

GIUSEPPE CORRADI



THE HISTORICAL  
EVOLUTION  
OF THE MARIAN IDEAL  
OF THE ORDER  
OF THE SERVANTS OF MARY

*In particular, considering devotion  
to the sorrows and compassion  
of the Mother of Christ*

*Edizioni Marianum*

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**THE HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF THE MARIAN IDEAL  
OF THE ORDER OF THE SERVANTS OF MARY**

***IN PARTICULAR, CONSIDERING DEVOTION  
TO THE SORROWS AND COMPASSION  
OF THE MOTHER OF CHRIST***

Preface by  
Aristide Serra, OSM

ROMA  
EDIZIONI MARIANUM  
2022

## PREFACE

There is a welcome surprise in this monumental work produced by the Servite Friar Giuseppe M. Corradi. Born at Brenton di Roncà in the Province of Verona in 1949, he is in fact Italian, however he has written this work in English. When I asked him why he decided to proceed in this manner (unfortunately, still quite a rare choice!) he explained that it would be appropriate “to provide new English-speaking candidates, from India, South Africa, Kenya, Uganda, Myanmar, the Philippines etc., with a strong motivation regarding the Order’s devotion to Our Lady of Sorrows” and that “this also applies to the sisters.”

The countenance of Our Lady of Sorrows is the image of Mary that is perhaps most loved by our people. With regard to the Immaculate and forever Virgin Mary, the Mediatrix of Graces, we may become engaged in certain discussions and ... we may even reach a point where a rather tense confrontation occurs. It is not so in the case of Maria ‘Addolorata’, our Lady of Sorrows. We all feel close to the Mother of Jesus suffering at the Cross. We feel that we are sharing a cordial bond with her. The experience of pain is such a universal reality and we all become sisters and brothers within a human and humane dimension. In this regard much may be said about the stressful Covid-19 infection which now afflicts most of our tiny planet!

Friar Giuseppe speaks of a “strong motivation”. As we read through the 526 pages of his dissertation we find ample proof of his familiarity with Latin, Greek and French, the languages he studied when he attended a *liceo classico*, an Italian grammar school where he studied humanities and classical literature. He subsequently acquired a high level of proficiency in the German language when he attended theology courses at Innsbruck. With regard to Spanish and English, he became familiar with these languages during the 15 years he spent as a provincial bursar. During this period, every year he had to communicate with countries where the Servite Venetian Province was present (i.e., Latin America, India, Uganda, Kenya and South Africa). Then, in Dayton (United States of America, Ohio) he deepened his knowledge of English as he continued his Mariological studies. These are the key points of his academic background.

### THE SUBJECT OF THIS WORK

The key concept of the dissertation presented by Fr. Giuseppe M. Corradi may be identified in that of the transition between the ‘Sorrowful Mother’ and

the 'Mother of Compassion'. The 'Sorrowful Mother' suffers on account of the fate of her Son Jesus, especially during his Passion and Death, while the 'Mother of Compassion' suffers together with Jesus, who submits to his own passion and death for the salvation of the world. Mary is 'compassionate' as she 'shares' this experience and, that is, she becomes united with her Son for the good of all people, both men and women.

The study initially focuses on the origins of the Order, referring to the *Legenda de Origine* and the *Constitutiones Novae*, and its history is illustrated until the time of the new Constitutions which were approved in 1987. The main points of the two extreme positions are optimally summarized in the letter of the Prior General Hubert M. Moons 'With Mary beside the Cross' (1992).

In this letter (section 6) the author states that "At its beginnings ... the Order looked to the Virgin in her overall mystery, in perfect harmony with the universal sense of the Church at that time. Holy Mary shone brightly in the gaze of her Servants as the Mother of Jesus, always intact in her virginity. Indeed, she had been raised to celestial glory, but remained ever-present - with vigilant mercy - to address the needs of her pilgrim children on this earth. And this occurs in compliance with the will of Jesus himself, when from the Cross he said to his Mother, "Woman, behold, your son!". Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your Mother!" (Jn 19: 26-27a). Assiduously recalling that ecclesial testament of Christ shortly before his death, the Church was induced to remember also the pain of Mary beside the Cross. According to our 'Legenda de Origine' (ca. 1318), the Virgin herself, appearing before Saint Peter Martyr, made it known that the friars of the Order should wear the black habit, "... in order to manifest [her] humility and to clearly reflect the pain that she suffered in the extremely bitter passion of her Son" (sect. 52). The same symbolism was also referred to by St Filippo Benizi while he was travelling to Siena in the company of Fra Vittore. Along the way they met two friars of the Order of Preachers who wished to know to which Order their habit pertained. Philip replied and told them, "We are called the Servants of the glorious Virgin, and we wear the habit of her widowhood" (sect.8). And the term 'widowhood' referred to the loneliness of the Virgin after the death of her Son. However, the fact remains that the Marian piety of our origins did not prioritise any particular aspect of the figure of the Virgin Mary as a characteristic of the Order. Rather, they were all acquired in a golden equilibrium still firmly anchored in the Sacred Scriptures".

And in section 3 we note the following: "Everyone is aware that in the Order of the Servants of Mary our devotion to the Lady of Sorrows underwent

forms of impressive development between the seventeenth and twentieth centuries”. In section 9 we are informed that “... in the mid-twentieth century a new trend was taking shape within our community, and this was mainly due to those friars who dedicated themselves to the study of Servite history and Marian theology. However, it should be noted that this two-fold line of interest received decisive stimuli from the foundation of the Pontifical ‘Marianum’ Theological Faculty established by the Holy See on 30th November 1950.

The most favourable claims of the new school of thought aimed at restoring the admirable equilibrium which characterised our Marian spirituality at the time when the Order was founded. It was thus a question of integrating the immense treasures identified by our family with respect to the Lady of Sorrows with all of the other aspects concerning the figure and persona and the mission of the Holy Virgin.

This work of skilful restoration, not entirely free from lively - albeit constructive - elements of tension, was authoritatively established in the text of the new constitution, which was the result of twenty years of post-conciliar work. The constitution was ratified definitively by the Apostolic See on 25 March 1987, on the solemn day of the Annunciation of the Lord and this being the date when John Paul II signed the encyclical ‘Redemptoris Mater’, which he presented to the Church for the Marian Year, lasting from 7 June 1987 until 15 August 1988.”

#### TWO EMBLEMATIC MOMENTS OF THE FIRST AND SECOND PERIOD

1. The two major pronouncements that define this first phase of the history of the Servite Order are those of Innocent XII (1692) and of the General Chapter held at the end of the 19th century (1895).

On 9 August 1692, ratifying a Decree issued by the Congregation of Rites on 2 August in the same year, Innocent XII granted the friars and nuns of the Order of Servants the right to celebrate on the third Sunday of September the feast of the Seven Sorrows of the Blessed Virgin, the Titular and Patroness of the order, with the Mass and Holy Office ... “as a form of devotion pertaining to the aforesaid Order as its main characteristic”. And at the very end of the nineteenth century, from 18 to 20 June 1895, the General Chapter was held at Monte Senario, when, together with his Definitorium, the newly elected Prior General Fr. Giovanni Angelo M. Pagliai established that “... the spirit of our Order ... is the cult of the Virgin of Sorrows.”

2. With respect to the second phase we are very pleased to indicate as the point of arrival the Second Vatican Council, and, in particular, the eighth and final chapter of the *Lumen Gentium* (1964) and some points in the Message of John Paul II sent from Castel Gandolfo to the Bishop of Adria-Rovigo on 8 September 2004, the day of the Feast of the Nativity of Mary: “Mary’s eyes are fixed first and foremost on the Most Holy Trinity, on the mystery of ineffable love that indissolubly unites the three divine Persons. Contemplating the Father, the Word and the Holy Spirit, the Virgin feels as though she were being directed to humanity to carry out for every human being the maternal mission entrusted to her by the crucified Son (cf. Jn 19: 25-27)”.

And a corresponding commitment is expressed in a ‘compassionate’ attitude found within the ecumenical area: Catholicism (cf. Leonardo Boff reflecting on and reinterpreting Martin Heidegger and Albert Schweitzer), Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism ...

This constitutes the informative and didactic value of the work of Fr. Giuseppe M. Corradi. We may certainly imagine that the author’s intention is to amiably guide every brother and sister of the Servite Order, drawing their attention to the surprising richness of the numerous documents which he has studied, adopting a clearly rigorous approach. The sources of reference relate to constitutional, pontifical, episcopal and liturgical matters and also to areas of literary and artistic interest, focusing on iconographic masterpieces ... Moreover, considering the vast spectrum of Fr. Corradi’s work, I feel I should highlight various further significant themes within the biblical-Jewish dimension forming a framework for the ‘Marian question’ in every historical period and location. One of these subjects - the final argument that is dealt with - focuses on biblical concerns, and pertains to Mount Senario as referred to in the *Legenda de Origine*. Relative specific references may be consulted in my own work ‘Biblical Testimonies on Mary of Nazareth (2020).

#### FROM THE COVENANT WITH ISRAEL AND WITH THE CHURCH

The Ancient Covenant was ratified at Mount Sinai. There were three principal actors in that great event: God, Moses and the people (Ex 19: 3-8). Through his prophet and advocate Moses, God spoke to the tribes of Israel that had gathered on the slopes of the holy mountain (Ex 19: 3-7). He spoke to them, illustrating his desire to forge a very special bond with them - indeed,

a 'Covenant' - based on the acceptance of his Law (Ex 19: 5-6). And, duly instructed by Moses in relation to this plan which originated from God (Ex 19: 7), all of the people responded unanimously: "Everything the Lord has said, we will do!" (Ex 19: 8).

With these words, which have remained recorded in the Jewish tradition of all times, Israel gave its consent to the Covenant with the Lord. Thus followed the Gift of the Torah, and the conclusion of the Covenant between God and the people (Ex 19.9-24.8). Hence, God became the husband of Israel and Israel was the spouse of God (cf. Ez 16: 8).

As the history of salvation unfolded in the various stages of the Old Testament the Covenant as such or some of the commitments deriving from it were renewed. The ritual of these celebrations repeated the pattern of what had happened at Mount Sinai. If at Sinai it was Moses who spoke in the name of God, a 'mediator', once again, now enters the scene, addressing the assembly in the name of the Lord. This mediator may be a king: Josiah (2 Kgs 23: 1-3), Asa (2 Chr 15: 9-15); a leader of the people: Joshua (Jos 1: 1-18; 24: 1-28), Nehemiah (Neh 5: 1-13), Simon Maccabeus (1 Mac 13: 1-9); or a priest: Ezra (Ezr 10: 10-12; Neh 9-10).

In a manner recalling the situation of Moses at Sinai, the function of the mediator remains that of remembering and clarifying the will of God expressed in the Covenant. These formularies are thus occasionally enriched by a lively exchange of words between the mediator and the assembly, or vice versa. This is what we see in the case of Joshua (Jos 24: 1-28), Ezra (Ezr 10: 10-17), and Nehemiah (Neh 5: 8-13) ...

At Sinai the people gave their consent, saying, "Everything the Lord has said, we will do!" (Ex 19: 8; 24: 3.7). On the occasions of renewal of the Covenant the people reaffirm their faith in the Lord with substantially identical formulas: "We will serve the Lord our God and will listen to his voice" (Jos 24: 21.24); or: "Yes! It is our duty to do as you say! [We will do exactly as you say]" (Ezr 10: 12; Neh 5: 12; 1 Mac 13: 9).

A reflection of this scene of the Covenant may be perceived in the Annunciation at Nazareth and in the Wedding Feast at Cana.

1. Also in *Nazareth*, as occurred at Sinai, we have three actors: God, the Angel Gabriel and Mary (Lk 1.26-38). Through the Angel Gabriel (a new Moses!) God informed Mary (the daughter of Abraham and of the people of Israel who descended from him) of the task he was about to assign to her, whereby she would become the mother of His Divine Son, in whom

is sealed the New and Eternal Covenant between heaven and earth. The angel speaks three times and Mary replies three times. Instructed by the angel in an opportune manner (Lk 1: 28-37), Mary accepts the divine proposal with the famous words: "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word." (Lk 1: 38). And as a result of his faith, the Son of the Most High becomes the Son of man.

2. Between the Christophany of *Cana* and the theophany of Mount Sinai, we may note the corresponding elements. In fact, on the third day at Sinai the Lord revealed his glory to Moses, presenting the Law, and the people believed also in him and, that is, in Moses (Ex: 19: 9,11,16). At *Cana*, on the third day, Jesus revealed his glory, donating the wine, the new symbol of the Law which is his Gospel, and the disciples believed in him (Jn 2:1.11). Mary had suggested to the servants at the wedding table: "Do whatever he tells you." (Jn 2: 5). Adhering more closely to the original Greek text, others translate this as: "Whatsoever he says unto you, do it." Her advice contains almost a remote echo of the words spoken by the entire people of Israel at the foot of Mount Sinai (Ex 19: 8). Mary draws us continually into the mystery of Israel and into the mystery of the Church, as the Risen One says: "You are *my friends*, if *ye do what I command you*. (Jn 15: 14). In this way she leads us into the sphere of intimacy with Jesus.

#### THE 'SWORD' AS A SYMBOL OF THE WORD OF GOD (LK 2: 35)

The elderly prophet Simeon foretold to Mary that a 'sword' would pierce her own soul or her life (Lk. 2: 35). From an examination of the biblical, Jewish late Old Testament, the scriptures of the New Testament and through the first thirteen centuries of the Christian era a particular condition was found to be quite constant or - we may even say - an emerging reality. And, to wit, the *sword* is a symbol of *the Word of God*. Indeed, in turn this Word manifests the 'Divine plan', 'the Law of the Lord' and the 'will of the God of the Covenant' as occurs in the various vicissitudes of the history of salvation.

Valorising the basic semantic significance, as conveyed by the Judaeo-Christian tradition, we may also refer once again to Luke 2: 35a. And what conclusion might we draw from our re-examination? I feel we may conclude that the *sword* which Simeon's obscure presentiment refers to is also - essentially - a symbolic representation of the *Word of God*.

As a new Daughter of Zion - and together with her Son - she will be instilled with and drawn into a 'divine plan', symbolized by the *sword* (Lk 2: 35a). Her

life will be endowed with *rich rewards* generated within her by the powerful mercy of the One who wishes to extend to all generations the wonderful gifts promised to Abraham and to his descendants (Lk 1: 49-50, 53, 54-55).

We have thus ascertained that the ‘sword’ is a symbol of the position whereby the Mother becomes associated with the mission of her Son. The pain that Mary will have to experience as her vocation unfolds and is realised alongside Jesus and certainly also forms part of this allocation of roles (cf. Lk 2: 48). However, it would be inappropriate to restrict the vast horizon opened up by the holy prophet of the Temple to this dimension alone. The Gospel according to Luke in fact highlights the effects that the Word of God produced in Mary: joy and praise (Lk 1: 46-47), feeling troubled (Lk 1: 29a), a sense of marvel (Lk 2: 33, 47-48), sorrow (Lk 2: 48b), a lack of understanding (Lk 1: 34; 2: 50), retaining memories (Lk 2: 19, 51), hearing the word of God (Lk 8: 21; 11: 28), persevering faith (Lk 1: 38, 45).

#### THE ‘SCHEME OF REVELATION’ OF JOHN 19: 26-27A

Biblical research conducted over the last fifty years has highlighted the manifold richness of verses 19: 25-27 in John’s Gospel. In particular, it is noted that the scenes of the Passion of Jesus according to the fourth Gospel all have an ecclesial significance. We note that the evangelist recalls the various moments of the passing of Jesus from this world to his Father, highlighting however the effects these moments have on the life of the Church. For example, the interrogation of Jesus before Pilate conveys the sense of Jesus’ lordship over all his disciples (Jn 18: 33-37); the tunic of the Lord not torn by the soldiers is a symbol of the unity of the church, which may trace its exemplary beginning to the unity existing between the mother and the disciple on Mount Calvary (Jn 19: 23-24, 26-27); the blood and water that flow from the pierced side of the Crucified Christ are a sign of the life that he transmitted to us through this cruel martyrdom, and of the Holy Spirit disseminated throughout the ecclesial community as a consequence of his redemptive death (Jn 19: 34 and 4: 14; 7: 37-39; 19: 30; 20: 20, 22) ... Moreover, the figure of Mary next to the cross also has great significance in ecclesial terms. In fact, the words of Jesus addressed to his mother (“Woman, behold, your son!”) and to his beloved disciple (“Behold, your mother!”) are generated according to a ‘revelatory scheme’.

In the unfolding of the ‘scheme’ in question three particular moments may be identified, i.e., ‘visual recognition’, ‘vocal expression’ and the ‘announcement of a reality’. Thus, a prophet and, that is, a man sent by God and enlight-

ened by his Spirit, *sees* another person, to whom *he speaks*, thereby revealing his role in God's plans. This role is specified through the adverbial expression '*Here is ...*' and this is followed by a title, relating precisely to the function for which the Lord has chosen that person. We may note, for example, John 1: 29 and 1: 35-36 (John the Baptist *sees* Jesus and *says*: "*Behold the Lamb of God*"); and then, John 1: 47 and 19: 26-27a. The terms chosen by the evangelist in the latter passage 'reveal' that, by virtue of the Holy Spirit, Jesus establishes his mother as the universal mother of all his disciples and, that is, of all the 'scattered children of God' who are united by his death. They are all represented by the disciple who is present on that occasion (Jn 19: 26-27, 30 and 11: 52). In Mary, the universal mother, the calling of Jerusalem as the universal 'mother' of her scattered children is fully realised (Is 60: 4; Bar 4: 36-37; 5: 5 ...).

#### THE 'MOTHER OF SORROWS' IN JOHN 19: 15-27

In the exposition of this highly ecclesial reinterpretation of the passion and death of Jesus would there be space for the Mother of Sorrows? Certainly! For John everything is rooted in the humanity of the Word which became flesh (Jn 1: 14). He who "does not recognise" the flesh of Christ is not of God! (cf. 1 Jn 4, 3 in the Vulgate). By virtue of the Incarnation, the Divine Word which was with God (Jn 1: 1-2) became "the man that is called Jesus" (Jn 9: 11), "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief" (Is 53: 3), "He whom they have pierced" (Zec 12: 10 quoted by Jn 19: 37). Who will be his mother then, if not 'the woman of sorrows'?

This traumatic condition - and this has to be recognised - is not immediately expressed in the words of John (19: 25). However, it is based on some intertextual references of his Gospel. In this regard, see chapters 16 and 20 of the fourth Gospel and the introduction of the scene where Mary stands next to the cross.

In the first place we should remember the words with which the Master, during the last supper, announced to the disciples the suffering that would have inundated their souls on account of his tragic passion. Jesus said: "Now ... I am going to the one who sent me ... Because I told you this, *grief has filled your heart ... You will weep and mourn ..., you will grieve*, but your *grief* will become joy." (Jn 16: 5-6, 20). And a little farther on - with a very human tone, inspired by the moment in which every life enters our world - the Lord compares the imminent grief of his followers with the woman who sees her womb rent asunder when she is delivered of the child (Jn 16: 21-22).

Secondly, Mary Magdalene, who stands near the cross, is then the same person who will stand *crying* near the tomb. Her tears are in fact recalled on four occasions (Jn 20: 11,12,13,15).

#### THE INTRODUCTION OF JOHN 19: 25A

Let us once again reflect on the words with which John recalls the presence of Mary and the others who followed Jesus to Mount Calvary: “*Standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother ...*” (Jn 19: 25a).

It is noted that in the Greek text of the New Testament the preposition *parà* (= close to, near, beside) is followed by the accusative case when an object or a thing is indicated; on the other hand, the dative case will be used when a person is indicated in the complementary phrase. Only in the verse of John 19: 25a does an exception occur. The cross is not a person, but an inanimate object; therefore the evangelist should have used the preposition *parà* with the accusative case (*tón staurón*). However, he uses the dative case (*tô staurô*). This exception, which is a unique event in the entire New Testament, may have been intentional. That is, the evangelist would like to highlight the fact that Mary, the pious women and the disciple are in a state of communion, not so much with the cross as with the *Crucified One*. It is, in effect, “the cross of Jesus” (Jn 19: 25a). The *Lumen Gentium* (58) captures very well the spirit of the content of the Gospel: “the Blessed Virgin advanced in her pilgrimage of faith, and faithfully persevered in her union with her Son unto the cross, where she stood, in keeping with the divine plan (cf. Jn 1-9, 25), grieving exceedingly with her only begotten Son, uniting herself, with a maternal heart, with His sacrifice and lovingly consenting to the immolation of the Victim whom she herself had brought forth.”

Thus, together with those other few passionately faithful followers (who personify ‘the faithful remnant of Israel’) the mother of Jesus embraces the cross, intimately assuming the message it encloses. Mary welcomes the mystery and paradox of God’s love, as expressed in the tragedy of Calvary.

#### MOUNT SENARIO, AS THE HOLY MOUNT OF THE COVENANT WITH THE LORD

In chapters 9, 10, 11 and 12 the *Legenda de Origine* contemplates Mount Senario in the light of various traditions that flourished in the heart of Israel, the people of the Covenant. These traditions may be traced back to three

moments of the sacred history relating to three moments of exodus: *Mount Moriah*, linked to Abraham's exodus from Mesopotamia and his journey to the land of Canaan; *Mount Sinai*, where the Israelites arrived after their departure from Egypt; *Mount Zion*, towards which all peoples would travel in their eschatological exodus from all nations to come together in the 'New Jerusalem', which became the 'new garden of Eden'. In fact, the prophet Ezekiel proclaimed: "This land that was desolate is become like the garden of Eden ..." (Ez 36, 35). And Isaiah: "Yes, the Lord shall comfort Zion, shall comfort all her ruins; Her wilderness he shall make like Eden, her wasteland like the garden of the Lord" (Is 51: 3; cf. Rv 2: 7).

Each of the three aforesaid Mounts is related to an Exodus, which leads to the foundation of the people of God of the Old and New Covenants. In a similar manner, Mount Senario is also the setting that is related to the exodus of our First Seven Fathers from the city of Florence, an exodus which then resulted in the birth of the Order of the Servants of St Mary. Mount Senario is our own Mount Moriah, our Mount Sinai, our Mount Zion (seat of the New Jerusalem, which appears as the New Eden).

#### AN OPEN CONCLUSION

It is said that history is the teacher of life, yet it has no disciples! And in the presence of the toil and these efforts of one of our brothers we are forced to admit there may be exceptions. Together with him, we have entered into the depths of Mary's pain, and, again, embracing the profound history of the Servite Order. Thank you, Father Giuseppe, for this wonderful gift!

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