

# **Mary Mediatrix: A Protestant Response**

**By Rev. Charles Dickson, Ph.D.**

The possible emergence of a papal dogma declaring Mary as the mediatrix, coredeptrix, and advocate for all of God's people couldn't hit the world ecumenical stage at a worse time. At least that is the reaction of many Protestant and some Catholic theologians as well. It was the initial reaction of such noted Catholic scholars as Prof. Dr. Joseph Seifert, Rector of the International Academy of Philosophy in Liechtenstein and an acclaimed Catholic teacher.

There were numerous reasons for such initial objections and Dr. Seifert is quick to point them out. Would not such a doctrine be regarded, in the first place, as just another promotion of what he terms, "a merely marginal Catholic belief that is open to many understandings, given the fact that there is only one Savior and one Redeemer, Jesus Christ?" A second objection he raise is that the issuance of such a dogma is not very timely given the fact that the Church today is shaken to its foundations by other greater issues, and a third concern which arises is that such a Marian dogma does not seemingly possess any Biblical roots, but is based purely on oral sacred Tradition.

After careful study of the proposed dogma and its ecumenical implications, Dr. Seifert has concluded that an urgent need actually exists for such a statement and that this need far overrides any reservations the World Christian community might have regarding its ecumenical of social implications.

A leading exponent for proclamation of Mary-Mediatrix is Dr. Mark Miravalle, professor of theology at Franciscan University in Steubenville, Ohio, and a leader in the international Catholic movement called *Vox Populi Mariae Mediatrici*. His efforts have the support of such people as Mother Teresa who wrote, "the papal definition of Mary as coredeptrix, mediatrix, and advocate will bring great grace to the Church," and John Cardinal O'Conner, Archbishop of New York, who responded by saying, "clearly a formal papal definition would be articulated in such a precise terminology that other Christians would lose their anxiety that we do not distinguish adequately between Mary's unique association with the redemption and the redemptive power exercised by Christ alone."

The initial Protestant reaction to such a dogma has been, rather predictably, one of anxiety. Will it not produce a red flag in the remarkable progress that has already been made through more than a quarter century of dialogue between leaders of various Christian communions? The answer to that question – is not necessarily.

Like Dr. Seifert, leaders of all the world's Christian groups need to prayerfully study and evaluate the theological truth implied in any such statements about Mary's place in our common Christian faith, but also the implications for such a proclamation at this point in history.

Perhaps a statement by Dr. Seifert, in a letter to the members of *Vox Populi Mariae Mediatrici*, sets the stage for any new dogma by asserting that it "would have to exclude any blurring of the distinction between Christ's redemptive deed and Mary's purely human way of participating in redemption and of becoming coredeptrix." Given

such careful attention to wording, there should be no valid reason for Protestant objections. Such a statement could have two major positive effects on world Christian dialogue. First, it would set the record straight in terms of Catholic teaching, i.e. the Catholic maintains the centrality of Christ and His redemptive act for human salvation. Secondly, it would bring into focus the often overlooked importance of the Mother of our Lord, who in becoming the willing human bearer of the Incarnate God, participates in her Son's act for human salvation.

Protestants need to understand that the words mediatrix, and coredemptrix do not mean equality. Pope John Paul II, while showing a deep devotion to the Mother of our Lord, has made it clear on numerous occasions that he understands human salvation as being an act empowered by Christ alone. The pontiff's words and witness should present no problem for Protestants. The Anglican theologian, John Macquarrie, notes that while there have been abuses of Mary-Mediatrix terms in past Church practices in which unthinking enthusiasts may have elevated Mary to a position of virtual equality with Christ, such abuses do not represent the official teachings of the Catholic Church any more than some extremist views or practices in other Christian churches represent the official teaching of those churches. Macquarrie acknowledges, "all responsible theologians would agree that Mary's coredemptive role is subordinate and auxiliary to the central role of Christ. But if she does have such a role, the more clearly we understand it, the better."

In this whole process, there is obvious need for dialogue. For only in the give-and-take atmosphere of such dialogue do Christians learn from each other and, in the process, learn to appreciate the uniqueness of each other's responses to the acts of a loving God on the stage of human history.

Perhaps it might not be too earth-shaking to suggest at this point in time that any papal formulation of a dogma of Mary-Mediatrix also consider the input of Orthodox, Anglican, and Protestant leaders as well as the input of the Roman curia and its theologians. Perhaps it would not be too earth-shaking, then again, maybe something earth-shaking is exactly what the world Christian community needs to do. And what better place to start than with Mary, the Mother of our unity.

If such be the case, then the response of this Protestant pastor is one which says, "let's go for it!"