

## Reflections on the Pontifical Commissioner's Letter of February 22, 2006

– [hyperlink to the Pontifical Commissioner's letter](#) –

The Pontifical Commissioner for the Sons of Mary, Archbishop Terrence Prendergast, wrote to them on February 22, 2006, to formulate a demand concerning their devotion to the Lady of All Peoples and to present to them the program of certain religious authorities regarding the Community of the Sons of Mary, in the months to come.

That letter encourages us to question ourselves on our obedience to God and to the Church, and the exemplary life of certain Christians may help us in our reflections. Did not Pope Benedict XVI declare in his first encyclical, *God Is Love*: “The saints are the true bearers of light within history, for they are men and women of faith, hope and love” (no. 40)?

### **Mary, Our First Model**

The Virgin Mary is the model par excellence for every Christian. As Pope Benedict XVI emphasized in his encyclical, Mary, who had placed herself “at the disposal of God’s initiatives”, had adopted as a program of life:

“Not setting herself at the centre, but leaving space for God, who is encountered both in prayer and in service of neighbour.... She knows that she will only contribute to the salvation of the world if, rather than carrying out her own projects, she places herself completely at the disposal of God’s initiatives.... Her thoughts are attuned to the thoughts of God, her will is one with the will of God.” (*God Is Love*, no. 41)

Intimately united with God, Mary let herself be “totally pervaded by him – a condition which enables those who have drunk from the fountain of God’s love to become in their turn a fountain from which ‘flow rivers of living water’ (Jn 7:38).” (*Id.*, no. 42)

As we know, Mary did not turn to the authorities in the Temple in order to be faithful to God’s plan. If she had done so, she would not have been able to be “at the disposal of God’s initiatives”, for God’s ways constantly challenge human prudence and open out onto unsuspected horizons. In order to accomplish her mission in favor of all humanity, Mary had to follow the exacting path of obedience to the Supreme Authority: God who had taken over her being.

### **“Obedience and Free Will”**

The Lady of All Peoples, in her messages in Amsterdam, confirms the validity of this attitude of the soul submissive first of all to God. Here is an excerpt from the 53rd message, first of all in its original Dutch, then in a French translation by Sister Chantal Buyse, a native of Belgium who masters Dutch very well.

In Dutch:

*“Ik had een ernstige en blijde boodschpa willen brengen. Ik heb laten zien aan alle volkeren, dat de gehoorzaamheid en vrije wil, vrije wil, moest voorgaan.”*

literally:

*“I had wanted to bring a serious and joyous message. I showed all peoples that obedience and free will, free will has to be given priority.”*

Unfortunately, an error of translation was made in the French edition of this message [and also in the English edition]:

“I had wanted to bring an important and joyous message. I have shown to all the peoples that obedience and free will – the freedom of will – come before everything else.”

In fact, the singular verb used by the Lady signifies that she assimilates “obedience” and “free will” and in that case, it can only be a matter of obedience to God through the exercise of a “free will” or of one’s free will.

#### *a) Obedience*

By virtue of obedience, we submit to someone; this someone may be a Church authority, but it can also be God Himself, as was the case in Mary’s life, as was the case for Peter who received his authority from the Son of God, for Saint Joan of Arc who saved the Kingdom of France by obeying her Voices.

#### *b) Free will and Conscience*

Free will here refers to the free choice made by the will enlightened by the conscience. According to the *Nouvelle encyclopédie catholique Théo* [New Catholic Encyclopedia Théo], the conscience is “the last criterion for the morality of an act. Let us insist: the Catholic Church has the reputation of dictating to its faithful what they must think or do. However, even when it speaks with authority, it never encourages one to go against his conscience. According to Christians, no one has the right to go against his conscience – even to please the Pope! The quite modern claim of freedom of conscience is written in the very heart of the Gospel and of Christ’s teaching. ‘Man perceives and acknowledges the imperatives of the divine law through the mediation of conscience. In all his activity a man is bound to follow his conscience faithfully, in order that he may come to God, for whom he was created. It follows that he is not to be forced to act in a manner contrary to his conscience. Nor, on the other hand, is he to be restrained from acting in accordance with his conscience...’ (Vatican II, *Declaration on Religious Freedom*, no. 3)” (p. 777).

This declaration by the Fathers of the Council is in complete agreement with the words of the Lady: “*the free will has to be given priority*” when this free will is lived in accordance with obedience to God.

The Council document also describes the conduct of the first Apostles who had to fight against the authorities of their time:

“Steadfastly they proclaimed to all the plan of God our Savior, ‘who wishes all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth’ (1 Tim. 2:4). At the same time, however, they showed respect for weaker souls even though these persons were in error. Thus they made it plain that ‘every one of us will render an account of himself to God’ (Rom. 14:12), and for this reason is bound to obey his conscience.... At the same time, however, they did not hesitate to speak out against governing powers which set themselves in opposition to the holy will of God: ‘We must obey God rather than men’ (Acts 5:29). This is the way along which countless martyrs and other believers have walked through all ages and over all the earth” (no. 11).

### **Saint Joan of Arc, a Model of Obedience to God**

Saint Joan of Arc shines forth with a particular brilliance among all the men and women who chose to “obey God rather than men”. At her trial, she declared to her judges:

“I came to France solely on an order from God. Since God commanded it, then it was advisable to do it... I did nothing without being commanded by God.”

And this dialogue between Joan and her judges exemplifies her firm decision to obey God first of all:

*Joan:* “Just in case the Church would want me to do something contrary to the command given me by God, I will not do it for any consideration whatsoever.”

– “Do you not believe that you are subject to the Church on earth, to our Holy Father the Pope, the cardinals, bishops and other prelates of the Church?”

*Joan:* “Yes, with Our Lord the first served.”

Condemned as a heretic and a relapsed heretic, Joan was burned at the stake as she repeated the name of Jesus. And, despite the condemnation of the ecclesiastical tribunal presided over by the Bishop of Beauvais, Bishop Cauchon, “almost all the people complained that great harm and injustice had been done to Joan”. One of her executioners, who had a very great hate for her, had a complete change of heart when, “the instant Joan’s spirit took leave of her body, [he saw] a white dove coming out of France’s side”, and he declared to some Friars Preachers that “he was very much afraid of being damned, for he had burned a holy woman”. As for Bishop Cauchon, he had a Friar Preacher thrown into prison for having had the brazenness to declare, on the afternoon of Joan’s martyrdom, that those who had judged her “had done wrong”. (Witnesses quoted by Régine Pernoud in her book *Jeanne d’Arc par elle-même et par ses témoins*, Ed. du Seuil, pp. 276-277)

History has shown that the *sensus fidelium* was more clear-sighted than Joan’s judges. What is

*sensus fidelium*? Here is what Father Eugène Lapointe, O.M.I. says in this regard:

“If the *sensus fidelium* means something, it implies that all the members of the Church have a role to play in the understanding of faith itself. This means that truth does not only come from On-High, it also comes from the base, that is to say, from the ordinary believers who are also influenced by the Spirit.” (<http://www.sedos.org/french/lapointe.html>)

### **Archbishop Prendergast’s Letter**

#### **1. “Obedience to the Authority Legitimately Established Within the Church”**

As Sons and Daughters of Mary, are we not obliged to model our obedience upon that of Mary, Mother of the Church?

That is what our Foundress has done, she who has always lived in a very close union with Heaven and who imposed all kinds of sacrifices upon herself in order to faithfully obey what was “indicated” and “commanded” her for the good of the Work, and, as a consequence, for the good of the Church and the world. (In this respect, Mother Paul-Marie is one with the Lady’s exhortation: “obedience and free will has to be given priority”, an attitude which can be verified so very many times in the pages of *Life of Love*.)

Would it not be to betray the spirit of our Foundress if we were to follow a path that is different from the one she set out for us and to thus be gravely unfaithful to the call of God and the Immaculate?

Are we not justified to make our own the words Peter addressed to the Sanhedrin: “We must obey God rather than men”, or Saint Joan’s words to her judges: “Our Lord, the first served”?

The liturgy of the Passion reminds us that “Christ was obedient unto death, and death on a Cross”. He may have appeared to be disobedient in the eyes of many of His contemporaries, but He was in fact obeying the ultimate Authority, that is to say, God His Father.

#### **2. The Prayer of the Lady of All Peoples**

Archbishop Prendergast no longer prohibits the Sons of Mary from saying the prayer of the Lady of All Peoples, but he conforms to the position of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith which requested that the faithful no longer say out loud this passage of the prayer: “who once was Mary”. Thus, the Pontifical Commissioner asks the Sons of Mary to omit the passage of the prayer which, it must be specified, is considered to be of prime importance by the Lady who declared:

*“As for the text of the prayer which I dictated to you, nothing in it can be changed.”* (29th apparition,

March 28, 1951)

*“Ask you bishop, then, to consent to the dissemination of the prayer in its entirety: ‘May the Lady of All Peoples, who once was Mary, be our Advocate.’ ”* (39th apparition, February 17, 1952)

*“Tell the theologians that I am not happy about the changes they have made in the prayer. MAY THE LADY OF ALL PEOPLES, WHO ONCE WAS MARY, BE OUR ADVOCATE. That must remain as it is.... ‘I am the Lady of All Peoples who once was Mary.’ Tell this to your theologians.”* (41st apparition, April 6, 1952)

*“This prayer must be kept in its present form; it will remain so to the very end.”* (44th apparition, December 8, 1952)

*“The Lady will save the world; she will save it through this prayer. Once again I promise this.”* (46th apparition, May 10, 1953)

*“You, the peoples of this time, know that the Lady of All Peoples is protecting you. Call upon her intercession; have recourse to her as Advocate; ask her to ward off all disaster. Ask her to banish corruption from this world. For from corruption comes disaster; for from corruption is born war, and it is through my prayer that you will ask that the world be spared all these scourges. Ah! If you only knew what importance and what power this prayer has before God! He will listen to His Mother when she will wish to be your Advocate.”* (51st apparition, May 31, 1951)

### **– The Primacy of Conscience with Regard to Private Devotions**

The *Nouvelle encyclopédie catholique Théo* stated the following on the subject of the primacy of one’s conscience and obedience to the Church with regard to private devotions:

*“To obey is not in itself an evil, or something degrading. Except if obeying is a means of not thinking, of not taking into account the other person, then it becomes the very opposite of the primary teaching of Christ. As far as He was concerned, in fact, it was out of love, out of respect that He became obedient. Without love, one’s respect of the law becomes pharisaism. That is why the Church always recognizes the primacy of the conscience over any and all Law, for only conscience can discover the paths leading to respect and love.”*

The text also specifies that the orders given by Church authorities do not all have the same importance: *“In secondary matters, such as a devotion for example, serious arguments can legitimately be raised against them”* (pp. 548-549).

This statement, as well as what was said previously about obedience, free will and conscience, do they not justify our obedience to the Lady’s exhortations, while we hope that the authority will reconsider its decision to permit the faithful to freely recite the prayer just as the Lady gave it to the world?

Are not the entreaties of Mary, Lady of All Peoples, sufficiently pressing?

And, since she gives us the means of obtaining peace from God, through the recitation of the prayer as she gave it to us, should we refuse the weapon she is holding out to us in her maternal kindness?

– ***Church Authorities Are Divided***

We cannot help noting that, concerning the devotion to the Lady of All Peoples and her prayer, there is division among Church authorities. A good number of bishops and cardinals throughout the world granted an imprimatur to the prayer as it was given us by the Lady, while in Rome, the prayer in its original form is being refused.

Yet, the Church ordinarily leaves it up to the local bishop to discern and make a judgment regarding private revelations, which in this case are the apparitions and messages received by Ida Peerdeman, the seeress of the Lady of All Peoples. In 1996, the Bishop of Haarlem-Amsterdam permitted public devotion to the Lady of All Peoples. In 2002, the Bishop of Haarlem-Amsterdam recognized the supernatural origin of the apparitions.

Once again, we see being realized this warning given by Mary at Akita on October 13, 1973:

*“One will see cardinals opposing cardinals, bishops against other bishops. The priests who venerate me will be scorned and opposed by their confreres.”*

– ***The “Sensus Fidelium”***

As an attachment to his letter of February 22, 2006, the Pontifical Commissioner included a commentary in English by Professor Mark Miravalle, a Theology professor, who has contributed to making known the Lady of All Peoples under her titles of Co-Redemptrix, Mediatrix and Advocate. In his commentary, the theologian stated:

“The Marian dialogue launched by this issue should also include the valuable contributions of bishops, clergy, theologians and the ‘sensus fidelium,’ the common consensus of the faithful, which should be offered to the CDF in their ongoing evaluation.”

On the web site of the Roman Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, it is written that the definition of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception was “a result of a deep *sensus fidelium* and the Magisterium rather than proof in scripture and ancient tradition” (<http://www.fides.org/eng> - then select “in-depth study”, and 150th Anniversary of the Dogma of the Immaculate Conception). In spite of the opposition of influential theologians, it was the *sensus fidelium* that prevailed and promoted this dogma long before its definition by Pope Pius IX in 1854.

Will it not be the same for the dogma of Mary Co-Redemptrix, Mediatrix and Advocate?

The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith spoke out against this devotion in 1974, and now it accepts the Lady's prayer after having deleted a phrase from it... Could we not see in this, in spite of everything, an evolution which allows us to hope that there will be complete recognition of these apparitions some day?

### **3. The Relations Between Church Authorities and the Sons of Mary**

In an article written for the paper *Le Royaume* entitled "A More Than Justified Departure..." (no. 171, January-February 2005, pp. 22-23), Father Pierre Mastropietro lifted the veil covering some of the regrettable actions of Archbishop Mario Peressin, Archbishop of L'Aquila and protector of the Community of the Sons of Mary who faithfully served that diocese for more than ten years.

Father Pierre also reported what the first Apostolic Visitor appointed for the Community by the Holy See, Bishop Antonio Ambrosanio, had said to him and to one of his confreres, Father Bruno Ruel, after having learned of certain events: "At this point, I don't know if I should tell you to rebel or not to rebel against Archbishop Peressin."

And Father Pierre concluded: "Bishop Ambrosanio clearly understood the impasse in which certain authorities had placed the Sons of Mary when they entrusted them to 'the good pastoral care' of Archbishop Peressin." The Sons of Mary, and more particularly Father Pierre who was Superior General at that time, could have recounted so many events which would have tarnished the reputation of Archbishop Peressin, among others. When they were forced to terminate their service in the Diocese of L'Aquila, they chose to do so quietly, by maintaining an heroic silence, not wishing, either, to turn their parishioners away from the diocesan authority.

Father Pierre goes on to say in his article: "Other authorities were informed of these regrettable actions by the Archbishop of L'Aquila, but, to date, none of them deigned to intervene to set things straight with this latter either while he was alive or after his death. And since then, they have preferred, with him, to close their eyes to the many injustices committed against the Sons of Mary by covering up the no less numerous consequences and wounds of a multitude of sins by the 'gift' of a first and then a second Pontifical Commissioner..."

The heavy crosses which have marked the ministry of the Sons of Mary will most certainly bear abundant fruit for souls. Let us nevertheless hope that they will be treated with greater consideration by the authorities mandated by the Church for this young Community.

### **4. The Ministry of the Sons of Mary Priests**

Let us also hope that the ecclesial reality of the Sons of Mary will be respected. They are not members of a secular clergy, called upon to live each on his own, in the service of parishes assigned him by the bishop. They are, first and foremost, regular members, united by a religious rule within a Marian Community. It is within this framework and capacity that they completed their theological studies and prepared themselves for their ministry, being supported financially and spiritually by the

members of the Army of Mary and its associated Works, Works which today are included as part of the Community of the Lady of All Peoples, as is the Community of the Sons of Mary. The Immaculate gave to the Church a Work after her Heart in which lay people and religious are united, wishing to work together to contribute to bringing about God's Kingdom on earth.

The Council *Declaration on Religious Freedom* stated:

“Religious bodies are a requirement of the social nature both of man and of religion itself”, and these religious bodies must be able to “govern themselves according to their own norms, honor the Supreme Being in public worship, assist their members in the practice of the religious life, strengthen them by instruction, and promote institutions in which they may join together for the purpose of ordering their own lives in accordance with their religious principles” (no. 4).

These rules were enacted to protect religious bodies against political power in a civil society, but they nonetheless state the necessity for these religious bodies to be able to enjoy the freedom required to develop in conformity with their charism, in accordance with God's plans for each Community. Has not the Church made it an obligation to respect the charism of the founder or foundress of a Work?

We do not ask for anything more... or anything less, desiring to pursue the Work begun here below by the Lady and her Handmaid, the instrument she chose for herself to give to this Work its vital impetus and its particular charism.

March 1, 2006

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