

Maternal Mediation, John Paul II, and Vatican II; A Response to a Statement of an International Theological Commission¹

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On 4 June 1997, a statement of a Theological Commission of the Pontifical International Marian Academy was published in *L'Osservatore Romano*. This commission was “asked by the Holy See to study the possibility and the opportuneness of a definition of the Marian titles of Mediatrix, Coredemptrix and Advocate. ‘The commission was composed of fifteen Catholic theologians and additional non-Catholic theologians, including an Anglican, a Lutheran and three Orthodox theologians.

Although I wish to express my appreciation for the furthering of the theological dialogue regarding the solemn definition of the Maternal Mediation of the Blessed Virgin Mary as provided by this statement of the international theological commission, I must at the same time state that there are several theological elements foundational to this question that appear to be missing from the considerations and conclusions of the commission. I will summarize only the more critical theological elements absent from the statement and conclusions of the commission, theological elements which are contained in the work of

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another international association of theologians and mariologists who have contributed to the two theological volumes dedicated to the question of the Maternal Mediation of Mary: *Mary Coredemptrix, Mediatrix, Advocate: Theological Foundations, Towards A Papal Definition?*, and *Mary Coredemptrix, Mediatrix, Advocate: Theological Foundations II, Papal, Pneumatological, Ecumenical* (Queenship Publishing, Santa Barbara, CA). The internationally respected theologians who participated in this serious theological study pertinent to the question of the solemn definition of the Maternal Mediation of Mary span several continents, many countries, and three communities of Christianity

1. The Title, “Coredemptrix” and the Papal Teachings of Pope John Paul II

A primary caution seems to be against the specific use of the title “Coredemptrix” in discussing the unique cooperation of the Blessed Virgin Mary with and under Jesus Christ in the Redemption of humanity. *It must be strongly underscored that our present Holy Father, Pope John Paul II, has used the explicit title “Coredemptrix” on at least five occasions in Papal Teachings during his present pontificate.*² This is well illustrated in the 1985 papal Address of Pope

² In his greetings to the sick after the general audience of 8 September 1982 the Pope said: “Mary, though conceived and born without the taint of sin, participated in a marvelous way in the sufferings of her divine Son, in order to be *Coredemptrix of humanity*” (*Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II, I, V/3* (1982) 404); In 1984 in his Angelus address in Arona: “To Our Lady — *the Coredemptrix* — St. Charles turned with singularly revealing accents” (*Inseg. VII/2* (1984) 1151 [ORE 860:1]);

On 31 January 1985, in an address at the Marian shrine in Guayaquil, Ecuador: “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

John Paul II in Guayaquil, Ecuador, where both the title “Coredemptrix” is used and an explanation of the role is given:

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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 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” (*Inseg.* VIII/1 (1985) 318-319 [ORE 876:7]);

On 31 March 1985, Palm Sunday and World Youth Day: “At the Angelus hour on this Palm Sunday, which the Liturgy calls also the Sunday of the Lord’s Passion, our thoughts run to Mary, immersed in the mystery of an immeasurable sorrow. Mary accompanied her divine Son in the most discreet concealment pondering everything in the depths of her heart. On Calvary, at the foot of the Cross, in the vastness and in the depth of her maternal sacrifice, she had John, the youngest Apostle, beside her ... May Mary our Protectress, *the Coredemptrix*, to whom we offer our prayer with great outpouring, make our desire generously correspond to the desire of the Redeemer” (*Inseg.* VIII/1 (1985) 889-890 [ORE 880:12]);

In commemorating the sixth centenary of the canonization of St. Bridget of Sweden on 6 October 1991: “Birgitta looked to Mary as her model and support in the various moments of her life. She spoke energetically about the divine privilege of Mary’s Immaculate Conception. She contemplated her astonishing mission as Mother of the Saviour. She invoked her as the Immaculate Conception, Our Lady of Sorrows, and *Coredemptrix*, exalting Mary’s singular role in the history of salvation and the life of the Christian people” (*Inseg.* XIV/2 (1991) 756 [ORE 1211:4]. Cf. Monsignor Arthur Calkins, “John Paul II’s Teaching on Marian Coredemption,” as found in *Mary Coredemptrix, Mediatrix, Advocate: Theological Foundations II, Papal, Pneumatological, Ecumenical*, 1997, Queenship Publishing, Santa Barbara, CA.

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More recently, in his general audience address of 9 April 1997 (at present the Holy Father has given a series of over 50 Marian catecheses), the Holy Father uses the example of St. Paul's call for all Christians to be "God's fellow workers" (1 Cor. 3:9), or in some translations "co-workers," and also specifies Mary's unique co-operation in the work of redemption (without inferring any equality between Christians, the Blessed Virgin Mary, and the unique act of redemption accomplished by Jesus Christ alone):

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 co-operate 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 "co-operator" acquires a specific meaning. The collaboration of Christians in salvation takes place after the Calvary event, whose fruits they endeavor to spread by prayer and sacrifice. Mary, instead, co-operated during the event itself and in the role of mother; thus her 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 the Christ and in submission to him, she collaborated in obtaining the grace of salvation for all humanity.⁴

In all instances of papal usage of the term, "Coredemptrix," the prefix "co" does not mean equal to 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 ally in the saving process of humanity's*

³ Cf. Miravalle, *Mary Coredemptrix, Mediatrix, Advocate: Theological Foundations, Towards A Papal Definition?*, 1995, Queenship Publishing, Santa Barbara, CA.

⁴ Pope John Paul II, General Audience of April 9, *L'Osservatore Romano*, p. 7, April 16 English ed.

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 Savior Son, who alone could reconcile humanity with the Father in his glorious divinity and humanity.⁵

Hence the title and role of Mary as Coredeptrix reveals Mary's unique participation, her "co-working" and "co-operating" with and under Jesus Christ, the sole Redeemer of humanity, while at the same time calling all Christians to cooperate in the saving work of redemption (cf. Col. 1:24). The teaching of our Holy Father that "the collaboration of believers ... obviously excludes any equality with him ..." corrects the somewhat misleading statement made in a commentary to the statement of the theological commission that the title "Coredeptrix" or the doctrine of Marian coredeptrition inappropriately "names" Mary as a mere creature to be "on the level with the Word of God in his particular redemptive function." Moreover, *Lumen Gentium*, n. 62 clarifies the rightful participation of creatures in the one mediation of Jesus Christ without the confusion of being inappropriately perceived as being on "the level with the Word of God":

No creature could ever be counted along with the Incarnate Word and Redeemer; but just as the priesthood of Christ is shared in various ways both by his ministers and the faithful, and as the one goodness of God is radiated in different ways among his creatures, so also the unique mediation of the Redeemer does not exclude but rather gives rise to a manifold cooperation which is but a sharing in this one source (*Lumen Gentium*, n. 62).

No claim is made here that the documents of the present Holy Father, where he employs the title "Coredeptrix," are the most definitive of his pontificate, as has been alluded to by commentators of the commission. At the same time, it would constitute an even greater error to unjustifiably claim that the Papal Teachings of John Paul II and the explicit usage of the title "Coredeptrix" have no theological importance and significance. They are clear, repeated, indications of how the Holy Father understands and would define what makes the Virgin Mother's cooperation in the work of redemption under the Cross

⁵ See Miravalle, "Mary Coredeptrix, Mediatrix, Advocate: Foundational Presence in Divine Revelation" as found in *Mary Coredeptrix, Mediatrix, Advocate: Theological Foundations, Towards A Papal Definition*, 1995, Queenship Publishing, Santa Barbara, CA.

singular and non-repeatable by any other believer. To say that her cooperation is singular is not to say it is equal to Christ's work. And to specifically designate this unique participation of Mary, the "New Eve," with and under Jesus Christ, the "New Adam," as "*Marian Coredeemption*" so as to *define* the singularity of that cooperation, hardly seems imprecise and ambiguous—any more than it would be imprecise or ambiguous to the divine primacy of Jesus Christ to define the singular cooperation of the Blessed Virgin in the Incarnation of Jesus Christ as Mother of God.

The further objection that "the titles as proposed are ambiguous" must be seen, again, in light of the rich Papal Magisterial Teaching of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Not only was the term "Coredeptrix" used under the pontificates of Pius X and Pius XI along with its contemporary usage by the present Holy Father, but the subsequent terms "Mediatrrix" and "Advocate" have an even greater frequency of usage and teaching by the nineteenth and twentieth century Papal Magisterium.⁶ Not only are the terms "Mediatrrix" and "Advocate" contained in the teachings of the Second Vatican Council (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, n. 62), but they are developed in great measure in the 1987 Papal Encyclical, *Redemptoris Mater* (Mother of the Redeemer), with the entire third section entitled and dedicated to the Church doctrine of "Maternal Mediation."⁷ Perhaps the "ambiguity" mentioned by the theological commission came from a lack of full understanding that the object of the petition is a solemn definition of the Maternal Mediation of Mary under its three essential aspects of Coredeptrix ("the Mother Suffering"), Mediatrrix ("the Mother Nourishing"), and Advocate ("the Mother Interceding"), and not a request for a "triple dogma" or "three non-homogeneous terms" as members of the commission have previously stated. The roles of a mother, as heart of the family, are multiformed; the truth of her motherhood is singular. The same holds true for the "Mother of the Church" (cf. Second Vatican Council, Nov. 21, 1964).

⁶ Cf. Rev. John Schug, "Mary, Coredeptrix: The Significance of her Title in the Magisterium of The Church" as found in *Mary Coredeptrix, Mediatrrix, Advocate: Theological Foundations, Towards A Papal Definition*, 1995, Queenship Publishing, Santa Barbara, CA; and Monsignor Arthur Calkins, "John Paul II's Teaching on Marian Coredeemption," as found in *Mary Coredeptrix, Mediatrrix, Advocate: Theological Foundations II, Papal, Pneumatological, Ecumenical*, 1997, Queenship Publishing, Santa Barbara, CA.

⁷ Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris Mater*, n. 3.

2. The Solemn Definition of Maternal Mediation and the Second Vatican Council

It must also be remembered that the Second Vatican Council was by its own self-definition not a “dogmatic council” but a “pastoral council,” and as such may not have been the most appropriate setting for a dogmatic definition. And yet, the Council Fathers made it clear that they did not intend to present a “complete doctrine on Mary” and encouraged future mariological doctrinal development: “This sacred synod ... does not, however, 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” (*Lumen Gentium*, n. 52). Church history and precedence teaches us that the decision of a given ecumenical council not to make a solemn definition does not preclude a solemn definition coming in an *ex cathedra* fashion in the future. For example, a petition for the solemn definition of the Assumption of Mary was raised and rejected at Vatican Council I, but this did not prevent the later solemn definition of the Assumption by Pius XII in an *ex cathedra* expression. There are no grounds for concluding that because Vatican II abstained from using the title “Co-redemptrix,” that therefore the Council intended the Church to abandon the use of this title forever. The mariological doctrine, language, and usage of the title by Pope John Paul II clearly make any such conclusion impossible.

For this and for many other reasons, therefore, the rich mariological doctrinal development on the subject of Mary’s Maternal Mediation provided by the Papal Teachings of John Paul II is a fruitful development of the teaching the Second Vatican Council offered. We must be aware of any mode of theological stagnancy that would reject authentic mariological doctrinal development as manifested by the present Pontiff in his Papal Magisterium, both in expressions of encyclicals, apostolic letters, and general papal addresses and teachings.

3. The Solemn Definition of Maternal Mediation and Ecumenism

Regarding sensitivity to “ecumenical difficulties” expressed by the theological commission, let us again return to the clear teaching of Pope John Paul II, a contemporary prophet for the critical call of ecumenism in his recent encyclical on ecumenism, *Ut Unum Sint*. Within this papal instruction on the ecclesial mandate for authentic ecumenical activity, John Paul II specifies that in our efforts of authentic Catholic ecumenism, the whole body of doctrine as taught by

the Church must be presented; full communion in the one body of Christ can only take place through the acceptance of the whole truth as taught by the Church, and that the “demands of revealed truth” does not prevent ecumenical activity, but rather provides the necessary foundation for ultimate union. *Ut Unum Sint* states:

With regard to the study of areas of disagreement, the Council requires that the whole body of doctrine be clearly presented Full communion of course will have to come about through the acceptance of the whole truth into which the Holy Spirit guides Christ’s disciples. Hence all forms of reductionism or facile “agreement” must be absolutely avoided⁸ ... unity willed by God can be attained only by the adherence of all to the content of revealed faith in its entirety. In matters of faith, compromise is in contradiction with God who is Truth. In the Body of Christ, “the way, and the truth, and the life” (Jn 14:6), who could consider legitimate a reconciliation brought about at the expense of the truth?⁹ ... To uphold a vision of unity which takes account of all the demands of revealed truth does not mean to put a brake on the ecumenical movement.¹⁰ On the contrary, it means preventing it from settling for apparent solutions which would lead to no firm and solid results. The obligation to respect the truth is absolute. Is this not the law of the Gospel?¹¹

In that same document on ecumenism, the Holy Father defends the exercise of the charism of papal infallibility as a “witness to the truth” which in fact serves as a value and foundation for ultimate Christian unity:

When circumstances require it, [the Pope] speaks in the name of all the pastors in communion with him. He can also—under very specific conditions clearly laid down by the First Vatican Council—declare *ex cathedra* that a certain doctrine belongs to the deposit

⁸ Pope John Paul II, *Ut Unum Sint*, n. 36.

⁹ *Ibid.*, n. 18.

¹⁰ Cf. Address to the Cardinals and Roman Curia (June 28, 1985), 6:*AAS* 77 (1985), 1153; cf. *Ut Unum Sint*, n. 79.

¹¹ *Ut Unum Sint*, n. 79.

of faith (First Vatican Ecumenical Council, *Pastor Aeternus*: DS 3074). By thus bearing witness to the truth, he serves unity.¹²

Solemn definitions of Marian dogmas, and in specific the solemn definition of Maternal Mediation, does not run counter to the Church's critical mandate of ecumenical activity; rather such definitions can serve this unity for the sake of doctrinal perfection and clarity, as we find in the words of John Cardinal O'Connor of New York: "Clearly, a formal definition would be articulated in such 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."¹³

At the same time we should not be surprised when Christian brothers and sisters from other communions who do not accept the office and charism of the papacy are not in favor of the exercise of the very office which they themselves do not accept as authentic. Therefore to require convincing support from other Christians and ecclesial bodies as a requisite condition for the exercise of papal infallibility would, practically speaking, effectively eliminate this charism given by the Holy Spirit and Christ to the Church for the sake of doctrinal clarity and perfection.

The Blessed Virgin Mary must be seen not as the obstacle, but as the instrument and Mother of the ecumenical movement (cf *Redemptoris Mater*, n. 30), remembering that no one unites the children of a family more than the mother of that family. Let us confidently leave such decisions of timeliness and opportuneness to the present Vicar of Christ, Pope John Paul II, who is at the same time both *fully Marian and fully ecumenical*.

4. Vox Populi Mariae Mediatrici

The international Catholic organization *Vox Populi Mariae Mediatrici* (Voice of the People for Mary Mediatrix) is a principal movement amidst others petitioning our Holy Father, Pope John Paul II, to solemnly define the Maternal Mediation of the Blessed Virgin Mary. This international Catholic organization carries with it the episcopal endorsements of over 500 bishops, inclusive of 42 Cardinals

¹² *Ut Unum Sint*, n. 94.

¹³ John Cardinal O'Connor, Letter of Endorsement to *Vox Populi Mariae Mediatrici*, Feb. 14, 1994, as published in *Mary Coredemptrix, Mediatrix, Advocate, Cardinal Endorsements*, Queenship Publications, Santa Barbara, CA, 1994.

and 4.5 million petitions from the faithful spanning over 155 countries, all united in the requesting of the solemn definition of Our Lady's Maternal Mediation. *Vox Populi Mariae Mediatrici* works in complete obedience and solidarity to the Papal Magisterium of Pope John Paul II in exercising the canonical right and duty encoded in Canon 212, §2, 3:

“The Christian faithful are free to make known their needs, especially spiritual ones, and their desires to the pastors of the Church”; “In accord with the knowledge, competence and preeminence which they possess, they have the right and even at times a duty to manifest to the sacred pastors their opinion on matters which pertain to the good of the Church, and they have a right to make their opinion known to the other Christian faithful, with due regard for the integrity of faith and morals and reverence toward their pastors, and with consideration for the common good and the dignity of persons.”

In the proper letter and spirit of this canon, *Vox Populi Mariae Mediatrici* continues to do all possible on the level of prayer, theological research, Marian catechesis and education of the faithful to assist in bringing to proper theological and ecclesial maturity the cause of the solemn definition of the Maternal Mediation of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

In light of the objection of the commission that the mariological doctrine in question still needs “further study” and “theological maturity,” let us recall from our recent past Church precedence that such maturity can come about in a rather brief span of time, based on the given minds and hearts, both authoritative and theological, dedicated to the development of a given doctrine at a given time of the Church. For example, in 1957 Pius XII stated that the cause of restoration of the permanent diaconate at that time lacked “theological maturity.” It was only a very few years later at the Second Vatican Council (1961-1965) that the permanent diaconate was seen as “having reached” its “proper theological maturity,” and hence was reinstated by Pope Paul VI shortly after the Council in 1967.

In sum then, this statement of the theological commission, while providing a valuable contribution to the theological dialogue concerning Maternal Mediation and its potential definition, neither constitutes nor contains any authoritative or official prohibition of the continued activities of *Vox Populi Mariae Mediatrici*, which will

continue to work in obedience and solidarity to the Papal Magisterium of Pope John Paul II in seeking to bring about the necessary theological and ecclesial maturity for the solemn definition of Maternal Mediation, whether that be in the distant or “not too distant” future. The final and definitive judgment of which, of course, remains with the present Pontiff. And with all proper appreciation and respect for the contribution of the theological commission, we know from the historical precedence of the Church that several advisory theological commissions requested by the Holy See have come to conclusions which ultimately were not adopted by the Holy See; the most radical example within recent Church precedence having been the theological commission requested by the Holy See to examine the question of artificial birth control, the conclusion of which was overridden by Pope Paul VI when he reaffirmed the constant Church teaching against artificial birth control in his 1968 Encyclical *Humanae Vitae*.¹⁴

In Conclusion, the following Summary Statements can be articulated:

1. The present Pontiff, Pope John Paul II has used the title “Coredemptrix” for the Blessed Virgin Mary on at least five occasions in papal statements accompanied by a profound teaching on the unique participation of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the redemption of humanity by Jesus Christ. The titles and roles of “Mediatrix” and “Advocate” are contained in the teachings of the Second Vatican Council (*Lumen Gentium*, n. 8) and have a rich tradition and usage in the Papal Magisterium of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (with special contribution by the present Papal Magisterium of John Paul II).
2. The teachings of the Second Vatican Council in no way prohibit a solemn definition on Maternal Mediation, and in fact call for a proper theological development and completion of authentic Marian doctrine (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, n. 54).
3. The specific contribution found in the papal teachings of Pope John Paul II on the subject of the Maternal Mediation of Mary as Coredemptrix, Mediatrix, and Advocate must be included and appreciated in the contemporary development of mariological doctrine, potentially leading to a solemn definition of Maternal Mediation.

¹⁴ Pope Paul VI, Encyclical Letter, *Humane Vitae*, 1968, p. 6, n. 6, Daughters of St. Paul, Boston, MA.

4. The request for a solemn definition of the Maternal Mediation of Mary in no way runs counter to the critical ecclesial mandate for authentic ecumenical activity. The “whole truth about Mary” as part of the “whole truth of the Gospel” will serve as the foundation for ultimate Christian unity, as taught by Christ and entrusted to the Church (cf. *Dei Verbum*, n. 9, 10). In the words of Pope John Paul II: “To uphold a vision of unity which takes account of all the demands of revealed truth does not mean to put a brake on the ecumenical movement.”¹⁵ The Blessed Virgin Mary must be seen not as an obstacle, but as a maternal instrument of unity of all Christians into the one fold of Jesus Christ
5. The international Catholic movement, *Vox Populi Mariae Mediatrici*, constituting 500 bishops, 42 cardinals, and the petitions of 4.5 million faithful spanning 155 countries, will continue to pray and work in obedience to the Papal Magisterium of Pope John Paul II, in striving for the theological and ecclesial maturity required for the solemn definition of the Maternal Mediation of Mary as Coredemptrix, Mediatrix, and Advocate, as is its canonical right and duty expressed in Canon 212, §2, 3.
6. *Vox Populi Mariae Mediatrici* leaves the ultimate discernment and decision of the “possibility and opportuneness” of the solemn definition of the Maternal Mediation of the Blessed Virgin Mary to His Holiness Pope John Paul II, and offers full obedience and submission to his final and definitive judgment.

¹⁵ Cf. Address to the Cardinals and Roman Curia (June 28, 1985), 6:*AAS* 77 (1985), 1153; cf. *Ut Unum Sint*, n. 79.