

St. John Paul II's Synthesis of Marian Coredeemption

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The most significant synthesis on Marian Coredeemption was the catechesis of Pope John Paul II of April 2nd and 9th 1997. On April 2, 1997, St. John Paul II offered these reflections:

Mary united herself to Jesus' offering

1. Regina caeli laetare, alleluia!

So the Church sings in this Easter season, inviting the faithful to join in the spiritual joy of Mary, Mother of the Redeemer. The Blessed Virgin's gladness at Christ's Resurrection is even greater if one considers her intimate participation in Jesus' entire life.

In accepting with complete availability the words of the Angel Gabriel, who announced to her that she would become the Mother of the Messiah, Mary began her participation in the drama of Redemption. Her involvement in her Son's sacrifice, revealed by Simeon during the presentation in the Temple, continues not only in the episode of the losing and finding of the 12-year-old Jesus, but also throughout his public life.

However, the Blessed Virgin's association with Christ's mission reaches its culmination in Jerusalem, at the time of the Redeemer's Passion and Death. As the Fourth Gospel testifies, she was in the Holy City at the time, probably for the celebration of the Jewish feast of Passover.

2. The Council stresses the profound dimension of the Blessed Virgin's presence on Calvary, recalling that she "faithfully persevered in her union with her Son unto the Cross" (*Lumen gentium*, n. 58), and points out that this union "in the work of salvation is made manifest from the time of Christ's virginal conception up to his death" (*ibid.*, n. 57).

Mary Joins her Suffering to Jesus' Priestly Sacrifice

With our gaze illumined by the radiance of the Resurrection, we pause to reflect on the Mother's involvement in her Son's redeeming Passion, which was completed by her sharing in his suffering. Let us return again, but now in the perspective of the Resurrection, to the foot of the Cross where the Mother endured "with her only-begotten Son the intensity of his suffering, associated herself with his sacrifice in her mother's heart, and lovingly consented to the immolation of this victim which was born of her" ([ibid.](#), n. 58).

With these words, the Council reminds us of "Mary's compassion"; in her heart reverberates all that Jesus suffers in body and soul, emphasizing her willingness to share in her Son's redeeming sacrifice and to join her own maternal suffering to his priestly offering.

The Council text also stresses that her consent to Jesus' immolation is not passive acceptance but a genuine act of love, by which she offers her Son as a "victim" of expiation for the sins of all humanity.

Lastly, *Lumen Gentium* relates the Blessed Virgin to Christ, who has the lead role in Redemption, making it clear that in associating herself "with his sacrifice" she remains subordinate to her divine Son.

3. In the Fourth Gospel, St John says that "standing by the Cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene" (19:25). By using the verb "to stand", which literally means "to be on one's feet", "to stand erect", perhaps the Evangelist intends to present the dignity and strength shown in their sorrow by Mary and the other women.

The Blessed Virgin's "standing erect" at the foot of the Cross recalls her unfailing constancy and extraordinary

courage in facing suffering. In the tragic events of Calvary, Mary is sustained by faith, strengthened during the events of her life and especially during Jesus' public life. The Council recalls that "the Blessed Virgin advanced in her pilgrimage of faith and faithfully persevered in her union with her Son unto the Cross" (*Lumen Gentium*, n. 58).

Sharing his deepest feelings, she counters the arrogant insults addressed to the crucified Messiah with forbearance and pardon, associating herself with his prayer to the Father: "Forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Lk 23:34). By sharing in the feeling of abandonment to the Father's will expressed in Jesus' last words on the Cross: "Father into your hands I commend my spirit!" (ibid., 23:46), she thus offers, as the Council notes, loving consent "to the immolation of this victim which was born of her" (*Lumen gentium*, n. 58).

Mary's Hope Contains Light Stronger than Darkness

4. Mary's supreme "yes" is radiant with trusting hope in the mysterious future, begun with the death of her crucified Son. The words in which Jesus taught the disciples on his way to Jerusalem "that the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again" re-echo in her heart at the dramatic hour of Calvary, awakening expectation of and yearning for the Resurrection.

Mary's hope at the foot of the Cross contains a light stronger than the darkness that reigns in many hearts: in the presence of the redeeming Sacrifice, the hope of the Church and of humanity is born in Mary. (John Paul II, General Audience, April 2, 1997).

The second very important text about the Virgin Mary's role as Cooperatrix in the Redemption is found in John Paul II's General Audience of April 9, 1997:

Mary's co-operation is totally unique

The basis of this singular co-operation is Mary's divine motherhood and her sharing in Jesus' life, culminating in her presence at the foot of the Cross:

1. Down the centuries the Church has reflected on Mary's co-operation in the work of salvation, deepening the analysis of her association with Christ's redemptive sacrifice. St Augustine already gave the Blessed Virgin the title "co-operator" in the Redemption (cf. *De Sancta Virginitate*, 6; PL 40, 399), a title which emphasizes Mary's joint but subordinate action with Christ the Redeemer.

Reflection has developed along these lines, particularly since the 15th century. Some feared there might be a desire to put Mary on the same level as Christ. Actually the Church's teaching makes a clear distinction between the Mother and the Son in the work of salvation, explaining the Blessed Virgin's subordination, as co-operator, to the one Redeemer.

Moreover, when the Apostle Paul says: "For we are God's fellow workers" (1 Cor 3:9), he maintains the real possibility for man to co-operate with God. The collaboration of believers, which obviously excludes any equality with him, is expressed in the proclamation of the Gospel and in their personal contribution to its taking root in human hearts.

Mary's Cooperation is Unique and Unrepeatable

2. However, applied to Mary, the term "co-operator" acquires a specific meaning. The collaboration of Christians in salvation takes place after the Calvary event, whose fruits they endeavor to spread by prayer and sacrifice. Mary, instead, co-operated during the event itself and in the role of mother; thus her co-operation embraces the whole of Christ's saving work. She alone was associated in this way with the redemptive sacrifice that merited the salvation of all mankind. In union with Christ and in submission to him,

she collaborated in obtaining the grace of salvation for all humanity.

The Blessed Virgin's role as co-operator has its source in her divine motherhood. By giving birth to the One who was destined to achieve man's redemption, by nourishing him, presenting him in the temple and suffering with him as he died on the Cross, "in a wholly singular way she co-operated ... in the work of the Savior" (*Lumen Gentium*, n. 61). Although God's call to co-operate in the work of salvation concerns every human being, the participation of the Saviour's Mother in humanity's Redemption is a unique and unrepeatable fact.

Despite the uniqueness of her condition, Mary is also the recipient of salvation. She is the first to be saved, redeemed by Christ "in the most sublime way" in her Immaculate Conception (cf. Bull *Ineffabilis Deus*, in Pius IX, *Acta*, 1, 605) and filled with the grace of the Holy Spirit.

3. This assertion now leads to the question: what is the meaning of Mary's unique co-operation in the plan of salvation? It should be sought in God's particular intention for the Mother of the Redeemer, whom on two solemn occasions, that is, at Cana and beneath the Cross, Jesus addresses as "Woman" (cf. Jn 2, 4; 19, 26). Mary is associated as a woman in the work of salvation. Having created man "male and female" (cf. Gn 1:27), the Lord also wants to place the New Eve beside the New Adam in the Redemption. Our first parents had chosen the way of sin as a couple; a new pair, the Son of God with his Mother's co-operation, would re-establish the human race in its original dignity.

Mary, the New Eve, thus becomes a perfect icon of the Church. In the divine plan, at the foot of the Cross, she represents redeemed humanity which, in need of salvation, is enabled to make a contribution to the unfolding of the saving work.

Mary is our Mother in the Order of Grace

4. The Council had this doctrine in mind and made it its own, stressing the Blessed Virgin's contribution not only to the Redeemer's birth, but also to the life of his Mystical Body down the ages until the "eschaton": in the Church Mary "has co-operated" (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, n. 63) and "co-operates" (cf. *ibid.*, n. 53) in the work of salvation. In describing the mystery of the Annunciation, the Council states that the Virgin of Nazareth, "committing herself wholeheartedly and impeded by no sin to God's saving will, devoted herself totally, as a handmaid of the Lord, to the person and work of her Son, under and with him, serving the mystery of Redemption by the grace of Almighty God" (*ibid.*, n. 56).

The Second Vatican Council moreover presents Mary not only as "Mother of the divine Redeemer", but also "in a singular way [as] the generous associate", who "co-operated by her obedience, faith, hope and burning charity in the work of the Savior". The Council also recalls that the sublime fruit of this cooperation is her universal motherhood: "For this reason she is a mother to us in the order of grace" (*ibid.*, n. 61).

We can therefore turn to the Blessed Virgin, trustfully imploring her aid in the awareness of the singular role entrusted to her by God, the role of co-operator in the Redemption, which she exercised throughout her life and in a special way at the foot of the Cross (John Paul II, General Audience, April 7, 1997).

These two papal addresses are particularly rich in doctrine and precision. St. John Paul II here accentuates the historical development of the Church's insight into Mary's cooperation in the work of our redemption. These two speeches highlight the subordinate nature of Mary's cooperation while at the same time recognizing that her cooperation is altogether singular because she cooperated during the event itself and in the role of Mother. In these two audiences St. John Paul II shows the participation of the Savior's Mother in humanity's Redemption.

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