

Letter of Dr. Robert Fastiggi in Response to the Cardinal Mueller Report

Dr. Robert Fastiggi
June 15, 2017

His Eminence Cardinal Gerhard Müller
Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith
Palazzo del Sant'Ufficio
00120 Città del Vaticano

Your Eminence,

Greetings in the Lord! I am writing first to express my heartfelt gratitude for your work as Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. I am especially grateful for your explanation of the Holy Father's exhortation, *Amoris laetitia*, in harmony with the full Catholic teaching on the Sacrament of Matrimony. I was very encouraged by what you said in your interview with the journal, *Il Timone*: "It is not *Amoris laetitia* that has provoked a confused interpretation, but some confused interpreters of it" (*Non è "Amoris laetitia" che ha provocato una confusa interpretazione, ma alcuni confusi interpreti di essa*).

I read with interest your interview with Father Carlos Granados, which was published in English as *The Cardinal Müller Report* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2017). You bring forth so many excellent insights that I hesitate to bring up a point of disagreement. I believe, however, that I must respond to your rejection of the Marian title, Co-redemptrix (*Corredentora*), which is translated into English as "co-redeemer" on p. 133 of *The Cardinal Müller Report*. Here is the passage that I find difficult to accept.

[T]heologians and preachers should especially avoid two risks: on the one hand, that of falsely exaggerating *per excessum*, attributing to the Virgin what is not attributable to her (for example, the Church, despite Mary's privileged position on the work of salvation, does not call her "co-redeemer," because the only Redeemer is Christ and she herself has been redeemed *sublimiore modo*, as *Lumen gentium* [n. 53] says, and serves this redemption wrought exclusively by Christ); and on the other hand, to deny her *per defectum* the unique privileges that are due her by divine

decision (*Lumen gentium*, no 67)—that is dogmas such as her Immaculate Conception, her divine maternity, her perpetual virginity, and her Assumption, body and soul, to heavenly glory.

In the Spanish original of your interview, the key part of this passage reads: “*la Iglesia ... no la llama ‘corredentora’, porque el único Redentor es Cristo y ella misma ha sido redimida sublimiore modo, como dice Lumen Gentium 53, y está al servicio de esta Redención obrada exclusivamente por Cristo.*”

I understand that you are speaking in the interview as a private theologian and not as Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. Nevertheless, your great status as both prefect and theologian will give many people the impression that the Marian title, “Co-redemptrix,” cannot be allowed because: 1) it stands in opposition to Christ as the only Redeemer; 2) it is irreconcilable with Mary’s redemption in a more sublime manner (i.e. her Immaculate Conception); and, 3) it is a title that is not used by the Church.

I have been teaching Mariology at a major Catholic seminary for over 15 years, and I also served for two years (2104–2016) as president of the Mariological Society of America (founded in 1949 by Fr. Juniper Carol, OFM, who defended Mary as Co-redemptrix). When the question of the Marian title, “Co-redemptrix,” is brought up in my classes I always defend its proper use in deference to prior statements of the Magisterium and the title’s use by numerous saints and well-respected theologians. I, of course, remind the students that this title must be understood in such a way “that it neither takes away nor adds anything to the dignity and efficaciousness of Christ, the one Mediator” (*Lumen gentium*, 62).

Your Eminence, with all due respect, I must point out that your theological objections to the title have been raised before, but they have been thoroughly answered by both prominent theologians and by the Magisterium itself. Christ’s status as the “only Redeemer” does not stand in opposition to Mary’s unique cooperation in the work of redemption with and under her divine Son.

The Belgian Redemptorist theologian, François Xavier Godts (1839–1929) expressed this point very well:

Through her close union with the Redeemer and through her continual sharing in all his sufferings, Mary has her part in the work of our Redemption and our salvation, a part secondary and totally subordinate to that of her Son, but no less universal; thus it can be affirmed that in every grace we receive there are the infinite merits of the blood of the Redeemer, to whose sufferings are added those of the Co-redemptrix.” F-X, Godts, *La Coré-*

demprice, in *Mémoires et rapports du Congrès Marial tenu à Bruxelles, 8-11 septembre 1921*, vol. I [Bruxelles 1922] 157).

Pope Pius XI, articulated the same teaching in his allocution to some pilgrims from Vicenza on November 30, 1933:

By necessity, the Redeemer could not but associate His Mother with His work, and for this reason, we invoke her under the title of Co-redemptrix. (*Il Redentore non poteva, per necessità, non associare La madre Sua alla Sua opera, e per questo noi la invociamo col titolo di Corredentrice*) She gave us the Savior, she accompanied Him in the work of Redemption as far as the Cross itself, sharing with Him the sorrows of the agony and of the death in which Jesus consummated the Redemption of all mankind (*L'Osservatore Romano*, December 1, 1933, p. 1).

Mary, of course, was redeemed in a more sublime manner by her Immaculate Conception. I fail, however, to see how this prevents her unique association with her divine Son in the work of redemption. In fact, her preservation from all sin enables her to associate herself in the work of the Redeemer more intimately and more profoundly. This is why *Lumen gentium*, 56 teaches that Mary, “impeded by no sin” (*nullo retardata peccato*), became, by her obedience, “the cause of salvation for herself and for the whole human race” (*et sibi et universo generi humano causa facta est salutis*; cf. St. Irenaeus. *Ad Haer.* III, 22, 4; PG 7, 959).

Your Eminence, if the Marian title, “Co-redemptrix,” undermines Christ’s work as the one Redeemer of the human race, I would also reject it. I would likewise reject the title if it suggests an equivalence of Mary’s human *co-operation* in redemption with the efficacy of Christ’s divine-human *operation* in redemption. The title, however, has not been understood in this way. Fr. Ludwig Ott, in his well-known text, *The Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, offers this comment on the Marian title, Coredeptrix:

The title *Coredeptrix* = Coredeptress, which has been current since the fifteenth century, and which also appears in some official Church documents under Pius X (cf. AAS 6 [1914] 108), must not be conceived in the sense of an equation of the efficacy of Mary with the redemptive activity of Christ, the sole Redeemer of humanity (1 Tim. 2, 5).

The German original can be found in Ludwig Ott, *Grundriss der Dogmatik* 11th ed. (Bonn: Nova et Vetera, 2010), p. 310:

Der seit dem 15. Jh gebrauchte Titel *Corredemptrix*=*Miterlöserin*, der unter Pius X auch in einigen amtlichen kirchlichen Dokumenten erscheint (vgl. DH 3370; DR 1978a note) darf nicht im Sinne einer Gleichstellung der Wirksamkeit Mariens mit der Erlösertätigkeit Christi, des einzigen Erlösers der Menschheit (1 Tim 2, 5), aufgefasst werden.

A similar explanation of the Marian title, Co-redemptrix, is found in the May 18, 2014 letter of Archbishop Juan José Asenjo Pelegrina of Seville, Spain, who uses the title *Coredemptrix* (*Corredentora*) three times in this single document. The Archbishop, however, makes it clear that Mary's role as *Corredentora* depends upon Christ, the one Mediator:

Efectivamente, la Santísima Virgen ocupa un lugar central en la historia de nuestra salvación, en el misterio de Cristo y de la Iglesia y, por ello, la devoción a María pertenece a la entraña misma de la vida cristiana. Ella es la madre de Jesús. Ella, como peregrina de la fe, aceptó humilde y confiada su misteriosa maternidad, haciendo posible la encarnación del Verbo. Ella fue la primera oyente de su palabra, su más fiel y atenta discípula, la encarnación más auténtica del Evangelio. Ella, por fin, al pie de la Cruz, nos recibe como hijos y se convierte, por un misterioso designio de la Providencia de Dios, en **corredentora** de toda la humanidad. Por ser madre y **corredentora**, es medianera de todas las gracias necesarias para nuestra salvación, nuestra santificación y nuestra fidelidad, lo cual en absoluto no oscurece la única mediación de Cristo. Todo lo contrario. Esta mediación maternal es querida por Cristo y se apoya y depende de los méritos de Cristo y de ellos obtiene toda su eficacia (LG 60).

La maternidad de María y su misión de **corredentora** siguen siendo actuales: ella asunta y gloriosa en el cielo, sigue actuando como madre, con una intervención activa, eficaz y benéfica en favor de nosotros sus hijos, impulsando, vivificando y dinamizando nuestra vida cristiana. Esta ha sido la doctrina constante de la Iglesia a través de los siglos, enseñada por los Padres de la Iglesia, vivida en la liturgia, celebrada por los escritores medievales, enseñada por los teólogos y muy especialmente por los Papas de los dos últimos siglos.

I know that some people accept the legitimacy of the Marian title, Co-redemptrix, but favor other terms to avoid false understandings. If this were your

position, Your Eminence, I would not be writing to you. In *The Cardinal Müller Report*, however, you explicitly state that the title, Co-redemptrix, *cannot* be attributed to the Blessed Virgin Mary, and you suggest that this title involves a false exaggeration.

I believe the title, Co-redemptrix, has been and can be appropriately applied to the Blessed Virgin Mary. I also believe that the suppression of this title would create many unnecessary difficulties. My reasons can be summarized as follows:

1. Many saints and blessed of the Catholic Church have spoken of Mary as Co-redemptrix. If this title is a false exaggeration, then we would need to say that St. Brigid of Sweden, Blessed John Henry Newman, St. Frances Xavier Cabrini, St. Maximilian Maria Kolbe, St. Leopold Mandic, St. José Maria Escrivà, St. Teresa of Calcutta, and many others were guilty of false exaggeration in using this title.

2. If the title, Co-redemptrix cannot be attributed to Mary, then the Sacred Congregation for Rites in 1908 was wrong to refer to Mary as “the merciful Co-redemptrix of the human race” (*misericordem humani generis Conredemptricem: Acta Sanctae Sedis* 41 [1908], p. 409). If this title involves a false exaggeration, then the Holy Office in 1913 was guilty of promoting this false exaggeration when it approved a prayer invoking the Blessed Mary as “our Co-redemptrix” (*corredemptricis nostrae: Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 5 [1913], p. 364). Likewise, the Holy Office would have perpetuated this same false exaggeration in 1914 when it sanctioned a prayer with an indulgence attached invoking Mary as “the Co-redemptrix of the human race” (*corredentricem del genere umano: Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 6 [1914], p. 108).

3. If the title, Co-redemptrix, cannot be attributed to Mary, then Pope Pius XI was wrong to refer to her as Co-redemptrix on three separate occasions (cf. *L'Osservatore Romano*, Dec. 1, 1933; *L'Osservatore Romano*, March 25, 1934, p. 1; *L'Osservatore Romano*, April 29-30, 1935, p. 1). Similarly, St. John Paul II would have also been wrong to speak publicly of Mary as the Co-redemptrix at least six times (cf. *Allocution to the Sick, September 8, 1982, Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, Vol 3, 1982, 404; General Audience, December 10, 1982, *L'Osservatore Romano*, English ed., Dec. 18, 1982, p. 2; General Audience, Nov. 4, 1984, *L'Osservatore Romano*, English ed., Nov. 12, 1984, p. 1; *Homily at the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Alborada*, Guayaquil, Ecuador, Jan. 31, 1985, *L'Osservatore Romano*, English ed., March 11, 1985; World Youth Day Allocution, May 31, 1985, *L'Osservatore Romano*, English ed., April 9, 1985, p. 12; Allocution to the Volunteers for the Sick at Lourdes, March 24, 1990, *Insegnamenti*, XIII/1, 1990, 743:1; *Allocution on Sixtb Centenary Canonization of St. Brigid of Sweden*, October 6, 1991, *L'Osservatore Romano*, English ed., October 14, 1991, p. 4).

4. To regard the Marian title, Co-redemptrix, as a false exaggeration would mean that Vatican II's 1962 *Schema Constitutionis Dogmaticae De Beata Maria Virgine*

Matre Dei et Matre Hominum, was promoting a false theology when, in its footnote 11, it states that “the compassion of Mary has a connection with the redemption in such a way that she may rightly be called co-redemptrix” (*compassio Mariae connexionem habet cum redemptione, talique modo ut ipsa inde merito dici possit corredemptrix: Acta Synodalia Sacrosancti Concilii Oecumenici Vaticani II, Volumen I, Periodus Prima, Pars IV* [Vatican City, 1971], p. 104). This *schema*, with its footnote endorsing the rightful use of the Marian title, *corredemptrix*, was approved by St. John XXIII on Nov. 10, 1962 and distributed among the conciliar Fathers on November 23, 1962 (cf. Frederick Jelly, O.P., “The Theological Context of and Introduction to Chapter 8 of *Lumen Gentium*,” *Marian Studies* XXXVII [1986], 47). This 1962 Marian schema also has an extensive footnote 16, which explains the history of the terms *Redemptrix* and *Co-redemptrix* as applied to Mary. This footnote refers to the approval of the Marian title, *Co-redemptrix*, by the Holy Office during the pontificate of St. Pius X and the use of this title by Pius XI on three separate occasions (*Acta Synodalia Sacrosancti Concilii Oecumenici Vaticani II, Volumen I, Periodus Prima, Pars IV* [Vatican City, 1971], p. 108).

The 1962 schema refers to Mary as *Co-redemptrix* in two footnotes even though it avoids the term in the actual text of the schema. The reason for this avoidance is given in the *praenotanda* that accompanied the schema of 1962. In the *praenotanda*, we are told that: “Certain terms and expressions used by Roman Pontiffs have been omitted, which, although most true in themselves (*in se verissima*), may be difficult for the separated brethren (such as the Protestants) to understand. Among such words the following may be enumerated: ‘Coredemptrix of the human race’ [St. Pius X, Pius XI]; ‘Reparatrix of the whole world’ [Leo XIII] ... etc.” (*Acta Synodalia Sacrosancti Concilii Oecumenici Vaticani II, Volumen I, Periodus Prima, Pars IV* [Vatican City, 1971], p. 99). Thus, the Marian title, *Co-redemptrix*, was omitted from the 1962 schema—and *Lumen gentium*, chapter eight—because it was thought difficult for the separated brethren to understand. It was *not* omitted because it was a false exaggeration. On the contrary, it was considered “most true” in itself. If we follow a hermeneutic of continuity, I do not understand how a title that was considered “most true” in 1962 can now be considered a false exaggeration in 2017.

Even if Vatican II chose not to refer to Mary as *Co-redemptrix*, there is no indication that it wished to suppress the use of the term by Catholics. If this were so, how could St. John Paul II speak of Mary as *Co-redemptrix* on multiple occasions? Moreover, *Lumen gentium*, 54 states that Vatican II “does not, however, have it in mind to give a complete doctrine on Mary, nor does it wish to decide those questions which the work of theologians has not yet fully clarified. **Those opinions therefore may be lawfully retained which are propounded in Catholic schools concerning her**, who occupies a place in the Church which is the highest

after Christ and yet very close to us.” Certainly, one of the opinions lawfully propounded in Catholic schools about Mary is the one affirmed in footnote 11 of the 1962 Marian schema, viz., “*compassio Mariae connexionem habet cum redemptione, talique modo ut ipsa inde merito dici possit corredemptrix.*” To forbid the use of the Marian title, Co-redemptrix, I believe, goes against the lawful freedom affirmed in *Lumen gentium*, 54.

It should also be noted that some prominent theologians have argued that Vatican II’s *Lumen gentium* affirms the doctrine of Mary as Co-redemptrix without using the term. Among these are Jean Galot, S.J and Georges Cottier, O.P., the former theologian of the papal household (cf. Galot in *La Civiltà Cattolica* [1994] III: 236-237 and Cottier, in *L’Osservatore Romano*, June 4, 2002).

5. To regard the Marian title, Co-redemptrix, as a false exaggeration stands in opposition to the various religious communities and associations that use the title. Some of these received episcopal approval before Vatican II and others after the council. Mention can be made of the following:

I) Congregation of Mother Coredemptrix/ *Congregation de Mère Corredemptrice*, a Vietnamese religious community approved by the Congregation of the Propagation of the Faith in 1953 (see F. Rizzoli, “Madre Corredentrice,” in *Dizionario degli Istituti di Perfezione* Vol. 5 [Roma: Edizione Paoline, 1973, p. 817).

II) Centro María Corredentora, founded in Madrid, Spain in 1953; run by the Sisters of Our Lady of Compassion.

III) Congregazione Figlie Maria SS. Corredentrice: founded in Catania, Italy in 1953; approved in 1964.

IV) Pia Associazione di Maria SS. Corredentrice: approved by the Archbishop of Reggio Calabria, Italy, in 1984.

V) Hijas de Maria Immaculada y Corredentora (Lima, Peru): founded in 1978, approved in 1980.

VI) Instituto de Misioneras de Maria Corredentora (Ecuador): founded in 1964, approved in 1969.

VII) Asociación de Fieles al Servicio de María Corredentora, Reina de la Paz, Barquisimeto, (Venezuela): founded in 1992 and approved then by the Archbishop of Barquisimeto, Venezuela.

In addition, mention should be made of the seminary of the Society of St. Pius X [SSPX] located in Moreno, Buenos Aires, Argentina. The name of this seminary is Seminario Nuestra Señora Corredentora. As you know, discussions are underway seeking full incorporation of the SSPX into the Catholic Church as a personal

prelature of the Roman Pontiff. If the title, “*Corredentora*,” is unacceptable, then another obstacle would be placed in the path toward the full integration of the SSPX into the life of the Church.

I know some people have suggested “Mother of the Redeemer” as an adequate substitute for the title, Co-redemptrix.” The two terms, however, are not equivalent. Certainly, Mary is the Mother of the Redeemer, but Vatican II clearly teaches that her association with Christ in the work of redemption went beyond that of merely giving birth to the Redeemer. *Lumen gentium*, 56 teaches that Mary, “embracing God’s salvific will with a full heart and impeded by no sin, devoted herself totally as a handmaid of the Lord to the person and work of her Son, under Him and with Him, by the grace of almighty God, serving the mystery of redemption. Rightly therefore the holy Fathers see her as used by God not merely in a passive way, but as freely cooperating in the work of human salvation through faith and obedience. For, as St. Irenaeus says, she ‘being obedient, became the cause of salvation for herself and for the whole human race’.” When Cardinal König, on Oct. 23, 1963, spoke in favor of integrating the Marian schema into the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, he said this would be a way of better highlighting the Blessed Virgin Mary as “the most sublime cooperatrix of Christ in both the accomplishment and the propagation of the work of salvation through his grace” (*Beata Maria Virgo potest in tali capite vel schemate integrato optimi proponi tamquam sublimissima Christi ex eius gratia cooperatrix in opere salutis et perficiendo et propaganda*; see *Acta Synodalia Sacrosancti Concilii Oecumenici Vaticani II* Vol. II Periodus Secunda, Pars III [Vatican City, 1972], 344).

The mind of Vatican II was not simply to affirm Mary as “the Mother of the Redeemer,” but to affirm her active collaboration with Christ in the work of salvation. This active cooperation can be rightfully expressed either by the title Co-redemptrix or by Cardinal König’s description of Mary as the “*sublimissima Christi ex eius gratia cooperatrix in opere salutis*.” The meaning, I believe, is the same with both expressions.

Your Eminence, I apologize for going on for so long, but I wanted to express my reasons as clearly as I could. I know that the Marian title, Co-redemptrix, has been the source of controversy, and many believe it would not be opportune to define Mary as Co-redemptrix because the term is considered ambiguous (cf. 1996 statement of the Theological Commission of the Pontifical International Marian Academy on the request for the definition of the dogma of Mary as Mediatrix, Coremptrix and Advocate). There is a big difference, though, between saying that the title Co-redemptrix is ambiguous and saying it is a false exaggeration. If some believe the title is ambiguous, then it should be properly explained. I hope

and pray that you or Pope Francis will issue a statement on Mary's co-redemptive role that explains the proper meaning and acceptability of the term, Co-redemptrix.

My own position is that of Fr. J. A. De Aldama, S.J., expressed in the well-respected *Sacrae Theologiae Summa* (Madrid, 1950). In this *Summa*, Fr. De Aldama argues that Mary's cooperation in bringing about redemption—at least in a mediate way (*saltem mediate*)—is *de fide* (p. 372). He also states that Mary's immediate cooperation in the work of redemption is “a doctrine that is more in conformity with cited texts of the Roman Pontiffs” (*doctrina conformior textibus citatis S.S. Pontificum*). As for the title “Coredeptrix,” Fr. De Aldama maintains that “it is certain that it can be correctly used and that it's not permitted to doubt its appropriateness” (“*Quod titulus Corredemptricis recte usurpetur, est certum; nec licet dubitare de eius opportunitate;*” (cf. *Sacrae Theologiae Summa*, Vol III, Tract. II, 372).

Your Eminence, please know that my disagreement with you over “Coredeptrix” in no way hinders my gratitude for your work and reverence for your person. I hope that you will give my thoughts some consideration. I only wish to serve Christ and His Church, entrusting myself to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Thank you for listening to my concerns.

In Cordibus Jesu et Mariae,

Robert Fastiggi, Ph.D.

— Professor of Systematic Theology, Sacred Heart Major Seminary, Detroit, MI USA

— former president of the Mariological Society of America (2014–2016)

— member of the Theological Commission of the International Marian Association

P.S. I have attached a copy of the 1962 Marian schema from Vatican II for your reference.