

Mary as Mediatrix of Grace: A Request to the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith for Clarification

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On July 5, 2024, the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith [DDF], published a Letter to the Bishop of Brescia that affirms that nothing stands in the way (*nihil obstat*) for the faithful to believe in the “Rosa Mystica” apparitions received by Pierina Gilli (1911–1991) at Fontanelle di Montichiari, Italy.¹ The letter brings out many important insights. For example, it says “that everything Mary does in us always directs us toward Jesus Christ.”

There is, though, one paragraph in the Letter that has raised some questions. In seeking to clarify various expressions in Pierina’s *Diaries* such as “Mary of Grace” and “Mary Mediatrix,” the DDF provides this commentary:

At the same time, it must be maintained that only the Lord can act in people’s hearts by bestowing sanctifying grace that uplifts and transforms, because sanctifying grace is “first and foremost the gift of the *Spirit* who justifies and sanctifies us” (CCC, no. 2003; emphasis added), “it is the gratuitous gift that God makes to us of *his* own life, infused by the Holy Spirit into our soul” (CCC, no. 1999; emphasis added). **In this action, which only God can do in the depths without overlooking our freedom, there is no other possible mediation, not even that of the Blessed Virgin Mary.** Her cooperation is always to be understood in the sense of her maternal intercession and in the context of her helping to create provisions for us to be open to the action of sanctifying grace. The Second Vatican Council explained that

¹ Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Letter to the Bishop of Brescia about the Devotion to Mary the “Rosa Mystica” (Mystical Rose) (Montichiari, Italy)* (July 5, 2024): https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_ddf_doc_20240705_lettera-devozione-mariarosamistica_en.html

since God “elicits in his creatures a manifold cooperation, which is but a sharing in this one source,” for this reason, “the Church does not hesitate to profess this subordinate role of Mary (LG, 62) [emphasis added].

Certainly, the source of sanctifying grace is God and not Mary. This is what St. Pius X emphasized in his 1904 encyclical when he said that “We are ...very far from attributing to the Mother of God a productive power of grace—a power that belongs to God alone” (Denz.-H, 3370). It is also true that only God is capable of sanctifying souls with his divine grace. How, though, does the action of sanctifying grace exclude Mary’s *mediation* of the divine grace that sanctifies us? The DDF says that “in this action [of sanctifying grace], which only God can do in the depths without overlooking our freedom, there is no other possible mediation, not even that of the Blessed Virgin Mary.” The mediation of divine grace by Mary, though, does not mean that she is the *source* or the power of divine grace. It does, however, mean that she is active in the *mediation* of the divine grace that sanctifies us.

The DDF’s Letter recognizes that the Virgin Mary’s “maternal intercession” helps “to create provisions for us to be open to the action of sanctifying grace.” Mary’s maternal intercession is certainly a form of mediation. Numerous popes, though, have referred to Our Lady as the “Mediatrice of *all* graces.” If Mary is the Mediatrice of *all* graces, then she would also be the Mediatrice of the grace that sanctifies us.

There are different ways of describing the causality of Marian meditation. Some theologians speak of instrumental causality while others prefer to speak of moral causality. Apart from these different theological explanations, numerous popes have affirmed Mary as the Mediatrice of all graces. Here are some examples:

- Pope Benedict XIV in his 1748 Bull, *Gloriosae Dominae*, describes the Blessed Virgin as “a celestial stream through which the flow of all graces and gifts reach the soul of all wretched mortals.”²
- Pope Pius VII, in his 1806 apostolic constitution, *Quod Divino afflata Spiritu*, refers to Mary as the “Dispensatrix of all graces.”³
- Bl. Pope Pius IX, in his 1849 encyclical, *Ubi primum*, writes: “For God has committed to Mary the treasury of all good things, in order that everyone may know that through her are obtained every hope, every grace, and all salvation.”⁴
- Pope Leo XIII, in his 1891 apostolic letter, *Octobri mense*, writes: “Consequently, it may be affirmed with no less truth and justice that absolutely nothing from this immense treasury of all the graces brought forth by the Lord—inasmuch as ‘grace and truth have come from Jesus Christ’ [Jn 1:17]—is imparted to us, by the will of God, except through Mary (*nisi per Mariam*).”⁵
- St. Pius X, in his 1904 encyclical, *Ad diem illum*, speaks of Mary as “the supreme minister of the distribution of graces.”⁶(Denz.-H, 3370).
- In a 1919 decree anticipating the canonization of St. Joan of Arc, Benedict XV refers to Mary as “the Mediatrix of all graces” (*Mediatrix omnium gratiarum*).⁷

² Pope Benedict XIV (1740-1758), *Op. Omnia*, v. 16, ed., Prati, 1846, p.428.

³ Pope Pius VII (1800-1823), *Ampliatio privilegiorum ecclesiae B.M. Virginis (Florentiae: 1806)*, § 1.

⁴ Pope Pius IX (1846-1878), encyclical letter, *Ubi Primum*, 1849:

<https://www.vatican.va/content/pius-ix/it/documents/enciclica-ubi-primum-2-febbraio-1849.html>.

⁵ Pope Leo XIII, encyclical, *Octobri mense* (September 22, 1891): Denz.-H, 3274.

⁶ Pius X, encyclical, *Ad diem illum* (February 2, 1904): Denz.-H, 3370.

⁷ *La Documentation Catholique* I (1919), 322; see also Fr. Manfred Hauke, *Mary, Mediatrix of Grace* (New Bedford, MA: Academy of the Immaculate, 2004), 52.

- In 1921 Pope Benedict XV approves the Mass and Office of the Feast of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mediatrix of All Graces.⁸
- Pius XI, in his 1932 encyclical, *Caritate Christi compulsi*, points to the powerful patronage of the Virgin Mother of God, “the Mediatrix of all graces” (*Virginis Deiparae, omnium gratiarum Mediatricis*).⁹
- Pius XII, in his apostolic constitution, *Sedes sapientiae* of May 31, 1956, speaks of Mary as “the One who was constituted Mediatrix of all graces regarding sanctification (“ ... *quae gratiarum omnium ad sanctificationem spectantium Mediatricis constituta est ...*”).¹⁰
- St. John XXIII, in his May 26, 1961 apostolic letter, *Beatissimum Virginem Mariam*, grants the title of Minor Basilica to the Ugandan Church dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mediatrix of All Graces, Sultana of Africa. In this letter, he refers to “the Virgin Mary, Mediatrix of All Graces (*Virginem Mariam, Omnium Gratiarum Sequestram*).¹¹
- St. Paul VI, in his 1965 encyclical, *Menso Maio*, says that “we must not forget that ‘the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort,’ (2 Cor 1:3) ... has appointed Mary most holy as the generous administrator (*generosam administram*) of the gifts of his mercy.”¹²

⁸ Hauke, 55–56.

⁹ *AAS* 24 (1932), p.192.

¹⁰ *AAS* 48 (1956), p. 354.

¹¹ *AAS* 54 (1962), p. 150.

¹² *AAS* 57 (1965), p.357.

- St. John Paul II referred to Mary as the Mediatrix of all graces (or its equivalent) at least nine times.¹³ For example, in his Angelus Address of January 17, 1988, he refers to the Egyptian Church of Our Lady in Medai as a shrine where many pilgrims come to entrust their intentions to “the Mediatrix of all graces” (*Mediatrice di tutte le grazie*).¹⁴
- Pope Benedict XVI, in his January 10, 2013 Letter to Archbishop Sigismundo Zimowski (who was representing the Holy See for the celebration of the 21st World Day of the Sick), commends his mission “by imploring the prayers and intercessions of the Blessed Immaculate Virgin Mary, the Mediatrix of all graces” (*implenda precibus comitamur atque intercessioni Beatae Virginis Mariae Immaculatae, Mediatricis omnium gratiarum, commendamus*).¹⁵
- Pope Francis, in his May 13, 2023 Message of Pope Francis to Archbishop Gian Franco Saba of Sassari, Sardinia, Italy, notes that “One of the most ancient titles by which Christians have invoked the Virgin Mary is precisely ‘the Mediatrix of all graces.’”¹⁶

All these references show that numerous popes have recognized Mary as the Mediatrix of *all* graces. How could Mary be the Mediatrix

¹³ Msgr. Arthur B. Calkins, “Mary, Mediatrix of All Graces, in the Papal Magisterium of Pope John Paul II,” in *Mary at the Foot of the Cross—VII: Coredemptrix, Therefore Mediatrix of All Graces* (New Bedford, MA: Academy of the Immaculate, 2008), 51–54.

¹⁴ John Paul II, Angelus Address (January 17, 1988): https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/angelus/1988/documents/hf_jp-ii_ang_19880117.html.

¹⁵ Benedict XVI, letter (January 10, 2013): https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/la/letters/2013/documents/hf_ben-xvi_let_20130110_card-zimowski.html.

¹⁶ Pope Francis, Message for the “Festa del Voto” in Sassari, Sardinia, Italy (May 13, 2023): <https://www.arcidiocesisassari.it/2023/05/28/festa-del-voto-il-messaggio-del-santo-padre/22881/>.

of all graces yet in the divine action of sanctifying grace in individual souls “there is no other possible mediation, not even that of the Blessed Virgin Mary?”

Perhaps the DDF’s point is that we should not confuse the action of God with the mediation of Mary. This, to be sure, is an important point; but the *mediation* of grace is not the same as the *action* of grace. The mediation of grace can take different forms without compromising the divine action of grace. Pius XII, in his 1954 encyclical, *Ad Caeli Reginam*, raises this question:

For if through His Humanity the divine Word performs miracles and gives graces, if He uses His Sacraments and Saints as instruments for the salvation of men, why should He not make use of the role and work of His most holy Mother in imparting to us the fruits of redemption?¹⁷

According to Pius XII, the sacraments mediate grace because they are used by God as instruments of his grace. The Church, as “the universal sacrament of salvation”¹⁸ is used by God to mediate grace. In a similar way, the Blessed Virgin Mary is used by God as an instrument of the Holy Spirit in the mediation of grace. In his General Audience of November 13, 2024, Pope Francis refers to the Mother of God as “an instrument of the Holy Spirit in His work of sanctification.”¹⁹ The work of sanctification takes place in human souls. If the Mother of God is an instrument of the Holy Spirit in the sanctification of souls, then it seems that she is also a Mediatrix of the grace that sanctifies souls.

Mary’s *mediation* of grace is not the same as the divine *action* of grace. Mary’s mediation of grace is united to God’s action in the

¹⁷ Pius XII, encyclical, *Ad Caeli Reginam* (Oct. 11, 1954); *AAS* 46 (1954), p. 636.

¹⁸ Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes* (December 7, 1965), no. 45.

¹⁹ Pope Francis, General Audience (November 13, 2024).

sanctification of souls, but it is always a subordinate and dependent cooperation with God's action. St. Paul VI, in his 1967 apostolic exhortation, *Signum magnum*, offers this reflection:

Indeed, just as no human mother can limit her task to the generation of a new man but must extend it to the function of nourishing and educating her offspring, thus the blessed Virgin Mary, after participating in the redeeming sacrifice of the Son, and in such an intimate way as to deserve to be proclaimed by Him the Mother not only of His disciple John but—may we be allowed to affirm it—of mankind which he in some way represents, now continues to fulfill from heaven her maternal function **as the cooperator in the birth and development of divine life in the individual souls of redeemed men.** This is a most consoling truth which, by the free consent of God the All-Wise, is an integrating part of the mystery of human salvation; **therefore it must be held as faith by all Christians** (emphasis added).²⁰

Paul VI reaffirms Mary's cooperation in the birth and development of divine life in human souls in his June 30, 1968 *Credo of the People of God*:

Joined by a close and indissoluble bond to the Mysteries of the Incarnation and Redemption, the Blessed Virgin, the Immaculate, was at the end of her earthly life raised body and soul to heavenly glory and likened to her risen Son in anticipation of the future lot of all the just; and we believe that the Blessed Mother of God, the New Eve, Mother of the Church, continues in heaven her maternal role with regard to Christ's members, **cooperating with the birth and growth**

²⁰ Paul VI, apostolic exhortation, *Signum magnum* (May 13, 1967), Part I, n.1.

of divine life in the souls of the redeemed (emphasis added).²¹

If Mary cooperates with the birth and growth of divine life in the souls of the redeemed, it seems that she is intimately involved in the mediation of the sanctifying grace of God in individual souls. Her mediation of grace is, as *Lumen gentium*, 62 teaches, a sharing or “participated cooperation” in the one source of Christ’s unique mediation (*participatam ex unico fonte cooperationem*). *Lumen gentium*, 63 states that

The Son whom she [Mary] brought forth is He whom God placed as the first-born among many brethren (cf. Rom 8: 29), that is, the faithful **in whose generation and formation she co-operates with a mother's love** (*Filium autem peperit, quem Deus posuit primogenitum in multis fratribus [cf. Rom 8:29], fidelibus nempe, cooperator ad quos gignendos et educandos materno amore* (emphasis added).

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 501 cites *Lumen gentium*, 63 to show that Mary’s “spiritual motherhood extends to all men whom He came to save.” As the spiritual Mother of all the saved, Mary participates and cooperates “in the birth and development of divine life in the individual souls of redeemed men” (as St. Paul VI teaches in *Signum magnum*).

St. John Paul II, in his 1987 encyclical, *Redemptoris Mater*, likewise points to Mary’s intimate union with Christ in the sanctification of souls:

In fact, the Council teaches that the "motherhood of Mary in the order of grace...will last without interruption until the

²¹ Paul VI, *Credo of the People of God* (June 30, 1968), no. 15; *AAS* 60 (1968), p. 439.

eternal fulfillment of all the elect" (*Lumen gentium*, 62). With the redeeming death of her Son, **the maternal mediation of the handmaid of the Lord took on a universal dimension**, for the work of redemption embraces the whole of humanity. Thus there is manifested in a singular way the efficacy of the one and universal mediation of Christ "between God and men." **Mary's cooperation shares, in its subordinate character, in the universality of the mediation of the Redeemer, the one Mediator.** This is clearly indicated by the Council in the words quoted above (emphasis added).²²

If the Virgin Mary's maternal mediation of grace is universal, then it cannot be excluded in the sanctification of souls. St. John Paul II teaches: "Mary's cooperation shares, in its subordinate character, in the universality of the mediation of the Redeemer, the one Mediator."

The exact way in which Mary mediates sanctifying grace with and under her divine Son is a mystery that needs further theological exploration and development. The tradition of the Church, though, seems to affirm that Mary's mediation of grace is not simply that of intercession but also that of *cooperation* in the sanctification of souls. This is why Benedict XVI, in his May 11, 2007 homily for the Mass and canonization of Fr. Antônio de Sant'Ana Galvão in São Paulo, Brazil, stated that "there is no fruit of grace in the history of salvation that does not have as its necessary instrument the mediation of Our Lady."²³ According to Benedict XVI, Mary's mediation of grace, with and under Christ, the one Mediator, is a necessary instrument for the fruit of grace. This means that Mary's mediation *is present with and united to* the action of divine grace in individual souls.

²² John Paul II, encyclical, *Redemptoris Mater* (March 25, 1987), no. 40.

²³ Benedict XVI, homily in, São Paulo, Brazil (May 11, 2007).

Pope Francis, in his August 5, 2024 homily at St. Mary Major's Basilica in celebration of the memorial of Our Lady of the Snows, said that, "she [Mary] is the Mediatrix of the grace that flows always and only through Jesus Christ, by the action of the Holy Spirit (*lei è la mediatrice della grazia che sgorga sempre e solo da Gesù Cristo, per opera dello Spirito Santo*)."²⁴ If Mary is the Mediatrice of the grace, which originates in Jesus Christ and comes to us through the power of the Holy Spirit, it seems that she is also the Mediatrix of all sanctifying grace, for this is the only grace that can save and sanctify us. The words of Pope Francis seem difficult to reconcile with the view that "in this action [of sanctifying grace] ... there is no other possible mediation, not even that of the Blessed Virgin Mary." Pope Francis, on the contrary, recognizes Mary as the *Mediatrice* of this grace.

In its September 19, 2024 "Note on the Spiritual Experience Connected with Medjugorje," the DDF rightly states that "Mary's mediatory cooperation is 'subordinate' to the mediation of Christ (cf. *Redemptoris Mater*, par. 39)" and Mary's cooperation "neither takes away from nor adds anything to the dignity and efficaciousness of Christ the one Mediator" (*Lumen gentium*, n.62).²⁵ These points are certainly true. The Virgin Mary, though, has been called "mediatrix" since the fifth or sixth century.²⁶ When Vatican II calls Mary Mediatrix in *Lumen gentium*, n. 62, it includes among its citations a passage from St. Andrew of Crete (c. 660-740), who extols Mary as

²⁴ Pope Francis, *Omelià Della Celebrazione Dei Secondi Vespri In Occasione Dell'Anniversario Della Basilica Papale di Santa Maria Maggiore e Della Solennità Della Madonna Delle Neve*, (Homily of the Celebration of Second Vespers on the Occasion of the Anniversary of the Papal Basilica of St. Mary Major and the Solemnity of the Lady of the Snows), Rome, August 5, 2024.

²⁵ DDF, "The Queen of Peace" *Note About the Spiritual Experience Connected with Medjugorje* (September 19, 2024):

https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_ddd_d oc_20240919_nota-esperienza-medjugorje_en.html.

²⁶ Cf. Michael O'Carroll, CSSp, *Theotokos: A Theological Encyclopedia of the Blessed Virgin Mary* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2000), 240.

the “mediatrix of law and grace” (*Salve legis ac gratiae mediatrix [mesitis]*).²⁷ Such mediation seems to go beyond that of intercession.

I bring forth these references and concerns in accordance with canon 212§ 3 of the *Codex Iuris Canonici* and no. 30 of the 1990 Instruction, *Donum veritatis* of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. I am simply trying to understand how what the DDF says about Marian mediation in its July 5, 2024 Letter can be reconciled with what has been previously taught by the Church. I hope and pray the DDF can clarify these matters in the future. May the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mediatrix of all graces, pray for us.

²⁷ S. Andreas Cret., *In Nat. Mariae, Sermo* IV, PG 97, 865 A; *Acta Synodalia* III, pars 1, 371.