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Title: Is the Mother of Jesus a 'Co-redemptrix'?

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He has spearheaded the international campaign for the Pope to make a formal definition of Mary's role as Co-redemptrix. In this article, he gives a brief explanation of why he considers that the title is correct, and why he thinks it would be appropriate for it to be formally defined as a dogma of the Catholic Church.

Is the Mother of Jesus a 'Co-redemptrix'?

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* and *Co-redemptrix*. All responsible theologians would agree that Mary's coredemptive 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.¹

— John Macquarrie

As one of Anglicanism's foremost twentieth century theologians, Macquarrie rightly alludes to the fact that certain terms bespeak concepts, and certain theological titles encapsulate doctrinal truths. Does this hold true for the title *Co-redemptrix* attributed by some Christians to the Mother of Jesus?

Before entering this Marian issue directly, a *sine qua non* foundation must first be addressed: can any human being participate in any aspect of the Redemption of humanity accomplished by Jesus Christ, the only Divine Redeemer? If the answer is no, then the subsequent Marian query is pointless.

Unless participation is properly understood, it can elicit an egalitarian, competitive connotation. In fact, its true nature typically indicates just the opposite. Participation commonly denotes when an inferior being shares in the being or qualities of a superior being, but without adding, subtracting or possessing equality with that superior being.² Participation generally includes in its very act the basic truth that someone or something clearly inferior (at least in regard to the specific being or quality in question) takes part in a being quality possessed to a greater degree by a greater someone or something.

Take the case of a postgraduate lecture in quantum physics offered by a world renowned physicist and attended by a university freshman. Hopefully the freshman will have his or her knowledge of quantum physics enhanced by participating in the physicist's lecture, but there is no danger of either a newfound competing equality in quantum knowledge

¹ John Macquarrie, 'Mary Coredemptrix and Disputes Over Justification and Grace: An Anglican View', in M. Miravalle, (ed) *Mary Co-redemptrix, Mediatrix, Advocate, Theological Foundations II: Papal, Pneumatological, Ecumenical*, Santa Barbara: Queenship Publications, 1996, p. 246.

² For a classic discussion on the metaphysics of participation, see C. Fabro, *La nozione metafisica di partecipazione secondo San Tommaso d'Aquino*, Torino: SEI, 3rd edn, 1963.



between the physicist and the freshman, nor any concern of anything being taken away from the physicist by the participation of the freshman.³ Participation must also not be understood in quantitative accidental terms whereby, for example, to ‘participate’ in eating a pizza means to take a piece, which results in less pizza for others.⁴

True participation, then, constitutes a partaking, a sharing in some real way, in the being of another greater being, without risk of equality, competition, reduction.

From the sources of Christian revelation, the New Testament clearly establishes that all followers of Jesus Christ are summoned to be, as St. Peter states, ‘partakers’ in the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4), i.e., participants in the very nature and being of God himself. St. Paul likewise exhorts Christians to become ‘co-workers with God’ (1 Cor. 3:9), and thus to personally cooperate in the salvific mission of Jesus Christ. In fact, St. Paul does not shy away from identifying himself in a cooperative role with Jesus to ‘save’ his fellow Jews, when he speaking to the Romans: ‘Now I am speaking to you Gentiles...I magnify my ministry in order to make my fellow Jews jealous, and thus save some of them (Rom. 11: 13-14).’

In fact, the Pauline doctrine of human participation in the saving mission of Christ, starting with the Apostle himself and extending by example to all Christians, is oftentimes undervalued. St. Paul repeatedly beckons the Christian to become ‘co-workers’ (*synergoi*) in the salvific ministry of Jesus, a term he uses at least five times in five different epistles, including ‘co-workers in the Kingdom of God’ (Col. 4:11); and ‘co-workers in Christ Jesus’ (Rom. 16:3).⁵ St. John joins St. Paul in this biblical teaching when he likewise refers to fellow Christians as ‘co-workers’ in spreading the ‘Truth’ of Jesus Christ (cf. 3 John 1:8).

The text of Col. 1:24 deserved special appreciation, where St. Paul brings in the critical Christian theme to *co-suffer with Christ* as a means of ‘making up’ what is ‘lacking’ in Christ’s sufferings for the salvation of God’s people: ‘Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I complete what is lacking in the suffering of Christ for the sake of his body, which is the Church’ (Col. 1:24). St. John Paul II rightly comments that this passage in no way refers

³ Dr. John-Mark Miravalle, ‘Reasonability of Mary in the Redemption’, International Marian Association Symposium, *Mary in the Redemption*, 2017, Dr. John-Mark Miravalle, Youtube Conference 444, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Btaa80p1mvc> (accessed July 13, 2023).

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Cf. 1 Cor. 3:9; Romans 16:3; 2 Cor. 1:24; Col. 4:11; Philemon 1:24.

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to an objective incompleteness in the infinite sufferings of the divine Redeemer, but rather refers to the 'creative character' of human suffering, in which Christ has 'opened his own redemptive suffering to all human suffering.'⁶

On a more fundamental ecclesiological level, the very historical fact that Jesus Christ chose to establish his redemptive mission as being utterly dependent upon the free will consent of human apostles, disciples, evangelists (not to forget the cooperation of creatures we call angels), testifies to the undeniable truth that human beings can and must participate in the redemptive mission of divine Redeemer. Christ both depends and relies on free human cooperation in spreading the saving gospel, teaching the saving gospel, and suffering for the saving gospel, both at the initiation of his Church, and for the salvific promulgation of his Church today.

St. Augustine was right: 'God created us without us, but he did not will to save us without us.'⁷

The Second Vatican Council explicitly confirms the legitimacy of subordinate human participation in the mission of the divine Redeemer:

For no creature could ever be counted as equal with the Incarnate Word and Redeemer. Just as the priesthood of Christ is shared in various ways both by the ministers and by the faithful, and as the one goodness of God is really communicated in different ways to His creatures, so also the unique mediation of the Redeemer does not exclude but rather gives rise to a manifold cooperation which is but a sharing in this one source.⁸

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, moreover, offers the following pastoral explanation of the same reality:

God is the sovereign master of his plan. But to carry it out he also makes use of his creatures' co-operation. This use is not a sign of weakness, but rather a token of

⁶ St. John Paul II, Apostolic Letter, *Salvifici Doloris*, Vatican City: Vatican Polygot Press, February 11, 1984, n. 24.

⁷ St. Augustine, *Sermo* 169, 11, 13: PL 38, 923.

⁸ Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, n. 62. Note that the Latin text of *Lumen Gentium* 62 twice uses forms of the verb, *participare* ('to participate') to denote the various modes of participation by both clergy and faithful in the one Priesthood of Christ (*participatur*), and to indicate the diverse cooperation in which creatures participate (*participatam*) in the unique mediation of the Redeemer. While the official Vatican Italian and Spanish translations use participation terminology (*partecipato*, *partecipata* and *participado*, *participada*, respectively), unfortunately the Vatican English translation does not.



Almighty God's greatness and goodness. For God grants his creatures not only their existence, but also the dignity of acting on their own, of being causes and principles for each other, and thus co-operating in the accomplishment of his plan.⁹

How, then, does Mary *uniquely participate* with Jesus in the work of Redemption?

In virtue of her Immaculate Conception, Mary, 'full of grace' was prepared by God the Father to be the greatest possible human participant in the Redemption accomplished by Christ. Her Annunciation 'fiat' brought the world its Redeemer; her lifetime 'yes' consistently supported the work of the Redeemer; and her sorrowful 'let it be done' on Calvary through her co-suffering beside the crucified Jesus was, in the words of St. John Paul II, 'mysteriously and supernaturally fruitful for the redemption of the world.'¹⁰

Vatican II provides a helpful synthesis:

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, (294) grieving exceedingly with her only begotten Son, uniting herself with a maternal heart with His sacrifice, and lovingly consenting to the immolation of this Victim which she herself had brought forth. Finally, she was given by the same Christ Jesus dying on the cross as a mother to His disciple with these words: 'Woman, behold thy son (Jn. 19:26-27).'11

And:

Predestined from eternity by that decree of divine providence which determined the incarnation of the Word to be the Mother of God, the Blessed Virgin was on this earth the virgin Mother of the Redeemer, and above all others and in a singular way the generous associate and humble handmaid of the Lord. She conceived, brought forth and nourished Christ. She presented Him to the Father in the temple, and was united with Him by compassion as He died on the Cross. In this singular way she cooperated by her obedience, faith, hope and burning charity in the work of the Savior in giving back supernatural life to souls. Wherefore she is our mother in the order of grace.¹²

⁹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Citta del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997, n. 306.

¹⁰ St. John Paul II, Apostolic Letter, *Salvifici Doloris*, 11 February, 1984, n. 25.

¹¹ Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, 58.

¹² Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, n. 61.

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Mary alone gave flesh to the Word. As contained in the common quip of St. Teresa of Calcutta: 'No Mary, no Jesus.' Mary alone was the sinless human companion with her divine Redeemer-Son throughout his earthly existence in fulfillment of his salvific task. Mary alone, as the New Eve providentially planned with and under the New Adam, uniquely cooperated in the restoration of grace for the human family. Second century Mariology bears this out in the words of Church doctor, St. Irenaeus, who declared her the 'cause of salvation for herself and the whole human race.'¹³

This Christian truth in a single term is denoted by the title, Co-redemptrix.

Any thought that Mary as human Co-redemptrix threatens equality with Jesus Christ, the divine Redeemer is an intellectual, let alone theological, absurdity. Humanity equal to divinity on any level? Impossible. A human woman competing with the divine Savior? Irrational. A human woman *participating* with a Divine Redeemer in the work of Redemption? Providential. Clearly, God wanted a woman to participate in the greatest divine act of human history. Mary, amidst all disciples of Christ, uniquely did so.

Is there anything truly radical in saying that the Mother of Jesus is the human being that cooperated the most with Jesus in the historic work of Redemption? Would St. Peter or St. Paul object? Would St. John, the beloved Disciple? Would Jesus?

On a separate though complementary issue, there is also some present discussion about a potential solemn definition or 'dogma' regarding Mary as the Spiritual Mother of all peoples, which would be inclusive of her Co-redemptrix role, as well as the subsequent roles of 'Mediatrix of all graces' and 'Advocate.' When did this ecclesial discussion begin? Well over 100 years ago.

The renowned Belgian Primate, Cardinal Désiré Mercier, initiated such a movement in 1915, believing it to have a potentially salutary effect on World War I and its mass devastation. Mercier believed that a dogmatic definition by the Roman pontiff would constitute a solemn

¹³ St. Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*. III, 22, 4: PG 7, 9S9 A; Harvey, 2, 123.

recognition and appreciation of Mary's Spiritual Motherhood (inclusive of her roles as Co-redemptrix and Mediatrix of all graces), and thus lead to a great historic release of grace and peace for the world. This gratuitous outpouring is based on the principle that the more we freely honor Mary's motherly roles of supernatural intercession, the more she can providentially enact and empower these roles for the benefit of humanity. Cardinal Mercier and over 300 hundred bishops with him by 1920 (as well as hundreds of thousands of priests, religious and faithful), petitioned Pope Benedict XV for this new Marian dogma, and maintained that a papal proclamation would be a type of universal plea for peace to the Mother of all peoples by Christ's vicar on behalf of all humanity.

Over the course of the twentieth century, Mariology would champion the themes of Spiritual Maternity, Mediatrix of all graces, and Marian Coredemption more than any other Mariological topic.¹⁴ Consistent papal teachings on these Mariological themes would also dominate the greater part of the century.¹⁵ By the twentieth century's end, over 800 bishops

¹⁴ This is verifiable by a summary examination of the major Mariological journals in the major languages from the 1910's to the 1960's, as well as confirmation by recognized Protestant theologians, cf. 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. Concerning Marian coredemption alone, cf. Cf. J.B. Carol, 'Marian Coredemption,' Carol, ed., *Mariology*, Vol 2, 1957, p. 409. 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 Coredemptrix: 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.

¹⁵ Papal teachings on these Marian themes are ubiquitous through 20th century papal encyclicals, apostolic letters, homilies, allocutions, etc. For papal and magisterial references just for Co-redemptrix title, cf.) 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. Pope Benedict XV, *Inter Sodalicia*, AAS 10, 182. '... ut dici merito queat, Ipsam cum Christo humanum genus redemisse.' 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. 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.

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and 7 million Catholic faithful from 180 countries would join in this petition for a fifth Marian dogma.¹⁶

Now in the twenty-first century, many believe the human family is in even greater need of a supernatural invention from the Mother of all peoples with the graces necessary for global peace. What, then, is the *status quaestionis* on this potential Marian dogma?

From a Catholic perspective, the final discernment and decision for a papally proclaimed dogma ultimately rests with the pope himself. Pope Francis has, in the past, made comments distancing himself both from the title and from any dogmatic act.¹⁷ More recently, however, in a May 13, 2023 papal address for a Marian celebration in Sardinia, the Pope referred to 'Mediatrice of all graces' as an 'ancient Marian title', and identified Mary as the 'Advocate close to Jesus'.¹⁸ Could this reference to two of the three titles so closely associated with the worldwide petition for a new Marian dogma indicate a new openness on the part of Francis? Time will tell.

In the meantime, the present Roman pontiff continues to teach the doctrine of Marian coredemption. For example, on January 1, 2020, Pope Francis confidently states of the Mother of God and humanity's Spiritual Mother: 'From her, a woman, salvation came forth, and thus, there is no salvation without a woman.'¹⁹

That woman, without which there is no salvation, is Mary Co-redemptrix.

¹⁶ 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, as well as petitions of the lay faithful likewise submitted to the CDF, 48765 Annapolis Rd, Hopedale, Ohio.

¹⁷ Cf. For example, Pope Francis, Papal Homily, December 12, 2019 on the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, where in his homily, *ex tempore*, he speaks against both any new title of Mary as 'co-Savior' and refers to discussion of a new dogma as 'chatter'.

https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2019/documents/papa-francesco_20191212_omelia-guadalupe.html (accessed July 16, 2023).

¹⁸ Pope Francis, Papal Address to Diocese of Sassari, Sardinia, May 13, 2023, <http://www.arcidiocesisassari.it/2023/05/28/festa-del-voto-il-messaggio-del-santo-padre/> (accessed July 13, 2023).

¹⁹ Pope Francis, Homily of the Mass of the Solemnity of the Mother of God, January 1, 2020, [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2020/documents/papa-francesco_20200101_omelia-madredidio-pace.html#:~:text=Holy%20Mass%20on%20the%20Solemnity,\(1st%20January%202020\)%20%7C%20Francis&text=%E2%80%9CBut%20when%20the%20time%20had,\(Lk%20%3B21\)](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2020/documents/papa-francesco_20200101_omelia-madredidio-pace.html#:~:text=Holy%20Mass%20on%20the%20Solemnity,(1st%20January%202020)%20%7C%20Francis&text=%E2%80%9CBut%20when%20the%20time%20had,(Lk%20%3B21)) (accessed July 16, 2023).