

## Is Mary Co-redemptrix A “False Exaggeration”?

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In its treatment on proper devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Second Vatican Council warns the People of God against two potential extremes. After the Council Fathers encourage a “generous fostering” of authentic devotion to the Blessed Virgin based on solid doctrine, and call for Marian devotional practices recommended by the teaching authority of the Church over centuries to be “highly esteemed,”<sup>1</sup> they then issue the following admonition: “But [the Council] strongly urges theologians and preachers of the Word of God to be careful to refrain as much from all false exaggeration as from too summary an attitude in considering the special dignity of the Mother of God.”<sup>2</sup> Here identified are the two immoderations of devotion to Mary, that is, Marian excess and Marian defect.

What, then, constitutes either “false exaggeration” or “too summary an attitude” regarding Mary? The Council repeatedly commends Marian devotions “within the limits of sound and orthodox doctrine,”<sup>3</sup> as well those formed by the study of “Sacred Scripture, the Fathers, the doctors and liturgy of the Church and under the guidance of the Church’s Magisterium.”<sup>4</sup>

Therefore, according to the Second Vatican Council, if a Marian devotion has its doctrinal basis in Scripture, a longstanding presence in the Church’s Tradition, and then taught by the papal Magisterium, then surely it would constitute an authentic form of Marian devotion.

Why, then, do some in the Church today consider the Marian title of human “Co-redemptrix” with Jesus, the only divine Redeemer, to constitute “false exaggeration”? The doctrine of Marian coredemption, which refers to Mary’s subordinate role though unique human role with Jesus in the historic work of Redemption, is deeply rooted in Scripture, the Fathers, the Liturgy, and Church doctors, and explicitly and consistently taught by the papal Magisterium for the last two centuries<sup>5</sup>; and the Co-redemptrix title, which in a single term denotes Mary’s unique human role in the Redemption, has enjoyed an unbroken presence within the Church’s devotional and mystical Tradition since the 14<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>6</sup>

Mary’s free and active consent at the Annunciation brought Jesus, the divine Redeemer into the world, to whom she gave his body, the instrument of Redemption (cf. Lk. 1:38, Lk. 2:1-20, Heb. 10:10).). Simeon prophesies Mary’s co-suffering with Jesus at Calvary (cf. Lk. 2:35). At Calvary, Mary shares in the suffering of her Redeemer Son, and consents to the offering of him as the

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<sup>1</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, Lumen Gentium*, n. 67.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, n. 66.

<sup>4</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, n. 67.

<sup>5</sup> Cf., “[The Role of Mary in Redemption](http://www.eccematertua.com): A Document of the Theological Commission of the International Marian Association,” *Ecce Mater Tua: An International Journal of Mariology*, Vol. 1, January 1, 2017, [www.eccematertua.com](http://www.eccematertua.com); J.B. Carol, *De corredemptione Beatae Virginis Mariae* (Rome, 1950); G. Roschini, *Maria Santissima Nella Storia Della Salvezza* Vol. II, (Isola Del Liri: Pisani, 1969) 144-155. For a survey of papal texts from Leo XIII to John Paul II, cf. A. Calkins, “The Mystery of Mary Co-redemptrix in the Papal Magisterium,” *Mary Co-redemptrix: Doctrinal Issues Today*, Queenship, 2002, 25-92; M. Perillo, F.I. and M. Somerton, F.I., “The Marian Coredemption Through Two Millennia,” *Mary at the Foot of the Cross*, Ratcliffe College, England, 2002, Academy of the Immaculate, 79- 112.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

victim-ransom of Redemption (cf. Jn. 19:26-27). The Council profoundly articulates our Lady's heroic coredemption with Jesus at Calvary:

Thus the Blessed Virgin advanced in her pilgrimage of faith, and faithfully persevered in union with her Son unto the cross, where she stood, in keeping with the divine plan, enduring with her only begotten son the intensity of his suffering, associated herself with his sacrifice in her mother's heart, and lovingly consenting to the immolation of this victim which was born of her.<sup>7</sup>

From the second century, St. Irenaeus expounds Mary's subordinate role with Jesus as the "New Eve" with the New Adam, and professes her as "the cause of salvation for herself and the whole human race."<sup>8</sup> In the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries, eastern liturgies refer to her subordinate role in the Redemption, with the great Akathist hymn invoking her, "Hail, Redemption of the tears of Eve."<sup>9</sup> By the 10<sup>th</sup> century, John the Geometer articulates Mary's co-suffering with Jesus throughout her life and culminating at Calvary;<sup>10</sup> and the term "Redemptrix" for Mary appears in liturgical hymns.<sup>11</sup> In the twelfth century, Mary's *cumpassio* ("suffering with") was taught by St. Bernard of Clairvaux<sup>12</sup>, and his disciple, Arnold of Chartres refers to the Mother at Calvary being spiritually "co-crucified" with her Son, and that she spiritually "co-dies" with Jesus in her heart.<sup>13</sup> In the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the title, "Co-redemptrix"<sup>14</sup> appears, and by the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the prominent Tridentine theologian, Jesuit Alphonsus Salmeron defends the theological legitimacy of the Co-redemptrix title.<sup>15</sup> The 17<sup>th</sup> century Golden Age of Marian coredemption would see over 300 theological references to the role and title, with the doctrine recognized as the "common consensus of theologians."<sup>16</sup>

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the papal Magisterium begins its consistent doctrinal teaching on Mary's unique participation in the Redemption, which will extend successively through the 21<sup>st</sup> century papal Magisterium to the present.<sup>17</sup> Under the pontificate of Pope St. Pius X, the Co-redemptrix title is first used and approved, significantly, by the *Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith itself* (then Holy

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<sup>7</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, n. 58.

<sup>8</sup> St. Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, III, Ch. 22, n. 4, PG 7, 959 A, Harvey 2, 123.

<sup>9</sup> *Akathist Hymn*, c. 525 A.D., Strophe 1, PG 92, 1337 A. Cited in *Lumen Gentium*, n. 56.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. John the Geometer, *Life of Mary*, Bol. 196, 123; cf. Pope St. John Paul II, *Wednesday Audience*, October 25, 1995, Inseg. XVIII/2 (1995) 934-936.

<sup>11</sup> For example, *Litanies des saintes*, Cathedral of Salisbury, Parchment 173; cf. Laurentin, *Le Titre de Corédemptrice*, 11-12.

<sup>12</sup> St. Bernard of Clairvaux, *Serm. 3 in Purificatione Beatae Mariae.*, 2; PL 183, 370; cf. Pope St. John Paul II, *Wednesday Audience*, October 25, 1995, Inseg. XVIII/2 (1995) 934-936.

<sup>13</sup> Arnold of Chartres, *De septem verbis Domini in cruce*, 3; PL 189, 1694; PL 189, 1726-1727; PL 189, 1693 B; cf. Pope St. John Paul II, *Wednesday Audience*, October 25, 1995, Inseg. XVIII/2 (1995) 934-936.

<sup>14</sup> *Orat. Ms S. Petri Slaisburgens, saec. XV; Codex Petrin, a, III, 20; Orat. Ms S. Petri. Saec. XIV, XV; Codex Petrin. , 1, 20*, quoted in M. Dreves, *Analecta hymnica medii aevi, Leipzig, Reiland*, t. 46, 1905, 126, n. 79.

<sup>15</sup> Alphonsus Salmerón, *Commentarii in Evangel.*, Tr. 5, Opera, Cologne, ed. Hierat, 1604, t. III, 37b-38a; *Commentarii*, vol. 10, tr. 41, 359b; vol. 10, tr. 41, 359b; vol. 11, tr. 38, 312a; vol. 3; tr. 43, 495a.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. J.B. Carol, "Marian Coredemption," Carol, ed., *Mariology*, Vol 2, 1957, p. 409.

<sup>17</sup> For a survey of papal texts on Marian Coredemption from Leo XIII to John Paul II, cf. A. Calkins, "The Mystery of Mary Co-redemptrix in the Papal Magisterium," *Mary Co-redemptrix: Doctrinal Issues Today*, Queenship, 2002, 25-92; M. Perillo, F.I. and M. Somerton, F.I., "The Marian Coredemption Through Two Millennia," *Mary at the Foot of the Cross*, Ratcliffe College, England, 2002, (New Bedford, MA: Academy of the Immaculate, 2002) 79- 112; Cf. J.B. Carol, *De corredemptione Beatae Virginis Mariae*, Rome, 1950; G. Roschini, *Maria Santissima Nella Storia Della Salvezza*, Vol. II, (Isola Del Liri, Pisani, 1969) 144-155.

Office) along with the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments (then Congregation of Rites).<sup>18</sup> Pope Benedict XV unequivocally teaches the Coredemptrix doctrine: "... We rightly say that she [Mary] redeemed the human race together with Christ."<sup>19</sup> Pope Pius XI explicitly uses the title on three occasions,<sup>20</sup> and specifically defends the Co-redemptrix title:

By necessity, the Redeemer could not but associate [*non poteva, per necessità di cose, non associare*] his Mother in his work. For this reason, we invoke her under the title of Co-redemptrix. She gave us the Savior, she accompanied him in the work of Redemption as far as the Cross itself, sharing with Him the sorrows and the agony and in the death in which Jesus consummated the Redemption of mankind.<sup>21</sup>

Recognized Italian and French Protestant theologians in the 1950's identified the doctrine of Marian Coredemption as the central and fundamental issue of 20<sup>th</sup> century Catholic Mariology,<sup>22</sup> and recognized it as the essential synthesis of all Mariology in the minds of popes and Catholic theologians.<sup>23</sup>

The Second Vatican Council authoritatively and repeatedly teaches the doctrine of Our Lady's coredemption in Chapter 8 of *Lumen Gentium*, in terms of her "lovingly consenting to the immolation of this victim"<sup>24</sup>; her "freely cooperating in the work of man's salvation" as the New Eve;<sup>25</sup> the "union of the mother with the Son in the work of salvation";<sup>26</sup> and "in a wholly singular way she cooperated by her obedience, faith, hope, and burning charity in the work of the Savior in restoring supernatural life to souls."<sup>27</sup>

It is further noteworthy that the first schema of the document on Mary as prepared by theologians from the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith (Holy Office) contained a strong historical, theological, and magisterial defense of the Co-redemptrix title within its notation.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Congregation of Rites, *Decretum quo festum Septem Dolorum B. M. V., Dominicae tertiae Septembris affixum, ad ritum duplicem secundae classis elevatur pro universa Ecclesia* (may 13, 1918) *Acta Sanctae Sedis*, 41 [1908] in which the Congregation itself uses the Co-redemptrix title in granting the feast of the Seven Sorrows of Mary to be raised to the rank of double class; the Congregation of the Holy Office also uses the title, Co-redemptrix, in a decree of June 26, 1913, *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* [AAS] 5[1913], 364; and in another decree of January 22, 1914, AAS 6, [1914], 108.

<sup>19</sup> Pope Benedict XV, *Inter Sodalicia*, AAS 10, 182. "... *ut dici merito queat, Ipsam cum Christo humanum genus redemisse.*"

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Pius XI, *Allocution to Pilgrims from Vicenza, Italy*, November 30, 1933, *L'Osservatore Romano*, Dec. 1, 1933, 1; Pius XI, *Allocution to Spanish Pilgrims*, *L'Osservatore Romano*, March 25, 1934, 1; Pius XI, *Radio Message for the Closing of the Holy Year at Lourdes*, *L'Osservatore Romano*, April 29-30, 1935, 1.

<sup>21</sup> Pius XI, *Allocution to Pilgrims from Vicenza, Italy*, November 30, 1933, *L'Osservatore Romano*, Dec. 1, 1933, 1; see also Domenico Bertetto, S.D.B., ed. *Discorsi di Pio XI* 2:1013.

<sup>22</sup> G. Miegge, *La Vergine Maria, saggio del storia del dogma* (Torre Pellice: Editrice Claudina, 1950) p. 178, as cited by Carol, *Mariology*, Vol. 2, p. 377.

<sup>23</sup> P. Maury, *La Vierge Marie dans le catholicisme contemporain*, in *Le Protestantisme et la Vierge Marie*, ed., J.Bosc, P. Bourguet, P. Maury, and H.Roux (Paris: Ed Je Sers, 1950) p. 39-40, as cited by Carol, *Mariology*, Vol 2, p. 377.

<sup>24</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, 58.

<sup>25</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, n. 56.

<sup>26</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, n. 57.

<sup>27</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, n. 61.

<sup>28</sup> "De Maria Virgine Matre Dei et Matre Hominum," Section 3, note 16, *Acta Synodalia Oecumenici Vaticani Secundi, Typis Polgottis Vaticanis*, 1971, vol. 1, pt. 4. The decision to exclude the Co-redemptrix title from the final version of the

Pope Benedict XVI has prudently and wisely warned against a post conciliar “hermeneutics of rupture” with the Church before the Council, and instead directed the contemporary theological community, to a reverend and fruitful *hermeneutics of continuity*. How could any present rejection of the Co-redemptrix title in light of its undeniable foundation in Scripture, Tradition, Magisterium, and its ubiquitous presence in authentic 20<sup>th</sup> century Mariology, as testified to even by Protestant observers, not constitute an obvious rupture of hermeneutical continuity?

### ***Five Post-conciliar Witnesses***

Let’s examine the testimony of five prominent post-conciliar Church figures, who, well after the Second Vatican Council and from diverse roles from within the Church, have faithfully employed the Co-redemptrix title for Our Lady, and in several cases, have staunchly defended it.

Pope St. John Paul II used the Co-redemptrix titles at least six times<sup>29</sup> and [universally taught](#) the doctrine of Marian coredemption as Roman pontiff.<sup>30</sup> One example of his teaching on Marian coredemption—highlighted within the context of a rich theology based on *Lumen Gentium*, n. 58—can be seen in this 1985 homily:

Crucified spiritually with her crucified Son (cf. Gal 2:20), she contemplated with heroic love the death of her God, she “lovingly consented to the immolation of this victim born of her” (*Lumen Gentium*, 58).... At Calvary with the sacrifice of her Son that led to the foundation of the Church .... Having suffered for the Church, Mary deserved to become the mother of all the disciples of her Son .... Mary’s role as Co-redemptrix did not cease with the glorification of her Son.<sup>31</sup>

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Marian document to be eventually found in *Lumen Gentium* Chapter 8 did not come from the Council Fathers themselves, but from a theological sub-committee who would state in a “*Praenotanda*” [explanatory pre-note] that while certain terms used by Roman Pontiffs such as “Co-redemptrix of the human race” were “absolutely true in themselves” (*in se verissima*) they “may be understood with difficulty by separated brethren (in this case, Protestants)” and were, for that reason, “omitted” from the schema. Cf. *Acta Synodalia Sacrosancti Concilii Oecumenici Vaticani II, Volumen I, Periodus Prima, Pars IV, Praenotanda*, Vatican City, 1971, 99; cf. *Besutti, Lo Schema Mariano*, 41.

<sup>29</sup> See John Paul II General Audience, 10 December 1980 (*Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo [Inseg]* II, III/2 [1980], p. 1646); General Audience 8 September 1982 (*Inseg* V/3 [1982], p. 404); Angelus Address 4 November, 1984 (*Inseg* VII/2 [1984], p. 1151); Discourse at World Youth Day 31 March 1985 (*Inseg* VIII/1 [1985], p. 889–890); Address to the Sick 24 March, 1990 (*Inseg* XIII/1 [1990], p. 743); Discourse of 6 October, 1991 (*Inseg* XIV/2 [1991], p. 756). Moreover, in a homily in Guayaquil, Ecuador on January 31, 1985, John Paul II spoke of the “co-redemptive role of Mary (*el papel corredentor de María*: *Inseg* VIII [1985], p. 319), which was translated as “Mary’s role as Co-redemptrix” in *L’Osservatore Romano*, English ed., March 11, 1985.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. A. Calkins, “Pope John Paul II’s Ordinary Magisterium on Marian Coredemption,” *Mary at the Foot of the Cross*, Vol. II, New Bedford, MA, Academy of the Immaculate, 2002; M. Perillo, F.I. and M. Somerton, F.I., “The Marian Coredemption Through Two Millenia,” *Mary at the Foot of the Cross*, Ratchliffe College, England, 2002, Academy of the Immaculate, 79- 112; G. Roschini, *Maria Santissima Nella Storia Della Salvezza*, Vol. II, Isola Del Liri, Pisani, 144-155; Arthur B. Calkins, “Pope John Paul II’s Teaching on Marian Coredemption,” M. Miravalle ed., *Mary Coredemptrix, Mediatrix, Advocate, Theological Foundations II: Papal, Pneumatological, Ecumenical*, Goleta, CA: Queenship Publishing Company, 1997.

<sup>31</sup> Pope St. John Paul II, *Homily at the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Alborada*, Guayaquil, Ecuador, Jan. 31, 1985, *L’Osservatore Romano*, English ed., March 11, 1985.

Any claims that John Paul II used the title in only marginal texts, or texts devoid of doctrinal value, seems to run contrary to the conciliar teachings regarding the norms for the required religious assent of mind and will to the manifest mind of the Pope even when not speaking *ex cathedra*,<sup>32</sup> including the characteristic of repeated papal teaching. Nor do such claims remove the plain fact that a post-conciliar Roman pontiff repeatedly used the Co-redemptrix title. Hence, any position which holds that Pope John Paul II did not use the Co-redemptrix term as part of his magisterial teaching is historically, theologically, and factually erroneous.

Cardinal Luigi Ciappi, O.P., Papal Theologian under St. John Paul II, confirmed the legitimacy of the Co-redemptrix title and strongly endorsed the universal petition for its solemn definition.<sup>33</sup> He has been joined by *over 600 brother cardinal and bishops*, who, since 1993 (obviously, well after the Second Vatican Council) have supported both the Co-redemptrix title and its solemn papal definition.<sup>34</sup>

St. Teresa of Calcutta, the most universally acclaimed saint of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, repeatedly used the Co-redemptrix title and likewise supported its papal definition: “Mary is our Co-redemptrix with Jesus. She gave Jesus his body and suffered with him at the foot of the cross...The papal definition of Mary as Co-redemptrix, Mediatrix, and Advocate will bring great graces to the Church.”<sup>35</sup>

The Fatima visionary, Sr. Lucia, who in her final writings, *Calls from the Message of Fatima* (published in 2002), not only uses the Co-redemptrix title for Our Lady of Fatima on seven occasions, but also provides extended explanations and defenses of the title and role. Sr. Lucia concludes: “Mary does not simply offer her Son, she offers herself with Christ, because Jesus had received his body and blood from her; thus, she offers herself in and with Christ to God, Co-redemptrix with Christ, of humanity”;<sup>36</sup> and again: “...Mary, made one with Christ, is the Co-redemptrix of the human race.”<sup>37</sup>

A fifth witness, Oxford theologian, John Macquarrie, from the Anglican tradition, offers a particularly valuable ecumenical testimony. Macquarrie, referred to as Anglicanism’s most prominent theologian of the last 50 years, defends an open theological and ecumenical dialogue regarding the potential merits of the Co-redemptrix title:

The matter cannot be settled by pointing to the dangers of exaggeration and abuse, or by appealing to isolated texts of scripture such as 1 Timothy 2:5, or by the changing fashions in theology and spirituality, or by the desire not to say anything that might offend one’s partners in ecumenical dialogue. Unthinking enthusiasts may have elevated Mary to a position of virtual equality with Christ, but this aberration is not a necessary consequence of recognizing that there may be a truth striving for expression in words like Mediatrix

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<sup>32</sup> Cf. Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, n. 25.

<sup>33</sup> M. Miravalle, *Mary Co-redemptrix, Mediatrix, Advocate* (Gloeta, CA: Queenship Publications, 1993) Introduction by Luigi Cardinal Ciappi, 5 May, 1993, ix.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. *Vox Populi Mariae Mediatrici* Archives of cardinal and bishop endorsement letters received, filed, copied and submitted to the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith since 1993, 48765 Annapolis Rd, Hopedale, Ohio.

<sup>35</sup> Letter of Mother Teresa of Calcutta, August 14, 1993 as contained in M. Miravalle, *With Jesus: The Story of Mary Co-redemptrix*, Queenship, 2003, p. 229.

<sup>36</sup> Sr. Lucia, *Calls from the Message of Fatima*, (Still River, MA: Ravengate Press, 2002, p. 279.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, p. 137.

and Co-redemptrix. All responsible theologians would agree that Mary's co-redemptive role is subordinate and auxiliary to the central role of Christ. But if she does have such a role, the more clearly we understand it, the better. It is a matter for theological investigation. And, like other doctrines concerning Mary, it is not only saying something about her, but something more general concerning the Church as a whole or even humanity as a whole.<sup>38</sup>

In light of these post-conciliar witnesses to the legitimacy and value of the Co-redemptrix title, who then would judge Mary Co-redemptrix to be guilty of false exaggeration? Who would identify John Paul II, Mother Teresa, 600 cardinals and bishops, and the others as supporting doctrinally erroneous title, pre-Vatican, or acting in violation of authentic ecumenism?

While there can certainly be preferences among the beauty of diversity of theological terminology, it is quite another thing, unacceptable from an authentic Catholic perspective, to decide that a Marian title, grounded in Scripture, nurtured through Tradition, and taught by the Magisterium, is now to be deemed theologically illegitimate, based only upon theological preference.

Preference, yes; prohibition, no. No one should judge these present-day Church luminaries, one a pope, two of them canonized, and a third with a cause open for canonization, and find them doctrinally unorthodox, ecclesiastically outdated, or ecumenically insensitive.

Theological preferences come and go, and our present time is but a brief step in the great historic journey of the development of doctrine. We must vigorously guard against any subtle or even unconscious forms of theological chronolatry of our temporary and passing role in this development. Lest we cast dispersions upon centuries of inspiration, prayer, reflection, and doctrinal development, effected by popes and bishops, saints and stigmatists, clergy and laity, contemplatives and mystics, let us respond to Mary Co-redemptrix in title and truth with theological humility and ecclesial reverence. We cannot play with Tradition.

### *Ecumenically Insensitive?*

The call to Ecumenism, in point of fact, has become the principal rationale used by some to oppose the Co-redemptrix title for Our Lady. Is calling Mary the human "Co-redemptrix" an act of ecumenical insensitivity?

The papal teachings of St. John Paul II on ecumenism, based on the Council, stand perennial, and need to be accurately applied now regarding the Co-redemptrix title:

Taking up an idea expressed by Pope John XXIII at the opening of the Council, the Decree on Ecumenism mentions the way of formulating doctrine as one of the elements of a continuing reform. Here it is not a question of altering the deposit of faith, changing the meaning of dogmas, eliminating essential words from them, accommodating truth to the preferences of a particular age, or suppressing certain articles of the *Creed* under the false pretext that they are no longer understood today. The unity willed by God can be attained

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<sup>38</sup> J. Macquarrie, "Mary Co-redemptrix and Disputes Over Justification and Grace: An Anglican View," *Mary Co-redemptrix: Ecumenically Doctrinal Issues Today* (Goleta, CA: Queenship, 2002), p. 140.

only by the adherence of all to the content of revealed faith in its entirety. In matters of faith, compromise is in contradiction with God who is Truth. In the Body of Christ, "the way, and the truth, and the life" (*Jn* 14:6), who could consider legitimate a reconciliation brought about at the expense of the truth? The Council's Declaration on Religious Freedom *Dignitatis Humanae* attributes to human dignity the quest for truth, "especially in what concerns God and his Church", and adherence to truth's demands. A "being together" which betrayed the truth would thus be opposed both to the nature of God who offers his communion and to the need for truth found in the depths of every human heart.<sup>39</sup>

And again:

With regard to the study of areas of disagreement, the Council requires that the whole body of doctrine be clearly presented. At the same time, it asks that the manner and method of expounding the Catholic faith should not be a hindrance to dialogue with our brothers and sisters. Certainly, it is possible to profess one's faith and to explain its teaching in a way that is correct, fair and understandable, and which at the same time takes into account both the way of thinking and the actual historical experiences of the other party. Full communion of course will have to come about through the acceptance of the whole truth into which the Holy Spirit guides Christ's disciples. Hence all forms of reductionism or facile "agreement" must be absolutely avoided.<sup>40</sup>

Marian coredemption is a doctrine of the Church. Co-redemptrix is the title that expresses this doctrine. The title must continue, as certainly will the doctrine.

Gradualism in ecumenical dialogue is legitimate. Reductionism is not.

The Co-redemptrix title, moreover, encompasses in itself several key Catholic doctrines concerning grace and free will, the necessity of human cooperation in salvation, and faith, hope, and charity as required for justification, all of which constitute an essential aspect of the *depositum fidei*.

Surely, terms like "transubstantiation" and "papal infallibility" take more work in dialogues of Christian unity, due to their constituting obvious areas of disagreement. Why, then, do we continue to use them? Because they convey critical Catholic doctrines that cannot be reduced or compromised. Papal infallibility, for example, requires extensive explanation as to its nature, proper application, and limits, but we do not seek to suppress that title, because no better single term captures the doctrinal truth contained therein. The same holds true for the unique role of Mary in the Redemption and its corresponding term of Co-redemptrix.

Once again, to posit any notion of Mary Co-redemptrix as constituting an alleged violation of authentic Catholic ecumenism is necessarily to indict John Paul the Great, Mother Teresa, and over 600 post-conciliar prelates as being ecumenically insensitive. Would that be true? Would that be fair?

### ***Model for the Church***

Is there a further value in this Marian title for the People of God? What does Mary Co-redemptrix say to the Church today?

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<sup>39</sup> John Paul II, Encyclical Letter, *Ut Unum Sint* (May 25, 1995), n. 18.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, n.36.



Apart from the rightful solemn acknowledgement our Mother deserves for her unique human role with Jesus, Mary Co-redemptrix also reminds all the faithful of the critical universal Christian call to cooperate in the work of redemption, to follow St. Paul's example to "make up what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ, for the sake of his body, which is the Church (Col:1:24)." By spreading the Gospel, by teaching the faith to our children, by feeding the hungry, by acts of fraternal kindness, by offering our sufferings— by these and many more ways, every Christian has the imperative to cooperate with Jesus in the redemption of others. The very nature of the Church has been established to continue the redemptive mission of Jesus Christ through its prayer and sacramental life. St. Paul calls us to be "co-workers with God" (1 Cor. 3:9). Should we be surprised when St. John Paul II calls us to be "co-redeemers in Christ"?<sup>41</sup>

If Christian married couples can co-create with the Creator in having children, and bishops and clergy can co-sanctify with the Sanctifier when administering the sacraments, then surely the People of God can co-redeem with the Redeemer by sharing in the saving work of Jesus.

Every truth about Mary abounds to the Church, and her unique role as human Co-redemptrix reminds us of the Christian duty to cooperate with the Redeemer in the ongoing work of human redemption in a contemporary world in such desperate need of Christian evangelization.

Some might argue that the term "redemption" should be reserved only to the divine act of Jesus. But this would logically deny another core Catholic doctrine and mission: *to freely and actively participate in the life and the saving mission of Jesus Christ*. When an inferior being, a human, shares in a quality or perfection of a superior being, God, this participation takes nothing away nor competes with the perfection of God. Thus, for a human being to participate in the work of Jesus, the divine Redeemer, takes nothing away nor competes with Jesus' one mediation (cf. 1 Tim 2:5), but rather manifests its glory.<sup>42</sup> As the Council teaches regarding Our Lady's unique participation in the one mediation of Christ: "Mary's function as mother of men in no way obscures or diminishes this unique mediation of Christ, but rather shows its power."<sup>43</sup> This is also true about all Christ's faithful who are called to participate in his great work of Redemption.

The Lord himself, providentially from all time, intended free human participation as an integral part of his divine work of Redemption. This constitutes essential Catholic doctrine and is embodied in the co-redemptrix and co-redeemer terms.

Pope Benedict XVI offers an extraordinary example of the universal call to Christian coredemption in which he incorporates precisely the same principle of human participation and analogy in calling the sick gathered at Fatima Shrine to become "redeemers in the Redeemer" and thereby to offer "a means of redemption for the whole world."

Dear friends who are sick, welcome the call of Jesus who will shortly pass among you in the Most Blessed Sacrament, and entrust to him every setback and pain that you face, so that

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<sup>41</sup> For example, John Paul II, *Discourse to the Personnel of the Fatebenefratelli Hospital*, *L'Osservatore Romano*, April 5, 1981.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, nn. 60-62.

<sup>43</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, n. 60.



they become—according to his design—a means of redemption for the whole world. You will be redeemers with the Redeemer, just as you are sons in the Son. At the cross...stands the mother of Jesus, our mother.<sup>44</sup>

Using the same root term of redemption in referring to Mary as Co-redemptrix and “co-redeemer in Christ” for every member of the Church provides an essential theological and etymological link, within the sound Catholic usage of analogy, on how the human members of the Church must intimately share in the divine Redeemer’s greatest victory.

Moreover, the Christian value of human suffering is intrinsic to the Co-redemptrix term. In light of the global and multiform human suffering being experienced right now, inclusive of the Covid pandemic and its tragic global consequences, should we not be accentuating suffering’s transcendent value right now as captured in this title and the unparalleled efficacious example of human suffering united with Christ by our Mother Co-redemptrix?

Finally, in our current efforts to more fully appreciate the role of women in the Church, should we not also accentuate the fact that it was not a pope, not a bishop, not a priest, nor a man, but a woman who was willed to the Father to join his incarnate Son, like no other creature, in the redemption of the human family?

Marian titles like Mary Co-redemptrix, deeply seeded in the sources of divine revelation, can never die. Quite the contrary, the Holy Spirit, Our Lady’s divine spouse, within his wondrous development of doctrine, only unveils more and more its timeless truth, its intrinsic beauty, its eternal profundity. Mary Co-redemptrix will live on to point perennially to redemptive victory of Jesus, her Son, and to the ongoing human imperative for the People of God to cooperate in Jesus’ saving mission, especially in our own present critical hour of human history.

*O Immaculate Mother of the Church, Mary Co-redemptrix, pray for us!*

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<sup>44</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, Papal Address to the Sick, “*You Can Overcome the Feeling of the Uselessness of Suffering*,” Shrine of Our Lady of Fatima, Fatima, Portugal, May 13, 2010.