

# COLUMNISTS

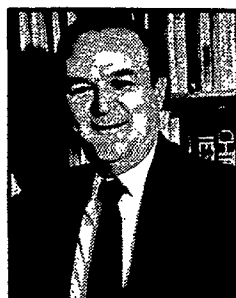
## Mary as Co-Redemptrix only a rumor

A rumor has persisted throughout this pontificate that John Paul II will eventually proclaim as an infallible dogma that the Blessed Virgin Mary is Co-Redemptrix of the human race along with her son, Jesus Christ. This rumor has sometimes been accompanied by another, namely, that Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, has heretofore prevented the pope from taking this action.

Rumors have a lengthy shelf-life only if they possess some element of credibility, however minimal. Otherwise, a rumor can be dismissed as fanciful nonsense. Examples: The pope will elevate Father Hans Küng to the rank of cardinal at the next consistory; or he intends to resign from the papacy on his 81st birthday in May and will urge the cardinal-electors to support Milan's Cardinal Carlo Martini as his successor.

There is as much chance of either as there would have been of President George W. Bush's withdrawing his nomination of Sen. John Ashcroft as attorney general and submitting the name of Massachusetts' U.S. Rep. Barney Frank.

Alas, the rumor about a possible definition of Mary as Co-Redemptrix cannot be relegated so easily to the category of the bizarre or the unthinkable. The Holy



By FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

essays in theology

Father's intense devotion to Mary is well known. His episcopal motto is "Totus tuus," which means "All yours." The "yours" in this instance is not Jesus; it is Mary. There is also a large "M" (for Mary) on his papal coat-of-arms.

The rumor about the possible new dogma was given renewed currency by way of a prominent article on the front page of the Arts & Ideas section of *The New York Times* (12/23/00).

Beneath a half-page, black-and-white reproduction of Raphael's "Madonna Sistina," the headline read: "Seeking a Promotion for the Virgin Mary." Alongside the opening paragraphs of the story there is a photograph of the pope with Mark Miravalle, a professor of theology at the Franciscan University in Steubenville, Ohio, widely regarded as the premier ul-

tra-conservative Catholic educational institution in the United States.

Professor Miravalle has written three volumes on the topic of Mary as Co-Redemptrix and seems to have emerged as a major force in promoting this pious belief, held by some Catholics, to the status of a dogma to be believed by all Catholics, under pain of heresy.

Miravalle began a petition drive four years ago. According to *The New York Times*, the Vatican has received more than 6 million signatures from 148 countries. The Steubenville professor also claims to have received support from 550 bishops and 42 cardinals, including Cardinal John O'Connor of New York and Mother Teresa before their deaths.

*The Times'* reporter speculated that if the campaign to declare Mary as Co-Redemptrix were to succeed, she would become "something close to a fourth member of the Holy Trinity." One can only assume that not even Professor Miravalle would hold such an extreme and self-evidently heretical position.

Although there is precedent for the papal proclamation of Marian dogmas — the Immaculate Conception by Pius IX in 1854 and the Assumption by Pius XII in 1950 — this one would disrupt the unity of the church in almost unimaginable ways.

Not only would it divide Catholics from non-Catholic Christians, but it would also divide Catholics from Catholics. If ever there were a potential catalyst for a schism in the Catholic Church, this would be it.

Marian scholars more reputable than Professor Miravalle have raised flags of caution, for example, Father John Roten, director of the International Marian Library at the University of Dayton, and Father René Laurentin, a well-known conservative French theologian and biblical scholar, who insists, "There is no mediation or co-redemption except in Christ. He alone is God."

In 1997, 23 leading experts on Mariology met in Poland and voted unanimously against the proposed dogma. The scholars underscored the ambiguity of the title "Co-Redemptrix" and expressed the fear that such a definition would only worsen ecumenical relations.

*The New York Times* quotes Miravalle as saying that Pope John Paul II, with whom he claims to have visited privately several times, will most surely define this dogma.

Fortunately for the Catholic Church and for all Christians, it will never happen.

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Father McBrien is a professor of theology at the University of Notre Dame.

## A priest shouldn't be an 'army of one'

I've been in a phase of circular reasoning this morning. I'll show you what happened, and how I arrived at a completely unexpected thought. First, I decided that I would take an inventory of my character flaws. Expecting to find about four, I sat down with a small piece of paper. I abandoned the exercise when I had reached 17. The paper was too small to continue. (My secretary said I should have used a flip chart.)

Anyway, I looked at this long list and was especially disillusioned by No. 3: imagining that I alone am responsible for everything — good and bad — that happens around me. This is especially true in my work. Somehow, I've become guilty of a core sin affecting many people in church ministry: I feel "overly accountable" for all that happens. This, of course, can make even ordinary responsibilities seem like really heavy burdens.

Correcting this flaw means that I have to substitute thoughts and behaviors that support these ideas instead: "I'm part of a team, we make decisions together, and as long as I contribute to the group, use my wisdom and gifts, I've done my part." This makes things seem less a burden, allows greater insight into the problems and opportunities, and is far more realistic.



By PATRICIA SCHOELLES, SSJ

the moral life

This thought triggered another. The army has a new slogan for recruiting. It is: "An Army of One." Like everyone else, I'm used to "Be All That You Can Be." When I first heard "An Army of One," I found myself questioning its meaning. I postulated that military recruiters must be trying to cash in on characteristic American ideals of individualism and self-reliance, on familiar images like pulling ourselves up by our bootstraps.

At first glance I take these to be positive notions. But on deeper reflection, I think they are capable of distortion, too. These notions contribute to attitudes that actually serve to isolate us from one another. Instead of helping us to become skilled at interdependence and teamwork, American individualism can make genuine com-

munity seem illusory. Personal power becomes an overriding good, while receiving the gifts of others is given little value.

This affects our approach to church ministry, too. Here's the example that came to mind. Like everyone, I've been reading a lot these days about the priest shortage. Countless reasons are offered for why fewer men are undertaking this ministry. Myriad solutions are proposed. Bishop Clark has encouraged all of us to think about ways in which we can support priests as their numbers decline and workloads increase.

As I related my earlier reflections on individualism to this situation, I found myself thinking along these lines: Priesthood is one ministry among others. We rely on pastoral associates, liturgical and youth ministry, social justice ministry, religious education, the diaconate and many other forms of ministries in which we all engage. Priestly ministry depends on collaboration with and support from the other ministries, and vice versa.

I think that too often we project onto priests a kind of "Army of One" set of expectations, except that in this case it is "a Church of One." Instead of appreciating priesthood as one ministry among others, we become nearly apoplectic as we cry

out with fear about "running out of them." I am guilty of this myself.

My proposal after all this is that, for the good of priests — present and future — we grow in our appreciation of priesthood as one ministry among many. We need to try harder to interest men who are genuine Christian leaders to consider priesthood as a vocation. At the same time we all need to think about our own ministerial vocations. If we continue to talk as if priesthood means being "a Church of One" apart from competent, compassionate and dedicated colleagues in ministry, we will lose viable candidates and ensure that the priests we have will be sentenced to stress-filled, unhappy lives.

Ironically, maybe part of the solution to the shortage of priests is for the rest of us to see ourselves as partners with priests, as we work together in faith to realize the kingdom of God on earth. To the extent that we impose being "a Church of One" on priests, we sap energy and vitality from that wonderful calling, and deprive the church of the wonderful richness that varying and complementary ministries bring.

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Sister Schoelles is president of St. Bernard's Institute.

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