of the Second Vatican Council about how Mary "lovingly consented to the immolation of this Victim which she herself had brought forth" (*Lumen Gentium*, 58).

4. Integral to her offering of Jesus as victim to the Father is her offering of herself in union with him. The Holy Father stresses that Mary "united herself with the sacrifice of her Son that led to the foundation of the Church". Thus he underscores the fact that, though secondary and subordinate to Jesus' all-sufficient sacrifice, Mary's sacrifice cannot be separated from that of her son.

5. Precisely because Mary is a co-offerer of the sacrifice of Calvary, John Paul II describes her as "crucified spiritually with her crucified son". This may at first seem to be a shocking assertion, even an exaggeration until the Pope provides us with his point of reference, Saint Paul's bold declaration to the Galatians: "I have been crucified with Christ" (2:20). If the Apostle of the Gentiles can say this of himself and invite us to be imitators of him (cf. I Cor. 4:16; Phil. 3:17), how much more can this be attributed to Mary, the "New Eve," she who is Jesus' most intimate associate in the work of the redemption?

VII. Mary Mediatrix of All Graces

According to the consistent teaching of the papal magisterium during the past hundred years it is precisely from Mary's role as Coredemptrix that her function in the distribution of graces proceeds. Here is how Pope Leo XIII described this in his Encyclical Letter *Adiutricem Populi* of 5 September 1895:

It is impossible to measure the power and scope of her [Mary's] offices since the day she was taken up to that height of heavenly glory in the company of her Son, to which the dignity and luster of her merits entitle her. From her heavenly abode, she began, by God's decree, to watch over the Church, to assist and befriend us as our Mother; so that she who was so intimately associated with the mystery of human salvation is just as closely associated with the distribution of the graces which from all time will flow from the Redemption.³⁶

³⁵ Richard Foley, S.J., *Mary and the Eucharist* (Newtonsville, OH: Hope of Saint Monica, 1997) 13.

In this text Pope Leo XIII highlights Mary's role as Mediatrix of all graces. As in the case of our understanding of Mary's coredemptive role, we must always recognize Mary's mediation as secondary and subordinate to and dependent upon that of Christ himself. Indeed, in *Lumen Gentium* #60 the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council emphasized that

Mary's function as mother of men in no way obscures or diminishes this unique mediation of Christ, but rather shows its power. But the Blessed Virgin's salutary influence on men originates not in any inner necessity but in the disposition of God. It flows forth from the superabundance of the merits of Christ, rests on his mediation, depends entirely on it and draws all its power from it.³⁷

Yet at the same time it must also be asserted that, precisely by the disposition of God, no other human being collaborated as intimately in the Redemption of mankind as Mary did. As the Pope put in his general audience address of 9 April 1997, which has already been cited above, Mary's

co-operation embraces the whole of Christ's saving work. She alone was associated in this way with the redemptive sacrifice that merited the salvation of all mankind. In union with Christ and in submission to him, she collaborated in obtaining the grace of salvation for all humanity.³⁸

To put it simply: because Mary is the Coredemptrix, she is also the Mediatrix of all graces.

Another very important principle should be noted in the text cited above: it speaks of Mary's union with Jesus in redeeming mankind. This is not to say that Jesus is not all-sufficient as Redeemer or that Mary can ever be thought of as his equal, but rather that by God's will she was indissolubly united with him in the work of redemption and is consequently inseparably united with him in dispensing the fruits of the redemption. This has been the consistent teaching of the Church under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Let us listen to how beautifully Pope St. Pius X elucidates this doctrine in his Encyclical Letter *Ad Diem Illum* of 2 February 1904:

It is because of this community of pain and will between Mary and Christ that "she merited to become in a most worthy manner the Reparatrix of the lost world" and, therefore, the Dispenser of the totality of gifts which Jesus by his death and blood has acquired for us.

Now surely we do not deny that the distribution of these gifts belongs by strict right to Christ personally, after all they have been acquired for us by His death alone, and He is in His own right the Mediator between God and men. And yet, out of regard for that community of pain and suffering between Mother and Son already mentioned, the august Virgin was privileged to be "the most powerful Mediatrix and advocate of the whole world, with her Divine Son".³⁹

³⁶ *ASS* 28 (1895-1896) 130 [*OL* #169].

³⁷ Flannery, *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents* 418.

³⁸ [*Inseg* XX/1 (1997) 621-622 [*ORE* 1487:7; *M*Cat 186].

The mystery of Mary's indissoluble union with Jesus in the work of our redemption is already prophetically proclaimed in Genesis 3:15 and described in the Gospels of Luke and John.⁴⁰ Further, chapter 12 of the Book of Revelation shows us how Mary's maternal relationship with Jesus is extended to "the rest of her offspring" (Rev. 12:17).⁴¹ Indeed, there is no other divine-human union to compare with this unique relationship between Jesus and Mary which exists precisely "for us men and for our salvation". Because of the uniqueness of this bond Father Stefano Manelli could make this striking claim about Mary's mediation:

The fundamental difference between the maternal Mediation of Mary and every other participated mediation on the part of other creatures, heavenly and earthly, consists in the fact that while all other mediations are limited in time and space, the Mediation of Mary instead extends to all creation, heavenly and earthly, and touches all ages, until the final end of creation.⁴²

Father Manelli's statement is striking because it underscores the extension of Mary's mediation, but not because it departs from the teaching of the Church. In fact he is only echoing the Servant of God Pope Pius XII who declared on 13 May 1946 in his radio message to Fatima that the Son of God

gave His heavenly Mother a share in His glory, His majesty, His kingship; because, associated as Mother and Minister to the King of martyrs in the ineffable work of man's Redemption, she is likewise associated with Him forever, with power so to speak infinite, in the distribution of the graces which flow from Redemption.⁴³

VIII. Mary Advocate

In the wonderfully rich homily which our Holy Father gave in Guayaquil, Ecuador on 31 January 1985 and which we have cited above he said that "Mary's role as Coredeptrix did not cease with the glorification of her Son" and then he went on to explain that

The Church believes that the Most Holy Virgin, assumed into heaven, is near Christ, forever living to make intercession for us (cf. Heb. 7:25), and that to her Son's Divine mediation there is joined the incessant supplication of his Mother

³⁹ *ASS* 36 (1903-1904) 453-454 [translation from Paul Palmer, S.J., *Mary in the Documents of the Church* (London: Burns Oates, 1953) 95 alt.].

⁴⁰ Cf. Stefano Maria Manelli, F.I., "Mary Coredeptrix in Sacred Scripture," in Mark I. Miravalle, S.T.D., (ed.), *Mary Coredeptrix, Mediatrix, Advocate, Theological Foundations II: Papal, Pneumatological, Ecumenical* (Santa Barbara, CA: Queenship Publishing Company, 1997) 71-99.

⁴¹ Cf. Manelli 99-103.

⁴² Manelli 70.

⁴³ *AAS* 38 (1946) 266 [*OL* #413].

on behalf of men, her sons and daughters.

Mary is the dawn, and the dawn unfailingly announces the arrival of the sun. Therefore I recommend to all of you, brothers and sisters of Ecuador, that you honour with profound love and have recourse to the Mother of Christ and the Church the "all-powerful suppliant" (*omnipotentia supplex*), that she will bring us ever closer to Christ, her Son and our Mediator.⁴⁴

There are at least two salient points to be drawn from this doctrinally rich statement. The first is that Mary participates in the priestly intercession of the glorified Christ who is now seated at the right hand of the Father where he ceaselessly intercedes for us. In union with Jesus she, too, is our Advocate. The second is a further precision of Mary's intercessory role: she is *omnipotentia supplex*, an almost untranslatable phrase which indicates that she is at the same time both a suppliant as well as all-powerful. The Pope has used this paradoxical expression to describe Our Lady's intercession on a number of occasions.⁴⁵ Perhaps one of the best explanations of this terminology comes from Saint Alphonsus Maria De Liguori:

Since the Mother, then, should have the same power as the Son, Jesus, who is omnipotent, has also made Mary omnipotent; though, of course, it is always true that, while Jesus is omnipotent by nature, Mary is omnipotent only by grace. But that she is so appears from the fact that, whatever the Mother asks for, the Son never denies her. ... Mary, then, is called omnipotent in the sense in which such a term can be applied to a creature who is incapable of a divine attribute; that is, she is omnipotent because she obtains by her prayers whatever she wishes.⁴⁶

As Mary is Coredemptrix and Mediatrix of all Graces, she is also our most perfect human Advocate before the Blessed Trinity. 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." The word Advocate is predicated of Mary literally hundreds of times in the papal magisterium and reference to her intercession is a constantly recurring theme. Indeed, the great Marian document of the Second Vatican Council readily recognized that Mary is rightly invoked as Advocate.⁴⁷

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

⁴⁴ *Inseg VIII/1* (1985) 321 [*ORE* 876:7].

⁴⁵ *Inseg II/1* (1979) 1034 [*ORE* 580:1]; *Inseg II/2* (1979) 816, 818 [*ORE* 610:3]; *Inseg VI/2* (1983) 558.

⁴⁶ St. Alphonsus Maria de Liguori, *The Glories of Mary*, Part I trans. Charles G. Fehrenbach, C.S.S.R. et al. (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1962) 113 [*Opere Ascetiche di S. Alfonso M. De Liguori* Vol. VI (Roma, 1936) 205-206].

⁴⁷ Cf. *LG* #62.

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).⁴⁸ Indeed, each of these terms brings out another facet of how Mary shares in an unparalleled way in the unique priestly mediation of Jesus: she participates in the work of our redemption; she distributes the graces of the redemption; she lives to make intercession for us.

These three themes are beautifully interwoven in the conclusion of *Miserentissimus Redemptor*, Pius XI's great Encyclical Letter on reparation to the Sacred Heart of Jesus:

May the most gracious Mother of God, who gave us Jesus as Redeemer, who reared Him, and at the foot of the Cross offered Him as Victim, who by her mysterious union with Christ and by her matchless grace rightly merits the name Reparatrix, deign to smile upon Our wishes and Our undertakings. Trusting in her intercession with Christ our Lord, who though sole Mediator between God and man (I Tim. 2:5), wished however to make His Mother the advocate for sinners and the dispenser and mediatrix of His grace, from the bottom of Our heart as a token of heavenly favor and of Our fatherly solicitude We heartily impart to you and to all the faithful entrusted to your care Our Apostolic Benediction.⁴⁹

IX. Some Questions

This essay has been written to show the internal logic and coherence of proposing a solemn papal definition of Mary as Coredemptrix, Mediatrix and Advocate. I have chosen to do so largely on the grounds of the teachings of recent popes. It is entirely possible to make a case for a definition in terms of the scriptural evidence or of the indications given in the Church's liturgical life or on the basis of the testimony of saints and theologians. A number of such studies have been done⁵⁰ and continue to be produced in various languages.

I have chosen to present this little introduction to the question primarily on the basis of the teaching authority of the modern popes precisely because they reflect and synthesize the belief of the Church in a way that is readily comprehensible to the faithful and which does not require an extensive background in scriptural studies, the history of theology, the lives of the saints, etc. Further, this approach manifests that the content of the proposed definition is already a part of the ordinary (as opposed to extraordinary) magisterium of the Church. The titles are not

⁴⁸ These texts in John's gospel all refer to the Greek word *Parakletos* which is sometimes left in the Greek form "Paraclete" and variously translated as "Counsellor" and "Advocate". It refers to one who intercedes and pleads the cause of another.

⁴⁹ *AAS* 20 (1928) 178 [*OL* #287].

⁵⁰ Cf. Mark I. Miravalle, S.T.D., *Mary: Coredemptrix, Mediatrix, Advocate* (Santa Barbara, CA: Queenship Publishing, 1993); Mark I. Miravalle, S.T.D., (ed.), *Mary Coredemptrix, Mediatrix, Advocate, Theological Foundations: Towards a Papal Definition?* (Santa Barbara, CA: Queenship Publishing Company, 1995); Mark I. Miravalle, S.T.D., (ed.), *Mary Coredemptrix, Mediatrix, Advocate, Theological Foundations II: Papal, Pneumatological, Ecumenical* (Santa Barbara, CA: Queenship Publishing Company, 1997).

novelties, but have been consistently used by the popes of the last century and a half to describe Mary's unique role in the lives of the faithful. I had to choose citations carefully in order to represent the hundreds more which space would not allow me to present and which would have weighed this short study down unduly. The point is that those who want to contest what I have presented above are not arguing with me or my theories but with the Successor of Peter carrying out his official teaching office.⁵¹

1. Why the title *Coredemptrix*?

My first response is "Why not"? It is true that the word can be misleading to those who don't know its etymology, i.e., that "with" does not mean "equal to". But the use of this term by the popes as well as the consistent doctrine of the Church make it abundantly clear that there is no intention to make Mary an equal Redeemer with Jesus. On the other hand, what titles would better indicate the altogether unique position occupied by Mary in the economy of grace? Cooperator, collaborator, co-worker, co-sufferer, participant? But these terms could and should be used of us all. They don't indicate the uniqueness of Mary's role. The great English convert and spiritual writer, Father Frederick William Faber, argued in favor of the anglicized form of the word, "co-redemptress", already in 1857 in his classic work *The Foot of the Cross*:

In fact, there is no other single word in which the truth could be expressed; and, far off from His sole and sufficient redemption as Mary's cooperation lies, her cooperation stands alone and aloof from all the cooperation of the elect of God. ... But neither the Immaculate Conception nor the Assumption will give us a higher idea of Mary's exaltation than this title of co-redemptress, when we have theologically ascertained its significance.⁵²

2. Why propose a papal definition?

It has been noted that there are already four dogmas about Mary. They are that she is (1) the Mother of God (*Theotokos*)⁵³; (2) ever-virgin⁵⁴; that she was (3) immaculately conceived⁵⁵ and (4) assumed body and soul into heaven⁵⁶. All of these truths of the faith pertain to the person of Mary, but thus far the Church has not yet proposed to the faithful in the most solemn manner the truth about Mary's role in their lives.

⁵¹ Cf. *LG* #25.

⁵² Frederick William Faber, *The Foot of the Cross or the Sorrows of Mary* (Philadelphia: The Peter Reilly Co., 1956) 377.

⁵³ Defined by the Council of Ephesus in 431. Cf. *D-H* #252 [*TCF* #606/1].

⁵⁴ By the time of the Council of Ephesus belief in Mary's virginity before, during and after birth was in possession and was explicitly defined at the Lateran Council of 649 convoked by Pope St. Martin I. Cf. *D-H* #503 [*TCF* #703].

⁵⁵ Defined by Blessed Pius IX on 8 December 1854. Cf. *D-H* #2803 [*TCF* #709].

⁵⁶ Defined by the Servant of God Pope Pius XII on 1 November 1950. Cf. *D-H* #3903 [*TCF* #715].

But why should this be done when so many other matters in the Church appear to be much more important and much more urgent? There is, indeed, indisputable evidence that there is now at least a large part of two generations of Catholics who do not know their faith or take it very seriously. This didn't happen by accident. There are many who, with good intentions or not, seized the moment toward the end of the Second Vatican Council to commandeer Catholic catechesis and education and have contributed mightily to the chaos which has ensued. They have not been simply unseated by the publication of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* nor will any simply legislative act be capable of doing this.

The moral turpitude and permissiveness of the world in which we live daily becomes more apparent and more appalling -- and it seeps into the Church. Contraception, abortion, the breakup of families, blatant pornography in the media, the attempted justification of homosexuality, militant feminism, the confusion of the roles of man and woman, the promotion of a society without values -- all of these plague the sons and daughters of the Catholic Church. Popes Paul VI and John Paul II have not hesitated to stand up to these myriad errors with courage, providing clear guidelines and admonishing the faithful to be converted and follow the way of the Gospel. Thirty years after *Humanae Vitae* the prophetic wisdom of Paul VI is far more apparent than it was in 1968, but has the tide changed?

In many places careless, insensitive and imprudent innovations have been introduced into the Church's worship. A new form of iconoclasm has caused the wanton destruction of many Catholic sanctuaries. Further, there is a notable tendency at work on various levels to shift the orientation of the liturgy from being God-centered to being more man-centered. The language of the "holy sacrifice of the Mass" is slowly disappearing from our vocabulary. Even more, there is an attempt on the part of some highly placed strategists to de-construct the present Roman liturgy and render it less recognizable. All of this has led to massive disorientation on the part of priests, religious and laity, resulting in many defections and apostasy. Can we reasonably expect that more directives on the right application of the Church's liturgical norms will dramatically alter the present situation?

Now, of course, I do not wish to minimize the many hopeful signs on the horizon or the often heroic work being done on many levels to re-establish Catholic practice in faith, morals and worship where this is needed. But I am convinced that a papal definition of Mary as Coredemptrix, Mediatrix of all graces and Advocate for the People of God could have incalculable positive effects, both direct and indirect, in all of these areas that will come in no other way. This is because

Mary, present in the Church as the Mother of the Redeemer, takes part, as a mother, in that "monumental struggle against the powers of darkness" which continues throughout human history.⁵⁷

She is not only the "Woman" of the *Protoevangelium* (Gen. 3.15), but also the triumphant "Woman" of the Apocalypse (Rev. 12). The more that the Church recognizes her role in our salvation, proclaims it and celebrates it, the more Satan will be vanquished and the more Jesus will reign. The Fathers of the Second Vatican Council already gave voice to this intuition when

⁵⁷ *Redemptoris Mater* #47 [*Inseg* X/1 (1987) 738; St. Paul Editions 67].

they stated in *Lumen Gentium* #65 that

when she [Mary] is being preached and venerated, she summons the faithful to her Son and His sacrifice, and to love for the Father. Seeking after the glory of Christ, the Church becomes more like her exalted model, and continually progresses in faith, hope, and charity, searching out and doing the will of God in all things.⁵⁸

3. Wouldn't a definition cause ecumenical problems?

This is an objection which has been consistently seized upon by those who oppose a definition. My question back to them is "Why should a more explicit proclamation of the truth cause problems?" The Church found it necessary to reassert the impossibility of the ordination⁵⁹ of women even though it recognized that there would be repercussions in those ecclesial bodies which have women ministers. As we have seen above, in 1998 it was compelled to uphold the Church's unbroken tradition on man's collaboration in the work of his redemption.

We must be perfectly clear on this fundamental principle of Catholic ecumenism enunciated by the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council:

It is, of course, essential that doctrine be clearly presented in its entirety. Nothing is so foreign to the spirit of ecumenism as a false conciliatory approach which harms the purity of Catholic doctrine and obscures its assured genuine meaning.

At the same time, Catholic belief needs to be explained more profoundly and precisely, in ways and in terminology which our separated brethren too can really understand.

Furthermore, Catholic theologians engaged in ecumenical dialogue, while standing fast by the teaching of the Church and searching together with separated brethren into the divine mysteries, should act with love for truth, with charity, and with humility.⁶⁰

These same Fathers were

aware that among them [separated Churches and Ecclesial Bodies in the West] views are held considerably different from the doctrine of the Catholic Church even concerning Christ, God's Word made flesh, and the work of redemption, and thus concerning the mystery and ministry of the Church and the role of Mary in the work of salvation.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Walter M. Abbott, S.J. (gen. ed.), *The Documents of Vatican II* (New York: Herder and Herder, Association Press, 1966) 93.

⁵⁹

Cf. Apostolic Letter *Ordinatio sacerdotalis* of 22 May 1994: *AAS* LXXXVI (1994) 545-548; *Inseg* XVII/1 (1994) 1104-1108 [*ORE* 1343:1-2].

⁶⁰ *UR* #11 (Abbott trans. 354).

They obviously didn't think that Mary's role should be passed over in silence in ecumenical dialogue. In fact, they concluded the master document of the Council, *Lumen Gentium*, with these words:

Let the entire body of the faithful pour forth persevering prayer to the Mother of God and Mother of men. Let them implore that she who aided the beginnings of the Church by her prayers may now, exalted as she is in heaven above all the saints and angels, intercede with her Son in the fellowship of all the saints. May she do so until all the peoples of the human family, whether they are honored with the name of Christian or whether they still do not know their Savior, are happily gathered together in peace and harmony into the one People of God, for the glory of the Most Holy and Undivided Trinity.⁶²

⁶¹ *UR* #20 (Abbott trans. 362).

⁶² *LG* #68 (Abbott trans. 96).

ABBREVIATIONS

<i>AAS</i>	<i>Acta Apostolicæ Sedis</i> (1909 --)
<i>ASS</i>	<i>Acta Sanctæ Sedis</i> (1865-1908)
<i>CCC</i>	<i>Catechism of the Catholic Church</i> (1994)
<i>D-H</i>	Heinrich Denzinger, S.I., <i>Enchiridion Symbolorum Definitionum et Declarationum de Rebus Fidei et Morum: Edizione Bilingue</i> (XXXVII) a cura di Peter Hünemann (Bologna: Edizioni Dehoniane, 2000)
<i>Inseg</i>	<i>Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II</i> , I (1978 --) (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1979 --)
<i>LG</i>	<i>Lumen Gentium</i> , Second Vatican Council's Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (21 November 1964)
<i>MCat</i>	Pope John Paul II, <i>Theotókos - Woman, Mother, Disciple: A Catechesis on Mary, Mother of God</i> with a Foreword by Eamon R. Carroll, O.Carm, S.T.D. (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 2000)
<i>OL</i>	<i>Our Lady: Papal Teachings</i> , trans. Daughters of St. Paul (Boston: St. Paul Editions, 1961)
<i>OR</i>	<i>L'Osservatore Romano</i> , daily Italian edition. Roman numeral = volume; first Arabic numeral = number; second Arabic numeral indicates page
<i>ORE</i>	<i>L'Osservatore Romano</i> , weekly edition in English. First number = cumulative edition number; second number = page
<i>TCF</i>	J. Neuner, S.J. and J. Dupuis, S.J. (eds.), <i>The Christian Faith in the Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church</i> (New York: Alba House, sixth revised ed., 1996)
<i>TPS</i>	<i>The Pope Speaks</i> , 1 -- (1954 --)
<i>UR</i>	<i>Unitatis Redintegratio</i> , Second Vatican Council's Decree on Ecumenism (21 November 1964)