

## **The Mother Co-redemptrix and the New Evangelization**

LUIS CARDINAL APONTE MARTÍNEZ

Pope John Paul II has prophetically summoned the Church to undertake with the greatest possible diligence and comprehensibility a new global promulgation of the Good News of Jesus Christ, a worldwide “New Evangelization” of the Word of God.

As we contemplate the imperative for the New Evangelization, particularly in light of Pope John Paul’s 2001 Apostolic Letter, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, which promulgates the ecclesial call for this New Evangelization, the question must be posed: who was the first to “hear the word of God and keep it” (cf. Lk 11:28)? It was the Mother of the Lord, who so completely accepted the Word and kept it that she literally “gave flesh” to the Word (cf. Lk 1:38, Jn 1: 14).

Who was the first to “meet Christ” (Lk 1:38, NMI, 4)? It was the Mother. Who was the first to “see Jesus” (Jn 12:21) and to “contemplate his face” (Lk 2:7, NMI, 16)? It was the Mother. Who was the first to “witness to the Gospel,” to live the “life of faith,” to participate intrinsically and uniquely in the “depth of the mystery” of the hypostatic union (NMI, 17, 19, 21)? It was the Mother.

The human face that most closely resembles and reveals “the Son’s face” (NMI, 24) is the Mother’s face. And no one more deeply experienced the paradoxical and redemptive “Face of Sorrow” at Calvary (NMI, 25) than the Mother Co-redemptrix (cf. Jn 19:26-27). For this reason, the same Mother was the first, as tradition holds, to see the “face of the One who is risen” (NMI, 28).

As we have been called by John Paul II in *Novo Millennio Ineunte* to “direct our thoughts to the future which lies before us,” and that “in the final analysis, this rooting of the Church in time and space mirrors the movement of the Incarnation itself” (NMI, 3), I believe that the exalted and unparalleled role of the Mother of the Lord in the Incarnation and in the First Evangelization, which was divinely ordained by the perfect will of the heavenly Father, must be acknowledged, imitated, and thereby essentially incorporated in our universal ecclesial mission for the New Evangelization of the Third Millennium.

As a native son of the Americas, I am happy to testify to the providential form and method implemented by the Eternal Father in His sixteenth century mission of evangelization that took place for our peoples of America. The Father of all mankind sent us Mary as Our Lady of Guadalupe to be the motherly means of intercession in preparing the way for the Good News of Jesus Christ to reach the peoples of America. The historical result of sending the Mother in the order of grace (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 61) to precede and prepare the way for the evangelization of her Son and his Good News was nothing short of arguably the greatest single Christian evangelization since the first apostolic evangelization, for the historic evangelization of America produced as its spiritual catch what is presently the most populated Catholic continent in the world.

Should we not imitate the Father's wisdom as manifested by "the catch for the Lord" accomplished by Our Lady of Guadalupe, which manifests the superabundant efficacy of inviting the Mother of the Lord into a historic program of Evangelization?

"Starting Afresh from Christ" (NMI, 29) in the work of the New Evangelization should also mean starting afresh with Mary. Should we not formally and freely invite the Virgin Immaculate to "give flesh" to the New Evangelization as she did with the first great evangelization, and again with the evangelization of America? If the Mother of Evangelization is formally and solemnly invited into this contemporary casting into the deep for humanity, we can be confident that she will initiate a similar historic and superabundant catch for our present Church and world situation.

If we formally invite the Virgin Mother into the New Evangelization, who says to all peoples "do whatever he tells you" (Jn 2:5), and who leads human hearts to the Heart of Christ as only the Mother's heart can, then she will guide the peoples of this new millennium into a "new holiness" (NMI, 30). She is the Mediatrix of all graces who "taken up into heaven did not lay aside this saving office, but by her manifold intercession continues to bring us the gifts of eternal salvation" (LG, 62). She mediates the graces of first conversions and renewed conversion to her Son and his Church.

If we solemnly invite the Virgin Mother into the New Evangelization, she will guide the peoples of the new millennium in the "art of prayer" (NMI, 32). It was the motherly Advocate in the Upper Room who by her imploring prayers for the first disciples of the Lord uniquely interceded for the descent

of the Holy Spirit at the first Pentecost (cf. Acts 1:14; *Redemptoris Mater*, 24, 40).

The same maternal Advocate can instruct and intercede for the contemporary Church and world for the fulfillment of the conciliar petition of Bl. John XXIII of happy memory, that is for a “New Pentecost,” a new descent of the Spirit over the earth and into the hearts of all peoples as the “soul” of the New Evangelization.

If we formally invite the Virgin Mother into the New Evangelization, then she will lead the peoples of the new millennium to the “Sunday Eucharist” (NMI, 35) as Mother of the Eucharist, particularly during our present celebration of the Year of the Eucharist. Who better to guide the peoples of the Third Millennium as “Witnesses to Love” (NMI, 42) than the Mother of Love: she who both “gave Love flesh” (Lk 1:38), who was spiritually crucified and, in her heart, died with “Crucified Love” at Calvary (cf. Jn 19:27). It is the same Mother and Mediatrix of all graces who brings to us the graces of Resurrected Love so as to empower us to live the new commandment to “love one another” (Jn 13:34).

My brother cardinals, bishops, and priests, which one of us, reviving the memories of our priestly and episcopal vocations, does not recognize that we owe special gratitude to the intercession of the Mother of Priests and Queen of Apostles for our own vocations? Let us not deny that same maternal intercession for the desperately needed priestly vocations for the Church and for the peoples of this new millennium and its successful evangelization (NMI, 46).

The great ecumenical imperative of our day (NMI, 48), constitutes one of the most urgent of Christian necessities and therefore is in greatest need of the powerful intercession of the Mother of Unity. Is it not time to formally invite “our common Mother” (RM, 30) to utilize fully the spiritual power of her motherly heart in unifying the sons and daughters of God into the one Body of Christ? It is now time to definitively turn to the Mother of all Christians to implore the graces necessary to fulfill the yet unfulfilled “ut unum sint” prayer of the one Lord (Jn 17:21).

The Theotokos-Mediatrix especially awaits to be formally invited to bring unity amidst the “two lungs of the Church” (RM, 34), where her common maternal presence in the East and in the West, who both so

profoundly share the Mother's love and grace, can truly effect a final spiritual adhesion of the Churches. New unity requires new humility. We must humble ourselves as yet divided children and see that only by the Mother's intercession can the children return in peace and lasting unity within the one Heart and Body of the Lord.

Pope John Paul II calls us to "stake everything on charity" (NMI, 49). In our modern theological and philosophical advancements in the formulation of an authentic Christian "personalism," founded on the need to love and respect the freedom of the individual person, is it then of any surprise that the Mother of all peoples likewise respects humanity's freedom? She will not impose herself on the New Evangelization. She will not, in obedience to the Father's heavenly design, force the graces of her spiritual roles of mediation upon the Church and the world, even for the good end of the New Evangelization. She must be formally invited.

How much the Mother of all peoples desires to fully intercede with the heavenly grace, redemption and peace of the Son to remedy the grave crises constituting "Today's Challenges" (NMI, 51)! How the Mother of Life longs to crush under foot the Culture of Death and its ancient Protagonist (cf. Gen. 3:15). How the Queen of Peace eagerly longs to intercede for a true peace for the Holy Lands and for all global places of fratricidal struggle, by establishing the spiritual peace of Christ among nations through the presence of the Spirit in the hearts of peoples. How the Mother of the New Creation longs to implore the Sanctifier to renew the face of the earth, and thus safeguard both people and planet in a renewed and properly prioritized awareness of Christian stewardship.

But the Virgin Immaculate, always obedient to the Father of all mankind, awaits our free invitation. Without our human cooperation, the Mother cannot fully activate her titles and roles of sanctification for her contemporary children.

How then do we properly and formally invite the Mother of the Lord and Mother of all peoples into the New Evangelization for the new millennium?

The past two centuries were graced with the papal definitions of two great Marian dogmas, the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption. I believe the time is now for the papal definition of her relationship to each

one of us, her earthly children, in her roles as our Co-redemptrix, Mediatrix of all graces, and Advocate.

It is by solemnly proclaiming the Christian truth that Mary is the spiritual Mother of all peoples that the Virgin Mother is fully released to bring forth the fruits of the New Evangelization and even more for our present critical world situation. It is by formally recognizing the maternal gift of great price given from the Heart of the Crucified Christ to every human heart at Calvary that we would most fully show appreciation and obedience to, “behold, your mother” (Jn 19:27), that we rejoice and give thanks for the great gift of her as our Mediatrix and Advocate, as she is clearly called in *Lumen Gentium* (LG, 62).

Is not the Christian truth of her Maternal Mediation the theological foundations of our Marian conciliar teaching (cf. LG, 56, 57, 58, 61, 62), of the “Ave Maria,” of the praying of the Rosary, of the acts of Marian consecrations and entrustments, of the historic events of Guadalupe and Fatima, and of the Pope’s own personal motto, *Totus Tuus*?

To solemnly proclaim the Virgin Immaculate as the Mother of all peoples, Co-redemptrix, Mediatrix of all graces, and Advocate is to fully and officially recognize her titles and, consequently, to activate, to bring to new life the spiritual functions they offer for humanity. This free act on the part of the Church, which reflects the freedom of all humanity, thus releases the Mother in the order of freedom and grace to fully intercede with these spiritual and maternal roles given her by God for the sanctification of the peoples of the world. As such, the Mother of the New Evangelization would be fully commissioned by humanity’s exercise of free will to “bring us the gifts of eternal salvation” afresh and anew (cf. LG, 62), which in turn will bring to new life the Incarnation and the Gospel in the hearts of her earthly children.

The dogmatic proclamation of the Mother of all peoples, Co-redemptrix, Mediatrix, and Advocate is the gateway to the New Evangelization. It is the “new Cana,” the renewed bridge that connects the human heart with the newly announced Heart of Christ in this new evangelization which is properly effected only through the Heart of the Mother (cf. Jn 2:5).

My brothers, we must remember that the intercessory role of the Mother is not the invention of man, but the divine design and disposition of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The ultimate criterion which should guide our discernment concerning such a proclamation, beyond the limited understandings and strategies of the human mind, is “What would the Lord desire?” “What would please the Lord in implementing a new worldwide evangelization?”

I believe it would greatly please the Lord of the New Evangelization to solemnly recognize and invite His Mother into the mission of the New Evangelization by solemnly proclaiming that we do accept the gift of his Mother as our own, and that we do recognize her mediational role as the best way to “duc in altum” (Lk 5:4).

Contrariwise we must consider the challenging question: if we attempt to “put out into the deep” without the full intercessory power of the Mother and Star of the New Evangelization, how many fish, entrusted to us, his fishermen, may be lost? Why would we exclude the greatest possible mediation of the Mother from the task assigned her by the Heavenly Father, in union with the Son, and sustained by the Spirit, in the spiritual evangelization of her earthly children?

Pope John Paul II has asked the Blessed Virgin Mary, in his document on the New Evangelization to “behold her children” (NMI, 58). I believe it is now time that we, her children, raise our voices to solemnly and officially “behold our Mother” (cf. Jn 19:27), by positively responding to the request of over 550 episcopal brothers and almost seven million faithful worldwide to solemnly and papally define that the Virgin Immaculate is the Mother of all peoples, Co-redemptrix, Mediatrix of all graces, and Advocate. I would pray that as the fruit of our final deliberations at this symposium in Our Lady’s special shrine of Fatima, and through her extraordinary intercession that we, brother cardinals and bishops, may be inspired to resolve to a common petition for the solemn definition of the maternal mediation of Our Lady. I would like to further offer the invitation that perhaps one or two brother cardinals present here could personally present our joint fraternal petition, God willing, to our new Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, as a humble but authentic expression of our apostolic hearts for this proposed Marian dogma in honor of Our Mother Mary, and in obedience and solidarity to the final judgment of the heart of our new Vicar of Christ on earth.