1883–1898 Twelve Encyclicals of Pope Leo XIII

**Centenary of the Rosary Encyclicals**

The period of preparation for the Jubilee Year 2000 is a sharing in the joy of the Virgin Mary, whose free consent to the angel’s message made possible the birth of Jesus Christ—the event which is the center of the millennium preparation. Jubilee 2000 is a time of renewal—“a special grace for the Church and all humanity”—and a time of praying for the grace of Christian unity. One hundred years ago, as the Church entered the twentieth century, the Virgin Mary played a significant part in the program of renewal and reunion proposed by the pope. In 1898, like Pope John Paul II today, Leo XIII was in the twentieth year of his pontificate (and ten years older than John Paul II is now); in that year, Leo issued what would be the last of twelve encyclicals on the rosary, a project which he had begun fifteen years earlier.

During his years as pope (1878–1903), Leo XIII wrote many significant encyclicals. His 1891 encyclical *On the Condition of Labor* initiated the Church’s modern social teachings. He also wrote on the teaching of the philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas in schools and seminaries, on the study of the Bible, on the Holy Spirit, and on St. Joseph; at the turn of the century, he wrote two encyclicals on Christ (the Sacred Heart, the Redeemer). He addressed specific political situations in which the Church’s liberties were threatened. The theme to which he returned most frequently in the final years of the last century was the rosary.

The rosary was the subject for twelve encyclicals and five apostolic letters. Beginning in 1883 and concluding in 1898, an encyclical on the rosary appeared almost every year, usually in preparation for the month of October. In the last of the rosary encyclicals (1898), he wrote, “we have never ceased to encourage the constant use of the rosary among Christians, by publishing every year since September, 1883, an encyclical letter on this subject, besides frequently issuing decrees.” (Pope John XXIII’s encyclical, *Grata Recordatio* (1961), spoke of the “pleasant memory” of hearing those encyclicals read every October.)

The rosary encyclicals can be divided into two groups: 1883–1885 and 1891–1898. The first group established the rosary as a public devotion. The first encyclical (1883) prescribed the public recitation of the rosary and the Litany of Loreto in Catholic churches and chapels as a special observance for “the month of October of this year.” Encouraged by the reception of the observance for 1883, the encyclicals 1884 and 1885 directed that October devotions be continued. The feast of the Most Holy Rosary was given a higher liturgical standing. The invocation “Queen of the Holy Rosary” was added to the Litany of Loreto. This encouragement of the public recitation of the rosary in churches conferred a new status on the rosary. “No longer,” said the *Ave Maria Magazine*, “was the rosary a devotion best suited to the illiterate.”

It now was officially encouraged as public devotion.

Beginning in 1891, the encyclicals dwell on the value of the rosary and on its role within the life of the Church and of society. In these encyclicals, there is frequent reference to the perilous situation in which the Church found itself: anticlerical governments and forces opposed to religion threatened its existence. Diplomatic relations between Italy and the Holy See were nonexistent, and the pope was the
"prisoner" within the Vatican walls. The Kulturkamp limited the Church in Germany and Switzerland; the governments of France and Belgium wished to obtain control of the religious schools and to expel the religious teaching congregations. Freemasonry, addressed by the pope in an encyclical, was openly hostile to the Church, and the findings of science seemed to refute long-held religious teachings.

As response to these trying times, Leo XIII followed the example of previous popes by proposing the rosary as a "weapon" which St. Dominic, eight centuries earlier, had confided to the Church. It was through the rosary that Dominic had overcome the Albigensian heresy, whose adherents lived in the southwest of France (not far removed from Lourdes). And, it was the rosary which was responsible for the victory of the Christian forces at the Battle of Lepanto against the forces of the Turks in 1571, and again at Temeswar and Corfu in 1716. The rosary would continue to be "balm for the wounds of society" as it had been in the time of Dominic, and it would make possible the two great goals of Leo's papacy— the renovation of Christian life and the reunion of Christendom.

Nowhere in the dozen encyclicals were there specific indications on how the rosary was to be prayed, nor was it presented as a devotion exclusively directed to the Virgin Mary. Rather, the rosary was broadly defined, just as it had been described four centuries earlier when approved in 1571 by Pius V. The essence of the rosary was "to recall the mysteries of salvation in succession, [while] the subject of meditation is mingled and interlaced with the Angelic Salutation and prayer to God the Father" (1883). Meditation on the mysteries of salvation was a short and easy method to nourish faith and to preserve it from ignorance and error (1895). The mysteries of salvation were not abstract truths but events in the lives of Jesus and Mary.

The rosary was presented both as a "school of faith" and a "school of charity." Meditation on the mysteries of salvation was to lead to conversion of heart and change of conduct. Contemplation of the mysteries was essentially a loving act of gratitude (1894), through which the heart was "filled with love... hope enlarged, and the desire increased for those things which Christ has prepared for such as have united themselves to Him in imitation of His example and in participation in His sufferings" (1891). Attentive consideration of the "precious memorials" of our Redeemer led to "a heart on fire with gratitude to Him" (1892). The rosary was an expression of faith in God, the future life, the forgiveness of sins, the mysteries of the august Trinity, the Incarnation of the Word, the Divine Maternity, and others" (1896).

The rosary, the pope believed, also would influence society as a whole. The 1893 encyclical spoke of the social consequences, or the effects on society, which meditation on the mysteries of the rosary could produce. The three sets of mysteries were an antidote or a remedy for the errors afflicting society. The joyful mysteries, centered on the "hidden" life of Christ and the holy family at Nazareth, stood in contrast to the contemporary disdain for poverty and simplicity of life. The sorrowful mysteries, depicting Christ's acceptance of the cross, stood opposed to the attitude of fleeing from any hardship and suffering. Finally, the glorious mysteries—which include the resurrection, ascension, the descent of the Spirit, and assumption of the Virgin Mary—were a reminder that this life was a prelude to a future life with God.
The lofty and impersonal style of Pope Leo's encyclicals announced an extraordinary jubilee year. However, the Lady of Lourdes on February 11 was not established until an appropriate time to recall the events at Lourdes.

For example, in 1885, an encyclical and Lourdes, the Lady of Lourdes, was observed as a jubilee year both at Lourdes and at Rome. In the silver anniversary year, work was already coming in great numbers, to ensure that a critical consolidation of Lourdes and at Rome. In the silver anniversary year, work on the Basilica of the Immaculate Conception. (Based on the Pope's term, the Silver Anniversary of the apparitions at Lourdes, was observed as a jubilee year both at Lourdes and at Rome. In the silver anniversary year, work on Lourdes, the new basilica, with its fifteen altars and murals depicting the mysteries of the rosary, was dedicated in 1901. Leo XIII sent an apostolic letter in the opening year of the century noting the significance of the consecration of the Basilica of the Rosary. The content of the letter was a summary of previous encyclicals on the rosary. The Rosary Basilica at Lourdes, with its fifteen altar murals depicting the mysteries of the rosary, was a summary of the Gospel—\textit{summa evangelicae doctrinae}. The rosary itself was like a great basilica in which all the truths of the faith are presented.

In 1901, the \textit{Annales} announced that the bonds between the Vatican and Lourdes would be even more apparent. As the Vatican was already present at Lourdes through a sculpture of Leo XIII, so now Lourdes would go the Vatican. Through the efforts of the Bishop of Tarbes and other French bishops, a replica of the grotto of the Massabielles would be constructed in the Vatican gardens. (This Lourdes grotto, still stands in the Vatican gardens.)

The legacy of Pope Leo's encyclicals was that the rosary was established as a central devotion in western Catholicism. Before Vatican II's encouragement of “active participation” in the liturgy, the rosary served as a vehicle for entering into and focusing on the mysteries of salvation as depicted in the life of Christ and the Virgin Mary. Vatican II influenced the rosary and all other devotions. All devotions were to be renewed in the spirit of the liturgy, to be “extensions of the liturgical life of the Church” (CCC 1674). The rosary complements and extends the liturgy.

The church's public liturgical worship presents a panoramic view of the whole history of salvation. The rosary, and rosary-like prayer, focus on the events of Christ's life—the incarnation, redemption, and the promise of eternal life—and on the Virgin Mary's participation in the mystery of Christ. A person praying must be the agent who actively enters into the mysteries, and not simply one before whom the celebration unfolds. Lastly, the rosary is a reminder of the constant prayer of the Church, the incessant prayer of God's people throughout the ages. The Psalter of Mary, as the rosary is sometimes called, is a remembrance of the Church's deepest nature as a community of continual prayer (1896).

\textbf{Leo XIII's Encyclicals on Rosary:}

1) \textit{Supremi apostolatus}. Sept. 1, 1883. The rosary and Litany of Loreto recited in churches during "the month of October of this year."

2) \textit{Superiore anno}. Aug. 30, 1884. The reception of the previous year's October devotions warranted their continuation.

3) \textit{Quod auctioritate}. Dec. 22, 1885. Exhortation to a greater spirit of pious and devout devotion to the rosary during the upcoming extraordinary jubilee year (the pope's fiftieth anniversary of ordination).

4) \textit{Quamquam pluries}. Aug. 15, 1889. The Prayer to St. Joseph added to the October devotions.

5) \textit{Octobri mense}. Sept. 22, 1891. The power of prayer and the efficacy of the rosary.

6) \textit{Magnae Dei Matriis}. Sept. 8, 1892. The relation of the rosary to faith and morality.

7) \textit{Laetitiae sanctae}. Sept. 8, 1893. The social benefits of the rosary.

8) \textit{Iucunda semper}. Sept. 8, 1894. The rosary as witness to Mary's intercession.

9) \textit{Adiutricem populi}. Sept. 5, 1895. Mary's universal motherhood; the rosary as the way to unity.


11) \textit{Augustissimae Virgini}. Sept. 12, 1897. Mary's association with Christ; the rosary confraternities, and "living rosary."

12) \textit{Diuturni temporis}. Sept. 5, 1898. A summary of the pope's teaching on the rosary; notice of the constitution on the rosary sodalities.

\textbf{Leo XIII's Letters on the Rosary}


\textit{Parta humanae generis}. Sept. 8, 1901. The consecration of the Lourdes' Basilica of the Rosary.
**Proposed Dogma: “Mary: Coredemptrix, Mediatrix, and Advocate”**

**Something to Consider Before you Sign**

The debate about whether the Pope should define Mary as coredemptrix is surprising. Does he really have such a project in mind? John Paul II has neither suggested it nor said anything about it. The idea comes from a brilliant young American theologian, Mark Miravalle, and a zealous organization which he has successfully mobilized, attracting millions of signatures, including those of 500 bishops.

The initiative carries on the request of a Dutch visionary, Ida Peerdemann, who died in her nineties in 1996. Since May 31, 1951, she had been asking the Pope to define the "final dogma" on Mary as coredemptrix, mediatrix and advocate.

This is the formula adopted by Miravalle in his book and in the petitions he has organized. He does not quote Ida Peerdemann, probably because this would mean linking his doctrinal project with private revelations, which the Church does not favor. But while he was preparing his book, he twice went to see Ida.

The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith does not support this initiative. In the Vatican newspaper, *L'Osservatore Romano*, it published the negative response of the Pontifical Mariological Academy (to which I belong) during its Mariological Congress in Czestochowa, Poland, in August 1996. The unanimous view was that the definition was inopportune.

This may seem surprising. “If mariologists are against the Virgin Mary, what's going on," ask the signatories of the petition, acting in good faith. Mariologists are not, of course, against the Virgin Mary, but they know all too well how ambiguous these titles are—what a cause of confusion to the faithful and of scandal to Protestants they could be.

During his pontificate, Pope Pius XII planned to defined Mary as Mediatrix of All Graces, following an initial wave of petitions, supported by Cardinal Mercier and many bishops. But, for many reasons, the theologians of the Holy Office dissuaded him from doing so. Was Mary truly the mediatrix of all graces? What about those in the Old Testament, before she existed? What about sanctifying grace, which is the immediate communication of God's life in us? Pius XII gave up the idea.

He turned instead to the definition of the Assumption, which had a better foundation in the tradition and prayer of the Church. After this expert advice from his theologians, he stopped using the title mediatrix. When one of his secretaries used it, he crossed it out and replaced it with the Latin word *sequestra*, which suggests the same thing more modestly. One of his reasons was the teaching of the Apostle Paul: Christ is "the unique mediator" (1 Tim 2:5). Pius XII carefully avoided appearing to contradict the Bible and pointless shocking the Protestants. Christ is the only mediator: he bridged the gap between divinity and humanity by uniting both in his person. Others are only intermediaries.

Later, at the Second Vatican Council, Cardinal Bea, president and founder of the Secretariat for Christian Unity, solemnly asked the council to distance itself from this title.

When I was a young priest, well before Vatican II, everyone was expecting the definition of Mary as "mediatrix," a frequent subject of sermons, which were then very "marital." I always refrained from this, despite strong ties of devotion with the Virgin. Why? Because it was poorly understood, and even unbalanced, since all the faithful then viewed Mary as mediatrix, but did not know that Christ was the mediator.

As for the title of coredemptrix, at Vatican II where I was theological advisor, it was whispered in the doctrinal commission that the authorities thought it inopportune to use the title, which was ambiguous and needed to be discussed. The mariologists of the commission always kept in line with this discreetly expressed wish. There was no question of such a title being sanctioned. But Vatican II did not neglect the problem. Its main document, the Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, deals with it, in a profoundly biblical way (in sections 58 and 62), which, in a remarkable fashion, sets out all that is essential.

For we are all "co-operators with God" in Jesus Christ ("co-workers," St. Paul says: the Greek word is *synergoi* in 1 Cor. 3:9). Mary was the first, and has a better claim than anyone else to a unique title, since she was the foundation of the Incarnation itself, was united through her exemplary faith (Lk. 1:45) to Christ's whole mission, and was present, standing on Calvary, when Christ confirmed her role as mother in his last testament (Jn. 19:25-27). But let us not forget that Christ, the only mediator, is also the only Redeemer.

He alone is God, he alone was crucified, died and rose again, he alone fulfilled the sacrifice by his return to the Father, 40 days after Easter. There is no mediation or coredemption except in Christ and through him.

Many theologians have strongly opposed the title of coredemptrix for Mary, since it seems to put her on an equal footing with Christ, whereas her role is more like that of the faithful at Mass: they offer the sacrifice, as well as the priest, but only the priest can present it. Moreover, that title, theologians add, makes us forget that Mary was raised up to heaven, and, through that redemption, arrived at supreme co-operation.

To calm the arguments, Cardinal Journet said: "We are all co-redeemers." This is an ingenious solution, but has nonetheless the disadvantage of making us overlook the fact that Mary's co-operation is the first—foundational and unique. She is the closest to Christ and the most perfectly involved with him.

The title of coredemptrix raises many other problems and risks many other sorts of unbalanced interpretations. For instance, at the divine level the Holy Spirit is the Co-Redeemer. Other co-operators—or, if you like, co-redeemers—including the Virgin who was the first, are so only at the human level, in him and through him.

The title of advocate raises the same question. It is to the Holy Spirit and to him alone that Jesus Christ gives this title. "The Father will give you another Paraclete," he says (Jn. 14:16). (The Greek word is equivalent in meaning to the Latin *advocatus*, advocate.) If Mary can also be said to be our advocate, it is in Christ and the Holy Spirit. It would unbalance things to define this title solemnly for her when that of the Holy Spirit is misunderstood or ignored by the faithful.
This lack of balance and display of exaggeration quite properly shock Protestants. The Orthodox have in varying degrees rejected earlier dogmatic definitions, such as that of the Immaculate Conception (1854), which some Orthodox synods have condemned, even though a feast of her Conception was celebrated in the East from the seventh century. Belief in her conception as pure and immaculate came late in the West, against the strong opposition of St. Bernard of Clairvaux. The definition of the Assumption (1950), even though belief in it was and still is clearer among the Orthodox, was also the cause of objections and protest from them. There would be still greater dissention if Mary were defined as coredeemptrix, a title foreign to the Orthodox tradition.

It would take too long to explain why and how the Orthodox have come to their positions. This explains why the Council for Christian Unity (formerly the Secretariat for Christian Unity) does not favor the definition.

Those who sign petitions “for Mary’s glory” at church doors undoubtedly have good intentions, but they ignore or do not recognize these problems. They have hardly considered them at all, as I have discovered in talking to the signatories. Such pressure groups do not make for health and peace in the life of the Church.

“This risks creating a schism in the Church,” a friend said to an enthusiastic signatory.

“All the better” was the reply, “it will get rid of the bad and leave the good.”

Before signing these petitions, it would be better good to consider all this.

René Laurentin

(Canon Laurentin, theological consultant at Vatican II and author of over 100 books, is widely recognized as a leading authority in Marian studies.) Reprinted (with permission) from The Tablet, January 31, 1998.

Books . . . and articles

Winston-Allen, Anne.
Stories of the Rose:
The Making of the Rosary in the Middle Ages.

Both the Bollandist scholar, Thomas Esser, and later at the turn of the last century, Herbert Thurston concluded that the 400-year tradition attributing the rosary to St. Dominic was a case of mistaken identity (although Dominicans from the fifteenth century were its chief promoters). Since these works appeared, there has been much research on the origins and the evolution of this prayer. From about the 11th century, the recitation of 150 prayers (Pater Noster or Ave Maria) was considered a way of participating in the monastic office. From the 11th to the 14th century, many “rosary-like” prayers appeared—psalm refrains or rhymed verses interspersed with the words of the Ave Maria.

Anne Winston-Allen’s study investigates the developments which occurred from 1420 to 1520 in Germany. Here, in Cistercian circles, a “life-of-Christ” rosary developed, attributed to Dominic of Prussia, with 50 short phrases (clausulae) added to the Ave Maria. As an aid to meditation, these 50 scenes from Christ’s life soon appeared on woodcuts. The Ulm Picture Rosary, containing these woodcuts, was among the earliest devotional works printed. Because, in popular recitation, it was difficult to retain the fifty points, the fifteen mysteries developed. Perhaps the most original part of Winston-Allen’s work is to locate the origins of the mysteries in the statutes of the rosary confraternities.

In 1470s, rosary confraternities or sodalities flourished in Cologne, Douai, Venice. The rosary fraternities attracted thousands of members, as they fulfilled the desire for greater religious participation. Winston-Allen’s work refers frequently to current literature on late medieval piety and devotion—a topic related to many Reformation issues. Ironically, the many indulgences granted to the rosary and the fraternities soon overshadowed and transformed a simple and basically contemplative prayer into a structured and unchangeable form. The author concludes that the rosary’s development was not unlike a “tissue of quotations drawn from innumerable centers of culture” (Roland Barthes). It was a form of prayer which developed over several centuries drawing from many sources.

Elizondo, Virgil.
Guadalupe: Mother of the New Creation.

The book presents a translation, from the Spanish, of the Nican Mopohua, a poetic account of the Guadalupe events of 1531. This masterpiece of Nahua literature is a work of great harmony, depth, and beauty. To this account, Fr. Elizondo provides an extended and enthusiastic commentary pointing out the epic qualities of the work and the great significance of Guadalupe for evangelization.

“It was already beginning to dawn” indicates both the arrival of the Gospel and new harmony between peoples and cultures which Guadalupe foretold. Juan Diego is a symbol of the native peoples, at once “most abandoned, most beloved.” The flowers and the singing of birds which are highlighted in the narrative communicate more effectively to native peoples...
than the abstractions of European theology. The bishop’s delay in receiving and speaking to Juan Diego is symptomatic of the treatment which the poor and the natives have received and continue to receive. The healing of Juan Diego’s uncle, Juan Bernardino, is a sign that the old life which Spaniards wished to destroy would be transformed and ennobled. The conversion of the bishop is a symbol of the conversion of the European (White) Church to understanding the gifts of native peoples.

In the *Nican Mopohua* and the commentary, Guadalupe is much more than a Marian apparition; it is a model for harmonious equilibrium, solidarity and fraternity. The book relies on and reflects much of the recent literature on inculturation and Latino theology. The heart of this book is personal and works of St. Ignatius Loyola with doctrinal dissertation, defended on February 28, 1998, a director.


*Reflecting on Mary,* by James Hanvey, in *The Month* 31/1 (January 1988): 9–12. Three unifying principles for evaluating Marian prayer: Mary is never separate from Christ, his kingdom of redemption; never apart from humanity and its destiny; never separated from the community of the Church.


*The Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 33/2 (1998). This issue, “Citeaux and Devotion to Mary,” contains several outstanding articles: “Mary and the Monk,” by Augustine Roberts; “Cistercian Antecedents of the Rosary,” by Andre Fracheboud; and “Mary, Mediatrix of all Graces, in the Work of Adam of Perseigne,” by Bishop Kazimierz Romanik. (This issue available, $5.00, from Sr. Sheryl Frances Chen [tel: 520–455–5595]).

*“The Final Jewel in Mary’s Crown: American Responses to the Definition of the Assumption,”* by James O’Toole, in *U.S. Catholic Historian* 14 (Fall, 1996). A survey of how the 1950 proclamation was reported in the American religious and secular press, American participation in the consultation which preceded the definition, and Protestant reaction of the event.

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**News from the Marian Library/IMRI***


- **The Mary Page** continues to attract visitors to its site—over 5,000 each month. Check the following:
  - “Raphael’s Madonnas on Postage Stamps.” The Renaissance artist, Raphael (1483–1520) was the most popular painter of Madonnas. By 1991, Raphael’s Madonnas were pictured on 296 stamps (or blocks of stamps) in 75 countries. Each month, the Mary Page features an image, with an explanation, of the Virgin Mary as depicted by Renaissance artist, Raphael.
  - “The Garden Way of the Cross,” a series of reflections on the Way of the Cross, accompanied by pictures of flowers which in the medieval tradition were associated with the sufferings of Christ and Mary. The texts were written by Fr. Thomas A. Stanley, S.M.

- **“Marian Apparitions.”** A listing of apparitions which have received the approbation of the bishop of the place in which they occurred. Included is a statistical study of apparitions in the twentieth century, and the norms for discerning authentic miraculous events.

The recent exhibits of religious art in the Marian Library Gallery include the following:


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