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*Rev. Cyril Vollert SJ*  
Professor of Dogmatic Theology  
St. Louis University School of Divinity  
St. Marys College, St. Marys, Kan.

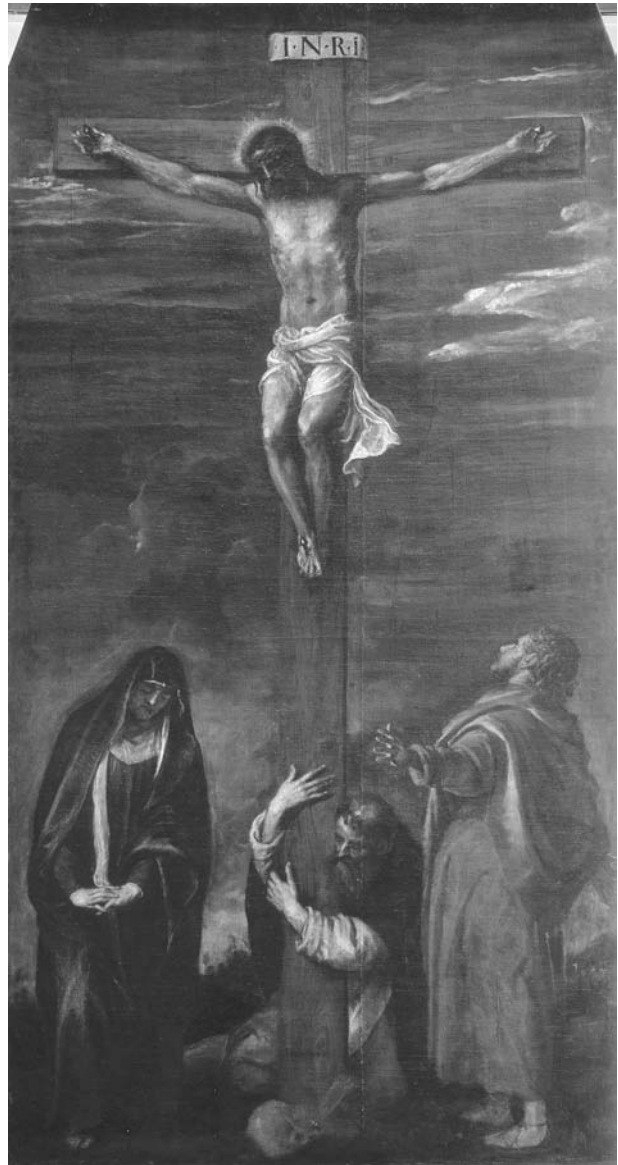
*Rev. Frederick M. Jelly OP*  
Academic Dean, School of Theology  
Pontifical College, Josephinum, Worthington, Ohio

*Robert L. Fastiggi*  
Professor of Systematic Theology  
Sacred Heart Major Seminary  
Detroit, Mich. (2010)

#### IV. MEDIATRIX OF ALL GRACES

By Mary's mediation Catholics designate, in general, Our Lady's unique share in the soteriological, or saving, mission of her Son. The belief of the faithful in this Marian role has found expression in Christian literature in a variety of ways from time immemorial. The genesis of the title *Mediatrix* itself, as applied to the Mother of God, is rather obscure. Perhaps the earliest sure witnesses are St. ANDREW OF CRETE (d. 740), St. Germanus of Constantinople (d. 733), and St. Tarasius (d. c. 807). From the East, the title was introduced into the literature of the West around the ninth century through a translation by PAUL THE DEACON of the *Life of Theophilus*, in which the term is used. From the twelfth century on, it was applied to Our Lady with ever-increasing frequency until it became generally accepted in the seventeenth century.

Generally speaking, a mediator interposes his good services between two physical or moral persons to



**Mary at the Foot of the Cross.** Christ stands alone as the Redeemer. The role of Mary as a participant in the Redemption is a topic of debate among theologians. CHRIST ON THE CROSS WITH THE VIRGIN, SAINT JOHN, AND SAINT DOMINIC (OIL ON CANVAS), TITIAN (TIZIANO VECELLIO) (C.1488-1576)/SAN DOMENICO, ANCONA, ITALY/ALINARI/THE BRIDGEMAN ART LIBRARY

facilitate an exchange of favors (e.g., an alliance). In most cases, the mission of a mediator is to reconcile parties at variance. Catholic theology applies the title *Mediatrix* to Our Lady for three reasons. First, because, owing to her divine motherhood and plenitude of grace, she occupies a middle position in the hierarchy between the Creator and His creatures. This is known as her ontological mediation. Second, during her earthly career she contributed considerably, through specific holy acts, to the reconciliation between GOD and man brought

about by the SAVIOR. Third, through her powerful intercession in heaven, she obtains for her spiritual children all the graces that God deigns to bestow on them. The last two phases constitute Mary's moral mediation. It should be borne in mind, however, that the mere use of the term *Mediatrix* need not always convey the above threefold meaning. In the more ancient writers, that expression is restricted sometimes to the first, sometimes to the third phase of Mary's mediatorial office. The exact meaning in each case must be determined by the context and parallel passages.

Theologians are always careful to emphasize that Mary's mediation differs substantially from that of her Son. The latter is primary, self-sufficient, and absolutely necessary for men's salvation; the former is secondary, wholly dependent on Christ's, and only hypothetically necessary. However, Mary's mediation differs also, and indeed essentially, from that of other creatures (e.g., the angels, the saints, the priests of the New Testament). The latter avails only in particular cases and for particular graces; it is exercised dependent on Mary's will and exclusively in the sphere of the actual application of graces. The former is universal, dependent on Christ only, and has a definite bearing on the acquisition (meriting) of graces, as well as on their application.

The actual exercise of Our Lady's mediatorial function may now be considered. The two phases of her moral mediation are treated in two separate sections.

**Our Lady's Coredeemption.** As indicated, the first aspect of Mary's moral mediation refers to her active and formal share in the redemptive work brought about by Our Lord while still on earth. To express this complex activity in one single word, Catholic theology has coined the Latin term *Coredeptrix*. This title first appears in Catholic literature toward the end of the fourteenth century (e.g., in an *orationale* of St. Peter's in Salzburg). It was used quite frequently during the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries. Because the HOLY SEE itself has made use of it in its documents [*Acta Sanctae Sedis* (ASS) 41 (1908) 409; *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* (AAS) 5 (1913) 364; 6 (1914) 108], Catholics no longer question its legitimacy.

*Meanings Attached to the Term.* Apart from the question of the term's appropriateness, theologians are divided as to the nature and extent of the doctrine conveyed by that title. Their views may be summarized as follows.

A first group claims that Our Lady, by knowingly and willingly making possible the coming of the Savior into the world, cooperated only remotely in the objective REDEMPTION. (Objective Redemption means the initial reconciliation of God and man as accomplished through the sacrifice of CALVARY.) Mary has, besides, a

direct share in the subjective Redemption, that is, the dispensation of graces through which the objective Redemption is actually applied to individuals. The theologians of this group concede that Our Lady suffered and merited much for men's salvation during her life, but they contend that these sufferings and merits contributed not to bring about the Redemption itself but only to make it applicable to men. Such is the opinion of Henricus Lennerz, Werner Goossens, George D. Smith, and several others.

A second view, called the receptivity theory, has been advanced by a group of German theologians among whom Heinrich Maria Köster and Otto Semmelroth are the most prominent. According to them, Christ alone redeemed the human race. Mary, however, cooperated in the objective Redemption in the sense that at the foot of the cross she accepted the effects or the fruits of her Son's redemptive act and made them available to the members of the Mystical Body, whom she officially represented on Calvary. This theory has appealed to some outside of Germany (e.g., Clement Dillenschneider) as a plausible explanation of the relationship between Mary and the Church.

A third group, representing the vast majority of theologians, considers the above explanations insufficient and unsatisfactory. According to them, Our Lady is Coredeptrix because she cooperated directly and immediately in the redemptive process itself (i.e., the objective Redemption) and not merely in the application of its effects to individual souls. In this third view Christ and Mary constitute one single principle of salvation for the whole human race in such a way that the restoration of mankind to the friendship of God as consummated on Calvary was the result of their joint causality. This joint causality does not place Our Lady on the same level with the Savior. In the orbit of primary, independent, and self-sufficient causality, Christ remains utterly alone: men's only Redeemer. Mary's merits and satisfactions contributed to bring about objective Redemption only after the manner of a secondary cause and as deriving their redemptive value wholly from the infinite merits and satisfactions of her Son.

To justify this opinion, a few further clarifications are in order. The first truth to bear in mind is that, since Our Lady herself was redeemed by Christ, she could cooperate in the objective Redemption only after its effects had been applied to her. How could she cooperate to bring about something that had already produced its effects and that, therefore, God regarded as already accomplished? This becomes possible by distinguishing two logical stages (*signa rationis*, as the schoolmen say) in Christ's Redemption. First, He redeemed Mary alone with a preservative Redemption; then, together with her, in a subsequent logical stage (*in signo posteriori rationis*), He redeemed the rest of

mankind with a liberative Redemption. Obviously, there is no chronological before and after in this process; merely a twofold acceptance of the Redemption on the part of the eternal Father, with a logical priority in favor of Mary.

Again, Our Lady's merits and satisfactions did not enhance the value of the infinite merits and satisfactions of her Son. Nevertheless, God accepted them as constituting a new title for granting pardon to the human race. Nothing prevents God from canceling men's debt in view of a twofold title, each of them operative in its own sphere. On the contrary, this divine disposition seems most fitting in the light of the Church's teaching, which considers Our Lady as the Savior's intimate partner and as man's official representative in God's redemptive alliance with mankind.

Does it follow from the above that Our Lady's cooperation was an essential element of the Redemption? Here a distinction is in order. Mary's share may have been essential in the sense that, without it, the Redemption would not have been what God decreed it to be. But it was not essential if it means that Christ's merits and satisfactions were, by themselves, insufficient to redeem men. Something analogous happens when the Christian cooperates with divine grace to perform some meritorious action. That cooperation is essential only insofar as it meets a divine requisite.

Of course, to establish that Mary's coredemption, as championed by the majority of theologians, is a true Catholic doctrine resulting from divine revelation, it is not sufficient to show that it is theologically possible and even fitting. Two further questions remain to be answered. Is it also attested to in the sources of revelation—Sacred Scripture and divine TRADITION? Is it accepted by the Magisterium, or TEACHING AUTHORITY OF THE CHURCH, as pertaining to the deposit of revelation?

*Papal Teaching.* Recent popes, beginning with LEO XIII in his Rosary encyclical *Jucunda semper* (1894), have expressed their views on this question with ever-increasing forcefulness. The classic passage is from BENEDICT XV's apostolic letter *Inter sodalicia* (1918), wherein he states: "To such an extent did [Mary] suffer and almost die with her suffering and dying Son, and to such an extent did she surrender her maternal rights over her Son for man's salvation, and immolated Him—insofar as she could—in order to appease the justice of God, that we may rightly say that she redeemed the human race together with Christ" [*Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 10 (1918) 182]. In a radio broadcast by PIUS XI (April 28, 1935) one finds the following words addressed to Our Lady: "O Mother of love and mercy, who, when thy dearest Son was consummating the Redemption of the

human race on the altar of the Cross, didst stand by Him, suffering with Him as a *Coredemptrix* ... preserve in us, we beseech thee, and increase day by day the precious fruit of His Redemption and of thy compassion" (*L'Osservatore Romano*, April 29–30, 1935). In his encyclical *Haurietis aquas* (May 15, 1956) PIUS XII affirms unequivocally that "in bringing about the work of human Redemption, the Most Blessed Virgin Mary was, by the will of God, so indissolubly associated with Christ, that our salvation proceeded from the love and sufferings of Jesus Christ intimately joined with the love and sorrows of His Mother" [*Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 48 (1956) 352].

The Second Vatican Council, while not explicitly adopting the expression *Coredemptrix*, taught the doctrine: "So also the Blessed Virgin advanced in her pilgrimage of faith, and faithfully bore with her union with her Son even to the cross, where, in accord with the divine plan, she stood, vehemently grieved with her Only-Begotten, and joined herself to His Sacrifice with a motherly heart, lovingly consenting to the immolation of the Victim born of her" (*Lumen gentium* 58; cf. 61). Pope JOHN PAUL II explicitly used the expression *Coredemptrix* on at least half a dozen occasions. The most important and often cited was on January 31, 1985, in an address at the Marian shrine in Guayaquil, Ecuador:

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... 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)... In fact, Mary's role as *Coredemptrix* did not cease with the glorification of her Son. (*Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II* 8/1 1985, 318–319)

The CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH (CCC) stated that Mary was "associated more intimately than any other person in the mystery of His redemptive suffering" (CCC 618; cf. Lk 2:35).

*Sacred Scripture.* Interpreted in the light of papal pronouncement, Sacred Scripture itself lends weight to the doctrine under discussion. The words addressed by



almighty God to the devil in the Garden of EDEN, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, between your seed and her seed,” (Gn 3:15), are generally cited by Catholic theologians as a pertinent Biblical argument. They see in the singular struggle between Christ and SATAN, as related in the text, a prophetic announcement of the Savior’s redemptive work. Because “the woman” spoken of is the mother of Christ in a true Biblical sense, as PIUS IX and Pius XII interpret it, and because her struggle with Satan is identical with her Son’s, as Pius IX states, it follows that the prophecy foreshadows also Our Lady’s coredemptive mission.

Another relevant passage is the ANNUNCIATION pericope. By her generous *fiat* to the angel’s proposal (Lk 1:38), Our Lady willingly and knowingly made possible the redemptive INCARNATION of the divine WORD, and thus may be said to have formally participated in the soteriological mystery that was then being inaugurated. SIMEON’s prophecy furnishes an insight into the concrete manner in which she was to share in that mystery: “And thy own soul a sword shall pierce” (Lk 2:35). This allusion to Mary’s compassion found its dramatic fulfillment as she stood by the cross of her dying Son, sharing His bitter agony for the salvation of mankind. It was then that the Savior, pointing to St. JOHN, addressed Our Lady saying: “Woman, behold thy son” (Jn 19:27). Recent popes, particularly Leo XIII in his encyclical *Adiutricem populi* (1895), have seen in the beloved disciple a representative of all the redeemed, and they have for this reason interpreted Christ’s words to Our Lady as a proclamation of her spiritual motherhood of men. Since the regeneration of mankind to the life of grace was brought about by Christ precisely by means of His redemptive act, theologians reason that Mary’s direct share in the former is inconceivable without her direct cooperation in the latter.

*Tradition.* If Biblical passages in support of the coredemption are relatively meager, the data yielded by Catholic Tradition, as a whole, are copious indeed. As in the case of so many other doctrinal theses, this one also had rather modest beginnings, but gradually attained its full development through an ever-increasing awareness of its implications. Chronologically, the first germ of the doctrine may be traced to the striking antithetical parallelism between Mary and EVE, so frequently described by ancient writers, specifically St. IRENAEUS of Lyons (d. c. 202). Contrasting the episode of the Fall with the scene of the Annunciation, they pointed out that, just as the first woman, through her disobedience, had shared ADAM’s responsibility in the original prevarication, so likewise Mary, through her voluntary surrender to God’s designs, was instrumental in bringing about men’s supernatural rehabilitation in Christ. It is scarcely likely, however, that these early writers intended to attribute to

Mary an immediate cooperation in the objective Redemption. They seem to signify exclusively her conscious role in bringing the Savior into the world. At the end of the tenth century in the East and the first half of the twelfth in the West, the strictly soteriological character of Mary’s cooperation began to receive explicit notice, due particularly to the intervention of John the Geometer (c. 989) and Arnold of Chartres (d. 1156), respectively. The latter’s remarkable teaching on this point actually became a *locus classicus* in the Marian literature of subsequent centuries. By the beginning of the eighteenth century, virtually every aspect of Mary’s coredemption (merit, satisfaction, ransom, sacrifice) had been studied at some length, and the doctrine accepted quite generally in its present formulation. The JESUITS Ferdinand Q. de Salazar (d. 1646) and Maximilian Reichenberger (c. 1677), the Franciscans Roderick de Portillo (c. 1630) and Charles del Moral (d. 1731), the Augustinian Bartholomew de los Rios (d. 1652), and the Dominican Lazarus Dassier (d. 1692) are only a few of those deserving of mention for their notable contribution in this connection.

From that time on, particularly in the decades of the mid-twentieth century, the theory of Mary’s coredemption in the strict sense had won so many adherents that it was rightly regarded as the opinion of the vast majority of theologians. After centuries of careful analysis and theological reflection, the complex doctrine, which had such modest beginnings in Christian antiquity, entered its final phase of scientific systematization. Indeed, in the judgment of some, the doctrine had attained sufficient maturity to be solemnly sanctioned by the ecclesiastical Magisterium. The first to voice these sentiments in an official petition to Pope Pius XII (November 26, 1951) was the Cuban hierarchy, headed by Cardinal Manuel Arteaga y Betancourt (1879–1963), archbishop of Havana.

*Controverted Points.* While awaiting the official pronouncement of the Church, the theologians who championed the theory of a strict coredemption divided among themselves concerning some secondary aspects of this doctrine. Thus, for example, a growing number of Mariologists hold (correctly, it seems) that Our Lady’s soteriological merit was not merely based on fittingness (i.e., *de congruo*), as the majority still believe, but rather based on simple justice (*de condigno ex mera condignitate*). This latter is not to be confused with Christ’s merit, which alone was condign in strict justice (*de condigno ex rigore justitiae*). The former involves a certain equality between the meritorious work performed and its reward, while the latter supposes, besides, an equality between the person giving the reward and the person meriting it.

Another phase of the coredemption that has given rise to prolonged discussion is the nature of Mary's share in the sacrifice of the cross *qua sacrificae*. Was her offering of the Victim on Calvary a sacrificial action in the proper sense? Some authors, such as Hermann Seiler, Giuseppe Petazzi, Emilio Sauras, and Marceliano Llamera, claim that it was. Others, following Narciso García Garcés, Gabriel M. Roschini, and Cornelis Friethoff, believe that it was a sacrificial action only in a broad sense. The Holy See, by repeatedly cautioning against the use of the controversial title Virgin-Priest given by some to Our Lady, seem to favor the latter view.

A third point of discrepancy concerns the exact relationship between Our Lady's soteriological actions and those performed by the Savior Himself. Precisely in what sense did Mary cooperate immediately with her Son to bring about the Redemption? Some theologians, such as Benoît Henri MERKELBACH, Seiler, and Paul Sträter, explain that Our Lady's will directly determined (i.e., had some influence on) her Son's will to perform His redemptive actions. Others, such as Domenico Bertetto, Rosaire Gagnebet, and Marie-Joseph Nicolas, contend that Our Lady's cooperation was redemptive, not because it directly influenced or determined the soteriological actions of Christ, but rather because Christ's actions conferred a redemptive value on her merits and satisfactions, thus enabling them to concur (in a subordinate though direct manner) in bringing about men's reconciliation with God in its initial phase (*in actu primo*). This second position seems better to safeguard the unencroachable rights of the unique Redeemer, without compromising Mary's immediate cooperation in His redemptive work.

*Twenty-first Century Theology.* In the early 2000s theology continued to take an interest in Mary's coredemptive role. Paul Haffner developed a theology of Marian coredemption starting from Our Lady's discipleship (*The Mystery of Mary* 2004, pp. 175–207). For Hans Urs von BALTHASAR, Mary had a coredemptive part to play, and the fact that the Son is accompanied by a witness to God's atoning action means that the revelation of the Trinity on the CROSS cannot be expounded on the basis of the Crucified Christ alone. This witness, the Mother of the Lord, is an icon of the fruitful receptivity by which the Son greets the love of the Father in the Holy Spirit. Because she witnesses in her poverty the humiliation of which the Magnificat speaks, standing behind sinners and with them, she is able to receive the measureless outpouring of the Son on the Cross in His sacrifice of praise and petition to the Father and receive it in such a way that she becomes the Bride of the Lamb and the Womb of the Church, in a nuptial relationship (Balthasar 1994, p. 358). René Laurentin explains that the expression Coredemptrix has been used by the popes

and therefore requires respect. It would be gravely temerarious to attack its legitimacy (Laurentin 1951, p. 27ff). For Brunero Gherardini, the truth of Marian Coredemption meets totally and verifiably the conditions to be considered Church doctrine. Its foundation is indirect and implicit, yet solid, in the Scriptures; extensive in the Fathers and theologians; unequivocal in the Magisterium. It follows, therefore, that the Coredemption belongs to the Church's doctrinal patrimony (Gherardini 2002, pp. 37–48). Gherardini points out that, until now, no solemn dogmatic or *ex cathedra* definition of the Coredemption exists. Hence it is not, in the narrow sense, a truth of Faith. The Coredemption is a part of the Church doctrine because it is indirectly and derivatively ascribable to the sacred deposit. Consequently, the theological note *proxima fidei* (close to faith) is appropriate for this doctrine. This means it belongs to Revelation, and even if not explicit, it is beyond doubt. The term *proxima fidei* best synthesizes all the intrinsic and extrinsic considerations involved in study of the Coredemption: in particular its connection with Revelation and its presence, even if not in a formal manner, within the ecclesiastical Magisterium.

**Dispensation of Graces through Mary.** The second phase of Our Lady's moral mediation concerns her share in the actual distribution of graces, that is to say, in the enduring process of applying to individual persons the supernatural merits acquired by Christ (and secondarily by herself) through the redemptive work. This is what theologians designate as Mary's cooperation in the subjective Redemption.

*Meaning.* Briefly stated, the meaning of this Marian prerogative is that all favors God grants to all men are granted in view of and because of Our Lady's actual intervention. This causality of hers, which is totally subordinate to that of Christ in the same process, is universal in its beneficiaries and likewise from its object's point of view. Thus, Mary's mediatorial intervention affects every member of the human race with the sole exception of Christ and herself. To those living before the objective Redemption was accomplished, including Adam and Eve, God made graces available in view of Mary's future merits, which were eternally present to Him. To those living after the objective Redemption, graces are granted through Mary's secondary efficient causality. Her mediation is likewise universal in that it grants every single grace without exception: sanctifying grace, the infused virtues, the gifts of the Holy Spirit, all actual graces, and even favors of the natural order insofar as they are related to the supernatural order. Our Lady does not, of course, produce the sanctifying grace given to men through the Sacraments. She does, however, intervene in its infusion in a twofold manner: (1)

remotely, inasmuch as that grace was merited by her (together with Christ) as coredemptrix; (2) proximately, inasmuch as the very desire to receive the Sacraments and the proper dispositions to do so worthily are made possible only through actual graces obtained through Mary's intercession.

Theologians differ concerning the precise nature of this causality. Some, such as Cardinal Alexis LÉPICIER, Édouard HUGON, Gabriel M. Roschini, and Réginald GARRIGOU-LAGRANGE, designate it as physical instrumental. The majority, however, believe that it is a moral causality by way of intercession. The arguments in favor of a physical-instrumental causality are based mostly on the traditional references to Mary as the channel, aqueduct, almoner, and treasurer of grace. But the proponents of moral causality point out that because these are metaphors, they hardly support the theory in question. The manner, then, in which Our Lady discharges her office as dispensatrix of all graces is specifically her intercession. She intercedes for men either expressly, by actually asking God to bestow a certain grace on a certain person, or interpretatively, by presenting to God her previous merits on men's behalf. While it is highly commendable to implore Our Lady's intercession in prayers, it is not necessary to do so. The graces men obtain from God are granted through her intercession whether she is invoked or not. As spiritual mother of men, Our Lady in Heaven is well aware of their spiritual needs and ardently desires to help them. Being the mother of God, the queen of all creation, and the coredemptrix of mankind, her appeal on men's behalf is most efficacious and always produces the intended results.

*Position of the Magisterium.* That Our Lady intervenes in the distribution of all heavenly favors to all men emerges quite clearly from the teaching authority of the Church as represented especially by the popes of the past two centuries. Thus BENEDICT XIV, in the bull *Gloriosae Dominae* (1748), likens Mary to "a heavenly stream through which the flow of all graces and favors reach the soul of every wretched mortal" (*Opera omnia* 1846, 428). Among the frequent allusions made by Leo XIII to this doctrine, the passage in the encyclical *Octobri mense* (1891) is particularly trenchant. After recalling that God had not wished to become incarnate in Mary's womb without first obtaining her consent, the pope adds: "It may be affirmed with no less truth and precision that, by the will of God, absolutely no part of that immense treasure of every grace which the Lord amassed ... is bestowed on us except through Mary" (*ASS* 1891, 195–196). St. Pius X in his encyclical *Ad diem illum* (1904), Benedict XV in his *Inter sodalicia* (1918), and Pius XII in his *Superiore anno* (1940) and *Doctor mellifluus* (1953) explicitly corroborate the traditional theme:

it is the will of God that one obtain every grace through Mary.

Pope JOHN XXIII also expressed the Church's faith in Mary's universal mediation:

For the faithful can do nothing more fruitful and salutary than to win for themselves the most powerful patronage of the Immaculate Virgin, so that by this most sweet Mother, there may be opened to them, all the treasures of the divine Redemption, and so they may have life, and have it more abundantly. Did not the Lord will that we have everything through Mary? (*Epistle to Cardinal Agagianian* 1959, 88)

The Second Vatican Council illustrated how Mary is mankind's Mother in the order of grace, and this motherhood in the economy of grace lasts without interruption from the consent that she gave in faith at the Annunciation, and which she unhesitatingly bore with under the cross, even to the perpetual consummation of all the elect. "For this reason, the Blessed Virgin Mary is invoked in the Church under the titles of Advocate, Auxiliatrix, Adiutrix, and Mediatrix. This however is to be so understood that it takes nothing away, or adds nothing to the dignity and efficacy of Christ the one Mediator" (*Lumen gentium [LG]* 1964, 62). Vatican II added that Mary's function as mother of men in no way obscures or diminishes this unique mediation of Christ, but rather shows its power. Therefore, far from being an obstacle to the exercise of Christ's unique mediation, Mary instead highlights its fruitfulness and efficacy. "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" (*LG* 60). Pope John Paul II has several times affirmed Mary's universal mediation and explained it in precise theological terms:

Thus there is a mediation: Mary places herself between her Son and mankind in the reality of its wants, needs and sufferings. She puts herself "in the middle," that is to say, she acts as a Mediatrix not as an outsider, but in her position as mother. She knows that, as such, she can point out to her Son the needs of mankind and in fact, she "has the right" to do so. Her mediation is thus in the nature of intercession: Mary "intercedes" for mankind. (*Redemptoris mater* 1987, 21)

*Liturgy.* The liturgical books of the Church, always a reliable index of Catholic belief, faithfully echo the



familiar strain found in papal documents. Thus the official prayer books of the Byzantines, Copts, Syrians, Armenians, and CHALDEANS abound in references to Mary's role as dispensatrix of all graces. As to the Latin liturgy, its most notable witness is embodied in the Office and Mass of Mary Mediatrix of All Graces. The text was composed by Joseph LEBON of the Catholic University of LOUVAIN at the suggestion of Cardinal Désiré Joseph MERCIER, archbishop of Malines, and approved by BENEDICT XV in 1921. The privilege to celebrate this feast on May 31 of each year was originally granted to the dioceses of Belgium, but it was soon extended to numerous other dioceses and religious orders throughout the world. When in 1954 Pius XII ordered the universal observance of Mary's queenship on May 31, the feast of Mary's mediation was discontinued by some and transferred by others. Since the revision of the calendar after the Second Vatican Council, the Feast of the Visitation is kept on May 31. In some calendars, Our Lady Mediatrix of All Graces is kept on May 24.

*Scripture.* What the popes and the liturgy proclaim in express terms, Sacred Scripture teaches by implication. It has been indicated above how the prophecy known as the Protoevangelium (Gn 3:15) already foreshadows the intimate association of Our Lady with her Son in the entire process of man's supernatural rehabilitation. Because the actual application of graces to the members of the Mystical Body is but the specific way in which they, as individuals, benefit from the redemptive work of the Savior, it seems logical to infer that Our Lady should have a share in it. In other words, if Our Lady, as coredeptrix, earned or acquired these graces with and under Christ, it is highly fitting that she should have a part in their actual dispensation to men. The unity of the divine plan would seem to demand it.

Another biblical passage bearing on the subject is Our Lord's testament from the cross (Jn 19:26–27), in which, according to the documents of recent popes, the Savior proclaimed His mother as mother of the entire human race. This motherhood of Mary implies a communication of grace (spiritual life) to her spiritual children, not only at the initial phase of regeneration on Calvary, but also in the subsequent process of conservation and development of that supernatural organism in the soul of her children.

*Tradition.* From the point of view of Tradition, the doctrine under discussion has undergone a gradual development reminiscent of other Marian theses. In the early period, or germinal stage, the doctrine was taught only implicitly by the numerous Fathers and ecclesiastical writers who portrayed Our Lady as the second Eve, the mother of all the living in the supernatural plane,

the associate of Christ as Savior of mankind. Appropriate references may be found, for example, in St. Irenaeus (d. c. 202), St. Epiphanius (d. 403), St. JEROME (d. 420), St. AUGUSTINE (d. 430), and St. Modestus of Jerusalem (d. 634). The eighth century yields the explicit testimony of St. Germanus of Constantinople (d. 733), who assures that "there is no one to whom the gift of grace is given except through Mary." It was, however, through the influence of St. BERNARD OF CLAIRVAUX (d. 1153) that this doctrine became widely accepted during the MIDDLE AGES. His statement that "God has willed that we should have nothing that did not pass through the hands of Mary" became a familiar apothegm in the Marian literature of subsequent centuries. The Franciscan St. BERNARDINE OF SIENA (d. 1444), who shares with St. Bernard the title *Doctor of Mary's Mediation*, summarizes the teaching of his age in these words: "I do not hesitate to say that she [Mary] has received a certain jurisdiction over all graces.... They are administered through her hands to whom she pleases, when she pleases, as she pleases, and as much as she pleases." During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the doctrine was not only generally accepted but also the object of extensive treatment within both dogmatic theology and devotional literature. The leading champion of the Catholic thesis during that period was St. ALPHONSUS DE LIGUORI (d. 1787), whose classic treatise *Glories of Mary* contains a vigorous refutation of the objections raised by Lodovico Antonio MURATORI (d. 1750).

In the twentieth century those who contributed most to the clarification of Mary's role as mediatrix are the Spanish Jesuit José M. Bover (d. 1954) and Joseph Bittremieux of the University of Louvain (d. 1950). Despite a few scattered adversaries, the Church generally regarded the traditional doctrine as definable. Shortly after WORLD WAR I and on the initiative of Cardinal Mercier, numerous petitions addressed to the Holy See urged defining the doctrine as an article of faith. These requests multiplied toward the turn of the century. For example, the petition of the Cuban hierarchy (1951) urged Pius XII to define both Our Lady's coredeemption and her actual intervention in the distribution of absolutely every grace.

*Difficulties and Responses.* Some proposed difficulties concerning a dogmatic definition of the Blessed Virgin Mary as Universal Mediatrix or Coredeptrix include, first, if this is a truth of faith, a definition seems unnecessary. A response is that the Immaculate Conception and Assumption were recognized truths, but were defined nonetheless. Others object that Marian Mediation and Coredeemption are truths *beyond any definition*. An answer is that the Divine Maternity itself is directed to the spiritual maternity and to its exercise, just as the divine Word was made flesh to save us. The third dif-

faculty touches the extent of Mary's mediation. Is she the Mother of angels too, or only of men; of sinners also, or only of the baptized who remain faithful? St. Paul's teaching concerning Christ's mediation provides an answer: "The Living God is the Savior of all men, especially of the believers" (1 Tim 4:10). The Marian transposition of the Pauline text by Vatican II in *Lumen gentium* 54 is clear. The Church also considers that Mary, exalted to divine motherhood in the order of hypostatic union, has merited, in dependence on Christ, for the angels, grace and glory. Following some Greek Fathers and St. Anselm, the Church considers a certain cosmic dimension of the Virgin's role in relation to all human and supernatural use in the universe. A fourth issue regards the *ecumenical dimension* of a definition: This definition would not constitute *in itself* an obstacle. Indeed, true Christian unity would not be possible without an agreement on Mary's spiritual motherhood, already held as a truth of faith by the Catholic Church. Also, a certain number of Anglicans and Protestants believe with the Orthodox the substance of the doctrine of spiritual motherhood, understood as unique and privileged cooperation of the Virgin with the economy of Redemption. Among those is Professor John Macquarrie in his *Principles of Christian Theology* (1966, p. 254), as well as in *Mary for All Christians*, where he explicitly approved the term *Coredemptrix* (Macquarrie 1990, p. 113). Finally, the question exists whether reflection on these truths has reached the degree of maturity necessary for its definition. A dogmatic definition would not necessarily entail technical discussions among theologians; it is not the custom with the supreme Magisterium of the Church to do so or to suppress the freedom of discussion among theologians in matters that are not of faith.

**SEE ALSO** DOMINICANS; EPIPHANIUS OF SALAMIS, ST.; GERMANUS I, PATRIARCH OF CONSTANTINOPLE, ST.; MARIOLGY; MARY, BLESSED VIRGIN (IN THEOLOGY); MYSTICAL BODY OF CHRIST; PROTOEVANGELIUM OF JAMES; SYRIAN LITURGY; TARASIVS, PATRIARCH OF CONSTANTINOPLE, ST.; TRINITY, HOLY; VATICAN COUNCIL II.

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*Rev. Juniper B. Carol OFM*  
Professor of Dogmatic Theology  
Tombrock College, Paterson, N.J.

*Rev. Dr. Paul M. Haffner*  
Full Professor, Department of Theology, Pontifical  
Athenaeum Regina Apostolorum, Rome, Italy  
Visiting Professor, Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome,  
Italy (2010)

## V. SPIRITUAL MATERNITY OF MARY

Of all the titles given to Mary by the faithful, there is none more common than the one used to indicate her spiritual Maternity—Mother. Paradoxically, however, there is perhaps no other prerogative of the Blessed Virgin that is less understood.

Two reasons may be advanced in explanation. There is, first of all, the nature of the terminology. When one calls Mary his Mother in the supernatural order, he is making use of analogy, a comparison between the divine and human levels. A failure to develop the full force of the comparison results in the deficient idea that Mary is spiritual Mother of men simply because of the love she has for them or because of her adoption of mankind at the foot of the Cross. Second, there is the neglect of an essential element of every maternity—a relationship with a person of the opposite sex. In the spiritual Maternity, this simply means the failure to associate Mary with Christ in the divine plan to give men spiritual life. Both of the above dangers have been avoided by the papal Magisterium.

**Reality of the Spiritual Maternity.** Since February 27, 1477, when Pope SIXTUS IV, in his apostolic constitution *Cum praeceles*, became the first pope to allude to the spiritual Motherhood of Mary (Mansi 1945, 32.373; Sericoli 1945, p. 153), the doctrine has been taught with ever-increasing emphasis. It can safely be asserted that this doctrine, having been taught clearly and repeatedly by the ordinary and universal Magisterium since

Sixtus IV's time, is certainly definable as a doctrine of faith. (See the extensive articles by Sebastian, and Shea). It is important, therefore, to ascertain the meaning given to the spiritual Maternity in the explanations of the papal Magisterium. There are three possible significations: (1) metaphorical—Mary acts in men's regard as a mother acts toward her children; she prays for them, she obtains grace for them, and so on; (2) adoptive—Christ willed that Mary adopt men as her children and that she possess the rights and fulfill all the duties of a mother toward men; and (3) real—Mary in some way transmits spiritual life to men by a kind of generation in the spiritual order and is, therefore, truly, the Mother of men.

In the present state of research it cannot be affirmed with certitude that the sovereign pontiffs from Sixtus IV to PIUS IX went beyond the metaphorical signification. While it is true that Pope LEO XIII and his successors speak most often about Mary's action in men's regard and their filial attitude toward her, yet for them these complementary attitudes are based on a most stable reality. At least twice, in his encyclicals *Quamquam pluries* (August 1889) and *Adiutricem populi* (September 1895), Leo XIII affirms that Mary "has brought us forth to life."

Although it cannot be denied that Leo XIII went beyond the simple metaphorical sense, some are inclined to think that he stopped at the juridical notion of an adoptive Motherhood. It is true that this pope placed great stress on Christ's donation of His Mother as the spiritual Mother of all mankind (see *Quamquam pluries* 9:175; *Octobri mense* 11:341; *Magnae Dei matris* 12:221; *Jucunda semper* 14:305; and *Amantissimae voluntatis* 15:138). Nevertheless, it must not be imagined that adoptive sonship necessarily excludes the idea of real filiation, for supernatural adoption surpasses a merely human adoption in one essential way: It really makes the person upon whom it is conferred a true son, for along with it comes a true participation in the nature and life of the person adopting. In other words, if Mary cooperates with her Son in meriting the divine life of grace for mankind, she is really the spiritual Mother of men.

Leo XIII's successor, Pope St. PIUS X, is explicit on the reality of Mary's spiritual Motherhood. For him the foundation is men's incorporation in Christ and the role of Mary in the INCARNATION:

Is not Mary the mother of Christ? She is therefore also our mother. It must be stated as a principle that Jesus, the Word made flesh, is at the same time the savior of the human race. Now, inasmuch as He is God-Man, He has a body like other men; inasmuch as He is redeemer of our race, He has a spiritual body, or, as it is called, a Mystical Body, which is