

PRESS RELEASE

Cardinals Initiate Worldwide Cardinal-Bishop Petition to Pope Benedict XVI for the Proclamation of a Marian Dogma

Five cardinals have invited every cardinal and bishop in the world to join them in petitioning Pope Benedict XVI to solemnly proclaim the Mother of Jesus as the "Spiritual Mother of humanity" as an ecumenical service of clarification to other religious traditions and to proclaim the full Christian truth about Mary.

An English copy of the letter which the five cardinals sent to all the world's cardinals and bishops in various languages on January 1, 2008, as well as a Latin "votum" or petition and its English translation has been released by His Eminence, Luis Cardinal Aponte Martínez, Fatima Symposium cardinal co-patron, with permission for publication (see below).

This initiative also intends to start an in-depth worldwide dialogue on Mary's role in salvation for our time and builds upon the endorsement of over 500 Catholic cardinals and bishops for the petition for the definition of this potential fifth Marian dogma over the course of the past 15 years. Renowned contemporary Catholic leaders have also voiced their support, such as Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta and Mother Angelica, foundress of the worldwide Eternal Word Television Network, along with approximately 7 million petitions from Catholics worldwide.

Should this effort prove successful, a proclamation would constitute a historical event for the Church as only the fifth Marian dogma defined in its 2,000-year history.

The five cardinals, Their Eminences Telesphore Cardinal Toppo, Archbishop of Ranchi, India, President of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India; Luis Cardinal Aponte Martínez, Archbishop Emeritus of San Juan, Puerto Rico; Varkey Cardinal Vithayathil, Major Archbishop of Ernakulam-Angamaly, India; Riccardo Cardinal Vidal, Archbishop Emeritus of Cebu, Philippines; and Ernesto Cardinal Corrippio Ahumada, Cardinal Primate Emeritus of Mexico City, have jointly invited their fellow cardinals and bishops throughout the world to add their names to their own petition to the Holy Father, which has already been formally presented to Benedict XVI in private audience by Cardinal Toppo on June 3, 2006.

These five cardinals and their petition, in the form of a Latin votum, included the names and petitions of a number of cardinals and bishops who met at the renowned Marian Shrine in Fatima, Portugal, in May 2005 for a theological symposium on the role of the Virgin Mary as the "Unique Cooperator in the Redemption" (an expression of Pope John Paul II). The symposium ended with a commonly accepted and signed votum to Pope Benedict, which respectfully asks him to prayerfully consider declaring the existing

Church doctrine on Mary as the spiritual mother of all peoples as a solemn definition or "dogma," which represents the highest level of recognition of a particular Christian doctrine as a Catholic truth. This definition of Mary as spiritual mother would include her three maternal roles as the human "Co-redemptrix" (which literally means "a woman with the Redeemer" but never on a level of equality with her divine son), "Mediatrice" or distributor of the graces of the redemption, and "Advocate" or principal intercessor to her Jesus Christ.

The votum emphasizes the rich ecumenical benefits that would come from a solemn definition of this role of Mary as humanity's spiritual mother, as the "ultimate expression of doctrinal clarity at the service of our Christian and non-Christian brothers and sisters who are not in communion with Rome, and as well as for the greater understanding and appreciation of this revealed doctrine concerning the Mother of the Redeemer by the People of God at the outset of this third millennium of Christianity."

The first major petition drive to the popes for the solemn definition of Mary's universal mediation of grace (a long-standing Catholic doctrine taught by the Roman pontiffs) came from Belgian Cardinal Mercier in 1915, at which time he received the positive support of hundreds of Catholic bishops. In the early 1920s, the petition was also strongly endorsed by Fr. Maximilian Kolbe (who was later canonized by Pope John Paul II), founder of the international Marian movement, *Militia Immaculatae* ("Army of the Immaculate"), and who offered his life in martyrdom in Auschwitz in 1941.

Cardinal Toppo, President of India's Conference of Catholic Bishops and cardinal co-patron of the 2005 Fatima symposium stated in his address, "The title 'co' clarifies it all. She is in no way the Redemptrix of humanity, and yet by the will of God and her humble human co-operation, she truly is, and deserves to be called/designated/honoured as 'Co-redemptrix.'"

Cardinal Aponte Martínez, also cardinal co-patron at the Fatima conference, offers the following comment in support of the present timeliness of this potential dogma by Benedict XVI: "I believe the time is now for the papal definition of the relationship of the Mother of Jesus to the each one of us, her earthly children, in her roles as Co-redemptrix, Mediatrice of all graces, and Advocate. To solemnly proclaim Mary as the spiritual mother of all peoples is to fully and officially recognize her titles, and consequently to activate, to bring to new life the spiritual, intercessory functions they offer the Church for the New Evangelization, and for humanity in our serious present world situation."

Contact information:

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**English Copy of Letter Sent
to the World's Cardinals and Bishops**

January 1, 2008
Solemnity of the Mother of God

Dear Brother Eminences and Excellencies:

In May 2005, we, as cardinal co-patrons, sponsored a Mariological symposium convened on the subject of the cooperation of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the work of human Redemption at the favored Fatima shrine in Portugal.

After extensive theological presentations delivered by a significant number of cardinals, bishops, and theologians, we concluded the symposium by enacting a *votum* to His Holiness, Pope Benedict XVI. The *votum* reads as follows:

Your Holiness, Benedict XVI,

In an effort to enhance the ecumenical mission of the Church, and to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ in all its fullness, we, the undersigned cardinals and bishops who have convened in the favored Marian Shrine of Fatima (May 3-7, 2005), wish to express to you, Most Holy Father, our united hope and desire for the solemn papal definition of the doctrine of the Church regarding Mary Most Holy as the Spiritual Mother of all humanity, the Co-redemptrix with Jesus the Redeemer, Mediatrix of all graces with Jesus the one Mediator, and Advocate with Jesus Christ on behalf of the human race.

In a time of significant confusion amidst the many diverse ecclesial bodies of Christianity, and as well among non-Christian peoples concerning this Marian doctrine, we believe the time opportune for a solemn definition of clarification regarding the constant teaching of the Church concerning the Mother of the Redeemer and her unique cooperation (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, n. 61) in the work of Redemption, as well as her subsequent roles in the distribution of grace and intercession for the human family.

It is of great importance, Holy Father, that peoples of other religious traditions receive the clarification on the highest level of authentic doctrinal certainty that we can provide, that the Catholic Church essentially distinguishes between the sole role of Jesus Christ, divine and human Redeemer of the world, and the unique though secondary and dependent human participation of the Mother of Christ in the great work of Redemption.

Therefore, Your Holiness, with filial obedience and respect, we wish to present you with this *votum* of our solidarity of hope for the papal definition of the Immaculate Virgin Mother of God as the spiritual Mother of all peoples in her three maternal roles as Co-redemptrix, Mediatrix of all graces and Advocate, as the ultimate expression of doctrinal clarity at the service of our Christian and non-Christian brothers and sisters who are not in communion with Rome, and as well as for the greater understanding and appreciation of this revealed doctrine concerning the Mother of the Redeemer by the People of God at the outset of this third millennium of Christianity.

We thereby submit this *votum* accompanied by one possible formulation of the Marian doctrine which we, please God, pray may be solemnly defined by your Holiness:

Jesus Christ, the Redeemer of man, gave to humanity from the Cross his mother Mary to be the spiritual Mother of all peoples, the Co-redemptrix, who under and with her Son cooperated in the Redemption of all people; the Mediatrix of all graces, who as Mother brings us the gifts of eternal life; and the Advocate, who presents our prayers to her Son.

On June 7, 2006, our brother, Telesphore Cardinal Toppo, presented the above *votum* in Latin to His Holiness on behalf of all the cardinal and bishop participants at the 2005 Fatima Symposium, together with the published *acta* from the symposium. The Holy Father received the *votum* and the *acta* with an accentuated gratitude and his expressed intention to study carefully the *acta*.

We now write to you, brother cardinals and bishops, to inform you of this *votum* for the solemn definition of Our Lady as the Spiritual Mother of humanity and its essential roles, and respectfully request your own prayerful consideration regarding the possibility of adding your own esteemed assent to this *votum* to Our Holy Father. We have enclosed a copy of the original Latin *votum* for your examination and, if you felt so inspired by Our Lady, you would be free to sign and to forward it on to His Holiness.

Certainly, if it so pleased the Holy Father to proceed with this request, any final formation of the definition would in no manner be bound to the formulation of the enclosed *votum*, but rather left entirely to his unique charism as the Successor of Peter. It is also noteworthy that over the course of the past fifteen years, over 500 bishops have sent their request for this solemn definition to the Holy See, along with approximately 7 million petitions from the Catholic faithful worldwide.

We thank you for your prayerful consideration of this request on behalf of Our Lady, Mother of the Church and Queen of the Apostles. May she guide you in your discernment of this matter to the wisdom of Jesus Christ, our divine Redeemer, through the counsel of the Holy Spirit, all leading to the fulfillment of the perfect will of our Heavenly Father.

With cordial best wishes in Jesus and Mary,

Telesphore Cardinal Toppo, Archbishop of Ranchi, India; President of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India

Luis Cardinal Aponte Martínez, Archbishop Emeritus of San Juan, Puerto Rico

Varkey Cardinal Vithayathil, Major Archbishop of Ernakulam-Angamaly, India

Riccardo Cardinal Vidal, Archbishop of Cebu, Philippines

Ernesto Cardinal Corripio Ahumada, Primate Emeritus of Mexico

Cardinal Co-sponsors of the Fatima Symposium on Marian Coredeemption