

Ecce Mater Tua

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Our Lady of Sorrows

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We welcome scholarly contributions from all topics in Mariology, including but not limited to Marian doctrine, Mary in Scripture and the writings of the Fathers, Marian piety and devotion, Mary in the liturgy, Mary in the papal magisterium. Topics in Marian mediation are especially welcome.

Quotations of the Bible should use the RSV-CE, unless the essay necessitates the use of another version. Please include five keywords with your submission (e.g., Mariology, perpetual virginity, John of Damascus, Thomas Aquinas, Pope Pius IX). If an article or book review is accepted for publication, authors must verify that the piece conforms to style instructions. Greek and Hebrew do not need to be transliterated, but may be submitted in Unicode format, and the author should attend to making sure that words are spelled correctly with correct diacritical marks.

Book Reviews:

Ecce Mater Tua does not accept unsolicited book reviews. Publishers interested in having Marian titles reviewed in this journal should contact the editors at the email address above.

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Ecce Mater Tua

Introduction to Ecce Mater Tua Vol. 9

THE EDITORS

This issue of *Ecce Mater Tua* coincides with the Feast of Our Lady of Sorrows, which is very significant for the Virgin Mary's coredemptive role. It also appears several months after the May 17, 2024 publication of the new "Norms for Proceeding in the Discernment of Alleged Supernatural Phenomena" issued by the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith [DDF]. Since these new Norms were issued, nine statements have been issued on various reported Marian apparitions. The majority of these statements have been positive (though some with certain qualifications). Several of the judgments, though, have been negative.

The *Commentario* section of this issue begins with an article co-authored by Mark Miravalle and Robert Fastiggi on the DDF's revelation that the reported 1945–1959 apparitions to Ida Peerdeman in Amsterdam had been judged not to be supernatural (*constat de non supernaturalitate*) by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith [CDF] in 1974 (with the approval of St. Paul VI). Miravalle and Fastiggi note that Catholics must manifest obedience to this judgment, but they also explain that such judgments are not necessarily definitive. They also speculate about possible reasons for the negative judgment of the Amsterdam apparitions.

In the second article in the *Commentario* section, Robert Fastiggi investigates the claim that Pope Pius XII intentionally avoided using the Marian title, co-redemptrix, during his pontificate. Fastiggi provides four explicit examples of the use of co-redemptrix by Pius XII as Cardinal Pacelli prior to becoming Pope. He also discusses a recent discovery by Fr. Paolo Siano that Pius XII referred to Mary as the "co-redemptrix of the human race" in a 1949 discourse to the Director of the General Secretariat of Marian Congregations. Although this discourse was never included in any of the official acts of Pius XII, it does appear in several scholarly publications.

The *Articles* section in the present issue includes six contributions. The first is by Mark Miravalle, who examines some of the qualifications of

the DDF touching on Marian mediation and coredeemption in its July 5, 2024 letter to the Bishop of Brescia. This letter grants a nihil obstat to the “Rosa Mystica” apparitions of the Italian visionary, Pierina Gilli. It also, though, makes some statements that seem to conflict with prior magisterial teachings on Mary’s universal mediation of grace and her coredeemptive role.

Robert Fastiggi follows with an article examining the implications of the new DDF “Norms for Proceeding in the Discernment of Alleged Supernatural Phenomena.” The DDF is rightly concerned that the faithful do not feel obliged to believe in approved Marian apparitions (because they pertain to private and not public revelation). The new DDF Norms, however, ask bishops to refrain from affirmations of the supernatural character of apparitions and events. In the past, though, many bishops have explicitly affirmed the supernatural character of Marian apparitions. Fastiggi provides multiple examples of such affirmations, and he asks how bishops might now express their personal belief in certain apparitions without violating the new DDF Norms.

The third article is by Fr. Serafino Lanzetta, an Italian Franciscan priest and Marian scholar. His article provides an in-depth investigation of the priesthood of Mary and the implications of her priesthood for coredeemption.

Mark Miravalle follows with an article on “The Crisis of Woman and the Proclamation of the Mother.” He shows that there is a crisis in womanhood today, and he explains how the full truth about Mary is very much needed to overcome this crisis.

Dr. Monica Migliorino Miller provides an important article on “Mary and the Authority of Women in the Church.” After investigating the true meaning of authority, she explores the extraordinary authority of Mary as the New Eve, the co-redemptrix, and the Mother of the Church.

The last article is by Fr. Ioan Gotia, a Byzantine-Latin bi-ritual priest originally from Romania, who now resides in Madrid, Spain as a

member of the Disciples of the Hearts of Jesus and Mary. Fr. Gotia earned his doctorate at the Pontifical Oriental Institute in Rome, with a specialization in Byzantine Iconography. Drawing upon his expertise as a theologian and iconographer, he examines the Mother of God as “Jacob’s Ladder” in various Byzantine hymns and works of art. As the Ladder or Bridge between heaven and earth, Mary exercises her role as Mediatrix. Fr. Gotia’s article is supplemented by some beautiful examples of Byzantine art that depict Mary as the Ladder.

The final section of this issue provides reviews of two recent books in Mariology that are of special importance.

MARÍA, MI MADRE: Corredentora, Mediadora, Abogada [MARY, MY MOTHER: Co-redemptrix, Mediatrix, and Advocate] is by Fr. Agustín Giménez González, a Spanish priest, Mariologist, and Scripture scholar. This book is one of the most comprehensive studies on Marian coredeemption, mediation, and advocacy in recent years. It is of special note because of its extensive coverage of proposals for a new Marian dogma.

Dr. Laurie Olsen makes a significant contribution to both Mariology and the history of Vatican II with her book, *Mary & the Church at Vatican II: The Untold Story of Lumen Gentium VIII*. Drawing upon never before studied Vatican archives, her book shows the behind-the-scenes discussions (and drama) regarding the drafting of chapter VIII of *Lumen Gentium*.

The editors of *Ecce Mater Tua* are grateful to all the contributors to this issue and to those who helped with the copyediting and formatting.

Commentario

New Vatican Statement on Amsterdam Apparitions: Obedience, Theological Issues, and Distinctions

MARK MIRAVALLE, STD & ROBERT FASTIGGI, PHD

On July 11, 2024, the Vatican Dicastery for the Doctrine of Faith published a new statement on the Amsterdam apparitions of the Lady of All Nations, stating that the reported apparitions have been judged as “*constat de non supernaturalitate*,” that is, not possessing a supernatural character, and that this position was orally confirmed by Pope St. Paul VI in an audience. Apart from ambiguities on the Vatican’s own website, which previously reported the 1974 status in several languages as “*non constat de supernaturalitate*,”¹ that is, “the supernatural character has not been established,” this new statement makes clear that the present position of the DDF is the more negative *constat de non* status.

In light of this new Vatican statement, we believe the following five points are important for its proper understanding and implementation.

1. Obedience is the proper response to Vatican disciplinary norms.

Obedience is the response of the saints and faithful Catholics to proper Church authority, even when it is not on a doctrinal level, but only a disciplinary level. Obedience in this specific case further requires an obedient following of all juridical norms specified by the DDF and as concretely designated by the local bishop, Bishop Johannes Henricks in his December 30, 2020 statement released after consultation with the Vatican doctrinal office² at the time. This would

¹ On the Vatican website, there are only vernacular texts of the 1974 CDF (DDF) judgment. The Italian, French, and German texts are all the equivalent of “*non constat de supernaturalitate*.” See this article by R. Fastiggi:

<https://www.motherofallpeoples.com/post/note-on-the-english-translation-of-the-1974-cdf-statement-on-our-lady-of-all-nations>.

² The Vatican doctrinal office since 2022 is known as the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith (DDF). From 1965 to 2022 it was known as the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) and before that, the Holy Office. To avoid confusion DDF will be used as the equivalent of CDF.

include, for example, not promulgating the reported message as if approved, or inaccurately portraying the Vatican position as anything but negative at this time.

Obedience, though, does not always imply an agreement with the DDF judgment, nor does it necessarily require rejecting a personal belief in the supernatural authenticity of the reported Amsterdam apparitions. The July 8, 2024 positive statement by the DDF concerning the Rosa Mystica apparitions, which previously had received at least five separate negative judgments from the local bishops of Brescia in the last 40 years, including several times after consultation with the DDF, have now all been completely reversed by the recent DDF statement. Certainly, the Rosa Mystica visionary, Pierina Gilli, maintained her personal faith in the supernatural character of her now essentially approved apparitions during these challenging periods of Church prohibition, condemnation, and even interdict.

Obedience to a Vatican disciplinary norm, therefore, requires obedience to the prescribed acts, but does not require an internal rejection of personal belief in the authenticity of the apparitions. Therefore, a faithful Catholic can be both obedient to the new DDF norms and still personally believe in the supernatural character of the reported Amsterdam apparitions.³

2. Vatican disciplinary norms, even those approved by a pope are not definitive, and have been completely reversed in time.

Recent Church examples clearly illustrate that even papally approved Vatican disciplinary norms are not, by their very nature, definitive and can in time be completely reversed.

For example, from 1924 to 1931, various statements of the Holy Office (now DDF) denied the supernaturality of Padre Pio's mystical

³ Faithful Catholics, though, must make every effort to understand the reasons for the judgment of the Holy See on particular apparitions. They must also avoid making any public statements that reject that judgment.

phenomena. In June, 1931, Padre Pio was ordered by the Holy Office with the approval of Pope Pius XI to desist from all activities except the celebration of the Mass, along with other prohibitions. In time, Padre Pio went from Church condemnation to Church canonization in a comprehensive overturning of his previous negative disciplinary status.

The Divine Mercy apparitions and messages likewise went through some 20 years of prohibition with the approval of its negative prohibition by Pope St. John XXIII in 1959. Due principally to the ongoing personal faith in the authenticity of the apparitions by Bishop Karol Wojtyla (Pope St. John Paul II) during this time of Church prohibition, the Church now universally celebrates the Feast of Divine Mercy and the Novena revealed in the apparitions of Jesus to St. Faustina throughout the universal Church.

The most recent example of the reversal of negative Vatican disciplinary norms is, once again, the case of the 1947-1966 Rosa Mystica apparitions, whereby the visionary Pierina Gilli received numerous negative disciplinary norms, several approved by the DDF and also experienced local ecclesiastical interdicts. All these negative norms have now being overturned with the DDF July 5, 2024 positive assessment and the bishop of Brescia's highest possible declaration of *Nihil Obstat*.

3. *The Lady of All Nations prayer, image, and prayer days remain approved the local bishop in consultation with the DDF.*

The December 30, 2020 statement on the Amsterdam apparitions by Bishop Johannes Hendricks of Haarlem-Amsterdam in consultation with the then Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith clearly states that the Prayer of the Lady of All Nations, its image, and prayer days in honor of the Lady of All Nations remain approved, as long as they are not seen as an indication of the supernatural character of the apparitions. The July 11, 2024 DDF statement is released in continuity with the norms specified in the Dec. 30, 2024 statement by

the local bishop. The Prayer of the Lady of all Nations, therefore, may continue to be prayed and spread.

4. *No explicit reasons were given by the DDF as to why the reported Amsterdam apparitions were judged to be not supernatural. There are some indications, though, that one possible reason might be opposition to the request for a fifth Marian dogma, which appears in the reported messages.*

Based on various Vatican statements on the reported Amsterdam apparitions, it appears one underlying reason for opposition to the apparitions may well be a newfound opposition to the papal and conciliar teachings on Marian coredemption and her mediation of graces, as well as the repeated request in the message for a fifth Marian dogma of these selfsame Marian title and roles.

One indication of this potential incongruity with papal and conciliar Marian doctrine was exhibited in the theological commentary contained in the recent DDF *Rosa Mystica* statement, whereby the document stated that “only the Lord can act in the hearts of people by giving sanctifying grace” and “in this action that only God can do profoundly, without neglecting our freedom, there is no other possible mediation, not even of the Holy Virgin Mary.” The content of this DDF statement runs in direct contradiction to three centuries of numerous papal teachings, starting with Pope Benedict XIV⁴ in the eighteenth century to Pope St. John Paul II, who calls Our Lady the Mediatrix of all graces on eight different occasions,⁵ to Pope Francis who positively referred to the Mediatrix of all graces title on

⁴ In his apostolic constitution, *Gloriosae Dominae* (September 27, 1748), Benedict XIV says that “Mary is that heavenly stream which brings to the hearts of wretched mortals all God’s gifts and graces” (*Papal Teachings Our Lady*, selected and arranged by the Benedictine Monks of Solesmes, translated by the Daughters of St. Paul (Boston, MA: Daughters of St. Paul, 1961), 26.

⁵ See “Mary, Mediatrix of All Graces in the Papal Magisterium of John Paul II” by Msgr. Arthur B. Calkins: <https://www.motherofallpeoples.com/post/mary-mediatrix-of-all-graces-in-the-papal-magisterium-of-pope-john-paul-ii>.

May 13, 2023,⁶ to this unambiguous statement by Pope Benedict XVI that “There is no fruit of grace in the history of salvation that does not have as its necessary instrument the mediation of Our Lady.”⁷

If indeed the major opposition to the reported Amsterdam apparitions is centered in a rejection of these authentic papal and conciliar teachings on Mary’s unique coredemptive role with Jesus, for which role St. John Paul II uses the title, “Co-redemprix” on six occasions,⁸ and her consequent role in the active mediation of the graces of redemption, then a deeper Mariological discussion must ensue about a proper defense of true Marian doctrine as found in the papal magisterium and in the conciliar teachings of Vatican II, where, for example, Our Lady’s coredemption is taught in *Lumen Gentium*,

⁶ See the May 13, 2023 Message of Pope Francis to Archbishop Gian Franco Saba, Archbishop of Sassari, Sardina (Italy), on the 80th anniversary of the Festa del Voto. In this message, Pope Francis refers to one of the most ancient Marian titles as precisely, the “Mediatrice of All Graces”:
<http://www.arcidiocesisassari.it/2023/05/28/festa-del-voto-il-messaggio-del-santo-padre/>.

⁷ Benedict XVI, In his May 11 2007 homily at Campo de Marte, São Paulo, for the canonization of Frei Antônio de Sant’Ana Galvão (May 11, 2007):
https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2007/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20070511_canonization-brazil.html.

⁸ See John Paul II General Audience, 10 December 1980 (*Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II [Inseg]* 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-redemprix” in the English edition of *L’Osservatore Romano* March 11, 1985, p. 7. The Italian translation, though, is closer to the Spanish, viz., *il ruolo corredentore di Maria*.

nn. 56, 57, 58, and in 61, which speaks of the “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.” Moreover, her role and title as “Mediatrix” is taught and explained in *Lumen Gentium*, nn. 60, 61, and 62, which says that, “taken up to heaven [Mary] did not lay aside this salvific duty, but by her constant intercession continued to bring us the gifts of eternal salvation (*in aeternae salutis donis nobis*).” Surely, the highest doctrinal commission in the Church must not only accept papal and conciliar teaching on Our Lady, but must also defend it as a precious part of the Church’s Marian tradition and truth.

We bring this forward in the proper spirit of the DDF’s own 1990 document, *Donum Veritatis*, “On the Ecclesial Vocation of the Theologian” which refers to the theologian’s duty to bring forth to magisterial authority the need for clarification or correction for the good of the Church:

...The theologian has the duty to make known to the Magisterial authorities the problems raised by the teaching in itself, in the arguments proposed to justify it, or even in the manner in which it is presented. He should do this in an evangelical spirit and with a profound desire to resolve the difficulties. His objections could then contribute to real progress and provide a stimulus to the Magisterium to propose the teaching of the Church in greater depth and with a clearer presentation of the arguments (*Donum Veritatis*, n. 30).

5. *This DDF statement on the Amsterdam Apparitions in no way hinders the continued progress of the international movement for a fifth Marian dogma.*

The international Catholic movement for the solemn papal definition of our Lady’s Spiritual Motherhood, inclusive of her three maternal roles as Co-redemptrix, Mediatrix of all graces and Advocate, has never been based on any private revelation, but was founded by the renowned Belgian prelate, Cardinal Désiré Mercier in 1915, some 30 years before the Amsterdam apparitions reportedly began. Cardinal Mercier based this movement on the truth of these Marian titles and

roles as found in Scripture, Tradition, and as articulated by the Papal Magisterium. Mercier believed that the solemn proclamation of our Lady's role as Spiritual Mother and Mediatrix of all graces (based theologically on her foundational role as Co-redemptrix) would bring great graces to the Church during the terrible days of World War I.

As we today, once again, face what Pope Francis refers to as a potential "World War III by piecemeal,"⁹ we believe there remains the need to solemnly recognize Our Lady's maternal roles, which will in turn activate the full exercise of her maternal mediation and intercession for humanity in its grave need for true peace.

The theological and pastoral efforts towards a fifth Marian dogma will certainly continue in full obedience to the Church's Magisterium, as part of a proper "Hermeneutics of Continuity" in conformity with the rich Mariological tradition of the past, the Mariological teachings of the Second Vatican Council, and the inspired Mariological teachings of St. John Paul II.

⁹ See, for example, this article of January 4, 2024: <https://www.agensir.it/chiesa/2024/01/08/pope-francis-the-present-third-world-war-fought-piecemeal-is-turning-into-a-global-conflict/>.

Cardinal Eugenio Pacelli/Pius XII on Mary as Co-redemptrix

ROBERT FASTIGGI, PHD

Was Pope Pius XII (r. 1939–1958) opposed to using the Marian title, co-redemptrix? According to a declaration of the theological commission of the Pontifical International Marian Academy [PAMI]—formed as an *ad hoc* group during the August 1996 PAMI Congress held in Częstochowa, Poland—“There is evidence that Pius XII intentionally avoided using it.”¹ The “evidence” for this claim is apparently found in the lack of the use of the title, “Co-redemptrix,” during his pontificate. This claim can be challenged in two ways: first, by the explicit use of the title by Cardinal Eugenio Pacelli—the future Pius XII—before his 1939 election as Pope; and secondly, by Pius XII’s reference to Mary as co-redemptrix in his 1949 discourse to the Director of the General Secretariat of Marian Congregations.²

Cardinal Pacelli’s use of the Marian title, co-redemptrix

Cardinal Eugenio Pacelli, the future Pius XII, served as the Vatican’s Secretary of State from February 7, 1930 until being elected to the papacy on March 2, 1939. It was during Cardinal Pacelli’s time as Secretary of State, that Pius XI became the first Pope to refer to Mary publicly as co-redemptrix, a title he used on three separate occasions.³ Did Cardinal Pacelli ever speak of Mary as co-redemptrix during his time as Secretary of State? The answer is yes. There are four uses of this Marian title by Cardinal Pacelli found in

¹ This declaration was published in *L’Osservatore Romano* English edition (June 4, 1997), p. 12; it can be found at: <https://udayton.edu/imri/mary/m/mediatrix-coredeptrix-and-advocate-declaration.php>.

² Father Paolo Siano makes reference to this discourse in his article, “La ‘Corredentrice’ nel ‘900, al tempo di Pio XII,” *Corrispondenza romana* (12 Maggio 2021): <https://www.corrispondenzaromana.it/la-corredentrice-nel-900-al-tempo-di-pio-xii/>.

³ Pius XI referred to Mary as co-redemptrix on November 30, 1933 (*Discorsi di Pio XI*, 2, p. 1013); he did so again on March 23, 1934 (*L’Osservatore Romano* [OR] 25 March 1934, p. 1); and once again on April 28, 1935 (OR 29–30 April 1935 p. 1).

his *Discorsi e Panegerici (1931-1938)* published in 1956.⁴ In a Latin exhortation to priests at Lourdes on April 26, 1935, he refers to Mary as "Co-redemptrix" (*Corredemptricem*).⁵ In a French discourse given at Lourdes on April 28, 1935 for the solemn closing of the world jubilee of human redemption, he refers to Mary as "our Coredemptrix" (*notre Corédemptrice*).⁶

In a November 28, 1937 discourse given at the Church of St. Louis of the French in Rome (*la Chiesa di S. Luigi dei Francesi*), Cardinal Pacelli asks Mary to offer to the celestial Father "your tears of Coredemptrix" (*vos larmes de Corédemptrice*).⁷ In the same discourse, Cardinal Pacelli says that Christ gave to Mary "the title and the rights of Co-redemptrix" (*le titre et les droits de Corédemptrice*).⁸ It is clear from these four explicit references to Mary as co-redemptrix, that the future Pius XII believed it was appropriate to call Our Lady the co-redemptrix.

Pius XII and Mary as Co-redemptrix during his pontificate

The great Mariologist, Fr. Gabriele Roschini OSM (1900–1977), believed that Cardinal Pacelli as Pius XII never used the title, co-redemptrix, "but he expressed in a clear way the doctrine that it signified" (*Ha espresso tuttavia in modo chiaro la dottrina da esso significata*).⁹ There is no doubt that Pius XII clearly taught the doctrine of Mary as co-redemptrix. In his October 11, 1954 encyclical, *Ad Caeli Reginam*, he states:

From these considerations, the proof develops on these lines: if Mary, in taking an active part in the

⁴ Eugenio Card. Pacelli, *Discorsi e Panegerici (1931–1938)* Second Edition (Vatican City: Tipografia Poliglotta Vaticana, 1956).

⁵ *Discorsi e Panegerici*, 405

⁶ *Discorsi e Panegerici*, 440.

⁷ *Discorsi e Panegerici*, 644.

⁸ *Discorsi e Panegerici*, 645.

⁹ G. Roschini, *Maria Santissima nella storia della salvezza, vol. II* (Isola del Liri: Tipografia Editrice M. Pisani, 1969), 126; cited by Siano in "La 'Corredentrica' nel '900, al tempo di Pio XII."

work of salvation, was, by God's design, associated with Jesus Christ, the source of salvation itself, in a manner comparable to that in which Eve was associated with Adam, the source of death, so that it may be stated that the work of our salvation was accomplished by a kind of "recapitulation" (S. Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.*, V, 19, 1: PG VII, 1175 B), in which a virgin was instrumental in the salvation of the human race, just as a virgin had been closely associated with its death; if, moreover, it can likewise be stated that this glorious Lady had been chosen Mother of Christ "in order that she might become a partner in the redemption of the human race (*ut redimendi generis humani consors efficeretur*)" (Pius XI, epist. *Auspiciatus profecto*: AAS XXV, 1933, p. 80).¹⁰

This passage of Pius XII clearly affirms Mary as the co-redemptrix without using the term. According to Roschini, "The title Co-redemptrix of the human race means that the most holy Virgin cooperated with Christ in our reparation as Eve cooperated with Adam in our ruin" (*Il titolo Corredentrica del genere umano significa che la Vergine SS. ha cooperato con Cristo alla nostra riparazione, come Eva aveva cooperato con Adamo alla nostra rovina*).¹¹ There is no doubt Pius XII affirmed what the title, co-redemptrix, means.

Many, though, have wondered why Pius XII never publicly referred to Mary as "co-redemptrix" during his pontificate (even though he used the title as Cardinal Pacelli). Is it true, though, that Pius XII never used the title "co-redemptrix" as Pope? Father Paolo Siano, in his 2021 article, "La «Corredentrica» nel '900, al tempo di Pio XII"

¹⁰ Pius XII, encyclical, *Ad Caeli Reginam* (October 11, 1954), no. 38; available at: https://www.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xii_enc_11101954_ad-caeli-reginam.html.

¹¹ Padre Gabriele Maria Roschini, *Chi è Maria? Catechismo Mariano* a cura di Carlo DiPietro (Pignola: Sursum Corda, 2017) domanda 83, p. 47.

[The Coredemptrix in the 20th century up to the time of Pius XII],¹² points to a recent discovery of his. He notes that on pages 623-625 of the 1954 book, *Doctrina Pontificia. IV. Documentos marianos*,¹³ a speech by Pius XII from 1949 is reproduced (though unfortunately neither day nor month is specified) “to the director of the Secretary General of Marian Congregations” (p. 623). In that speech Pius XII says,

Do you not see in the whole world what an example of love, of extraordinary fervor, of what we might call holy madness, there is for the Mother of God, **for the mediatrix of all things, for the co-redemptrix of the human race**, for the divine governess, for the one who holds the keys of all grace, of every perfect gift, of every good that comes down from heaven? What has always been true; what has always been a Catholic dogma is lived now more than ever; it is the palpitation of millions of children of the Virgin Mary, who love her, who venerate her;...” (p. 625: emphasis added).¹⁴

[In the Spanish] *No ves en el mundo entero qué lección de amor, de fervor extraordinario, íbamos a decir de santa locura, por la Madre de Dios, **por la medianera de todas las cosas, por la corredentora del linaje humano**, por la divina gobernadora, por la que tiene las llaves de toda gracia, de todo don perfecto, de todo bien que desciende del cielo? Lo que siempre ha sido verdad; lo que siempre ha sido un dogma católico, se vive ahora más que nunca; es la palpitación de millones de hijos de la Virgen maria, que la aman, que la veneran [...]* (p. 625).

¹² Fr. Siano’s article is published in *Corrispondenza romana* (May 12, 2021), pages 10-15.

¹³ See *Doctrina Pontificia. IV. Documentos marianos*” (Edición preparada por el P. Hilario Marin S.J., Pontificia Universidad de Salamanca (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos (BAC), La Editorial Catolica, 1954), pages 623-625.

¹⁴ The translation is mine from the Spanish text cited by Fr. Siano.

Fr. Siano points out that this passage confirms something noted by Father Juniper B. Carol OFM in volume 2 of his three volume work, *Mariology* (1955–1961). Writing in 1957, Fr. Carol says: “While the present Holy Father, Pius XII, has not yet employed the term ‘Coredemptrix’ in any of his official documents, nevertheless, his mind on this Marian prerogative is quite clear from several utterances of his.”¹⁵ In a footnote (no. 24) to this sentence, Fr. Carol writes: “Cf., however, the words of the Holy Father to A. Carrillo de Albornoz, S.J., as reported in the latter’s article *La pensée du Pape*, in *Marie*, Vol. 3, March–April 1950, p. 59.” The words of the Holy Father to A. Carrillo de Albornoz, S.J. (the director of the Secretariat General of Marian Congregations) are the same as those found above in the passage cited above from the 1954 book, *Doctrina Pontificia. IV. Documentos marianos*. Fr. Siano mentions that on p. 623 of this book the editor provides a footnote explaining that this discourse was given in French, but it was published in a Spanish translation in the journal *Marie*, vol. III pages 58–59.

It is true that the 1949 discourse of Pius XII, in which he refers to Mary as “the co- redemptrix of the human race,” is not found in the official acts of the Holy Father. Nevertheless, its appearance in two publications and its mention by Fr. Juniper Carol O.F.M. provide evidence for believing that Pius XII did, in fact, refer to Mary as “co- redemptrix” at least one time during his pontificate (and this in a public discourse). If Pius XII as Cardinal Pacelli referred to Mary as co- redemptrix at least four times, there is no reason to believe that he suddenly found the term unacceptable as the Roman Pontiff. Both Fr. Roschini and Fr. Carol are correct that Pius XII explicitly taught the doctrine of Marian coredemption without using the title co- redemptrix (and he did so in major documents such as *Munificentissimus Deus* [1950] and *Ad Caeli Reginam* [1954]).¹⁶ The 1996 declaration of the theological commission of PAMI claims that “There is evidence that Pius XII intentionally avoided using it [co-

¹⁵ Juniper B. Carol, O.F.M., S.T.D., “Our Lady’s Coredemption” in *Mariology Volume 2*, edited by Juniper B. Carol, O.F.M. (Milwaukee, WI, The Bruce Publishing Company, 1957), 384.

¹⁶ See Carol, “Our Lady’s Coredemption,” 385–386

redemptrix].” This claim, though, is open to challenge. There is actually evidence showing that Pius XII did *not* intentionally avoid using the term co-redemptrix during his pontificate. At least in one cited discourse of 1949, he referred to Our Lady as “the co-redemptrix of the human race” (*la corredentora del linaje humano*).

Articles

Mary Co-redemptrix and Mediatrix of all graces: Perennial Catholic Doctrines and Recent DDF Statements

MARK MIRAVALLE, STD

...The theologian has the duty to make known to the Magisterial authorities the problems raised by the teaching in itself, in the arguments proposed to justify it, or even in the manner in which it is presented. He should do this in an evangelical spirit and with a profound desire to resolve the difficulties. His objections could then contribute to real progress and provide a stimulus to the Magisterium to propose the teaching of the Church in greater depth and with a clearer presentation of the arguments. (Donum Veritatis, n. 30)

New DDF Norms

On May 17, 2024, the Vatican Dicastery for the Doctrine of Faith released, *Norms for Proceeding in the Discernment of Alleged Supernatural Phenomena*, a new disciplinary document on the process of pronouncing on the credibility of reported apparitions. A significant difference from the 1978 DDF (then CDF) Norms, these new norms remove the possibility of any bishop, or even the DDF itself, from declaring any reported apparition, to be supernatural in origin (*constat de supernaturalitate*), but only the pope on rare occasions. This constitutes a substantial break from an approximate half millennium Church precedent (dating back at least to the Guadalupe apparitions in 1531) whereby local bishops made the initial call concerning the potential supernatural character of private revelations within their diocese. Noteworthy is the fact that on the other side of the Vatican piazza, the Dicastery for the Cause of Saints still requires a positive judgment of the supernatural character of an act (i.e., a miracle) in order for a cause of beautification or canonization to advance--an unusual inconsistency.

Now, alleged supernatural phenomena will only be placed in one of six new prudential categories, and only with the direct approval of the DDF. The new categories begin with *Nilil Obstat* ("nothing stands in the way" i.e., no doctrinal errors), followed by increasingly problematic

categories, and concluding with the fully negative category of *declaratio de non supernaturalitate*.¹

Problem with Mary's Role in the Mediation of graces?

The release of the new DDF norms were quickly followed by several specific rulings, each accompanied by theological commentaries pertaining to the reported apparition in question. For example, one commentary of particular Mariological relevance is the commentary on the Rosa Mystica apparitions declaration of July 8, 2024.² In this statement wherein the DDF essentially grants the local bishop of Brescia permission to proceed with a *Nihil Obstat* determination, the document also identifies certain texts of the Rosa Mystica message which they place under the heading, "Some Texts Require Clarification." The document states that certain texts of the message "attribute functions to the Blessed Virgin that can easily be misinterpreted."³ Among those Marian messages presented are several texts with refer to Our Lady's function as "Mediatrice." For example:

"[Mary said:] 'I placed myself as Mediatrice between men (particularly religious souls) and my Divine Son who, tired of the offenses continually received, wished to exercise his justice'" (22 October 1947, p. 123).

"[Mary said:] 'After I was assumed into heaven, I always placed myself as the Motherly Mediatrice between my Divine Son, Jesus Christ, and all humanity!'" (6 August 1966, p. 322).

"[Mary said:] 'Through the prayers and the sacrifices that so many generous souls offered for their sinful

¹ Dicastery for the Doctrine of Faith, *Norms for Proceeding in the Discernment of Alleged Supernatural Phenomena*, May 17, 2024,

<https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2024/05/17/240517h.html>, cited May 31, 2024.

² Dicastery for the Doctrine of Faith, *Declaration of the Rosa Mystica Apparitions*, July 8, 2024,

https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_ddf_doc_20240705_lettera-devozione-mariarosamistica_en.html, cited July 9, 2024.

³ *Ibid.*

brothers and sisters [...] How many graces have I, the Motherly Mediatrix, obtained for humanity from the Lord, my Divine Son, Jesus Christ, sparing terrible chastisements that the world had to suffer” (1 January 1978, p. 408).⁴

The DDF document then makes the substantially problematic statement in which it appears *to specifically reject any role of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the mediation of graces*:

At the same time, it must be maintained that ***only the Lord can act in people’s hearts by bestowing sanctifying grace*** that uplifts and transforms, because sanctifying grace is “first and foremost the gift of the *Spirit* who justifies and sanctifies us” (CCC, no. 2003; emphasis added), “it is the gratuitous gift that God makes to us of *his* own life, infused by the Holy Spirit into our soul” (CCC, no. 1999; emphasis added). ***In this action, which only God can do in the depths without overlooking our freedom, there is no other possible mediation, not even that of the Blessed Virgin Mary.*** Her cooperation is always to be understood in the sense of her maternal intercession and in the context of her helping to create provisions for us to be open to the action of sanctifying grace. The Second Vatican Council explained that since God “elicits in his creatures a manifold cooperation, which is but a sharing in this one source,” for this reason, “the Church does not hesitate to profess this subordinate role of Mary” (LG, 62).⁵

Even apart from DDF difficulties with messages of Our Lady which expound on her doctrinal role as Mediatrix of graces, the explicit statement that “there is no possible mediation...not even that of the

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid., (bold emphasis mine).

Blessed Virgin Mary” in the bestowing of sanctifying graces from God to humanity directly contradicts the consistent official papal teachings on Mary as Mediatrix of all graces which spans over four centuries.

Mindful of Chesterton’s famed example of an English explorer who eventually rediscovers his own homeland of England, it appears necessary to re-examine in order to rediscover what *already constitutes the perennial papal and conciliar teachings on Mary as the Mediatrix of all graces*, as evidenced in the following litany of magisterial texts.

Mediatrix of All Graces in the Papal Magisterium

Beginning in the mid-eighteenth century, Pope Benedict XIV describes the Mother of Jesus’ mediational role in grace as “a celestial stream through which the flow of all graces and gifts reach the soul of all wretched mortals.”⁶

Pope Pius VII, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, identifies her as the “Dispensatrix of all graces.”⁷

Pope Pius IX, in his 1849 encyclical, *Ubi Primum*, states: “For God has committed to Mary the treasury of all good things, in order that everyone may know that through her are obtained every hope, every grace, and all salvation.”⁸

Pope Leo XIII repeatedly teaches the Virgin’s role as the Mediatrix of all graces, as, for example, in his 1891 Apostolic letter, *Octobri mense*:

It is right to say that *nothing at all of the immense treasury of every grace which the Lord accumulated* – for ‘grace and truth come from Jesus Christ’ (Jn 1:17) – *nothing is imparted to*

⁶ Pope Benedict XIV (1740-1758), *Op. Omnia*, v. 16, ed., Prati, 1846, p. 428. See also this list of papal texts in Mark Miravalle, *Mary Co-redemprix, Mediatrix, Advocate*, Santa Barbara, Queenship Publications, 1993, pp. 39-48.

⁷ Pope Pius VII (1800-1823), *Ampliatio privilegiorum ecclesiae B.M. Virginis*

⁸ Pope Pius IX (1846-1878), Encyclical Letter, *Ubi Primum*, 1849.

us except through Mary. How great are the goodness and the mercy revealed in this design of God. Mary is our glorious intermediary; she is the powerful Mother of the omnipotent God.⁹

Leo XIII also quotes St. Bernadine of Siena as to Mary's essential and direct role in the mediation of sanctifying graces to humanity: "Thus is confirmed that law of merciful mediation of which we have spoken, and which St. Bernadine of Siena thus expresses: 'Every grace granted to man has three degrees in order: for by God it is communicated to Christ, *from Christ it passes to the Virgin, and from the Virgin it descends to us.*'"¹⁰

Another encyclical teaching by Leo XIII unequivocally defends Mary's role as "mediatrix to the Mediator", based on her unique coredemptive participation with the Redeemer:

For, surely, no one person can be conceived, who has ever made, or at any time will make an equal contribution as Mary to the reconciliation of men with God. Surely, she it was who brought the Savior to man as he was rushing into eternal destruction...she it is "of whom was born Jesus [Matt. 1:16], namely his true Mother, and for this reason she is worthy and quite acceptable as the *mediatrix to the Mediator.*"¹¹

Pope St. Pius X in his monumental Marian 1904 encyclical letter, *Ad diem illum*, repeatedly articulates Mary's direct mediation of all graces of Jesus Christ to humanity. It is Mary who "entirely participating in his Passion, became the "*dispensatrix of all the gifts that our Savior purchased for us by his death and his blood.*"¹² In further defense and explanation of her role as Mediatrix, St. Pius X explains: "It cannot, of course, be denied

⁹ Pope Leo XIII, *Octobri mense*, 1891 (emphasis mine).

¹⁰ Pope Leo XIII, *Jucunda Semper*, 1894; cf. St. Bernadine of Siena, *Serm. in Nativit. B.V.M.*, n. 6 (emphasis mine).

¹¹ Pope Leo XIII, encyclical *Fidentem*, on the Rosary, Sept. 20, 1896, ASS 29 (1896), 206; AL. VI 214.

¹² Pope St. Pius X, *Ad diem illum*, 1904; cf., Eadmer, *De Excellentia Virginis Mariae*, c. 9.

that the dispensing of these gifts belongs by strict and proper right to Christ, for they are the exclusive fruit of his death, who by his nature is Mediator between God and man. Nevertheless, by this union in sorrow and suffering, as we have said, which existed between the Mother and the Son, it has been allowed to the august Virgin ‘to be the most powerful mediatrix and advocate of the whole world with her divine Son.’¹³ Once more on the level of encyclical teaching, St. Pius X instructs: ...Since she surpassed all in holiness and union with Christ, and has been associated with Christ in the work of redemption, she...is the principal minister in the distribution of grace.”¹⁴

Pope Benedict XV confirms that the reason Mary is the Mediatrix of all graces in distributing the fruits of redemption is because she was first participated with Jesus Christ in redeeming the world, and therefore in the acquisition of the heavenly gifts of grace at Calvary: “For with her suffering and dying Son, Mary endured suffering and almost death. One can truly affirm that together with Christ she has redeemed the human race....For this reason, every kind of grace we receive from the treasury of the redemption is ministered as it were through the hands of the same sorrowful Virgin.”¹⁵

Benedict XV further granted permission to celebrate the liturgical office and mass of *Mary, Mediatrix of All Graces* to the ordinaries of the world who, along with Belgium, petitioned for it.¹⁶

¹³ Pope St. Pius X, Encyclical, *Ad diem illum*, 1904; cf., St. Bernard of Clairvaux, *Serm. De temp., in Nativ. B.V. de Aquaeductu*, n. 4; St. Bernadine of Siena, *Quadrag. de Evangelio aeterno*, *Serm. X*, a. 3, c.3.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, (emphasis mine).

¹⁵ Pope Benedict XV (1914-1922), Apostolic Letter, *Inter Sodalicia*, *AAS* 10, 1918, p. 182. For other papal references to Mediatrix of all graces by Benedict XV, cf. Encyclical Letter, *Fausto appetente die*, *AAS* 13, 1921, p. 334; Letter to Cardinal Gasparri, *AAS* 10, 27 April 1917, p. 182; *Allocution at Decree Reading for Canonization of Joan of Arc*, *Actes de Benoit XV*, v. 2, 1926, p. 22; *Letter to American Hierarchy concerning the Shrine of the Immaculate Conception*, *AAS* 11, 1919, p. 173.

¹⁶ Cf. *La Vie Diocesaine*, v. 10, 1921, pp. 96-106, *Rescript of the Sacred Congregation of Rites*, 12 January 1921. Based on the Mass and Office of Mediatrix of all Graces of 1921, the Congregation for Divine Worship approved a Mass of the Blessed Virgin

Pope Pius XI continues the rich papal tradition of Mediatrix by recalling this universal mediatorial function of Mary with the Mediator in numerous Church teachings. “We have nothing more at heart than to promote more and more the devotion of the Christian people towards the *Virgin who is treasurer of all graces with God.*”¹⁷

In 1929 Encyclical, *Miserentissimus Redemptor*, Pius XI references Mary as Mediatrix of grace: “...Confiding in her intercession with Jesus, ‘the one Mediator between God and man’ (1 Tim 2:5), who wished to associate his own Mother with himself as the advocate of sinners, *as dispenser and mediatrix of grace.*”¹⁸

Pope Pius XII made his own, and the Church’s, the classic expression of St. Bernard: “And since, as St. Bernard declares, ‘it is the will of God that we obtain all favors through Mary,’ let everyone hasten to have recourse to Mary;”¹⁹ and in a 1946 Fatma address states: “Having been associated, as Mother and Minister, with the King of Martyrs in the ineffable work of human Redemption, she remains always associated with him, *with an almost measureless power, in the distribution of graces flowing from the Redemption.*”²⁰

The Second Vatican Council refers to the legitimacy of invoking Mary under the title of “Mediatrix” in *Lumen Gentium* 62, as well as her continued active role in brings to the gifts of eternal life to humanity:

Mary, Mother and Mediatrix of Grace in 1971, cf., *Collection of Masses of the Blessed Virgin Mary*, v. 1, Sacramentary, Catholic Book Co., New York, 1992. The new liturgy refers to Mary as the “treasure- house of all graces”, Entrance antiphon, p. 223.

¹⁷ Pope Pius XI (1922-1939), Apostolic Letter, *Cognitum sane*, *AAS* 18, p. 213.

¹⁸ Pope Pius XI, Encyclical Letter, *Miserentissimus Redemptor*, *AAS* 20, 1928, p. 178 (emphasis mine).

¹⁹ Pope Pius XII (1939-1957), *Superiore anno*, *AAS* 32, 1940, p. 145. For usage of same expression by Pius XII, cf., *AAS* 45, 1953, p. 382 (emphasis mine).

²⁰ Pope Pius XII, *Radio message to Fatima*, 13 May 1946, *AAS* 38, p. 266. For other references to Mediatrix of graces by Pius XII, cf., *Mystici Corporis*, *AAS* 35, 1943, p. 248; *L’Osservatore Romano*, April 22-3, 1940, p. 1; *Decree of Sacred Congregation of Rites on Canonization of Louis M. de Montfort*, *AAS* 34, (emphasis mine).

“Taken up to heaven she did not lay aside this saving office, but *by her manifold intercession continues to bring us the gifts of eternal salvation.*”²¹

Since the Council and in a post-conciliar hermeneutic of continuity with the pre-conciliar papal magisterium, Pope St. John Paul II will refer to Mary as “mediatrix of all graces” on eight separate occasions,²² and in his 1987 encyclical, *Redemptoris Mater*, clearly establishes the foundation for our Lady’s participation in the mediation of Christ: “Thus there is a mediation: Mary places herself between her son and mankind in the reality of their wants, needs, and sufferings. She *puts herself “in the middle”*, that is to say *she acts as a mediatrix, not as an outsider, but in her position as mother.*”²³

Mindful of the authentic liturgical maxim, *lex orandi lex credendi*, the Vatican Congregation for Divine Worship, at the request of St. John Paul II, approved and published in 1986 the liturgy of the Blessed Virgin as the “Mediatrix of grace” as contained in the *Collection of Masses of the Blessed Virgin Mary.*²⁴

Pope Benedict XVI offers this remarkably maximalist formulation of the Mediatrix of all graces doctrine in this May 11, 2007 homily in Brazil “*There is no fruit of grace in the history of salvation that does not have as its necessary instrument the mediation of Our Lady.*”²⁵

²¹ Vatican Council II, *Lumen Gentium*, n. 62 (emphasis mine).

²² For all specific references, see “Mary, Mediatrix of All Graces in the Papal Magisterium of John Paul II” by Msgr. Arthur B. Calkins: <https://www.motherofallpeoples.com/post/mary-mediatrix-of-all-graces-in-the-papal-magisterium-of-pope-john-paul-ii>.

²³ Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris Mater*, n. 21.

²⁴ Congregation for Divine Worship, *Collection of the Masses of the Blessed Virgin Mary*, Approval, Pope St. John Paul II, 1986.

²⁵ Benedict XVI, In his May 11 2007 homily at Campo de Marte, São Paulo, for the canonization of Frei Antônio de Sant’Ana Galvão (May 11, 2007): https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2007/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20070511_canonization-brazil.html, (emphasis mine).

Moreover, Benedict XVI, in a 2013 letter to Archbishop Zimowski, the Holy See’s representative to the World Day of the Sick, specifically used the title of “Mediatrice of all graces” (*Mediatrice omnium gratiarum*).²⁶

In a May 13, 2023 letter to the Archbishop of Sardinia, Pope Francis positively referenced the Mediatrice of all graces title as one of her “ancient titles.”²⁷

Thirteen popes, including five encyclical teachings, and two Vatican approved liturgies over four centuries—this perennial collection of magisterial statements irrefutably establishes the Mediatrice of all graces role and title as an authoritatively taught doctrine of the modern papal magisterium.

Problem with Marian Coredemption?

The DDF in its *Rosa Mystica* commentary, as well as other recent apparition commentaries²⁸, seems to also have difficulties with messages of Our Lady that refer to her unique role with Jesus in the Redemption:

Finally, certain expressions appear in the *Diaries* that Pierina does not explain, such as “Mary the

²⁶ Benedict XVI, letter to Archbishop Zimowski (January 10, 2013): https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/la/letters/2013/documents/hf_ben-xvi_let_20130110_card-zimowski.html.

²⁷ See the May 13, 2023 Message of Pope Francis to Archbishop Gian Franco Saba, Archbishop of Sassari, Sardinia (Italy), on the 80th anniversary of the Festa del Voto. In this message, Pope Francis refers to one of the most ancient Marian titles as precisely, the “Mediatrice of All Graces”: <http://www.arcidiocesisassari.it/2023/05/28/festa-del-voto-il-messaggio-del-santo-padre/>.

²⁸ Cf. also, for example, July 11, 2024 DDF *Statement on Amsterdam Apparitions*, as well as May 17, 2024 DDF *Norms* document.

Redemption,²⁹ “Mary of Grace,” “Mary Mediatrix,” and so on. Bearing in mind that such expressions are often not interpreted in a convenient way, one must remember that *Jesus Christ is our only Redeemer, because only his humanity, hypostatically united to the Person of the Word, can offer to the Father the sacrifice that obtains salvation for us: “the sacrifice of the Cross, offered in a spirit of love and obedience, presents the most abundant and infinite satisfaction due for the sins of the human race”* (Pius XII, *Haurietis Aquas* [15 May 1956], no. 35). The revealed Word affirms that “there is but one God, one also is the mediator between God and men, the man Jesus Christ, who gave himself as a ransom for all” (1 Tim. 2:5-6) [emphasis mine].³⁰

Is the statement, “one must remember that Jesus Christ is our only Redeemer” to be understood as a possible corrective against the subordinate role of Marian coredemption, or perhaps more specifically, the Marian title, “Co-redemptrix”?

Certainly, there is the absolutely foundational Christian truth that Jesus Christ is the only divine Redeemer of humanity through his infinitely meritorious passion, death, and resurrection. Yet, the truth that Jesus is our only divine redeemer *must not be interpreted as a prohibition nor denial of the unique human cooperation of the Immaculate Virgin with and under Jesus, in the historic accomplishment of Redemption.*

The quintessential soteriological truth that Jesus Christ is our only divine Redeemer must never be threatened by any gravely erroneous concept of another equal or parallel redeemer, as his divine redemptive victory is infinitely beyond the merits of any creaturely act. Yet, as an expression of his love for humanity, God the Father has willed that his human creatures living in his grace would have the great privilege of sharing in the Redeemer’s work of human salvation through the

²⁹ N.B. Mary’s role in Redemption was legitimately referred to in the renowned 6th century Eastern Akathist hymn, “*Hail, Redemption of the tears of Eve,*” Strophe 1, PG 92, 1337 A.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

mysteries release of redemptive graces. St. Paul tells us that Christians are called to “make up what is lacking in the suffering of Christ for the sake of his body, which is the Church” (Col. 1:24); and, further, that we must be “co-workers with God” (1 Cor:3:9) in the work of salvation. St. John Paul II beckons the same Christian call to become “co-redeemers in Christ.”³¹ Based upon the selfsame principle of participation, Pope Benedict XVI invoked the sick at Fatima to “become redeemers with the Redeemer:”

Dear friends who are sick, entrust to him [Jesus] every setback and pain that you face, so that 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.³²

The DDF quotes Pope Pius XII in explaining the infinite satisfaction accomplishing by the Redeemer at Calvary. Yet, Pius XII also clearly teaches the active possibility for all members of the Church to participate in the release of a “rain of heavenly gifts” of redemption upon humanity:

Our zealous love for the Church demands it, as does our brotherly love for the souls she brings forth in Christ. For although our Savior’s cruel passion and death merited for His Church an infinite treasure of graces, God’s inscrutable providence has decreed that these graces should not be granted to us all at once; but

³¹ Pope St. John Paul II,

Cf. Pope St. John Paul II, *Allocution to the Sick at the Hospital of the Brothers of St. John of God, April 5, 1981*, *L’Osservatore Romano*, English ed., April 13, 1981, p. 6; *Address to the Sick following General Audience, January 13, 1982*, Inseg. V/1, 1982, 91; *Address to the Bishops of Uruguay, May 8, 1988*, *L’Osservatore Romano*, English ed., May 30, 1988, p. 4.

³² Pope Benedict XVI, *Address to the Sick*, Shrine of Our Lady of Fatima, Portugal, May 13, 2010.

their greater or lesser abundance will depend in no small part on our good works, which draw down on the souls of men a rain of heavenly gifts freely bestowed by God.³³

Since this participation in the salvific mission of Jesus can be true for all those baptized in Christ, it must be *emphatically and definitively be true of the immaculate human mother of Jesus.*

When popes, saints, theologians, doctors, and mystics down the centuries refer to Mary as the Co-redemptrix³⁴, this must be understood as a single term which denotes Mary's unique participation with and under Jesus Christ in the historic work of Redemption. The Co-redemptrix term refers to Mary, the human New Eve, with and under Christ, the divine and human New Adam, in the universal salvific act of restoring supernatural life to souls. Never as an idolatrous "divine equal," but always as a human immaculate handmaid, Mary cooperates with the Redeemer like no other creature—not only in the release of grace possible for all Christians, but also in the *historic obtaining of grace*, as the following popes will testify.

Once again, the doctrinal status of Marian coredeemption cannot be left to theological opinion, but rather grounded upon the authoritative teachings of the papal Magisterium.

Pope Leo XIII in his 1895 encyclical, *Adjutricem populi*, refers to the Blessed Virgin as the "cooperatrix" (literally, "female co-worker") with Christ in the Redemption of humanity, and therefore the principal cooperator in the distribution of redemptive graces: "...she who had been the cooperatrix in the sacrament of man's Redemption, would be likewise the cooperatrix in the dispensation of graces deriving from it."³⁵

³³ Pope Pius XII, Encyclical, *Mystici Corporis*, 1943, n. 106.

³⁴ Cf. M. Miravalle, *With Jesus: The Story of Mary Co-redemptrix*, Goleta, Ca, Queenship Publications, 2003; J.B. Carol, *De Corredemptione B. V. Mariae disquisitio positiva*, Civitas Vaticana, , 1950, 600 pages.

³⁵ Pope Leo XIII, Encyclical Letter, *Adjutricem populi*, 1895, *ASS.* v. 28, p. 130, (emphasis mine).

In 1885, Leo XIII also approved a prayer to Jesus and Mary which refers to the Virgin Mother as “*co-redemptrix of the world*” (Italian, *corredentrica del mondo*; Latin, *mundo redimendo coadiutrix*).³⁶

Pope St. Pius X, in his 1904 renowned encyclical, *Ad diem illum* designates Mary as “chosen by Christ to be His partner in the work of human salvation” and specifies Mary’s coredemptive merit in the order of fittingness (*de congruo*) in union with Christ’s *de condigno* meriting in strict justice:

Owing to the union of suffering and purpose existing between Christ and Mary, she merited to become most worthily the reparatrix of the lost world, and for this reason, the dispenser of all the favors which Jesus acquired for us by His death and His blood. Nevertheless, because she surpasses all in holiness and in union with Christ, and because she was chosen by Christ to be His partner in the work of human salvation, she merits for us de congruo, as they say, that which Christ merits for us de condigno,³⁷ and she is the principal dispenser of the graces to be distributed.³⁸

³⁶ Pope Leo XIII, Congregation for Indulgences and Sacred Relics, ASS, 18 [1885], p.93 (emphasis mine).

³⁷ *Meritum de condigno* (condign merit) *ex toto rigore justitiae* (equality between the meritorious action and its reward, as well as between the persons giving and receiving the reward) is a type of merit (“a right to a reward”) that can be obtained only by Jesus Christ in light of his divine nature. The redemptive act by Jesus Christ on the cross was both satisfactory (removing the relationship of guilt between the human race and God) and meritorious (establishing a right to a reward from Almighty God, which is always at the same time presupposing a gift of grace from God).. *Meritum de congruo* (congruous merit) is a right to a reward based on its appropriateness or fittingness, along with the generosity of the person granting the reward. In light of Mary’s unique participation with Christ in Redemption and the graciousness of the Father, such *de congruo* merit is rightfully attributed by St. Pius X to Mary. Cf. Council of Trent, D 799, D 809, 810; cf also for example, J. B. Carol, O.F.M., “Our Lady’s Coredemption” in *Mariology*, Bruce Pub., 1957, v. 2, p. 410.

³⁸ Pope St. Pius X, Encyclical Letter, *Ad diem illum*, 1904, ASS., v. 36, 1903-1904, p. 453 (emphasis mine).

Pope Benedict XV in his 1918 apostolic letter, *Inter Sodalicia*, emphatically concludes to Mary's historic co-redemptive role by explicitly stating that "together with Christ, *she* [Mary] redeemed the human race."

...The fact that she was with her Son crucified and dying, was in accord with the divine plan. To such extent did she [Mary] suffer and almost die with her suffering and dying Son; to such extent did she surrender her maternal rights over her Son for man's salvation, and immolated Him – insofar as she could – in order to appease the justice of God, that ***we may rightly say that together with Christ she redeemed the human race.***³⁹

Pope Pius XI is the first pope to specifically use the title of Co-redemptrix, and does so on three occasions, as for example in this 1935 allocution at the end of the Holy Year of Redemption:

O Mother of love and mercy who, when thy sweetest Son was consummating the Redemption of the human race on the altar of the cross, did stand next to Him, *suffering with Him as a Coredeptrix*...preserve in us, we beseech thee, and increase day by day the precious fruit of His redemption and the compassion of His Mother.⁴⁰

Pius XI explains and defends the Co-redemptrix title and the sound theology behind it in this 1933 allocution:

"From the nature of His work the Redeemer ought to have associated His Mother with His work. *For this reason we invoke her under the title of*

³⁹ Pope Benedict XV, Apostolic Letter, *Inter Sodalicia*, 1918, *AAS* 10, p.182 (emphasis and bold mine).

⁴⁰ Pope Pius XI, Prayer of the Solemn Closing of the Redemption Jubilee, April 28, 1935, *L'Osservatore Romano*, 29-30 April 1935, p. 1(emphasis mine).For other papal statements in relation to the doctrine of Coredeptrix by Pius XI, see *L'Osservatore Romano*, 1 November 1933; *AAS*, v. 15, 1923, p. 105; v. 20, 1928, p. 178; Papal Address to Pilgrims from Vicenza, 30 Nov. 1933, *L'Osservatore Romano*, 1 Dec. 1933.

Coredemptrix. 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 mankind. And immediately beneath the Cross, at the last moments of His life, she was proclaimed by the Redeemer as our Mother, the Mother of the whole universe.”⁴¹

Pius XII teaches Marian coredemption with encyclical level authority and integrates the Patristic understanding of Mary as the New Eve with her coredemptive offering of Jesus at Calvary: “It was she [Mary] who, always most intimately united with her Son, *like a New Eve, offered Him on Golgotha to the Eternal Father, together with the sacrifice of her maternal rights and love, on behalf of all the children of Adam, stained by the latter’s shameful fall.*”⁴²

Again, Pius XII identifies Mary as Christ’s “associate” in the work of Redemption, leading to an “almost unlimited power in the distribution of graces: “For *having been associated with the King of Martyrs in the ineffable work of human redemption, as Mother and cooperatrix*, she remains forever associated with Him, with an almost unlimited power, in the distribution of graces which flow from the Redemption.”⁴³

The Second Vatican Council teaches Our Lady’s coredemption with Jesus repeatedly and in a certain fashion. The specific Co-redemptrix title is not included in the document, as it was removed from the first Marian schema (draft) before ever reaching the Council fathers by a sub-commission of theologians. In their *praenotanda* (pre-note), the subcommittee designated the Co-redemptrix title as being “absolutely true in itself” [*quae licet in se verissima*] but “which may be misunderstood by the separated brethren, in this case, Protestants.”⁴⁴ If this same

⁴¹ Pope Pius XI, Papal Allocution to Pilgrims of Vicenza, 30 November 1933, *L’Osservatore Romano*, 1 Dec. 1933 (emphasis mine).

⁴² Pope Pius XII, Encyclical Letter, *Mystici Corporis*, 1943, *AAS* 35, 1943, p.247 (emphasis mine).

⁴³ Pope Pius XII, *Radio Broadcast to Pilgrims at Fatima*, 13 May 1946, *AAS* 38, 1946, p. 266 (emphasis mine).

⁴⁴ *Acta Synodalia Consilii*, vol 1, pt 4; cf Besutti, *Lo Schema Mariano*, p. 41.

zealous ecumenical standard, i.e., possible Protestant misunderstanding, was universally used at the Council for the elimination of terms, one wonders how the conciliar treatments on Liturgy, Eucharist, Papal Authority, and Priesthood would have fared?

Nonetheless, the Marian coredemption doctrine is undeniably present in Vatican II teachings. *Lumen Gentium*, n. 56 testifies to Mary's role as the New Eve (the patristic type of Marian coredemption) and her active, not passive, participation in her Son's work of salvation:

Committing herself wholeheartedly and impeded by no sin to God's saving will, she 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. Rightly, therefore, the Fathers see Mary not merely as passively engaged by God, but as freely cooperated in the work of man's salvation through faith and obedience. For, as St. Irenaeus says, she "being obedient, became the cause of salvation for herself and the whole human race."⁴⁵

Lumen Gentium, n. 57 expresses Mary's lifetime work in union in the salvific mission of Jesus: "This union of the mother with the Son in the work of salvation is made manifest from the time of Christ's virginal conception up to his death...".⁴⁶

Lumen Gentium, n. 58 identifies Mary's coredemptive participation in the intensity of Christ's suffering at Calvary, as well as her "consenting to the immolation of this victim which was born of her":

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

⁴⁵ Second Vatican Council, *Lumen gentium*, 56; St. Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* III, 22, 4: PG 7, 959 A, Harvey, 2, 123.

⁴⁶ Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, n. 57.

to the immolation of this victim which was born of her. Finally, she was given by the same Christ Jesus dying on the cross as a mother to his disciple, with these words: “woman, behold your son” (Jn. 19:26-27).⁴⁷

Lumen Gentium, n. 61 refers to the Mother of Christ as the “loving associate of the Redeemer” [*alma socio redemptoris*] which denotes the Virgin’s unique role with Christ in Redemption, and then proceeds to state her singular cooperation “in the work of the Savior in restoring supernatural life to souls,” which in turn constitutes the foundation for her consequential role as spiritual mother “in the order of grace.”

She conceived, brought forth, and nourished Christ, she presented him to the Father in the temple, shared her Son’s sufferings as he died on the cross. Thus, 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. For this reason, she is a mother to us in the order of grace.⁴⁸

Pope St. John Paul II dynamically continues and expands papal teaching on Marian coredemption. Not only does he specifically use the Co-redemptrix title on seven occasions, but he also teaches the doctrine within a great frequency and diversity of documents.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, n. 58

⁴⁸ Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, 61.

⁴⁹ Cf. for example, Pope St. John Paul II, *Allocution to the Sick, September 8, 1982*, *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, Vol 3, 1982, 404; 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 Sixth Centenary Canonization of St. Brigid of Sweden*, October 6, 1991, *L’Osservatore Romano*, English ed., October 14, 1991, p. 4. Cf. for example, Msgr. Arthur Calkins, “John Paul II’s Teaching on Marian Coredemption” in *Mary Co-redemptrix, Mediatrix, Advocate: Theological Foundations II*, Goleta, Ca., Queenship Publishing, 1997, pp. 113-139.

For example, in this 1985 homily, the Totus Tuus pontiff provides a synthetic theology of Coredemption based on Lumen Gentium 58:

Mary goes before us and accompanies us. The silent journey which begins with her Immaculate Conception and passes through the “yes” of Nazareth, which makes her the Mother of God, find on Calvary a particularly important moment. There also accepting and assisting in the sacrifice of her Son, Mary is the dawn of Redemption...Crucified spiritually with her crucified son, (cf. Gal. 2:20), she contemplates with heroic love the death of her God, she “lovingly consented to the immolation of the victim which she herself brought forth” (*Lumen Gentium*, 58)... In fact at Calvary she united herself with the sacrifice of her Son that led to the foundation of the Church...In fact, Mary’s coredemptive role did not cease with the glorification of her son.⁵⁰

In his 1984 apostolic letter, *Salvifici Doloris*, St. John Paul refers to Mary’s sufferings as a historic “contribution to the Redemption of all:”

In her, the many and intense sufferings were amassed in such an interconnected way, that they were not only a proof of her unshakable faith, but also a contribution to the Redemption of all...It was on Calvary that Mary’s sufferings, besides the suffering of Jesus, reached an intensity which can hardly be imagined from a human point of view, but was mysteriously and supernaturally fruitful for the Redemption of the world.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Pope St. John Paul II, Homily at Our Lady of Alborada Shrine, Quayaquil, Ecuador, Jan. 31, 1985, *L’Osservatore Romano*, March 11, 1985, p. 7.

⁵¹ Pope St. John Paul II, Apostolic Letter, *Salvifici Doloris*, February 11, 1984, n. 25.

In his April 9, 1997 audience, John Paul II makes a critically important distinction between the coredemptive call of all Christians in the release of redemptive grace, from the unique role of Mary with Jesus in the *objective obtaining of the graces of Redemption*:

The collaboration of Christians in salvation takes place after the Calvary event, whose fruits they endeavor to share by prayer and sacrifice. Mary, instead, cooperated in the event itself and in the role of mother; thus her cooperation embraces the whole of Christ's saving work. She alone was associated in this way with Christ's 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.

...Although God's call to cooperate in the work of salvation concerns every human being, the participation of the Savior's mother in humanity's redemption is a unique and unrepeatable fact.⁵²

In this one sentence addressing the sick in a 1982 allocution, Pope St. John Paul II captures the essence of the Catholic doctrine of Mary as Co-redemptrix: "*Mary, conceived and born without the stain of sin, participated in a marvelous way in the sufferings of her divine Son, in order to be Co-redemptrix of humanity.*"⁵³

Pope Benedict XVI confirms Marian coredemption in this 2009 allocution: "We are accompanied in this itinerary by the Blessed Virgin who silently followed her Son, Jesus to Calvary, taking part with deep sorrow in his sacrifice and thus cooperating in the mystery of the Redemption and becoming Mother of all believers."⁵⁴

⁵² Pope St. John Paul II, Audience, April 9, 1997, *L'Osservatore Romano*, April 16, 1997, p. 7.

⁵³ Pope St. John Paul II, Greeting to the Sick after September 8, 1982, *Insegnamenti*, V/3, 1982, p. 404 (emphasis mine).

⁵⁴ Pope Benedict XVI, *General Audience*, April 8, 2009.

Pope Francis extends the contemporary papal teaching on Marian coredemption. In his October 23, 2013 allocution, he speaks of Mary's "martyrdom of her heart" in union with her Son and his sacrifice on Calvary:

This union finds its culmination on Calvary: here Mary is united to the Son in the martyrdom of her heart and in the offering of his life to the Father for the salvation of humanity. Our Lady shared in the pain of the Son and accepted with him the will of the Father, in that obedience that bears fruit, that grants the true victory over evil and death.⁵⁵

Moreover, Pope Francis conveys the indispensable role of Mary in human salvation during his January 1, 2020 homily when he teaches that there is "no salvation without a woman": "Mary will forever be the Mother of God. She is both woman and mother: this is what is essential. From her, a woman, salvation came forth and thus there is no salvation without a woman."⁵⁶

With this surplus of official teachings from the Papal Magisterium, which extend from the nineteenth through the twenty-first century, *can there truly be a valid objection from within the Church regarding the undeniable doctrinal truth of Marian coredemption?*

It must be reiterated that Marian coredemption denotes Mary's unique cooperation with and under Jesus Christ, the only divine Redeemer in the historic accomplishment of human Redemption, and *the title, Co-redemptrix, denotes exactly the same truth.* Why then, is the title causing such contemporary controversy?

There can certainly be a danger in isolating the Co-redemptrix title from its proper theological meaning, in which case it could be misunderstood to connote an equality between the divine Jesus and

⁵⁵ Pope Francis, *General Audience*, October 23, 2013.

⁵⁶ Pope Francis, *Homily for the Solemnity of the Mother of God*, St. Peter's Basilica, January 1, 2020.

the human Mary. In this case, proper theological instruction is required to communicate Mary's absolute subordination to her divine Son in the redemptive act. Could this, perhaps, be the concern of our present Holy Father with the present use of this title?

Why, then, use a Marian title which could potentially be misunderstood? We have only to look at the example of the first great Marian dogma and its respective title, "Mother of God." This title, outside of its proper explanation and meaning, could easily be misunderstood, perhaps even more easily than the Co-redemptrix title. "How can God have a mother?" "Does this denote Mary as "Mother of the Father," or "Mother of the Holy Spirit?" Why then did the Church dogmatically declare the Mother of God title? *Because of the Christian truth it powerfully expresses in one title: that Mary is true human mother of God the Son incarnate, which ultimately points to and protects the sublime Christocentric mystery of the hypostatic union—the divine nature and human nature in the one divine person of Jesus Christ.*

So, too, *the title, Mary Co-redemptrix, powerfully points to Jesus Christ, the only divine Redeemer* and his infinite act of Redemption, without which her title has absolutely no meaning. This Marian title also points to and fulfills the plan of the Heavenly Father that a woman have an integral role with Jesus in the reversal of Eve's disobedience through an immaculate woman's heroic obedience to her divine Redeemer.

Some theological minds may prefer to use a different term than Co-redemptrix for this role, one which does not share the same etymological root (*redimere*) as "Redeemer" since, as has been reiterated in DDF commentaries, there is only one divine Redeemer in Jesus Christ.

Could we not raise the same objection about using the term "priest" for anyone except Jesus Christ, the one divine Priest?

The Letter to the Hebrews reveals that we have one "great high priest" (Heb 4:14), Jesus Christ, only one divine Priest who offers one single

sacrifice for the sins of the world (cf. Heb. 4:14; 8:1; 14:28; 10:10). Should the Church then stop using the term, “priest” for anyone except Jesus, our one and only divine Priest?

The Church has rather chosen to use the same term for the one and only divine Priest and various human priests, and to make distinctions for those human persons who participate in different degrees in the one divine Priesthood of Jesus Christ. The Church also use the same term with further distinguishes between “ministerial priests” and “royal priesthood of the laity”, based on their different degrees of participation in the life and mission of one divine High Priest.

We therefore must also recognize the legitimacy of using the same term “redeemer” to indicate Jesus Christ, as the one and only divine Redeemer; Mary’s unique and subordinate participation as human Co-redemptrix in the mission of the Redeemer; and the further subordinate human participation in the mission of the one divine Redeemer by all Christian faithful as “*co-redeemers in Christ*.”⁵⁷ Using the same root word, furthermore, dynamically expresses the intimate mystical body union between the divine Redeemer, the human Co-redemptrix, and all co-redeemers in Christ.

Ultimately, three centuries of papal teachings on Marian coredeemption, including its positive teaching at the Second Vatican Council clearly validates its authentic doctrinal integrity. The use or approval of the Co-redemptrix title likewise assures its doctrinal legitimacy. Such should be reflected in all relevant statements by the Vatican’s doctrinal dicastery.

⁵⁷ Pope St. John Paul II, cf. Cf. Pope St. John Paul II, *Allocution to the Sick at the Hospital of the Brothers of St. John of God, April 5, 1981*, *L’Osservatore Romano*, English ed., April 13, 1981, p. 6; *Address to the Sick following General Audience*, January 13, 1982, Inseg. V/1, 1982, 91; *Address to the Bishops of Uruguay, May 8, 1988*, *L’Osservatore Romano*, English ed., May 30, 1988, p. 4.

Conclusion

Jesus Christ is the one divine mediator between God and man (cf. 1 Tim. 2:5) and the one and only divine Redeemer of humanity. Yet, it is the will of God that Mary Immaculate should participate and cooperate like no other creature in both the mediation of Jesus as Mediatrix of all graces, and in the Redemption of Jesus as human Co-redemptrix. These Marian titles and their respective doctrines should not only be faithfully taught by the contemporary Church, but should also be championed for the truth they express, albeit with the necessary articulation of their human subordination to the divine soteriological roles ultimately accomplished by Jesus Christ.

The denial of Marian mediation in the distribution of graces not only runs contrary to centuries of papal teachings, but it also poses as a proximate theological threat to the mediation of the Church and of the ministerial priesthood in the distribution of grace.

With a true spirit in service of the Church of seeking the best possible articulation of these authentic Marian truths by the Church's highest doctrinal commission (cf. DV 30) and in sincere respect for their invaluable service in seeking to safeguard the *depositum fidei*, I would hope for a corrective clarification regarding the Rosa Mystica theological commentary which appears to negate Mary's true role in the mediation of graces. I would also hope that present and future Mariological commentary properly reflect the rich traditional and contemporary papal and conciliar teaching on Marian coredemption and the theologically legitimate use of the title, Co-redemptrix.

Happily (after the completion of this article but before its publication), Pope Francis, during his recent August 5, 2024 homily at St. Mary Major's Basilica in celebration of the memorial of Our Lady of the Snow, offered a key papal corrective to this issue by stating that "***she[Mary] is the Mediatrix of the grace that flows always and only through Jesus Christ, by the action of the Holy Spirit*** (*lei è la mediatrice della grazia che sgorga sempre e solo da Gesù Cristo, per opera dello*

Spirito Santo).⁵⁸ Since, in fact, *all sanctifying grace* originates in Jesus Christ and comes to us through the power of the Holy Spirit, and she is the Mediatrix of this grace, this reiteration of Our Lady's doctrine as Mediatrix of grace can also imply the full role and title of Mediatrix of *all graces*.

Deo et papae gratias.

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August 15, 2024, Solemnity of the Assumption

⁵⁸ Pope Francis, *Omelià Della Celebrazione Dei Secondi Vespri In Occasione Dell'Anniversario Della Basilica Papal de Santa Maria Maggiore e Della Solennità Della Madonna Delle Neve*, (Homily of the Celebration of Second Vespers on the Occasion of the Anniversary of the Papal Basilica of St. Mary Majors and the Solemnity of the Lady of the Snows), Rome, August 5, 2024.

Episcopal Affirmations of the Supernatural: Some Historical Cases

ROBERT FASTIGGI, PHD

Introduction: The importance of Marian apparitions

Marian apparitions have played an important role in the life of the Church.¹ We only need think of how the 1531 apparitions of Our Lady of Guadalupe to St. Juan Diego—along with Mary’s miraculous image on his tilma—led to the conversion of over nine million Aztecs to the Catholic faith.² Shrines that have been erected because of Marian apparitions continue to draw millions of pilgrims each year. About 20 million pilgrims visit the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe annually; about 6 million go to Lourdes; 6–8 million to Fatima; and about 10 million to the Basilica of Our Lady of Good Health in Vailankanni, which is recognized as “the Lourdes of the East”(John Paul II, Angelus address, July 31, 1988).

Marian apparitions as private revelations

Marian apparitions fall into the category of “private revelations” to distinguish them from the public revelation of Scripture and apostolic tradition. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church explains,

Throughout the ages, there have been so-called "private" revelations, some of which have been recognized by the authority of the Church. They do not belong, however, to the deposit of faith. It is not their role to improve or complete Christ's definitive Revelation, but to help live more fully by it in a certain period of history. Guided by the Magisterium of the Church, the *sensus fidelium* knows how to discern and welcome in these revelations whatever constitutes an authentic call of Christ or his saints to the Church (no. 67).

¹ See Robert Fastiggi, “Mary and Our Pilgrimage to Heaven” *The Priest* (September, 2024): <https://thepriest.com/2024/06/16/mary-and-our-pilgrimage-to-heaven/>.

² Francis Johnson, *The Wonder of Guadalupe* (Rockford, IL: Tan Books, 1981), 56.

The distinction between the deposit of faith and the messages of private revelations is important to keep in mind when discerning the validity of reported apparitions. The Catechism, though, also recognizes how the *sensus fidelium*, guided by the Magisterium, “knows how to discern and welcome in these revelations whatever constitutes an authentic call of Christ or his saints to the Church.” If the *sensus fidelium*—the supernatural sense of the faithful—can discern and welcome authentic calls from Christ or his saints to the Church, does this not suggest the ability to discern whether or not reported Marian apparitions are supernatural?

The New Norms of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith (DDF)

I raise this question in light of the cautious approach to the validity of private revelations provided by the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith [DDF] in the new *Norms for Proceeding in the Discernment of Alleged Supernatural Phenomena* of May 17, 2024.³ The DDF is concerned that direct affirmations of the supernatural character of apparitions or phenomena will give the faithful the impression that they are obliged to believe in them as supernatural. Because of this concern, the DDF will not allow bishops to issue statements affirming the supernatural character of apparitions or miraculous events. The highest form of episcopal approval now permitted is a declaration of *nihil obstat*, which means that nothing stands in the way for the faithful to believe in the reported apparitions or miraculous event. But even with the *nihil obstat*, the diocesan bishop is asked to “clearly indicate, through a decree, the nature of the authorization and the limits of any permitted veneration, specifying that the faithful ‘are authorized to give to it their adherence in a prudent manner’” (Art. 22 § 1). Moreover, “The Diocesan Bishop will also take care to ensure that the faithful do not consider any of the determinations as an approval of the supernatural nature of the phenomenon itself (Art. 22 § 2).

³ These Norms can be found on the Vatican website:
https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_ddf_doc_20240517_norme-fenomeni-soprannaturali_en.html.

In support of this cautious approach, the DDF cites this 2010 statement of Pope Benedict XVI:

Ecclesiastical approval of a private revelation essentially means that its message contains nothing contrary to faith and morals; it is licit to make it public and the faithful are authorized to give to it their adherence in a prudent manner. [...] It is a help which is proffered, but its use is not obligatory. In any event, it must be a matter of nourishing faith, hope and love, which are for everyone the permanent path of salvation.⁴

The Church for centuries has taught that the faithful are not obliged to believe in private revelations—even those approved by the Church. The question can be asked, though, whether the non-obligatory character of a private revelation should prevent a bishop from making a personal affirmation of it as supernatural. According to the 1978 *Norms Regarding the Manner of Proceeding in the Discernment of Presumed Apparitions or Revelations* issued by the then Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith [CDF], it was possible for the diocesan bishop “to express a judgment regarding the authenticity and supernatural character if the case so merits.”⁵

The 1978 Norms were sent to Catholic bishops in Latin to guide them in discerning reported apparitions. There were, though, many unauthorized translations that made their way into the public domain. Because of this, the CDF published its own official translations of the Norms in a number of languages in 2012 along with a preface by

⁴ Benedict XVI, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini* (30 September 2010), no. 14: *AAS* 102 (2010), p. 696; this exhortation is also available on the Vatican website: https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_ben-xvi_exh_20100930_verbum-domini.html.

⁵ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Norms Regarding the Manner of Proceeding in the Discernment of Presumed Apparitions or Revelations* (Feb. 25, 1978), no. 2c, available at https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19780225_norme-apparizioni_en.html.

Cardinal William Levada, the prefect of the CDF.⁶ In his preface, Cardinal Levada cites Benedict XVI's *Verbum Domini* on the nature and purpose of private revelations and their non-obligatory character. The 1978 Norms, though, still allows bishops "to express a judgment regarding the authenticity and supernatural character" of the apparition.

As we have seen, the May 17, 2024 DDF Norms no longer allow the diocesan bishop to issue a statement affirming the supernatural character of the apparition. Instead, the most positive judgment a bishop can offer is a *nihil obstat* in consultation with the DDF. The reason for this cautious approach is to avoid giving the impression that belief in an approved apparition is obligatory. The new Norms make this clear:

Whenever a *Nihil obstat* is granted by the Dicastery (cf. Par. 17, below), such phenomena do not become objects of faith, which means the faithful are not obliged to give an assent of faith to them. Rather, as in the case of charisms recognized by the Church, they are "ways to deepen one's knowledge of Christ and to give oneself more generously to him, while rooting oneself more and more deeply in communion with the entire Christian people." (no. 12).

The DDF, therefore, believes bishops should avoid declaring an apparition or event supernatural. This explanation is given:

In the past, the Holy See seemed to accept that Bishops would make statements such as, "*Les fidèles sont fondés à la croire indubitable et certaine*" [The faithful have grounds to believe it as indubitable and certain]: Decree of the Bishop of Grenoble, 19 September 1851) and "one cannot doubt the reality of the tears" (Decree of the Bishops of Sicily, 12 December 1953).

⁶ Cardinal Levada's Preface is dated December 14, 2011, and it can be found on the Vatican website:

https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20111214_prefazione-levada_en.html.

However, these expressions conflicted with the Church's own conviction that the faithful did not have to accept the authenticity of these events. Therefore, a few months after the latter case, the Holy Office explained that it had "not yet made any decision regarding the *Madonna delle Lacrime*" ([Syracuse, Sicily] 2 October 1954). More recently, in reference to Fatima, the then Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith explained that ecclesiastical approval of a private revelation highlights that "the message contains nothing contrary to faith or morals" (26 June 2000).

The DDF is rightly concerned that the faithful should not feel obliged to believe in apparitions that have received Church approval. Private revelations—even those that have been approved—cannot demand the assent of faith as do truths set forth by the Church as revealed by God. In the past it was generally understood that belief in approved apparitions was not obligatory. This was handled by proper catechesis. The DDF, though, now feels the need to be very cautious in this regard. Thus, it instructs bishops not to make statements affirming apparitions or miraculous events as supernatural.

The DDF provides two examples of episcopal statements judged to conflict "with the Church's own conviction that the faithful did not have to accept the authenticity of these events." It should be noted, though, that the 1851 approval of the La Salette apparition by Bishop Philibert de Bruillard does not explicitly say that the faithful *are obliged* to believe in it as supernatural. Instead the Bishop says: "The apparition of the Holy Virgin to the two shepherds on the mountain of La Salette [...] bears in itself all the characteristics of truth and the faithful have grounds to believe it as indubitable and certain" ("*L'apparition de la Sainte Vierge à deux bergers sur la montagne de La Salette [...] porte en elle-même tous les caractères de la vérité et que les fidèles sont fondés*

à la croire indubitable et certaine)”.⁷ The Bishop does not say that the apparition is indubitable and certain but the faithful have grounds (or are justified) in believing it as such. The DDF, though, believes that even this type of approval conflicts “with the Church’s own conviction that the faithful did not have to accept the authenticity of these events.”

Episcopal approvals as worthy of belief and supernatural

What type of episcopal approval, then, would be acceptable to the DDF? In the history of the Church, some apparitions seem to have been approved with the type of cautious language that the DDF now prefers. For example, the 1877 Marian apparitions received by two young Polish girls in Gietrzwałd, Poland were given indirect approval by Bishop Filip Krementz of the Diocese Warmia (Ermland), Poland in 1878. Bishop Krementz did not issue a decree approving the apparitions as supernatural. Instead, “he promoted the publication in German and in Polish of the study by Father Franciszek Hipler entitled ‘The Apparitions of Our Lady in Gietrzwałd to the Catholic People According to the Official Documents’.”⁸ On September 11, 1977, commemorating the 100th anniversary of the apparitions, Bishop Julian Wojtowski, issued a decree recognizing the apparitions as “worthy of credibility.”⁹ This would seem to be the type of approval that DDF now prefers. Bishop Wojtowski in 1977 did not declare the 1877 apparitions to be supernatural. He simply said they were worthy of

⁷ My translation taken from the French text cited on the website of La Salette <https://lasalette.cef.fr/lhistoire/>.

⁸ See the outline of events provided by Michael O’Neill in his Miracle Hunter website: https://www.miraclehunter.com/marian_apparitions/approved_apparitions/gietrzwald/index.html.

⁹ *Dictionnaire des “Apparitions” de La Vierge Marie*, edited by René Laurentin and Patrick Sbalchiero (Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 2007), 389.

belief as such. In other words, nothing prevents (*nihil obstat*) the faithful from believing in these apparitions.

There have also been episcopal declarations on Marian apparitions and miraculous events that have affirmed the supernatural while also making it clear that the faithful are not obliged to believe in the apparitions. One example of this type of declaration is that of Most. Rev. John Shojiro Ito, the Bishop of Niignata, Japan, who issued a pastoral letter on April 22, 1984 in which he states:

I recognize the supernatural character of a series of mysterious events concerning the statue of the Holy Mother Mary which is found in the convent of the Institute of the Handmaids of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in the Holy Eucharist at Yuzawadai, Soegawa, Akita. I do not find in these events any elements which are contrary to Catholic faith and morals.¹⁰

Bishop Ito's recognition of the supernatural character of the events, however, is followed by this explanation and qualification:

Consequently, I authorize, throughout the entire diocese, the veneration of the Holy Mother of Akita, while awaiting that the Holy See publishes definitive judgment on this matter. And I ask that it be remembered that even if the Holy See later publishes a favorable judgment with regard to the events of Akita, it is a question only of a private Divine revelation. Christians are bound to believe only content of public Divine revelation (closed after the death of the last Apostle) which contains all that is necessary for salvation.¹¹

As can be seen, Bishop Ito recognizes the supernatural character of the events of Akita, but he makes it clear that the faithful are not

¹⁰ The text of Bishop Ito's Pastoral letter of April 22, 1984 can be found at: https://www.miraclehunter.com/marian_apparitions/statements/akita_statement_01.html.

¹¹ Ibid.

obliged to believe in these events as supernatural. This is because it concerns a private revelation, which is distinct from public divine revelation.

In terms of Catholic history, there seem to be numerous examples of bishops making explicit affirmations of the supernatural character of various Marian apparitions. Here are some examples.

In July of 1836 Archbishop Hyacinthe-Louis de Quélen of Paris approved the supernatural character of the Miraculous Medal, based on the 1830 apparitions to St. Catheriine Labouré, with these words:

... [T]he prodigious number of medals that have been stamped and distributed, the stunning benefits and singular graces ... truly seem to be the signs by which heaven has wished to confirm the reality of the apparitions, the truth of the report of the visionary and the diffusion of the medal.¹²

Archbishop de Quélen does not appeal to his own authority to confirm the supernatural nature of the apparitions received by the visionary (at that time not named). Instead, he appeals to the signs of heaven that confirm the reality of the apparitions. Behind his statement, though, is the belief that he, as the Archbishop, can discern the signs given by heaven.

On January 18, 1862, Bishop Bertrand-Sévère Mascarou-*Laurence* of Tarbes, France, published a letter confirming the validity of the apparitions of Lourdes. He did not hesitate to say: “The Immaculate Mother of God has really appeared to Bernandette” (“*L’Immaculée Mère de Dieu a réellement apparu a Bernadette*”).¹³

On February 2, 1872, Bishop Casimir-Alexis-Joseph Wicart of Laval, France, issued his official judgment on the 1871 apparition of the Virgin Mary in Pontmain, France. In approving the apparition, he said:

¹² As cited in Robert L. Fastiggi and Michael O’Neill, *Virgin, Mother, Queen: Encountering Mary in Time and Tradition* (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 2019), 89. The French text is found in Nicole Vray, *Un autre regard sur Marie: Histoire et religion* (Lyon: Olivetan, 2008), 86.

¹³ Laurentin and Sbalchiero I, 564.

“The Immaculate Virgin Mary, Mother of God, truly appeared on January 17, 1871 to Eugène Barbedette, Joseph Barbedette, Françoise Richer and Jeanne-Marie Lebossé, in the hamlet of Pontmain” (“*L’Immaculée Vierge Marie, Mère de Dieu, a véritablement apparu, le 17 janvier 1871, à Eugène Barbedette, Joseph Barbedette, Françoise Richer et Jeanne-Marie Lebossé, dans le hameau de Pontmain*”).¹⁴

On November 21, 1987, Bishop Pio Bello Ricardo of Los Teques, Venezuela, issued a pastoral instruction on the apparitions of Our Lady to Maria Esperanza Medrano de Bianchini, which began in Betania in 1976. In approving these apparitions, the Bishop stated: “I declare that in my judgment the aforesaid apparitions are authentic and have a supernatural character. I therefore officially approve that the place where they were produced be considered sacred.”¹⁵

On June 29, 2001, Bishop Augustin Misago of Gikongoro, Rwanda, issued a declaration affirming the Marian apparitions that took place in Kibeho, Rwanda in 1981–1982. The full text of the French original was released by the Holy See on July 2, 2001, and key parts of this declaration were published in *L’Osservatore Romano* English edition of July 11, 2001.¹⁶

In affirming the apparitions Bishop Misago is quite explicit: “Yes, the Virgin Mary appeared at Kibeho on 28 November 1981 and in the months that followed. There are more reasons to believe in the apparitions than to deny them.”¹⁷ Even though Bishop Misago states clearly that the Virgin Mary did appear at Kibeho, he offers this qualification:

¹⁴ Laurentin and Sbalchiero I, 749–750.

¹⁵ Laurentin and Sbalchiero II, 1056.

¹⁶ The full text of the July 11, 2001 *L’Osservatore Romano* article can be found on the Miracle Hunter website:

https://www.miraclehunter.com/marian_apparitions/statements/kibeho_statement_01.html.

¹⁷ The translation is from the *L’Osservatore Romano* Eng. ed. article of July 11, 2001. French original is given in Laurentin and Sbalchiero, II, 1056: “*Oui, La Vierge Marie est apparue à Kibeho dans la journée du November 1981 [...]. Il y a plus des bonnes raisons d’y croire que de le nier.*”

The recognition or negation of the authenticity of an apparition does not guarantee infallibility; it is based on proofs of probability more than on apodictic arguments". In the sphere of the apparitions there is then no absolute certainty for the witnesses, except perhaps for the visionary. The definitive judgement about the Apparitions of Kibeho should be interpreted in this spirit. The recognition of these apparitions should not be considered a requirement of faith. Therefore each Christian is free to believe or not.¹⁸

Bishop Misago's qualification is similar to the one given by Bishop Ito in 1984. His explicit statement that the Virgin Mary did appear at Kibeho is balanced with a reminder that belief in the apparitions is not a requirement of the faith.

During Mass on May 4, 2008—with officials of the Roman Curia present— Bishop Jean-Michel di Falco of the Diocese of Gap and Embrun, announced his approval of the Marian apparitions of Laus received by Benoîte Rencurel, between 1664 and 1718. In his words of approval, he clearly affirms the supernatural character of the apparitions:

After having carefully studied the facts and taken counsel from competent people, I recognize the supernatural origin of the apparitions and events experienced and related by Benoîte Rencurel between 1664 and 1718. The testimony of her life is a guarantee of the truth of her statements. I encourage the faithful to come and pray and renew themselves spiritually in this sanctuary.¹⁹

¹⁸ This text is found on the Miracle Hunter website:
https://www.miraclehunter.com/marian_apparitions/statements/kibeho_statement_01.html.

¹⁹ My translation of the French, which reads: "*Après avoir soigneusement étudié les faits et pris conseil auprès des personnes compétentes, je reconnais l'origine surnaturelle des apparitions et faits vécus et relatés par Benoîte Rencurel, entre 1664 et 1718. Le témoignage de sa vie est une garantie de la vérité de ses dires. J'encourage les fidèles à venir prier et à se ressourcer.*" This passage from the French text is found at: <https://www.la->

After having recognized the supernatural origin of the apparitions, Bishop di Falco then adds this qualification: “Nobody is obliged to believe in apparitions, even in those officially recognized, but if they help us in our faith and our daily lives, why should we reject them?”²⁰

Here we see an approach similar to that of Bishop Ito with regard to Akita and Bishop Misago with regard to Kibeho. The Bishop affirms the supernatural character of the apparitions, but he makes it clear that the faithful are not obliged to believe in apparitions, even those officially recognized by the Church.

On December 8, 2010, Bishop David L. Ricken of Green Bay, WI issued a “Decree on the Authenticity of the Marian Apparitions of 1859 at the Shrine of Our Lady of Good Help Diocese of Green Bay.” The key part of his Decree reads as follows:

I declare with moral certainty and in accord with the norms of the Church that the events, apparitions and locutions given to Adele Brise in October of 1859 do exhibit the substance of supernatural character, and I do hereby approve these apparitions as worthy of belief (although not obligatory) by the Christian faithful.²¹

Here we see another example of an affirmation of “supernatural character” along with the qualification that belief in the approved apparition is not obligatory.

croix.com/Religion/Actualite/Les-apparitions-de-Notre-Dame-du-Laus-officiellement-reconnues-_NG_-2008-05-05-671012.

²⁰ This part of his discourse is found at:

https://www.miraclehunter.com/marian_apparitions/approved_apparitions/laus/index.html.

²¹ Bishop Ricken’s 2010 Decree can be found at: <chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcgclefindmkaj/https://championshrine.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Shrine-of-Our-Lady-of-Good-Help-Declaration.pdf>.

On May 22, 2016, Bishop Hector Cardelli of St. Nicolas, Argentina formally declared that the apparitions of Our Lady of the Rosary to Gladys Quiroga de Motta were "supernatural in character" and "worthy of belief." He approved the apparitions—which were mostly from Mary but some from Jesus—for the period from 1983 to 1990.²² Bishop Cardelli announced his approval in a homily of May 22, 2016, but his more formal approval was by means of Decree issued that same day entitled "The Spiritual School of Holy Mary of the Rosary of San Nicolas" (*La Escuela Espiritual de Santa Maria del Rosario de San Nicolas*).²³ In this Decree, Bishop Cardelli carefully reviews the 1978 CDF Norms for Discerning Apparitions. He also cites the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* no. 67 to make the distinction between public revelation and private revelation. After ruling out a natural or a diabolical origin of the apparitions, he concludes that the origin is beyond the natural. Following the 1978 CDF Norms he notes that no negative criteria apply but only positive criteria. Therefore, he issues his judgment that the case "exhibits a supernatural character and is worthy of belief. Consequently, for us, it is *constat de supernaturalitate*?" (*exhibe carácter sobrenatural y es digno de creencia. Consecuentamente, para nosotros, constat de supernaturalitate*).

Bishop Cardelli's Decree is a model of how a Bishop would arrive at a judgment according to the 1978 CDF Norms. He carefully distinguishes between the assent owed to public revelation and the assent owed to private revelation. Nevertheless, he believes that the evidence points to a supernatural origin, and he ends his Decree giving thanks to God and encouraging devotion to Our Lady of the Rosary.

Final Reflections

²² See this June 4, 2016 article from the *Catholic News Agency*: <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/33982/a-marian-apparition-has-been-approved-in-argentina-and-its-a-big-deal>.

²³ The Spanish text of this Decree can be found at Michael O'Neill's Miracle Hunter website: chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.miraclehunter.com/marian_apparitions/statements/la-escuela-espiritual-de-santa-maria-del-rosario-de-san-nicolas.pdf.

In light of the examples given above, it's clear that many bishops have made formal declarations of the supernatural character of Marian apparitions. In many of these formal statements, the bishops have also been careful to note that belief in approved Marian apparitions is not obligatory because these apparitions pertain to private rather than public revelation. If the major concern of the new DDF Norms is to make it clear that the faithful are not obliged to believe in even approved apparitions, then it seems that many bishops have already stressed this point. The question is whether a formal declaration of the supernatural character of a Marian apparition necessarily conflicts with the Church's conviction that the faithful are not obliged to accept the authenticity of the approved apparition or event. A deeper issue is whether bishops, by virtue of their office as successors to the apostles, have the capacity and the authority to declare that an apparition or miraculous event is supernatural. The new DDF Norms allow for the Pope, in rare cases, to declare an apparition to be supernatural. The Dicastery for the Causes of the Saints, which operates under the authority of the Roman Pontiff, clearly has the authority to affirm miracles as supernatural interventions. Why, though, do bishops lack this authority?

Perhaps the DDF is not denying the capacity of individual bishops to recognize the supernatural. The Dicastery might be operating more out of prudential caution than denying the episcopal ability to discern the supernatural. As Catholics we must respect the new Norms of the DDF, but we must also realize that they are more disciplinary rather than doctrinal in nature. In abiding by these new Norms, bishops will need to approve Marian apparitions judged to be worthy of belief by means of a *nihil obstat* rather than a judgment that they are supernatural in character. If a *nihil obstat* is issued, the faithful would have the right to discern for themselves whether an apparition is supernatural.

Bishops, though, are members of the faithful. Nothing, therefore, would stand in the way for a bishop to say something like: "I personally believe this apparition is supernatural, and I approve it as worthy of belief as such. The faithful, however, are not obliged to believe in this apparition as supernatural, but nothing stands in their way to believe it is." As long as these new Norms remain in force, this might be the

proper way for a bishop to affirm an apparition or event as supernatural.

Our Lady's Unique Participation in the Priesthood of Christ

Rev. Serafino M. Lanzetta

The main question to which this essay will endeavour to respond is *how* the Blessed Virgin Mary participates in the priesthood of Christ.¹ In light of *Lumen gentium* 10, according to which there is a dual participation in the priesthood of Christ, one ministerial, in virtue of the sacrament of Holy Orders, and the other royal, in virtue of Baptism; and given that the latter is not metaphorical but real, we can affirm that the Blessed Virgin is no exception to all other members of the Mystical Body of Christ. However, we will argue that assigning Our Lady to the royal priesthood, shared in a typical manner, is unsatisfactory. Mary's priesthood is of its own genre for the fact that she was associated with Christ in the objective work of Redemption, that is, in the making of salvation.² The level of her cooperation precedes the sacramental dimension of the Church and lays its foundation. Theology and the Magisterium concur in holding that the

¹ This essay was presented at the International Conference 'Christian Know Your Dignity'. *The Royal Priesthood and the Renewal of the Church*, 20-22 June 2024, organized by St Mary's University Twickenham, London, in collaboration with Ave Maria University, Florida.

² Our Lady's priesthood, understood correctly as a sharing in the fountal priesthood of Christ, is a soteriological aspect of Mariology which raises ever more interests among scholars. As an introduction to the topic: René Laurentin, *Marie, l'Eglise et le Sacerdoce*. 1 *Essai sur le Développement d'une Idée Religieuse*, vol. 1 (Paris: Lethielleux, 1952); Id., *Marie, l'Eglise et le Sacerdoce*. 2 *Etude Théologique* (Paris: Lethielleux, 1953); John Samaha, *The Sacerdotal Quality of Mary's Mission, Mother and Associate of Christ the Priest*, in *Immaculata Mediatrix* 2 (2002), 197-207; Id., *Mary's Priestly Dimension*, in *The Month* (May 2000), 184-189; Sarah Jane Boss, *Marian Sacrifice at the Eucharist?* in *Maria. A Journal of Marian Studies* 2/2 (2022), 1-17, available on-line at marianstudies.ac.uk; Serafino M. Lanzetta, *Il sacerdozio di Maria nella teologia cattolica del XX secolo. Analisi storico-teologica* (Frigento: Casa Mariana Editrice, 2006); Id., *Il sacerdozio della Beata Vergine Maria*, edited by Stefano M. Manelli – Serafino M. Lanzetta, *Il sacerdozio ministeriale: "l'amore del Cuore di Gesù"* (Casa Mariana Editrice: Frigento, 2010), 395-428; Id., *The Symphony of Truth. Theological Essays: A 'Sacerdotal People of God': A Look at the Priesthood of Mary and Her Victimhood as Co-Redemptrix* (Waterloo, ON: Arouca Press, 2021), 125-136.

Blessed Virgin Mary offered on Calvary the sacrifice of our salvation: She offered Christ, her Son, and, in Him, she offered herself. Now, since Christ's priesthood is a "sacrificial mediation" (cf. Heb 9:14-15), whose *culmen* is his immolation on the altar of the Cross, so likewise Our Lady's participation in this action also unveils and manifests the unique and singular nature of her maternal priesthood, consisting in her salvific co-redemption. After analyzing the historical emergence of our theological issue, we will study the nature of Mary's Priesthood, whose underlying doctrine is her sacrifice offered in Christ and through him. This last point will be supported by making reference to a relevant and incisive theological thought, welcomed by the ordinary Magisterium.

1. *Virgo Sacerdos: Fas sit quo properat sequi*

Let us start this final contribution to our International Conference with a question: can Our Lady be called, using a Latin definition, *Virgo Sacerdos*?³ This title was attributed to her when a young deacon of the Diocese of Rouen, France, Urbain Robinet (doctor in theology) composed, in the first half of the XVIII century, a hymn for the Vespers of Our Lady's Presentation in the Temple. Robinet had been a student of the Seminary of Saint-Sulpice around 1706. Our Lady is called upon as *Virgo Sacerdos* who is *dux*, the leader of seminarians. All is envisaged in an offertorial context: Mary enters the temple as a prelude of a more precious sacrifice that she will offer soon, at the presentation of her Son.³ This theology is an evident echo of what

³ The hymn, titled *Quam pulchre graditur*, was welcomed by several diocesan French breviaries for the Vespers of Our Lady's Presentation and remains the proper hymn of these Vespers in the diocese of Paris. Its music is taken from *The proper Offices of the diocese of Paris*, approved by His Holiness Pope Pius XI and published by authorization of His Eminence Cardinal Dubois, Archbishop of Paris, in 1923. This hymn is known above all for being prayed at the ceremony of the renewal of the clerical promises on 21 November, feast of Our Lady's Presentation in the Temple. This ceremony was instituted by the Sulpicians and was spread consequently in many seminaries. The Schola Sainte Cecile of Paris offers, on their website, the musical text

Jean-Jacques Olier (1608-1657), the founder of the Seminary and of the religious Society of St Sulpice, taught. In fact, according to Olier, since her presentation into the temple, Our Lady possessed a priestly spirit. She was offered as a host. She was brought into the temple, not only for being aware of its holiness, which she could already sense in herself, but, above all, to be spiritually immolated in God in every moment. Since then, there was no sacrifice offered to God that she was not longing to be immolated with to the glory of God.⁴ Moreover, according to Olier, Our Lady was imbued with all plenitude of a priestly spirit since her Immaculate Conception. During her presentation she would learn the holiness required of the priests, that she however already possessed, to be then ready one day to offer her Son to God on Calvary. He writes thus:

The Blessed Virgin entered... the Temple as a priest to learn of the holiness that God figured in the priests and that she possessed in herself without knowing it, having been consecrated priest in advance of the sacrifice that she was to offer one day to God on Calvary. She had received in the holy mystery of her Conception all the holiness and grace of the works she was to accomplish in her life. Having one day to present the sacrifice to God, she had to possess its spirit in eminence, and for this she carried within her the spirit of a priest which brought her into the Temple to live among the priests whose spirit she possessed in fullness and exercised with them in the Temple in the ministry of the priesthood.”⁵

This priestly title was revived later by Bl. Marie Deluil-Martiny (1841-1884; beatified by St John Paul II), foundress of the religious Institute

and the historical notes. See <https://schola-sainte-cecile.com/2011/11/21/quampulchre-graditur-la-marseillaise-de-saint-sulpice>.

⁴ See Jean-Jacques Olier, *Écrits sur la Sainte Vierge* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2020) 54.

⁵ Jean-Jacques Olier, *Écrits sur la Sainte Vierge*, 55.

of the “Daughters of the Sacred Heart,” established for the sanctification of priests and in reparation for the outrages against the Holy Eucharist. The *Virgo Sacerdos* spirituality became the ‘icon’ of the new foundation.⁶ A prayer to the *Virgo Sacerdos* was composed, under instructions of St Pius X, by Card. Vannutelli. This prayer, composed on 8 May 1908, was approved the day after by St Pius X, and an indulgence of 300 days was given to those who would recite it devotedly.⁷ An image was also painted, representing Our Lady in priestly or better diaconal vestments, but disapproved of by the Holy Office in 1916. The most difficult element, in fact, was not the image, but the title, which translated in French as *Vierge-Prêtre* (Virgin Priest), sounded equivocal.⁸ The title posed a theological problem that theologians would seek to resolve over the years,⁹ and whose

⁶ See René Laurentin, *Marie Deluil-Martiny, Précurseur et martyre béatifiée par Jean Paul II. La sainte de Marseille* (Paris: A. Fayard, 2003). For a very accurate agiographic profile of Bl. Deluil-Martiny, see Paolo Rizzo, *La mia vita nel tuo cuore. La Beata Madre Maria di Gesù Deluil-Martiny Fondatrice delle Figlie del Cuore di Gesù* (Rome: Dehoniane, 1996).

⁷ This is Latin original text of the prayer: «*Maria Mater misericordiae, Mater et filia Illius qui Pater est misericordiarum et Deus totius consolationis, Dispensatrix thesaurorum Filii tui, Ministra Dei, Mater Summi Sacerdotis Christi, Sacerdos pariter et Altare, Sacarium Immaculatum Verbi Dei, Magistra Apostolorum omnium et Discipulorum Christi, protege Pontificem Maximum, intercede pro nobis et pro sacerdotibus nostris ut Summus Sacerdos Christus Iesus conscientias nostras purificet, et digne ac pie ad sacrum convivium suum accedamus. O Virgo Immaculata, quae non modo dedisti nobis panem caelestem Christum in remissionem peccatorum, sed es Tu ipsa Hostia acceptissima Deo litata, et gloria sacerdotum, quæque, Beatissimo Famulo Tuo S. Antonino, quamvis sacramentum Ordinis non acceperis, quidquid tamen dignitatis et gratiae in ipso confertur, de hoc plena fuisti: unde merito Virgo Sacerdos predicaris; respice super nos et super sacerdotes Filii Tui, salva nos, purifica nos, sanctifica nos, ut ineffabiles Sacramentorum thesauros sancte suscipiamus et æternam animarum nostrarum salutem consequi mereamur. Amen. Mater misericordiae ora pro nobis. Mater æterni Sacerdotis Christi Iesu, ora pro nobis. Regina Cleri, ora pro nobis. Maria, Virgo Sacerdos, ora pro nobis*», in ASS 40 (1907), 909-110. For more historical insights about this prayer, see Serafino M. Lanzetta, *Il Sacerdozio di Maria nella teologica cattolica del XX secolo*, 32-33.

⁸ Cf. René Laurentin, *Le problème du sacerdoce marial devant le Magistère*, in *Marianum* 10 (1948), 160-178.

⁹ See the *statuts questionis* from early 1900s up until recent times, in three main theological areas, France, Spain and Italy: Serafino M. Lanzetta, *Il Sacerdozio di Maria nella teologica cattolica del XX secolo*, 40ss.

contributions we can take into account in light of our discussion on the importance of royal priesthood.

The first theological reaction to the title of *Vierge-Prêtre* was that it needed to be avoided as it might be interpreted as pointing to the ministerial priesthood and therefore as insinuating that Our Lady could be an ordained priest (which is precisely, and incorrectly, what the movement www.womenpriest.org does). The only analogy possible was with the sacrament of Holy Orders, considered as the only real priestly activity. From this initial reaction, the problem concerning the new title arose. With the theological development of Vatican II, and with a clearer anchoring of the priesthood in its very source, the priesthood of Christ, one can correctly say that there are two ways of participating in Christ's priesthood: the ministerial and the baptismal-common one. They are ontologically different, and certainly not the completion of one another. In fact, the common participation requires the ministerial one, which is representation of Christ Head, Shepherd and Spouse of the Church.¹⁰ However, both partake of the one priesthood of Christ.¹¹ Moreover, with *Lumen gentium* 10, one can surely assert that the royal priesthood is a *real* participation in Jesus' priesthood in virtue of Baptism,¹² and not merely a metaphorical participation, as held at the time of Bl. Marie Deluil-Martiny. Hence, the Latin title, *Virgo Sacerdos*, is attributed to Our Lady correctly for the fact that if the whole Church shares in Christ's priesthood, and if all baptized can indeed be a priestly people (cf. Ex 19:6 and 1Pt 2:9), then the Blessed Virgin can indeed be a priest. How so?

¹⁰ See John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores dabo vobis*, 15 March 1992, in particular no 22.

¹¹ For a *status quaestionis* on contemporary scholarship on the Priesthood of Christ, see Matthew Levering, *Christ and the Catholic Priesthood. Ecclesial Hierarchy and the Pattern of the Trinity* (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 2019) 60-117.

¹² See, among others, Albert Vanhoye, *Sacerdoti antichi e nuovo sacerdote. Secondo il Nuovo Testamento*, (Torino: Elledici, 1985); Albert Vanhoye, *Il sacerdozio regale*, in A. Vanhoye - Franco Manzi - Ugo Vanni, *Il sacerdozio della nuova alleanza* (Milano: Ancora, 1999) 67-83.

2. The unique nature of Our Lady's Priesthood

We will now endeavour to assess the nature of Our Lady's participation in Christ's Priesthood. As it is evident that Our Lady was not ordained a priest by the Son, the logical conclusion would be to attribute to her the royal priesthood, although shared in a typical manner, in accord with the plausible theological conclusion held by eminent Mariologists. We dare to argue that this is unsatisfactory. There is something additional which needs to be highlighted. As a member of the Church, Our Lady shares definitively in the priesthood of Christ, as all other members of the Mystical Body do. And yet, she is not merely a member but also and above all the Mother of the Church, whose maternity precedes the Church, insofar as it is rooted directly and physically in Christ as she is Mother of the Redeemer. Therefore, Our Lady's priesthood cannot but precede the priesthood of the Church in its dual nature, as, being on a unique and antecedent level, it contributes with Christ to the making of salvation and to the forming of the Church. It is the level of the *Redemptio in actu primo* or objective Redemption, while the Church as such – priests as well as all baptized Christians – shares in the *Redemptio in actu secundo* or subjective Redemption. Our Lady contributed with Christ, in a unique manner, in the accomplishing of Redemption, cooperating in a “singular way... in the work of the Saviour in giving back supernatural life to souls” (*Lumen Gentium* 61).

Moreover, as the priesthood of Christ is a ‘sacrificial mediation,’ which establishes a new covenant through the offering of Himself in virtue of the eternal Spirit (cf. Heb 9:14-15),¹³ Our Lady's priesthood should also be understood and theologically qualified along the same lines. Although the sacrificial aspect does not absorb the priestly identity as

¹³ See Jean Galot, *Theology of the Priesthood* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1985) 58-61; Matthew Levering, *Christ and the Catholic Priesthood*, 101-107; Albert Vanhoye, *The Letter to the Hebrews: A New Commentary* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 2015); Id., *A Perfect Priest: Studies in the Letter to the Hebrews*, edited and translated by Nicholas J. More and Richard J. Ounsworth (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018) 46-58.

such, it represents its very *culmen*.¹⁴ Therefore, the very foundation of Mary's singular participation in Christ's priesthood, as salvific mediation between God and man, is her unique participation in our salvation as *Socia Christi*, New Eve beside the New Adam. As the first Eve was one with Adam from the time of her creation and particularly in her active contribution to our ruin, so Our Lady was one heart, one will, and one offering with her Son, actively contributing to our salvation. In more technical terms, Mary's singular cooperation to our salvation can be defined as "co-redemption," where the prefix "co" indicates *active* but *subordinate* cooperation, without ever suggesting an equal salvific action. As it is Christ's mediation which gives rise to a manifold cooperation, shared in various ways, both by the ministers and by the faithful (cf. *Lumen gentium* 62), so the same mediation is shared eminently by Our Lady. She, in a very unique manner, is associated with Christ in our salvation; she is one with Him, in particular in accomplishing the supreme act of Our Lord's Priesthood: the offering of the sacrifice of salvation, i.e., the offering of Himself on the altar of the Cross. If Mary uniquely concurs in this foundational salvific action, by contributing in offering her Son on the altar of the Cross, and herself together with her Son, then she holds a unique priesthood, whose very nature is fulfilled in her co-redemption. This needs now to be discussed.

¹⁴ Cf. Philip Goyret, *Chiamati, consacrati, inviati. Il sacramento dell'Ordine* (Vatican City: LEV, 2003) 29-30.

3. Our Lady's sacrifice offered for our salvation¹⁵

Let us now embark on a deeper level of discussion. We wish to determine whether Our Lady offered the sacrifice¹⁶ of salvation *in* and *with* Christ. As mentioned above, as it consisted in the offering, on the altar of the Cross, of the sacrifice of Christ, which is both the core element qualifying his priesthood as well as the source of grace for all sacraments of the Church, Our Lady's Co-redemption and Priesthood should also find in her co-offering of the same sacrifice at Calvary their union *in* and *with* Christ and their *apex*.

What was Our Lady's role in this offering? Certainly, Christ did not exclude her contribution, as he does not exclude the cooperation of any Christian in the work of salvation (cf. Col 1:24). However, it is not a simple matter of an absence of exclusion. We must rather seek to grasp Mary's degree of involvement in the sacrificial action of the Son, both internally and externally. As one with the Son in all the mysteries of our salvation, She cooperates in a unique manner in the offering of the sacrifice of Calvary. Her active role can be seen, above all, in the fact that She is the only person whom Her Son hanging on the Cross calls "Woman" (Jn 19:26), in continuity with Cana (Jn 2:4), as a recapitulation of Genesis (3:15), and a foreshadowing of the vision of Revelation (12,1). The term Woman designates the New Eve in

¹⁵ I have developed this topic more extensively in this my recent paper: Serafino M. Lanzetta, *The Sacrifice of Our Lady*, edited by Id., *Co-redemptrix. The relevance of a Marian Doctrine for our Time*. Proceedings of the First International Marian Conference, organised by the Marian Franciscans, Dundee, Scotland, 2023 (Portsmouth: Mary House Press, 2024) 311-334.

¹⁶ On the notion of sacrifice, *sacrum facere*, see my essay (with further bibliography noted): Serafino M. Lanzetta, *The Sacrifice of the "Logos incarnatus"*. *Ratzinger Theology of the Liturgy in Perspective*, edited by Mariusz Biliniewicz, *Worship in Spirit and in Truth. Essays to mark the twentieth anniversary of the publication of Benedict XVI/ Joseph's Ratzinger's "The Spirit of the Liturgy"*, Proceedings of the Thirteenth Fota International Liturgical Conference, 2022 (Ballyhea-Cork: Smenos, 2023) 41-44.

relationship with the New Adam, Christ. Our Lady's active participation in the sacrifice of Christ has been well highlighted by St John Paul II, who, in an address of 24 May 1996, defined the Blessed Virgin "the perfect co-worker in Christ's sacrifice".¹⁷ Passion is to Redemption what Compassion is to Co-redemption. Mary's compassion is described by Fr Frederick William Faber (1814-1863) as the sacrifice of Mary beneath the Cross, just as the Passion is the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross.¹⁸

One of the first to explore the soteriological involvement of Our Lady in our Redemption, characterised as 'active compassion', is John Geometres (ca. 935 – ca. 1000).¹⁹ He was one of the most highly esteemed poets and authors of the Byzantine milieu, who among many other works, he distinguished himself for writing the *Life of the Virgin Mary*, a masterpiece of literature and theology, recently translated into English from the original Greek, with an accurate critical apparatus.²⁰ It belongs to the biographical genre and covers the life of the Blessed Virgin from her birth, to her presentation to the Temple, her betrothal, the Annunciation, the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple, the Passion, the Resurrection, and finally her Dormition with Her Assumption into heaven. This work contains a very rich Mariology, whose golden thread is the intimate union between the Mother and her Son, from the time of the Annunciation, seen as a bridal mystery, when the nuptials between the divine Word and the Virgin Mary were celebrated. Mary is the bridal chamber and the mystery to take place an espousal.²¹ This

¹⁷ In *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, XIX/1 (1996) 1344. See also "L'Osservatore Romano," Weekly Edition in English (abbrev. ORE), 1446:6.

¹⁸ Cf. F. W. Faber, *The Foot of the Cross, or The Sorrows of Mary*, 383.

¹⁹ The Middle Ages is the time when a greater attention was given to Our Lady's compassion at the foot of the Cross. Cf. M. Hauke, *La cooperazione di Maria alla Redenzione. Prospettiva storica (patristica, medioevale, moderna, contemporanea)* 187.

²⁰ John Geometres, *Life of the Virgin Mary*, edited and translated by Maximos Constas and Christos Simelidis, Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library (Cambridge, MA: London: Harvard University Press, 2023).

²¹ John Geometres, *Life of the Virgin Mary*, 22, 63. On the Annunciation as spousal mystery between Christ and his Mother, with the antinomy Eve-Mary, see also another Byzantine theologian, held as a saint by the Orthodox Church and a

spousal union is redemptive and collaborative, as Mary is the antitype of Eve and Christ of Adam,²² and it leads decisively from the Presentation of Jesus in the temple, the very dawn of salvation with the prophecy of Simeon to Jesus' Mother,²³ to Calvary, where all is accomplished and the Blessed Lady is pierced with the sword of suffering together with Her Son.²⁴ Here Our Lady stands beside Her Crucified Son, receiving the judgement against Him. Highlighting in a unique way the sacrificial nature of her collaboration, Geometres contemplates the Virgin as being

led about like a heifer or a ewe lamb, not leading the way, but following her child as he was dragged away and being voluntarily crucified with him, or rather considering and choosing ten thousand deaths over life without her life-giving child.

In view of this unique role of hers in our salvation, Our Lady is constituted as the "second mediator" by Christ, and, more uniquely, as the "second offering" (*aparchè*) of our first fruit to the Father. The text goes thus:

...we have a second mediator between us and the first mediator, a God-bearing human being between us and the man-bearing God, a second offering of our first fruit to the

contemporary of John Geometres, St Symon The New Theologian (949-1022), *On the Mystical Life: The Ethical Discourses*, vol. 1: The Church and the Last Things, translated from Greek and introduced by Alexander Golitzin (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1995) 31-32.52-60.

²² John Geometres, *Life of the Virgin Mary*, 21, 61: "...for just as the curse and sorrow come through one woman and one man, so too blessings and joy are now given to all through one woman and one man." See also *Ibid.*, 9, 33.

²³ The sword of Simeon refers to the Passion, says John Geometres, *Life of the Virgin Mary*, 53, 140.

²⁴ "...the lance that pierced him also pierced her, and, as it tore her heart asunder, it immediately rekindled new pains within her..." John Geometres, *Life of the Virgin Mary*, 85, 239.

Father, an offering which, after the first one, is delightful and without blemish.²⁵

Christ, a “ransom” for us, subsequently gives his own mother to us as a daily “deliverance”.²⁶ She has endured pain and labours *for* us until the present day and hour.²⁷ This compassionate Virgin was constituted

to be not simply his mother but a mediator with himself and reconciler so that the Intercessor to the Father, being supplicated on both sides, might be lovingly disposed towards us in a way that is inescapable and irrevocable, and find her to be *another intercessor*, who in every hour could overturn his just wrath, conveying mercies and lavishly bestowing munificence on all.²⁸

This is such a rich Marian soteriology depicting Mary’s intimate union with Jesus in our salvation and her active role in the offering of Christ for us. Mary is indeed the second mediator and another intercessor – all priestly qualities belonging to her uniquely.²⁹ Another eminent witness of Mary’s sacrificial offering is St Bernard of Clairvaux (died 1153), who comments thus on the words of the presentation of the child Jesus in the temple:

Offer your Son, sacrosanct Virgin, and present the fruit of your womb to the Lord. For our reconciliation with all, offer the heavenly victim pleasing to God.³⁰

A disciple and friend of St Bernard, Arnold of Chartres (died 1156), shed light particularly on Mary’s offering in the sacrifice of Calvary. He distinguished in the Cross “two altars: one in Mary’s heart, the other

²⁵ John Geometres, *Life of the Virgin Mary*, 123, 359.

²⁶ John Geometres, *Life of the Virgin Mary*, 124, 363.

²⁷ John Geometres, *Life of the Virgin Mary*, 125, 363.

²⁸ John Geometres, *Life of the Virgin Mary*, 126, 365-367. Italics in the text.

²⁹ For a more in depth analysis, see Serafino M. Lanzetta, *The Sacrifice of Our Lady*, 317-324.

³⁰ *Serm. 3 in Purif.*, 2: PL 183, 370.

in Christ's body. Christ sacrificed his flesh, Mary her soul". Mary sacrificed herself spiritually in deep communion with Christ, and implored the world's salvation: "What the mother asks, the Son approves and the Father grants."³¹ John Paul II comments that from this time onward, other authors have sought to explain the doctrine of Mary's special cooperation in the redemptive sacrifice.³²

From these few testimonies, we can already grasp the unicity of Mary's sacrifice, which is characterized by an interior and an exterior dimension. Her will, one with Christ's, was united to the external offering of her body, in the one offering of her Son's body and blood. Our Lady offered up Jesus and, in Him, she offered herself, too. What is truly peculiar to her is that she participated not only in the *oblation* of the Victim, but also in its *immolation*. *Lumen gentium* 58 teaches that she consented to the immolation of the divine Victim: something truly unique, belonging exclusively to Mary, which not even the priest at Mass can do, as he only represents sacramentally the sacrifice of Calvary. The faithful, on their part, "join in the offering of the Eucharist", says *Lumen gentium* 10 (the Latin says: "*in oblationem Eucharistiae concurrunt*")³³, by enacting substantially what Pius XII teaches in *Mediator Dei*, namely, by taking part in the *oblation* of the sacrifice in a spiritual and interior manner, whilst the priest alone carries out the *immolation* in the public and external rite.³⁴

³¹ *De septem verbis Domini in cruce*, 3: PL 189, 1694.

³² See his Catechesis given at the General Audience on 25 October 1995, where he also quotes St Anselm (died 1109), Gueric of Igny (ca. 1070/80-1157) and the *Mariale* of the XIII century, in *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II XVIII/2* (1995) 934-935; ORE, 1414:11.

³³ With reference to Pius XI, Litt. Encycl. *Miserentissimus Redemptor*, 8 maii 1928: AAS 20 (1928), 171s. Pius XII, Alloc. *Vous nous avez*, 22 sept. 1956: AAS 48 (1956), 714. The same topic is also dealt with by Pius XII's *Mediator Dei*.

³⁴ *Incruenta enim illa immolatio, qua consecrationis verbis prolatis Christus in statu victimae super altare praesens redditur, ab ipso solo sacerdote perficitur, prout Christi personam sustinet, non vero prout christifidelium personam gerit. At idcirco quod sacerdos divinam victimam altari superponit, eadem Deo Patri qua oblationem defert ad gloriam Sanctissimae Trinitatis et in bonum totius Ecclesiae. Hanc autem restricti nominis oblationem christifideles suo modo duplicique ratione*

It is worth quoting and analysing *Lumen gentium* 58, in which one can denote, in the vocabulary used, the reiteration of a previous magisterium, and also a key Marian-soteriological teaching on Our Lady's unique role in the offering of Christ, reiterated by the post-conciliar popes. The text teaches thus:

After this manner 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, grieving exceedingly with her only begotten Son, uniting herself with a maternal heart with His sacrifice (*cum Unigenito suo condoluit et sacrificio Eius se materno animo sociavit*), and lovingly consenting to the immolation of this Victim which she herself had brought forth (*victimae de se genitae immolationi amanter consentiens*). 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".³⁵

We should highlight in this text two important references for the Marian priestly vocabulary: *Mary associated herself with the sacrifice of her Son* and *consented to the immolation of the victim*, her Son. Here Mary's sacrificial association at Calvary is interpreted by *Lumen gentium* certainly not along the lines of the common cooperation of the faithful in the redemption, but rather of the co-redemptive magisterium of the

participant: quia nempe non tantum per sacerdotis manus, sed etiam una cum ipso quodammodo Sacrificium offerunt: qua quidem participatione, populi quoque oblatio ad ipsum liturgicum refertur cultum, Pius XII, Encyclical Letter *Mediator Dei*, 20 November 1947, in AAS 39 (1947) 555-556, English text available at www.vatican.va. The magisterium on this subject has remained substantially unchanged, from Pius XII to the Catechism of the Catholic Church (see no 1546 and 1547).

³⁵ *Ita etiam B. Virgo in peregrinatione fidei processit, suamque unionem cum Filio fideliter sustinuit usque ad crucem, ubi non sine divino consilio stetit (cf. Io 19,25), vehementer cum Unigenito suo condoluit et sacrificio Eius se materno animo sociavit, victimae de se genitae immolationi amanter consentiens; ac demum ab eodem Christo Iesu in cruce moriente uti mater discipulo, hisce verbis data est: Mulier, ecce filius tuus (cf. Io 19,26-27).*

previous pontiffs,³⁶ stretching back to Bl. Pius IX, and moving forward, after Vatican II, to Benedict XVI. For the sake of precision, one should also add Pope Francis who, though sceptical about Co-redemption as a private teacher, has nonetheless instituted the feast of Our Lady Mother of the Church (2018), whose Latin decree makes reference to the *Virgo offerens*, as in *Marialis cultus* 20 by Paul VI.³⁷ The continuity of the same teaching over more than one hundred years is therefore perfectly visible.

Conclusion

On Calvary, only Mary in Christ takes actively part in the *making* of the sacrifice. Her maternal action contributed to structuring the sacrifice. There is only one sacrifice indeed, that of Christ, and one High Priest, Christ our Saviour, but with Mary's contribution, and offered in conjunction with Her: one sacrifice, but two offering persons; one oblation, but two altars, as will be the case with the Church, who will celebrate the one sacrifice of salvation, offered by a multitude of priests, with the participation of the faithful. The unity of the sacrifice, along with the multiplicity of those who offer this sacrifice, is safeguarded by Our Lady's presence in the hour of salvation. Our Lady, in fact, prepares the ministry of the Church and stands on Calvary for the Church.

Mary's active role in the offering of the bloody sacrifice, therefore, configures a unique participation of Our Lady in the priesthood of Christ. Surely, she does not share in the ordained priesthood, but

³⁶ For a lengthy analysis, see Arthur B. Calkins, *The Mystery of Mary the Coredeptrix in the Papal Magisterium*, edited by Mark I. Miravalle, *Mary Co-redemptrix: Doctrinal Issues Today* (Goleta, CA: Queenship Publishing Company, 2022) 25-92; Arthur B. Calkins, *The Truth of Marian Co-redemption, the Papal Magisterium and the Present Situation*, edited by Serafino M. Lanzetta, *Co-redemptrix. The relevance of a Marian Doctrine for our Time*, 111-154; Serafino M. Lanzetta *The Sacrifice of Our Lady*, 324-332.

³⁷ The relevant text is the following: "*Haec celebratio nos adiuuabit ad hoc meditandum, id est quod vita christiana, ut augescere valeat, in mysterio Crucis, Christi oblatione in convivio eucharistico, Virgine offerenti, Matre Redemptoris redemptorumque, fundari debet*", in AAS 110 (2018/3), pp. 437-438, here 438.

neither could she merely share in the common priesthood of all the faithful, though in a typical manner. Her priestly role is unique and of its own genre, for the fact that She had the privilege of being present and actively participating in the objective Redemption. Her unique maternal priesthood is *above* its participation in the Church and *precedent* to its dual form, as ministerial and baptismal. For all these reasons, Our Lady could not have merely presented the matter of the sacrifice by giving her human nature to the Divine Word, but She also participated in the sacrifice of the Victim to the Father, through a singular action, by associating herself with a maternal spirit to the immolation and oblation of the Victim. Her consent on Calvary to Her Son's sacrifice, which configures the very core of her maternal offering, is both the echo of her *Fiat* at the Annunciation as well as its final ratification. One single *Fiat* pronounced "in the name of all human nature"³⁸ at the Annunciation was silently repeated at Calvary, through her steadfast stance at the foot of the Cross. In Mary and in her *sui generis* priesthood, both priests and the faithful find their *raison d'être* and their cooperation in the one mission of evangelization, bringing forth the Gospel of Christ.

³⁸ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* III, 30, 1.

The Crisis of Woman and the Proclamation of the Mother

MARK MIRAVALLE, S.T.D.

The concept and role of woman in western society is most certainly in a state of crisis. Recently, not only have biological males been named, “Woman of the Year” by national publications in the United States and Great Britain, but they have also won national women’s beauty contests, and continue to break women’s sport records internationally.¹ The United States Congress has prohibited the term “mother” from being used in certain legislative texts.² In an opposing spectrum, a national outcry was voiced by secular commentators when a National Football League Player at a Catholic college commencement address praised the fulfillment of womanhood in the traditional roles of “wife” and “homemaker.”³

Whenever ethics loses its foundations in metaphysics, there is grave danger that the subject in question will be acting against their nature and, consequently, seriously harmed. When actions are not grounded in being, and determinations of right and wrong for a given subject are not based on what or who the subject is, then a precarious Pandora’s box has been opened. Such, I believe, is the contemporary *status quaestionis* regarding women.

The journey towards remedy begs the ontological question: *who is woman?* While contemporary philosophical and anthropological efforts to answer this question can be helpful, their *principia mulieris* can also be tainted by the passing ethics of the present moment, which only fuels a vicious circle rather than lead to authentic philosophical, theological and anthropological foundations.

¹ Cf. Rachel Lewis, “2022 Woman of the Year” *USA Today*, March, 2022; Dylan Mulvaney, “2023 Woman of the Year” *Attitude Magazine*; Lia Thomas, nominated by NCAA as “Woman of the Year,” University of Pennsylvania, July, 2022; NCAA National Championship in women’s swimming, March, 2022; Rikkie Kolle, 2023 Miss Netherlands, National Dutch Beauty Pageant, July, 2023.

² Cf. U.S. Congress voted to restrict “mother” to more gender inclusive language, in texts of Standing rules in House, Jan. 6, 2021.

³ Harrison Butker, Kansas City Chiefs placekicker, Commencement speech to the graduating class of 2024 at Benedictine College, Atchison, Kansas, May 11, 2024.

Ultimately, I believe, to “get woman right”, we will need to go to Revelation, far beyond the chronolatr of our own day, and as well to a historical figure who “did woman” perfectly.

I. Who is Woman?

In his Apostolic Letter, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, Pope St. John Paul II describes the essence of woman in relation to her primary feminine charism: *the order of love in relation to persons*. He explains:

The significant comparison in the Letter to the Ephesians [5:21-33] gives perfect clarity to *what is decisive for the dignity of women*—both in the eyes of God—the Creator and Redeemer—and *in the eyes of human beings*—men and women. In God’s eternal plan, woman is the one in whom *the order of love in the created world of persons takes first root...the dignity of women is measured by the order of love.*⁴

According to the *Totus Tuus* pontiff, unless we begin with identifying the quintessential feminine act of loving and caring for human beings, then we will fail to identify the *sine qua non* of women’s dignity and vocation:

Unless we refer to this order and primacy of love [1Cor:13:13], we cannot give a complete and adequate answer to the question about women’s dignity and vocation. When we say that the woman is the one who receives love in order to love in return, this refers not only and above all to the specific relationship of marriage. It means something more universal, based on the very fact of her being a woman within all the interpersonal relationships which, in the most varied ways, shape society and

⁴ St. John Paul II, Apostolic Letter, *Mulieris Dignitatem*. August 15, 1988,29 (emphasis mine).

structure between all persons—men and women. In this broad and diversified context, a woman represents a particular value by the fact that she is a human person, and, at the same time, this particular person, by the fact of her femininity⁵... “A woman’s dignity is closely connected with the love she receives by the very reason of her femininity; it is likewise connected *with the love she gives in return*... Woman can only find herself by giving love to others.”⁶

In fact, the “who” of woman can only be truly answered in the sublime task providentially entrusted to her *to love and care for God’s images, his highpoints of creation—the human person*: Again from St. John Paul: “...*The true order of love constitutes woman’s own vocation*... The moral and spiritual strength of a woman is joined to her awareness that God entrusts the human being to her in a special way.”⁷

To love after receiving love, and to care for God’s sacred images on earth are at the heart of the accentuated mission of woman. In a historical moment when society has drastically lost its respect for the human person, coupled with a world replete with ubiquitous loneliness and woundedness, we can see St. John Paul’s urgent plea for women to *become what you are*: “Our time in particular awaits the manifestation of that “genius” which belongs to women, and which can ensure sensitivity for human beings in every circumstance: because they are human! -and because the greatest of these is love (cf. 1 Cor. 13:13).”⁸

Does this unique feminine *munus* for the love and caring of persons appear to some as insignificant or secondary? It should not for the Christian who truly believes the words of St. Paul that properly

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid., n. 30.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

designate the summit of the hierarchy of human acts: “the greatest of these is love” (1 Cor. 13:13).

Woman is, then, by her feminine nature, particularly directed to the concrete loving and nurturing of persons. Edith Stein, i.e., St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, who is presently being considered by the Holy See as a potential Doctor of the Church (“Doctor Veritatis”), states that “woman naturally seeks to embrace that which is living, personal and whole. To cherish, guard, protect, nourish and advance growth is her natural and maternal longing.”⁹ While Stein, as does St. John Paul II, identifies this sublimely radical personalism of woman by her very nature, and not therefore dependent on the vocation of physical motherhood, both authors speak of motherhood as essentially connected with the charism of femininity, in all of its physical and spiritual manifestations. To be a “mother”, Stein states, means to “protect and safeguard true humanity and to bring it to full development.”¹⁰

American theologian, Dr. Monica Migliorino Miller, develops an understanding of “maternal authority” as a dynamic manifestation of womanhood in relation to motherhood. The term, *authority* comes from the Latin *auctores*, meaning to be author or creator of something: “A person, therefore, has authority precisely by giving life... Authority is the power to give life, but equally as important, authority is entirely bound up with rights and responsibilities that are connected to this power so that the life that has been brought forth may come to its proper fulfillment.”¹¹

Since a woman plays a primary role in bringing human life into the world through conception, gestation and birth, she therefore acquires

⁹ Lucy Gelber and Romaeus Leuven, editors, *Essays on Woman, Collected Works of Edith Stein*, Volume 2, Second Edition Revised, Washington, D.C., ICS Publications, 2010, p. 45.

¹⁰ Edith Stein, as quoted by I. Guardini, “On the Education of Women,” *L’Osservatore Romano*, March 6, 1969, English Edition, p. 9.

¹¹ Monica Migliorino Miller, *The Authority of Women in the Catholic Church*, Steubenville, Ohio, Emmaus Road Publishing, 2015, p. 19.

a legitimate maternal authority in overseeing that human life in order that he or she receive its proper fulfillment. This accentuates her role as loving and caring for human beings, especially her own children. It likewise extends to the spiritual maternity of participating in bringing human beings into the spiritual life of faith in Jesus Christ, Priestly Head of the Church and the New Covenant:

Christ is the Head of a new humanity because he is the New Adam whose death is the source of the Church. This is his authority because this is how Jesus is the source of life and redemption. But women also possess authority, as they are the source of life in relation to Him [Christ] in the completion of the New Covenant. The authority of women is based on what women have been specifically entrusted with, according to the meaning of their gender, for the world's salvation.¹²

St. Teresa of Calcutta teaches that the greatest manifestation of woman's unique charism of love is seen in motherhood. In a message to the Fourth United Nations World Conference on Women, St. Teresa writes: "The special power of loving that belongs to a woman is seen most clearly when she becomes a mother. Motherhood is the gift of God to women."¹³

Venerable Fulton Sheen speaks of womanhood's lofty role as "protectress of culture," particularly within the context of her motherhood:

Culture derives from woman—for had she not taught her children to talk, the great spiritual values of the world would not have passed from generation to generation. After nourishing the substance of the body to which she gave birth, she then nourishes the

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 91.

¹³ St. Teresa of Calcutta, *Letter to the Fourth World Conference on Women*, Beijing, 1995.

child with the substance of her mind. As guardian of the values of the spirit, as protectress of the morality of the young, she preserves culture, which deals with *purposes and ends*, while man upholds civilization, which deals only with means...¹⁴

Ultimately, the nature of woman is most profoundly found and rooted in the revelation of *the Woman of Scripture*, the “Woman-Mother of God,” without which today’s woman, I believe, will not find her full meaning and greatest fulfillment. Contemporary woman will not fully know “who she is” or be able to “become what she is” without the biblical revelation of the Woman of Scripture. As St. John Paul emphatically states:

This reality [of the Woman-Mother of God] also determines the essential horizon of reflection on the dignity and vocation of women. In anything we think, say or do concerning the dignity and the vocation of women, our thoughts, hearts and actions must not become detached from this horizon... Mary, the woman of the Bible, is the most complete expression of this dignity and vocation.¹⁵

II. The Woman of Scripture

We turn to Mary, the Woman of Scripture, to find the *whole truth about woman*. Five times in Scripture, Mary is referred to as “woman” either prophetically or personally, which collectively unveil the genius of woman in its greatest feminine and maternal personification.

The Woman of Genesis

Mary is the Woman of Genesis. “I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your seed and her seed (Gen. 3:15).” As the

¹⁴ Fulton Sheen, *The World’s First Love*, Ignatius Press, 1996, p. 184.

¹⁵ *Mulieris Dignitatem*, n.5.

victorious seed of the woman must ultimately be Jesus Christ, the woman-mother must ultimately be Mary (cf. Gen. 3:15). The woman of Genesis will be put by God the Father in total and perpetual enmity with the serpent, Satan, which will manifest the parallel opposition which will exist between the future Redeemer and the seed of evil. The woman's perpetual opposition to Satan and sin is positively embodied in an Immaculate Conception and a fullness of grace, eventually to be solemnly defined as such by Blessed Pius IX in 1854.

Following the revelation of her absolute enmity with the Devil, the Father immediately reveals the woman's future role in the plan of Redemption, "She will crush your head and you will lie in wait for her heel (Gen. 3:15)." Regardless as to whether the more Jeromian "*ipsa*" (she), or the more contemporary "*ipse*" (he) translation is used, or consideration of their respective Greek and Hebrew antecedents,¹⁶ the overall passage reveals that the woman will actively participate in the battle and ultimate redemptive victory of Christ over Satan. The role of Mary as the human Co-redemptrix with the divine Redeemer is first prophetically revealed in the first Good News.

In Genesis, chapters 2-3, Eve is only twice referred to by her name¹⁷, but is referred to as "woman" nine times,¹⁸ for she foreshadows Mary, *the* Woman of Scripture. Adam names the woman, "Eve," because she is "mother of all the living" (Gen. 3:20), which inseparably connects womanhood with motherhood. As well as being called "woman" because she was "taken out of man" to be his unique human companion within all creation (Gen 2:23), Eve will show her unique feminine ability to bring forth children after her union with Adam: "I have gotten a man with the help of the Lord (Gen. 4:1)."

¹⁶ Cf. Stefano Manelli, F.I., "The Blessed Virgin Mary in the Old Testament," in M. Miravalle, ed., *Mariology: A Guide For Priests, Deacons, Seminarians and Consecrated Persons*, Santa Barbara, California, Seat of Wisdom Publications, p. 10.

¹⁷ Cf. Gen. 3:20; Gen. 4:1.

¹⁸ Cf., Gen. 2:22; Gen. 2:23; Gen. 3:1; Gen. 3:4; Gen. 3:6; Gen. 3:1`3; Gen. 3:15; and Gen 3:16.

The first woman predicts the greatest woman. The original mother of all the living in the order of nature foreshadows the perpetual Mother of all the living in the order of grace. The old Eve anticipates the New Eve. St. John Henry Newman confirms this most ancient Christian teaching: “What is the great teaching of Antiquity from its earliest date concerning her?...She is the Second Eve.”¹⁹

The Woman of Galatians

Mary is the Woman of Galatians. “In the fullness of time, God sent his son born of a woman (Galatians 4:4).” The Father predestined that a *new Woman* would be actively involved with Christ, the new Man, in the greatest act of human history—its Redemption. Just as a man, a woman and a tree would be the essentially involved in humanity’s fall, God the Father willed, as a manifestation of divine omnipotence, that a man, a woman, and a tree would be essentially involved in humanity’s redemption.

“Be it done unto me according to your word” (Lk. 1:38). These free, faithful, and feminine words from a young Jewish woman brought the human race its Redeemer. It remains a wonderment of nature that a creature should bring forth her creator as a true human mother. Yet, the young Mary was no surrogate mother. Her intimate participation with her son in Redemption began with the Incarnation and birth, but would continue uninterruptedly unto Calvary and beyond, extending for the entirety of his redemptive mission and her earthly life.²⁰ St. Thomas Aquinas is correct in saying Mary’s “yes” is uttered “in the name of all human nature.”²¹ St. Augustine is also right in saying, “God created us without us, but he did not will to save us without us,”²² and thus the providential appropriateness of a woman’s free consent for human salvation.

¹⁹ St. John Henry Newman, *The New Eve*, Great Britain, Samuel Walker Publishers, reprinted by Newman Press, Westminster, 1952, p. 13.

²⁰ Cf. Second Vatican Council, *Lumen gentium*, n. 58, 62.

²¹ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, III, 30, a. 1.

²² St. Augustine, *Sermo 169*, 11,13:PL 38, 923.

The mystery of a woman intrinsically cooperating in the hypostatic union of Jesus Christ will always remain a mystery. Yet, it nevertheless reveals God's requirement of free human participation for our salvation and for the salvation of others. St. John Paul II's expression, "co-redeemers in Christ"²³ likewise serves this mystery, as does St. Paul's call to be "co-workers with God" (1 Cor. 3:9), and as well to "make up what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ, for the sake of his body which is the Church" (Col. 1:24).

Still, the unparalleled role of the Immaculate Theotokos in giving flesh to the Word in order to redeem the world is the unfathomable accomplishment of the woman revealed in Galatians. For this alone—her free, active, feminine cooperation in the redemptive Incarnation, Mary already merits the title of human Co-redemptrix, though it in no sense stops with the Annunciation.

The Woman of Cana

Mary is the Woman of Cana. "Woman, what is this to me and to you? My hour has not yet come?" (Jn. 2:4). The words of Jesus to his mother after her intercessory petition for a miracle ("they have no wine"), convey a question leading to grace, not a punitive correction. Often mistranslated, the Greek, "*Ti emoi kai soi*" is a leading question from the New Adam to the New Eve, the Redeemer to the Co-redemptrix, as if to communicate something like the following: "You know that if I perform this miracle, we are on the quick road to Calvary, and all that my "hour" entails. Are you ready for this? Are you ready to begin my public ministry here at Cana, which will end with my death at Calvary?" The woman of Cana's final words of Scripture, delivered to the attendants, convey her perpetual fiat to Jesus and his redemptive mission: "Do whatever he tells you" (Jn. 2:5).

²³ Cf. for example, Pope St. John Paul II, *Papal Address to the Sick at the Hospital of the Brothers of St. John of God*, Rome, April 5, 1981, L'Osservatore Romano, English edition, April 13, 1981, p. 6.

Although the Woman of Scripture already revealed her role as Mediatrix at the Annunciation, she underscores her moral mediation at Cana. With her historic fiat, Mary mediates Christ the one mediator into the world (cf. 1 Tim 2:5). She is the *Mediatrix of the Mediator*, Jesus Christ, divine source and author of all graces. At Cana, she manifests her explicitly willed intercession as Mediatrix of all graces for humanity. St. John Paul II expounds on Mary's motherly mediation at Cana:

Thus, there is a mediation: Mary places herself between her Son and mankind in the reality of their wants, needs, and sufferings. She puts herself "in the middle" that is to say she acts as a mediatrix, not as an outsider, but as a mother. She knows that as such she can point out to her Son the needs of mankind, and in fact, she has the "right" to do so.²⁴

It is noteworthy that the newly married couple are not recorded as disciples of Jesus, thus manifesting the *universality* of Mary's role as Mediatrix for all humanity, not only for Christians, but for all peoples. Most every pope from Benedict XIV in the mid-eighteenth century²⁵ to Pope Francis in 2023 have taught this doctrine, with Pope Francis referring to "Mediatrix of all graces" as "an ancient Marian title."²⁶

The Woman of Calvary

Mary is the Woman of Calvary. "When Jesus saw his mother, and the disciple whom he loved standing near, he said to his mother, 'Woman, behold, your son!' Then he said to the disciple, Behold, your mother! (Jn. 19:26-27)." Here the New Eve, the New Woman,

²⁴ St. John Paul II, *Redemptoris Mater*, March 25, 1987, n. 21.

²⁵ Cf. Pope Benedict XIV, (107-1758), Mary is "the celestial stream through whom all graces flow" *Op. Omnia*, V. 16, ed., Prati, 1846, p. 428.

²⁶ Pope Francis, *Papal Address to the Diocese of Sassari*, Sardinia, May 13, 2023, <http://www.arcidiocesisassari.it/2023/festa-del-voto-il-messaggio-del-santo-padre/> (accessed July 13, 2023).

joins in mind, heart, and purpose with the redemptive mission of her son at its most climactic moment. Monica Miller emphasizes the unquestionably active role of Mary in the redemptive sacrifice at Calvary as manifestation of her role as Co-redemptrix, and as appropriate exercise of Mary's maternal authority:

As the New Eve, Mary is the Co-redemptrix....This woman of Cana is the Woman of Calvary, where Mary accomplished by her maternal authority the covenantal role of the New Eve, whose work, united to the sacrifice of her Son, serves as the origin of man's regeneration....²⁷At Calvary, Mary is not a passive onlooker. The crucifixion of her Son is not just something that just "happens" to her. Mary actively participates in the sacrifice by offering up her Son. It is a mother's sacrifice, the sacrifice of the New Eve. Her sacrifice is different from Christ's, but is in covenantal union with it. Without her sacrifice, the new creation would not be established...without woman, the covenant of Redemption would not be fulfilled."²⁸

The now classic conciliar text of *Lumen Gentium* 58 describes the intimate union of hearts between Son and mother in their unified obtaining of the graces of Redemption:

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 divine Son the intensity of his suffering, associated herself with his suffering in her mother's heart, and lovingly consenting to the immolation of this victim born of her. Finally, she was given by the same Christ Jesus

²⁷ Miller, *The Authority of Women in the Catholic Church*, p. 98.

²⁸Ibid., pp. 104-105.

dying on the cross as a mother to his disciple, with the words: Woman, behold thy son (Jn. 19:27).”²⁹

St. John Paul II adds this commentary to the conciliar testimony to Mary’s co-suffering:

...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 the victim which she herself had brought forth” (*Lumen Gentium*, 58)...In fact, at Calvary she united herself with the sacrifice of her Son that led to the foundation of the Church...Having suffered for the Church, Mary persevered to become Mother of all the disciples of her Son, the Mother of their unity...In fact, Mary’s coredemptive role did not cease with the glorification of her Son.³⁰

Mary offers her son and herself in obedience to the Father’s plan, as the New Adam and the New Eve, who jointly complete the mission of Redemption, though each, of course, on their own level—Jesus qua God, Mary qua human. This unified redemptive act of Son and Mother is mystically articulated in the classic *Revelations* of Jesus and Mary to St. Bridget of Sweden, where Mary conveys, “My Son and I redeemed the world as if with one heart,”³¹ followed by the words of Jesus, “My mother and I saved man as with one Heart only; I by suffering in my Heart and my flesh, she by the sorrow and love of her heart.”³²

The Second Vatican Council further teaches with certainty the unique coredemptive cooperation of Mary with Christ, which constitutes the

²⁹ Second Vatican Council, *Lumen gentium*, n. 58.

³⁰ St. John Paul II, *Papal Homily at the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Alborada*, Quayaquil Ecuador, Jan. 31, 1985, *L’Osservatore Romano*, English edition, March 11, 1985, p. 7.

³¹ St. Bridget of Sweden, *Revelationes*, ed. Rome, ap S. Paulinum, 1606, L., I., c. 35.

³²*Revelationes*, IX, c. 3.

causal foundation of her consequent role as Spiritual Mother of all peoples:

Thus, 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. For this reason, she is a mother to us in the order of grace.³³

Pre-conciliar popes repeatedly refer to the New Woman's unique role in Redemption at Calvary. For example, Pope Benedict XV stated in his 1918 Apostolic letter, *Inter Sodalicia*: "...we may rightly say that Mary redeemed the human race together with Christ."³⁴ Pope Pius XI specifically uses and directly 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 of the agony and of the death in which Jesus consummated the Redemption of mankind.³⁵

The post-conciliar papacy of St. John Paul II continued to use the Co-redemptrix title on at least six occasions, and consistently generously taught the doctrine of Marian coredemption on numerous occasions,³⁶ as for example, in this excerpt from *Salvifici Doloris*:

³³ Second Vatican Council, *Lumen gentium*, n. 61.

³⁴ Pope Benedict XV, Apostolic Letter, *Inter Sodalicia*, 1918, AAS 10, p. 181-182.

³⁵ Pope Pius XI, Papal Allocution to the Pilgrims of Vicenza, November 30, 1933, *L'Osservatore Romano*, Dec. 1, 1933, p.1.

³⁶ Cf. Msgr. Arthur Calkins, "Pope John Paul II's Teaching on Marian Coredemption" in M. Miravalle, ed., *Mary Co-redemptrix, Mediatrix, Advocate Theological Foundations II, Papal, Pneumatological, Ecumenical*, Santa Barbara, Queenship Publishing Company, 1996, pp. 113-148.

In her [Mary], the many and intense sufferings were amassed in such an interconnected way that they were not only a proof of her unshakable faith, but also a contribution of the Redemption of all...It was on Calvary that Mary's suffering, beside the suffering of Jesus, reached an intensity which can hardly be imagined from a human point of view, but which was mysteriously and supernaturally fruitful for the Redemption of the world.³⁷

We see here the appropriate “hermeneutics of continuity” between pre-conciliar and post-conciliar Mariological teaching as most certainly implemented by St. John Paul II.

The cooperating role of the Woman of Calvary was a central though subordinate sharing with Jesus in the Father's eternal plan of human salvation. Pope Francis succinctly confirms this Marian truth in his January 1, 2020 homily: “From her, a woman, salvation came forth, and thus there is no salvation without a woman.”³⁸

The Woman of Revelation

Mary is the Woman of Revelation. “A great sign appeared in heaven, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars; she was with child...” (Rev. 12:1). As St. John Henry Newman expounds: “No one doubts that the ‘man-child’ is an allusion to our Lord: why then is not the ‘Woman’ an allusion to his Mother? This surely is the obvious sense of the words...they are not personifications but Persons. This is true of the Child, therefore it is true of the Woman.”³⁹

She is the woman clothed with the sun, i.e., in sanctified union with Christ her Son, who engages in the battle against the ancient dragon.

³⁷ Pope St. John Paul II, Apostolic Letter, *Salvifici Doloris*, 1984, n. 25.

³⁸ Pope Francis, Papal *Homily*, *Mass of the Solemnity of the Mother of God*, Jan 1, 2020.

³⁹ Newman, *The New Eve*, p. 31.

The dragon is angry with the woman and therefore “makes battle on the rest of her offspring” (Rev. 12:17). Humanity is the “rest of the offspring” of this woman, the New Eve, who now fulfills the prophecy of Genesis 3:15 by leading the spiritual battle in the name of Christ to crush the serpent’s head and defeat the Dragon.

The Woman of Revelation has a crown with twelve stars, for she is mother of the king, and thus Queen in his kingdom. Mary’s queenship is as universal as Christ’s kingdom. The Old Testament *Gebirah* or “Queen Mother” of the Davidic kingdoms held the high office and consequent duty of both dynastic succession and principal advocate for the people of Israel.⁴⁰ This intercessory power of the queen-mother constituted the exercise of a dynamic feminine authority, based upon her maternal relation to the king (cf. 1 Kings 2:19).

The Woman of Revelation possesses and exercises the same dynamic maternal authority and advocacy for the People of God today. I believe it is time for the Church to honestly ask ourselves a critical question: Do we properly acknowledge Mary’s queenly and maternal authority in the Church today? Is she recognized, by both hierarchy and laity, as *leading* the contemporary cosmic battle against Satan for souls in virtue of her powerful maternal authority given her by Christ? Or is she sometimes given a passing devotional nod by members of the hierarchy or laity, with perhaps a concluding Marian hymn or procession, after we ourselves seek to be our own remedies through new synods or norms, to be our own leaders in the present spiritual battle against the Ancient Foe? Is it also possible that for certain members of the hierarchy, the idea would be problematic that the major problems facing the Church today could better be solved by a woman—by Mary, the Woman of Scripture and Mother of all peoples?

⁴⁰ Cf also Edward Sri, “Advocate and Queen,” in *Mariology for Priests, Deacons, Seminarians and Consecrated Persons*, Santa Barbara, Seat of Wisdom Publications, 2007, pp. 467-501.

In truth, we have neither the authority nor the power given by God to spiritually lead today's Church against the ubiquitous attacks coming from the Dragon, as it has been that uniquely granted to Mary, Queen and Advocate. As a corrective, I believe it would greatly benefit the Church to solemnly recognize and proclaim the maternal authority of Mary, the Woman of Revelation, for the greatest possible protection and defense for the "rest of her offspring."

III. Woman in the Church Today: Marian Principles

In what ways does Mary, the Woman of Scripture, shed light on the role of woman for all ages, including our own? We must avoid any modern temptation which would falsely maintain that while Mary may have been a model for past women, she no longer holds relevance for today's woman. The essential nature of womanhood has not changed, nor has Mary as its perfect exemplar.

Returning to the wisdom of *Mulieris Dignitatem*, St. John Paul II highlights the imperative for woman to fully exercise the royal priesthood of the laity: "If the human being is entrusted by God to women in a particular way, does this not mean that *Christ looks to them for the accomplishment of the "royal priesthood"* (1 Pet 2:9), which is the treasure he has given to every individual?"⁴¹

The Christian woman of today, after the model of Mary, is called to co-redeem with Christ. All Christian women are called to "make up what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ for the sake of his body, which is the Church (Col 1:24)." Does the exceptional personalism and receptivity of a woman make her especially proficient in coredeemptive suffering? Is her accentuated empathy for the needs of the individual person in particular and humanity in general make her specifically capable to share as a co-redeemer in Christ, and to fulfill on the level of the priesthood of the laity the call of St. Peter to

⁴¹ *Mulieris Dignitatem*, n. 30.

“offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Pet 2:4-5)?

Critical distinctions are necessary between Mary’s exemplary exercise of the royal priesthood of the laity and the rest of humanity, including all women. Once again, St. John Paul II provides us the necessary distinctions. The clarity of these papal texts merit their extended quotations:

... 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... 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” (*Lumen Gentium*, 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*.⁴²

The sacrifice of Mary as mother is joined to the sacrifice of Christ as priest in order to jointly redeem the world—New Adam and New Eve, the Redeemer and Co-redemptrix. The Mother exercises her maternal authority when she “offers the Son as a ‘victim’ of expiation” for the world’s Redemption.

⁴² Pope St. John Paul II, “Mary Unites Herself to Jesus’ Suffering”, Papal Audience, April 2, 1997, *L’Osservatore Romano*, English edition, p. 3 (emphasis mine).

Again from St. John Paul II:

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.

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...* Although God’s call to co-operate in the work of salvation concerns every human being, *the participation of the Savior’s Mother in humanity’s Redemption is a unique and unrepeatable fact.*⁴³

Classically stated, Mary alone participated in objective redemption by her unique cooperation in the acquisition of the graces of Redemption through her unified suffering with Jesus, and through her active offering of Jesus to the Father. Mary alone, as the Pope states, “co-operated in the event herself” and “collaborates in the obtaining of the grace of salvation for all humanity.”

⁴³ Pope St. John Paul II, “Mary’s Cooperation Is Totally Unique” Papal Audience, April 9, 1997, *L’Osservatore Romano*, English edition, p. 3 (emphasis mine).

Although not as an ordained ministerial priest, Mary nonetheless had a unique sharing in the one divine Priesthood of Jesus Christ: an unparalleled participation in the obtaining of redemptive graces through her maternal offering of Christ, the Divine Victim, along with her own maternal self-offering, which leads to the obtaining of the graces of Redemption. It is precisely this acquisition of grace by the Redeemer and the Co-redemptrix upon which all other and later forms of ministerial priesthood depend for the dispensation of redemptive graces. In this sense, her immaculate maternal participation in the Priesthood of her Son is superior to all later forms of ordained priesthood, since she alone cooperates in the historic obtaining of the redemptive graces, whereas post-Calvary ministerial priesthood participated in the distribution of the graces of redemption.

Mary, therefore, as feminine and maternal Co-redemptrix, provides the ultimate example for all Christian women of today in exercising their royal priesthood, who by their prayers and offerings, participate in the mysterious release of redemptive graces for human salvation.

The Christian woman of today, after the example of Mary, is also called to mediate with Christ. Women's sensibility and openness to *things spiritual* make her specifically disposed to the spiritual nurturing and forming of human beings. A woman's gift of mediation is dynamically, even if not exclusively, manifest in her role as wife and mother in the *ecclesia domestica*. If a mediator (*mesitis*) is a "go-between", a person who intervenes between two other persons or parties for the sake of union, how many times does the typical wife and mother perform maternal mediation at the service of her family daily between children, as well, oftentimes between husband and children. A mother's domestic mediation also includes repeated daily nurturing and educating. When done in union with Christ all these individual acts of maternal mediation bring grace and peace to the members of her domestic Church.

A woman's participation in the one mediation of Christ in service to the Church can, of course, go beyond her family to her parish, her

diocese, and ultimately to the universal Church. Women's nurturing strength would factor favorably in programs of religious education and preparation of sacramental life. A woman's gift for mediation in the arenas of formation, education, and administration can reach all levels of the Church and all areas of service which do not require ordination. For example, having women on parish, diocesan, and even Vatican commissions would add an invaluable component of feminine and maternal focus for all dialogues, decisions, and policies, in utilizing the special feminine charism of insuring that individual persons, and not only policies, be always respected. While it is critically important that women appointed to ecclesiastical commissions would exercise a "religious assent and mind and will to the manifest mind of the Pope"⁴⁴ and overall magisterial teachings, the same necessary criterion should hold true for men, both ordained and lay, on the same respective commissions.

The Christian woman, after the example of Mary, is called to advocate with Christ. Returning to her particular strength of caring for persons, the female presence helps to ensure the uncompromised prioritizing of human beings over factors of productivity, financial gain, or even project expediency, and as such would be a much needed and refreshing contribution on all levels of Church life. With particular accentuation, woman can serve the Church as a "feminine conscience" in fostering ultimate respect for the human person on all ecclesiastical levels, especially regarding children, the elderly and the marginalized. If women were included on commissions concerning cases of clerical sexual abuse of children, for example, is it not probable that children would be more consistently protected, as well those guilty would have less possibility of inappropriate tolerance?

While these three categories of feminine contribution to the life of the Church are in no sense exhaustive, they nonetheless offer a general template for ways in which women can model the Woman-Mother of Scripture in her roles as feminine and maternal Co-

⁴⁴ Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, n. 25.

redemptrix, Mediatrix, and Advocate in providing unique and invaluable service to the modern Church.

Misdirected, and doctrinally impossible calls for women's ordination tragically distract from the proper recognition of women's vitally needed role in today's Church, in authentic appreciation of woman's uniquely feminine and maternal gifts.

IV. The Recognition of Woman and the Proclamation of the Mother

Women will not be properly recognized in the multiform ways through which their particular gifts can richly benefit the Church until *the Woman-Mother* is solemnly recognized. Simply put, I believe that only with the papal proclamation of Mary, the Spiritual Mother of all peoples, inclusive of her threefold maternal functions as Co-redemptrix, Mediatrix of all graces and Advocate, will the proper and critically needed role of women in the Church be fully recognized and utilized. When we fail to recognize the perfect biblical revelation of the feminine and maternal Mediation of Mary, how can we expect to recognize the proper feminine and maternal mediation of all women in the Church?

Mary uniquely cooperated in the redemptive mission of Christ, not as priest, but as woman, and was through her unique feminine fiat, as St. Irenaeus stated in the second century, "the cause of salvation for herself and the whole human race." Can we not proclaim the same truth now, solemnly and dogmatically, for all the world to appreciate? Would it not benefit all peoples to know that they have Christ's mother as their own spiritual mother, as a personal gift from the crucified Christ at Calvary to every member of the human race?

Mary is the universal spiritual mother, who is "all-powerful by grace"⁴⁵ and humanity's greatest human Advocate for world peace. Over one hundred years ago in 1915, the renowned Belgian scholar

⁴⁵ Cf. St. John Paul II, *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, 2001, n. 16.

and prelate, Cardinal Desire Mercier, initiated an ecclesial petition drive to the popes for the solemn papal definition of Our Lady's Spiritual Motherhood, precisely as a remedy for the historic travesty of World War I. Mercier's rationale was simple: that a public declaration from the Roman pontiff would fulfill the providential condition of free human consent for a historic release of grace and peace for humanity through Our Lady's motherly intercession. Well over 1200 bishops and 8 million lay petitions later, the world still remains in grave need for a supernatural remedy for the *grave contemporary threats to world peace*.

The Mother of all humanity has also revealed through the secondary domain of Church approved private revelation that there are unprecedented challenges approaching humanity, and that, as she states respectively at authentic apparition sites like Fatima and Akita, "...only she can help you"⁴⁶ and "I alone can save you from the calamities that approach."⁴⁷ Only through the *full exercise* of her powerful maternal intercession, enacted through humanity's consent as expressed by the Vicar of Christ in a solemn definition, can the Mother of all peoples fully intercede for peace, *true peace for the world*.

As in the Church, so with the world, it would be naïveté to believe that humanity can remedy itself from the endless geopolitical entanglements that are presently propelling major nations of power toward a third world war. Theology need not be ignorant nor dismissive of contemporary politics. The present aggression of Russia in Ukraine, with the strong possibility of intended belligerent expansion into eastern and even western Europe; the Israeli-Palestine war, with its potential for a full Middle Eastern conflict; China's hegemonic desires for Taiwanese domination and well beyond; not to mention the United States- Great Britain-NATO-Israel alliance in

⁴⁶ Our Lady of the Rosary, July 13, 1917 message, Sr. Lucia, *Memoirs*, Fourth Memoir.

⁴⁷ October 13, 1973 message of Our Lady at Akita, mystical phenomena approved by Bishop John Ito as *constat de supernaturalitate*, April 22, 1984; Cf. July 13, 1917 message of Our Lady of Fatima, Fourth Memoir, Robert Fox, ed., *Documents on Fatima and the Memoirs of Sr. Lucia*, Fatima Family Apostolate, 1984, p. 401.

opposition to the Russia-China-North Korea-Iran alliance all speak boldly of a potential global conflict, which would certainly at some point would become tragically nuclear.

Here, too, the world needs a supernatural remedy. The world needs the powerful intercession of a Woman: a universal Mother, a Mediatrix of grace, a Queen-Advocate of Peace.

May the Church soon proclaim the whole truth about the Woman of Scripture and the “Mother of us all,”⁴⁸ (to use a favored expression of Pope Francis,) and thus dogmatically recognize Mary, the greatest of all women, upon whom all women, the Church, and all of humanity desperately depend. We conclude with the endearing filial Marian testament of St. John Henry Cardinal Newman:

...Vindicate the glory of your Mother Mary, whom the world blasphemes, in the very face of the world...She is the beautiful gift of God which outshines the fascination of a bad world, and which no one ever sought in sincerity and was disappointed. She is the personal type and representative image of all spiritual life and renovation in grace, “without which no one will see God.”⁴⁹

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June 22, 2024 Feast of St. Thomas More and St. John Fischer

⁴⁸ For example, Pope Francis, *Homily on the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe*, Dec. 12, 2019, *L'Osservatore Romano*, p. 1. Cf. Also M. Miravalle, “Mary, “Mother of Us All”: Global Ramifications for a World in Crisis, *Ecce Mater Tua International Journal of Mariology*, vol. 9, February 17, 2024, www.eccematertua.com/current-issue.

⁴⁹ Newman, *The New Eve*, p. 90; Heb. 12:14.

Mary and the Authority of Women in the Church

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Women possess authority in the Catholic Church.¹ But if we think authority is synonymous with the holding of formal office, if it is merely a juridical, legal, and political status, then women may feel seriously left out! The task before us is to penetrate the true meaning of authority which, according to the Christian dispensation and the sacramental structure of the Church, has very little to do with such things. Let me repeat: women possess authority in the Catholic Church.

The authority of women is different from the authority exercised by the Catholic ordained priesthood. However, it is an authority complementary to the priesthood and it is an authority without which the sacramental life of the Church and redemption itself could not exist.

Authority is most usually understood according to a secular paradigm; authority as a quantifiable force, exercised visibly and publicly by persons who hold a special position or office. Thus, those who do not hold public office have no authority. Within the Church, since women are denied access to Church office it must be obvious to all that they, ipso facto, are without power. Feminist theologians, especially, believe that women in relation to the hierarchical priesthood are in a position of subjection because they are not permitted to share in this formal, visible office. Because men alone, so it seems, are in a ruling and teaching position, feminists are resentful that their destinies are bound to the directives of men.

However, the authority women exercise in the Church flows from the manner in which authority is exercised within the order of redemption itself. The crisis of ecclesial authority can only really be

¹ This article draws upon material and insights from my previously published books, *Sexuality and Authority in the Catholic Church* (Scranton, PA: University of Scranton Press, 1995) and *The Authority of Women in the Catholic Church* (Crisis Books, 1997).

resolved when Christians come to appreciate that real authority is not synonymous with power. The person who possesses authority is not simply or always the strong one within a group who then uses his strength to organize the group around his vision. We must refuse the idea that whoever holds office, whoever has the most strength of will, whoever has strength because of size or numbers is the one who therefore has authority or is deserving of respect.

The question needs to be asked, why should anyone obey God? In what way does God have authority that calls for obedience? If we were to take a poll on this question there would undoubtedly be several answers. For instance, perhaps God should be obeyed because He is almighty in the sense that He can wipe people out if they do not listen to Him or punish them for disobedience. In other words, God is obeyed precisely because He has raw power. Or perhaps God should be obeyed because He is the law-giver, and justice demands that if human beings transgress what He has decreed, punishment is in order. After all, God is the Supreme Being, superior to human beings in every way, and He therefore has the right to demand that we listen to Him.

Simply a look at the word "authority" itself will be helpful. The word "authority" comes from the Latin "*auctores*" meaning to be the author or creator of something. A person has authority precisely by giving life. If God has authority, it is because *He is life itself* and the creator of all life. When Christians recite the Nicene Creed, the first item of faith declared is, "We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth." Yes, God is Almighty, but not in the sense of simply holding power over something in some arbitrary way. Rather, "creator of heaven and earth" defines the almighty character of God. He is truly almighty because He alone can create out of nothing and the fact that God is Creator is the essence of God's authority.

Obedience to God keeps humanity alive by keeping persons connected to their source of life. Simple fear can motivate obedience to God, but if God has given the gift of life, then obedience is easily

motivated by love. And, of course, this is the ideal. But not to obey God brings death. After all, real death, the death of Hell, is separation from God.

Authority is the power to give life, but equally important; it is entirely bound up with the rights and responsibilities that are connected to this power so that the life that has been brought forth may come to its proper fulfillment.

If authority is the power to give life and the responsibility to oversee the good for that life then it is not too hard to understand Christ's authority in relation to the Church. The first principle of Christ's authority is that it exists within a covenant. Authority is covenantal. Christ is in union with that to whom He exercises authority, namely, the Church. There is a love relation between Christ and that over which He has authority. And dare we say it, the Church fulfills and completes Jesus as Eph. 1: 23 teaches the Church: "which is his body, the fullness of him, who fills the universe in all its parts."

Authentic authority never exists unilaterally, but covenantally. And authority exists in a covenant between Christ and the Church. Together, in their nuptial unity of Head and Body, they beget new sons and daughters for God.

We need to cultivate a new, radical appreciation for the truth that redemption is accomplished by God actively partnering with persons! No greater instance exists of this partnering than the role the Blessed Virgin Mary plays in the drama of salvation. And so we need to examine just how Mary fulfills that covenant partnership—as she, in her relation with Christ is a true agent in the salvific mission action of her Son.

Mary, Source of the New Covenant

I cannot now remember whether she was naked or clothed. If she were naked, then it must have been the almost visible penumbra of her courtesy and

joy which produces in my memory the illusion of a great and shining train that followed her across the happy grass. If she were clothed, then the illusion of nakedness is doubtless due to the clarity with which her inmost spirit shone through the clothes. For clothes in that country are not a disguise: the spiritual body lives along each thread and turns them into living organs. A robe or a crown is there as much one of the wearer's features as a lip or an eye.

But I have forgotten. And only partly do I remember the unbearable beauty of her face.

“Is it? ... is it?” I whispered to my guide.

“Not at all,” said he. “It's someone ye'll never have heard of. Her name on earth was Sarah Smith and she lived at Golders Green.”

“She seems to be...well, a person of particular importance?”

“Aye. She is one of the great ones. Ye have heard that fame in this country and fame on Earth are two quite different things.” “And who are these gigantic people...look! They're like emeralds...who are dancing and throwing flowers before here?”

“Haven't ye read your Milton? A thousand liveried angels lackey her.”

“And who are all these young men and women on each side?”

“They are her sons and daughters.”²

This quote from C.S. Lewis' *The Great Divorce* illustrates one of the most important aspects of authority—though if we base our idea of authority on notions of quantitative strength and power, publicly enshrined then indeed Sarah Smith could not be regarded as “a person of particular importance.” Indeed, while Sarah lived she

² C.S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce* (Harper: San Francisco, 1946), 118-119.

appeared to be of no real consequence—living a small, apparently ordinary obscure life in someplace called “Golders Green.” However, according to spiritual truths, the ones that really matter, Sarah is “one of the great ones.”

She is described by Lewis as having many children—those that she birthed into life by her charity. By her own charity she caused all those who came into touch with her to love others more. She is described as having power to “awaken all the dead things of the universe into life.”

Sarah Smith exercised a true motherhood and exercised authority according to this role. Indeed, due to this woman’s splendor, the main character of the Lewis story at first mistakes Sarah Smith for Mary, the Mother of God. But Sarah Smith is not really like Mary simply because many show her reverence. Sarah is like Mary because they both in a most unassuming way lead people to the fullness of life.

If we don’t locate the essence of authority in this principle, then it is easy to conclude that Mary had little to no authority. And because authority is often primarily associated with official quantitative power over others, feminist theology does not have much use for Mary. She is either ignored altogether or perhaps rehabilitated as a symbol for liberation theology. In feminist theology Mary, simply by being a woman belongs to an oppressed class and thus is a voice for all the oppressed when in her Magnificat she announces the overthrow of unjust systems, as God will “depose the mighty from their thrones and raise the lowly to high places.” Mary loses respect among feminists because she is seen as a passive figure, following and not leading, who is ultimately defined according to her procreative powers. Mary has been honored throughout the ages because she is a mother, but motherhood is not held in high esteem these days. Mary’s motherhood ties her to the hidden and domestic realm where there is little power and status.

Authority, as we have already noted, is not simply the exercise of power. Authority is the possession of rights that a creator (or author) exercises so that his or her created work may be maintained and brought to its fulfillment. Saint Augustine affirmed this life-giving authority when he stated "Two parents have generated us for death, two parents have generated us for life."³ The parents of death are Adam and Eve. We are saved by a New Covenant that repairs, or one might even say, fulfills what was in the beginning. This New Covenant is created by the union and cooperation between the New Adam and the New Eve: Christ and Mary.

Christ is the head of a New Humanity because He is the New Adam whose death is the source of the Church. This is His authority because this is how Jesus is the source of life and redemption. But women also possess authority, as they are source of life in relation to Him in the completion of the New Covenant. The authority of women is based on what women have been specifically entrusted with, according to the meaning of their gender, for the world's salvation. Salvation could not have been accomplished without the contribution of Mary Mother of God. God's divine plan of salvation could not have been achieved without her.

Mary: Source of the Incarnation

St. Paul declares that interdependency exists between the sexes:

Yet, in the Lord, woman is not independent of man nor man independent of woman. In the same way that woman was made from man, so man is born of woman; and all is from God (1 Cor. 11: 11-12).

"Man is born of woman." This is true even of the Son of God. Christ is dependent on the life-giving power of Mary. She made God physically present in human history so that salvation could be accomplished. Christ is from Mary because of her "yes," because of

³ St. Augustine, *Sermo* 22.10 (CCL 41.300).

her "fiat mihi." "Let it be done to me," declared Mary to the angel. Mary's "yes" is the beginning, not only of her motherhood, but of the New Creation. Redemption is begun with the "yes" of Mary. The Marian era of grace and mercy was often contrasted by the Fathers of the Church with the era of sin and death that Eve ushered in by her misuse of power. For the early Fathers Mary is the source of life, the font of the New Covenant. St. Justin Martyr wrote:

We know that [Christ] before all creatures, proceeded from the Father by His will and power ... and by means of the Virgin became man, that by what way the disobedience arising from the serpent had its beginning, by that way also it might have an undoing (*Dialogue with Trypho*, 100).⁴

Because Christ came "by means of the Virgin" the disobedience of the first woman is undone. Tertullian similarly states:

God recovered His image and likeness, which the devil had seized, by a rival operation. For into Eve, as yet a virgin, had crept the word which was the framer of death. Equally into a virgin was to be introduced the Word of God which was the builder up of that life; that what by one sex had gone into perdition, by the same sex might be brought back to salvation. Eve had believed the serpent; Mary believed Gabriel; the fault which the one committed by believing, the other by believing blotted out (*On the Flesh of Christ*, 17).⁵

Women hold the key to death and life. Tertullian seems to think it is entirely appropriate that if death came by a woman—this death

⁴ St. Justin Martyr, *Dialogue With Trypho*, 100, trans. R.P.C. Hanson, World Christian Books, vol. 49 (New York: Associated Press, 1964), 60-1 (PG 6. 710).

⁵ Tertullian, *On the Flesh of Christ*, 17, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1963), 536 (CSEL 69-70.233).

should be overcome by a woman. Womankind is not dismissed because in the beginning she brought death. Salvation is not brought by men having to suppress women and keep them in subjugation according to the pessimism of the ancient pagan worldview. Rather women are fully engaged, free moral agents—able to fulfill their God-given responsibilities for the faith. Tertullian appreciates quite clearly the redemptive power of the female sex.

St. Irenaeus provides one of the most famous passages on the salvific life-giving role of Mary.

But Eve was disobedient ... As she, having indeed Adam for a husband but as yet being a virgin ... becoming disobedient became the cause of death both for herself and for the whole human race, so also Mary, having the predestined man, yet being a Virgin, being obedient, became both to herself and to the whole human race the cause of salvation For, whereas the Lord, when born, was the first-begotten of the dead, and received into His bosom the primitive fathers, He regenerated them unto the Life of God. He Himself becoming the beginning of the living, since Adam became the beginning of the dying And so the knot of Eve's disobedience received its unloosing through the obedience of Mary; for what Eve, a virgin, bound by incredulity, that Mary, a virgin, unloosed by faith (*Against Heresies*, 3,22,4).⁶

And, though the one had disobeyed God, yet the other was drawn to obey God; that of the virgin Eve the Virgin Mary might become the advocate. And, as by a virgin the human race had been bound by death, by a virgin it is saved, the balance being preserved, a virgin's disobedience by a virgin's obedience (*Against Heresies*, 5,19,1).⁷

⁶ St. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 3,22,4, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1987), 455 (PG 7,1, 958-9).

⁷ *Ibid.*, 5,19,1.547 (PG 7,2.1175).

Both Christ and Mary are origins of life. Irenaeus states that Christ is "the beginning of the living" but this is only possible through the Virgin's obedience. The saint does go so far as to say that the human race is saved by this Virgin's obedience.

SS. Cyril of Jerusalem, Ephrem Syrus, and Epiphanius all likewise proclaim that Mary is the cause of new life in God.⁸ Mary as source of life in contrast to Eve is proclaimed by St. Jerome in almost the form of a slogan: "Death by Eve, life by Mary."⁹

Mary is not a passive instrument of God. Rather, she is instrumental. She is instrumental in the drama of salvation specifically according to her feminine life-giving powers. Eve was disobedient. Mary is obedient. This means that in their freedom Eve and Mary are real moral agents: they effect death or life for others by their personal choices. It is through the authority of Mary's obedience that God became man. The entire economy of salvation is bound up with this fact. In the beginning Eve is taken from the first Adam. In the New Beginning the Last Adam is taken from the New Eve. By this, St. Paul's teaching is affirmed: "In the same way that woman was made from man, so man is born of woman; and all is from God" (1 Cor. 11: 12).

Mary is God's true partner in redemption and is so precisely through her femininity. God re-created the world through a woman. In the beginning God's word "Let it be done" brought life into being. His divine "fiat" brought forth creation out of nothing. At the Annunciation Mary becomes the source of the New Creation. Now the "Let it be done" is not God's, but man's. More specifically it is woman's. Because the Incarnation is the beginning of a new humanity Mary is the New Eve, Mother of all the Living, in relation to Christ, the New Adam.

⁸ St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechesis* 12, 15 (PG 33.742); St. Ephrem Syrus, *Opp. Syr.* ii; St. Epiphanius, *Haer.* 78, 18 (PG 42.730).

⁹ St. Jerome, *Letter 22 to Eustochiam* (CSEL 54.173).

Mary and the Mission of Christ

The motherhood of Mary is a redemptive responsibility. She was entrusted with bringing Christ into the world, but her maternity also means that she brings Christ's priesthood to its supreme fulfillment. The Mother of Christ helps lead her Son to the Cross. The ministerial priesthood is under the rule of women's responsibility for the faith as the sacramental order itself is realized through the Marian maternal principle.

Mary is an actual agent of salvation. She is not just a puppet for God who simply makes use of her female biology so that Christ may be present in history. Mary's motherhood means that she actually helps her Son accomplish His redemptive work. When Mary opened her womb to Christ she gave birth to Him on the Cross.

The maternal authority of Mary is clearly revealed at the wedding at Cana. Here Mary instigates the mission of her Son and leads Him to the Passion.

On the third day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and his disciples had likewise been invited to the celebration. At a certain point the wine ran out and Jesus' mother told him, "They have no more wine." Jesus replied, "Woman, how does this concern of yours involve me? My hour has not yet come." His mother instructed those waiting on table, "Do whatever he tells you" (Jn. 2: 1-5).

This incident is remarkable for a number of reasons. First, Mary takes the initiative in the situation. Jesus says the lack of wine is her concern but she obviously thinks it is His concern too and expects that He will do something about it. But, of course, the wedding at Cana is not about simply the replenishment of an alcoholic beverage. Jesus' words "My hour has not yet come" are the key to the meaning

of this passage. In the Gospel of John "the hour" refers to Christ's crucifixion and His entrance into glory. Christ's words at Cana: "My hour has not yet come" connect His first miracle to His Passion. The performance of the miracle of changing water into wine will usher in "the Hour" which is precisely the reason Christ was conceived and born "of woman." The wedding at Cana shows that Mary is not only the "mother of Jesus," she is the mother of His mission. She is the principal human agent in the initiation of Christ to His public ministry. Mary officiates at Cana. Her officiation is directed at aiding her Son in the accomplishment of His work of redemption.

The quality and quantity of the wine produced by Christ demonstrates the messianic import of His first miracle. Mary knew the importance of Christ's first public act.¹⁰ She serves as the catalyst of Christ's salvific activity. Because she leads Christ to His Passion she therefore also leads Him towards His glory. She is not the cause of this glory in the sense that she gave Christ the power to perform the miracle. Christ is God and the power is His. But she acts as the origin of the miracle in the sense of being the facilitator of it in the same way that Mary exercises authority in the Incarnation. As Mary brought Christ into the world, here she causes Christ's glory to be manifested to the world. Thus she is the origin of the disciples' faith which comes as a result of the Cana miracle (Jn. 2:11).

Mary, the New Eve

Christ executed His first miracle because someone requested it. But this someone is not just anyone—it is His mother. It is precisely because Mary is Christ's mother, the source of His presence in the world that she has the authority to request a miracle that would lead her Son to His Passion. Mary possesses this authority because it is tied to her maternal role in the economy of salvation. As the Mother of God she has been entrusted with aiding Christ in His salvific work. She can send Christ to the Cross because she is the source of His

¹⁰André Feuillet, *Jesus and His Mother* (Still River, MA: St. Bede's Publications, 1984), 14.

priesthood and thus she has a maternal right to nourish its fulfillment. Indeed, Mary has not only the right, but the responsibility to do so.

When Mary leads Christ to the Cross, she undoes the knot of Eve's disobedience. Eve led Adam away from what it meant for him to be a man and to be the head. Eve brought Adam under the power of her own whim. She misused her feminine power which, as St. John Chrysostom in *Homily IX* stated, led Adam astray from the will of God.¹¹ The New Eve uses her authority to lead the Second Adam, not to do her will, but to accomplish the will of the Father who sent Him.

This is a key element of feminine authority. Feminine authority is meant to lead men to fulfill what it means for them to be masculine and to fulfill the specific tasks and responsibilities with which they are entrusted in the order of creation and redemption. At Cana Christ subjects Himself to Mary in the accomplishment of His Father's business. Or perhaps we should say that Christ through the mediation of Mary's maternal authority, discerned and then subjected Himself to the will of the Father. She is the New Eve, the true and effective helpmate of the New Adam.

As the New Eve Mary is the co-redemptrix. Her role as such is revealed by Christ at Cana when He addresses His mother by the word "woman." This woman of Cana is the woman of Calvary where Mary accomplished by her maternal authority the covenantal role of the New Eve whose work, united to the sacrifice of her Son, serves as the origin of mankind's regeneration.

Mary fulfills the promise of the Protogospel. The Protogospel is a verse found in Genesis, chapter three. God confronts the first couple

¹¹ St. John Chrysostom, *Homily IX*, trans. Philip Schaff. "Homilies on Timothy," *Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 13, ed. Philip Schaff, (Grand Rapids, MI., Wm. B. Eerdmans), 1962, 435 (PG 62.544).

with their sin of disobedience and then turns to the serpent with these words:

I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your offspring and hers; he will strike at your head while you strike at his heel (Gn. 3: 15).

The passage describes a serious struggle involving the woman, her offspring and the Evil One. The triumph will ultimately be won by the woman's child. St. Justin Martyr identifies the Offspring as Christ who came through the New Eve whose life-giving obedience he contrasts with the death-giving disobedience of the old Eve.¹² Eve, not Adam is at the center of the struggle whereby the world's redemption is won. Yes, Eve, was seduced by Satan. Nevertheless, she is most directly involved in undoing the Fall and this undoing is possible through her because of her life-giving maternal position. Because the Offspring is Christ, Mary is at the center of the redemptive struggle as she fulfills the prophecy of the Protogospel.

The essence of woman is to have authority over the divine gift of life. Because of this, Mary is the source of the New Covenant. The Protogospel tells us that this is the meaning of woman. Because the woman as "mother of all the living" was indispensable to the beginning of creation, so too is she indispensable as the source of the New Beginning. John Paul II states this clearly in his apostolic letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*:

It is significant that the foretelling of the Redeemer contained in these words refers to "the woman." She is assigned the first place in the Proto-evangelium as the progenitrix of him who will be the redeemer of man ... Mary is the witness to the new "beginning" and the "new creation" ... since she herself as the first of the redeemed in salvation history, is a "new

¹² Justin Martyr, *Dialogue*, 100.

creation": she is "full of grace." It is difficult to grasp why the words of the Protoevangelium place such strong emphasis on the "woman," if it is not admitted that in her the new and definitive covenant of God with humanity has its beginning, the covenant in the redeeming blood of Christ. The covenant begins with a woman, the "woman" of the annunciation of Nazareth.¹³

With the sin of Adam and Eve death came into the world yet the Fall of Man did not obliterate the fact that woman is still the center of life. The Savior will come from a woman. The Fall could not obliterate her life-giving powers. Indeed, the maternity of Eve constitutes the vital factor in salvation history. From the beginning the woman is identified with her power: she is "mother of all the living" (Gn. 3:20).

Benedict XVI, as Cardinal Ratzinger, had noted that, even after the Fall, woman preserves the mystery of life, the power that is opposed to death. Even though Eve brought death, she is nonetheless the keeper of the seal of life.¹⁴ St. Paul teaches that the turning point in all history is bound to a woman. "But when the fulness of time came, God sent his Son, born of a woman" (Gal. 4:4). The feminine authority of the first woman is definitively fulfilled by the Virgin Mary from whom comes the long awaited Messiah. Eve's words of triumph literally apply to Mary. She can say "I have produced the God-man with the help of the Lord" (Gn. 4:1).

Mary and the Cross of Christ

¹³ John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, (Art. 11) *On the Dignity and Vocation of Women* (Boston: St. Paul Editions, 1988), 41-42.

¹⁴ Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Daughter Zion*, trans. J. Michael McDermott, S.J. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1983), 17.

The woman of the Proto-gospel is the Woman who will stand at the foot of the Cross on Golgotha and be a true "mother of all the living" through the sacrificial offering she makes as the Second Eve. The suffering of the Woman is an essential part of the work of salvation: "In pain shall you bring forth children" (Gn. 3:16). These words apply not only to Eve but also to the New Eve who became the Mother of the Church and of all Christians.

At Cana, Mary is entrusted with the task of ushering her Son to His Hour. But the Hour is also hers. The pain of Gn. 3:16 that belongs to the woman is scripturally linked to the pain of the Cross. In the farewell discourse of John's gospel Jesus states:

When a woman is in labor she is sad that her hour has come. When she has borne her child, she no longer remembers her pain for joy that a man has been born into the world (Jn. 16: 21).

Salvation's drama is linked to the work of the Woman. The Woman who instigates Christ's first miracle is the same Woman present at the Hour of His death. Unfortunately many bibles translate Christ's words to His mother "How does this concern of yours involve me? My Hour has not yet come." Such a translation seems to indicate that Jesus places a separation between her seemingly minor concern and His salvific mission. However the original Greek text literally reads "What is this to me and to you, woman? My hour has not yet come" Here we see that Jesus, rather than treating Mary as an outsider or someone removed from His Hour, actually includes her in it. The Hour is not just the Hour of the Son. It is theirs. Mary is a partner with Christ in His work of redemption.

The feminine life-giving power permeates salvation history, bringing it about from the very Beginning. When Christ describes His death in terms of a woman engaged in the painful labor of childbirth the Proto-gospel is placed at the center of His Passion. Here on Calvary the Woman gives birth to the Offspring that will crush the head of Satan. Thus the Hour of Cana is the Woman's Hour as well as

Christ's. Mary's "fiat" has brought herself and her Son to the Cross. Both of them have accepted the meaning of the Incarnation. It is at the Cross that Mary's maternity is ultimately fulfilled. There she becomes the Mother of all those reborn through the blood of the New Adam.

According to Gn. 3:15, the Adversary of the Offspring, the Evil One, is also the enemy of the Woman. Therefore the Mother of the Offspring is not only present at the Cross but she actually contributes to the victory over the Evil One. For this reason Mary is established for all eternity as Mother of all the Living. On Calvary the personages of the messianic drama meet each other for the final action. At Calvary Mary is again addressed by Christ as "Woman." Her womanhood is entirely connected to what it means for her to be the universal Mother of the disciples.

Near the cross of Christ there stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdelene. Seeing his mother there with the disciple whom he loved, Jesus said to his mother, "Woman, there is your son." In turn he said to the disciple, "There is your mother." From that hour onward, the disciple took her into his care (Jn. 19: 25-27).

At the Cross Mary's universal motherhood is fulfilled. She is not only the mother of Christ; she is the mother of the faithful whom John, the beloved disciple represents. Christ exercises His headship supremely from the Cross because it is from there that the Lord becomes source of a New People. The New Eve stands in direct relation to the headship of Christ, whom as the Proto-gospel indicates and the New Testament witness affirms, is the covenantal partner in the Order of Redemption. Because Christ is from her, the Body of Christ, the Church, is derivatively from her. Furthermore, the Bride of Christ, the Church, is made in the Marian image as the Church is the essence of feminine response to the creative action of God. Pope Pius X states:

Wherefore in the same holy bosom of His most chaste Mother, Christ took to Himself flesh and united to Himself the spiritual body formed by those who were to believe in Him. Hence Mary, carrying the Savior within her, may be said to have carried all those whose life was contained in the Savior.

Therefore all who are united to Christ, and as the Apostle says, are members of His body, of his flesh, and of his bones, have issued forth from the womb of Mary like a body united to its head.¹⁵

Because Mary is the Mother of Christ the Head, when she conceived Him she conceived the faithful. Thus she is the mother of the whole body. This is why her maternity, declared by Christ from the Cross, is not simply a motherhood in the moral sense (as in the case of adoption) or merely symbolism. Mary's motherhood to the disciples is a real motherhood and thus a real authority. The Fathers of the Church call Mary the New Eve because by her obedience she is the Mother of the Redeemer and thus the woman through whom the human race is reborn.

The Compassion of Mary

The Woman is the covenantal partner of Christ. Christ, the priest and the victim offers the one sacrifice truly acceptable to the Father. Christ's offering brings about the covenant of the New People of God. Thus its reality requires the response of creation. The response is not a passivity—a mere reception of God's gifts of grace. The response is an active participation in the sacrifice that effects redemption. It is Mary who gives the first and definitive response. Her response makes her the Mother of the faithful. Her response is a compassion with Christ as she fulfills the feminine responsibility for the New Covenant. Pope Benedict XV teaches:

¹⁵ Pope Pius X, *Ad deum illum*, Feb. 2, 1904, *Papal Documents on Mary*, ed. William J. Doherty and Joseph P. Kelly (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Co., 1954), 139.

To such an extent did she suffer and almost die with her suffering and dying Son, and to such an extent did she surrender her maternal rights over her Son for man's salvation, and immolated Him, insofar as she could, in order to appease the justice of God, that we may rightly say that she redeemed the human race together with Christ.¹⁶

Pope Pius XII in the conclusion of his encyclical *Mystici Corporis* states:

It was she, the second Eve, who free from all sin, original or personal, and always intimately linked with her Son, offered Him on Golgotha to the eternal Father for all the children of Adam, sin-stained by his unhappy fall, and her mother's rights and her mother's love were included in the holocaust. Thus she who was mother of our Head, through the added title of pain and glory became, according to the Spirit, the mother of His members.¹⁷

At Calvary Mary is not a passive on-looker. The crucifixion of her Son is not something that just "happens" to her. Mary actively participates in the sacrifice by offering up her Son. It is a mother's sacrifice; the sacrifice of the New Eve. Her sacrifice is different from Christ's but is in covenantal union with it. Without her sacrifice, the New Creation would not be established. Mary's offering up of Christ is the fulfillment of her "fiat" as the New Eve to the New Adam. This offer is specific to feminine responsibility for the faith. The New Eve held Christ in her womb but her motherhood in bringing forth

¹⁶ Pope Benedict XV, *Inter Sodalicia*, March 22, 1918, *Mary in the Documents of the Church*, ed. Paul F. Palmer (Westminster, MD: The Newman Press, 1952), 97.

¹⁷ Pope Pius XII, *Mystici Corporis*, June 10, 1943, (Boston: St. Paul Editions), 66.

the Head resides equally in letting Him go. The Mother of Christ must let Him be the Savior. Louis Bouyer states:

The final gesture, the most sublime perhaps, that a mother has to make is to renounce possession of her child's life, to accept that it should be lived on its own terms. With Mary, this renunciation meant accepting that Christ should deliver himself up to his Father's will, that is, to the Cross.¹⁸

The Response of Mary, the Response of Man

The New Covenant could not have been formed without cooperation coming from the side of man. If nothing else, the "fiat" of Mary demonstrates this. The response that Mary gives at Calvary is the feminine response of God's graced creation to the sacrificial love of the New Adam. At Calvary, Mary is not simply a single person whose response to and participation in the Passion of her Son begins and ends with her. Mary represents the Church, the collectivity of the redeemed. The Church is the covenantal partner in redemption—the Body and Bride of Christ.

Because Mary gives her consent to the Cross and offers Christ upon it the faithful are represented by her. In other words, Mary really can stand in for them because she is their mother. In Mary the entire reality of the faithful is present at Calvary.

Because Mary is the New Eve of the Protogospel, the covenantal partner of Christ, she is the origin of a New Humanity. This New Humanity, born from the covenant between Christ and Mary, has Mary as its model and mode of existence. The motherhood of Mary and the motherhood of the Church partakes of the same reality. The Church comes from the maternal "yes" of Mary to the salvific mission of her Son and exists within this reality. Mary's graced

¹⁸ Louis Bouyer, *Seat of Wisdom* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1960), 162-3.

response to Christ produces a New People. She has other children born in the likeness of the "firstborn of all creation."

The order of redemption is the relation of the Head and the Body; their covenantal one-flesh union. Therefore, the Church is not Christ. She is not a mere continuation, in a monadic fashion of the Incarnation. If anything, the Church is the continuation of Mary. The Church is her feminine reality extended in history. Her "yes" is an authoritative life-giving word. In Mary we see the utter indispensability of feminine responsibility for the faith. Without woman the covenant of redemption would not be fulfilled.

The Mother of God and the Ladder of Jacob: Some Reflections on the Mediating Role of the Theotokos in the Work of Redemption according to the Tradition of the Eastern Church

REV. IOAN GOȚIA

Hail, O Pious one, who gave birth to God in the flesh for the salvation of all. Through you, humankind has found salvation. Through you, O pure and blessed Mother of God, may we reach heaven! (*Troparion* of Matins)¹

The Virgin Mother of God, by virtue of her divine motherhood, remains in close union with her Son even after the Incarnation, cooperating intimately with Him in the divine economy of salvation.² As exemplified in the *troparion* cited above, in the Byzantine liturgy the hymnic compositions for both Christological and Marian feasts make constant reference, in fact, to the mystery of divine motherhood with a view to the reconciliation of humanity with its Creator.

In meditating on the theme of man's return to his heavenly homeland and on the role of the Virgin Mary, the homiletic reflections of the Fathers of the Church (which were later incorporated into the liturgical texts) often refer to Old Testament images that emphasize the symbolism of the passage between the earthly and heavenly worlds, such as those of *the gate* and *the bridge*, combined with the symbolism of ascent: *the tree, the mountain, the ladder*.³

Among these symbolic images interpreted from a Marian perspective, I would like to dwell on that of *the ladder*, which refers to a gradual,

¹ *Horologion*, Rome, 1937, 90, quoted in *TMPM* [= GHARIB G. et al., (edd.), *Testi mariani del primo millennio*, Città Nuova, Rome, 1988-1991], I, 923.

² KNIAZEFF A., "Mariologie biblique et liturgie byzantine", *Irenikon* XXVIII (1955), 280-281.

³ CHAMPEAUX – STERCKX, *Symboles* [= CHAMPEAUX G. – STERCKX S., *Introduction au monde des symboles*, Zodiaque, St. Léger Vauban, 1972], 161-162.

bidirectional ascending movement.⁴ The research will explore the rich hymnic production of the great feasts of the Byzantine liturgical year, in order to then consider the figurative heritage, especially the monumental iconography, paying special attention to the place assigned to the representation of the ladder of Jacob's dream.

The Divine Ladder in Byzantine Hymnography

The image of *the ladder*, used especially in the Christmas festive cycle to indicate the divine maternity as the channel for the descent of the Son of God to earth, is already echoed in the hymns of the feast of the Conception of St. Anne, the mother of the Virgin Mary, to indicate the beginning of the fulfillment of the plan of salvation, when "the divine ladder was planted on earth".

The prophets' proclamation is fulfilled: the holy mountain rises from the loins; *the divine ladder is planted on the earth*; the great throne of the King is prepared; the place where God will tread is prepared; the unburned bush begins to sprout; the jar of the fragrances of holiness already gushes out and stops the rivers of barrenness of Anne, the divinely inspired, whom we with faith call blessed. (*Troparion* of the Feast of the Conception of St. Anne, mother of the Mother of God)⁵

Through the Virgin Mary, "the divine ladder," the Creator of all things chose to carry out the work of elevating the fallen man. The hymns of the Feast of the Entrance into the Temple of the Most Holy Mother of God subsequently emphasize the privileged role of Mary, elected as the "mediatrix of the mystery" of the Incarnation in view of Adam's return to his heavenly home:

⁴ CHEVALIER – GHEERBRANT, "Scala" [= CHEVALIER J.– GHEERBRANT A., "Scala", in *Dizionario dei simboli*, Rizzoli, Milano, 1986], 889 ss.

⁵ Vespers, troparion tone 4. *Anthologhion* [= *Anthologhion di tutto l'anno*, Lipa, Roma, 1999], I, Lipa, Roma, 1999, 1033. Our emphasis and our translation from Italian for all quoted liturgical texts.

The Creator of all things, the Architect and Sovereign, bending down with indescribable compassion, only out of His love for mankind, pitied the one whom He had formed with His hands and whom He saw fallen, and *was pleased to raise him up again*, reshaping him in a more divine way, by His own annihilation, because He is good and merciful by nature. That is why He takes Mary, virgin and pure, as *the mediatrix of the mystery*, to take from her, according to His plan, what is ours: she is the heavenly dwelling place. (Orthros Preortia of the Feast of the Entrance into the Temple of the Most Holy Mother of God)⁶

Before this mystery, even the heavenly messenger sent to announce the glad tidings of the Incarnation was enraptured:

The bodiless one, knowing the order given him, went with solicitude to Joseph's home and said to her, who knew no marriage: "He who in *His descent* bows down the heavens comes all and unchangeable, enclosed in your womb. I, contemplating Him made a slave in your womb, remain ecstatic and exclaim: Hail, Virgin and Bride!" (Preface III, *Akathist Hymn*)

Hail, thou guide to supernal counsel; Hail, thou proof of arcane mystery; Hail, thou Christ's first prodigy; Hail, compendium of His truths. Hail, thou *heavenly ladder that descended the Eternal*; Hail, thou bridge that leads men to heaven. (*Kontakion III, Akathist Hymn*)⁷

Gabriel, O maiden, who hastened to reveal to you the plan ordained by the Eternal, greeted you and said: "Hail, unseeded earth; Hail, unburned bush; Hail, unfathomable abyss! Hail, chariot that leads to the heavens, and *lofty ladder that Jacob saw*; Hail, divine vessel of manna; Hail, deliverer of the curse; Hail, call of Adam, the Lord is with you!" (Sticherà Prosomoia of the Vespers for the Feast of the Annunciation).⁸

The path of salvation for the recall of Adam is, in fact, a new creation: Christ, the New Adam, descends to reshape man with the cooperation of Mary, the New Eve; the deception and the chain of sin induced by

⁶ Preortia of the feast, Orthros, Ikos, Hymn of the humble George. *Anthologhion*, I, 926. Our emphasis.

⁷ Akathistos, *Horologion*, Rome, 1937, 887-900, quoted in *TMPM* I, 954-955. Our emphasis.

⁸ *Menea*, IV, 170, quoted in *TMPM*, I, 935. Our emphasis.

the serpent are dissolved and the access to Paradise is reopened so that Adam, hitherto exiled, can return. The joy of the fulfillment of this mystery shines forth in every hymn of the feast of the Nativity of the Lord, as an echo of the rejoicing of all creation, which heralds its fulfillment:

Rejoice, Jerusalem, be glad, all you who love Zion. Today the ancient bond of Adam's condemnation has been loosed; Paradise has been opened to us; the serpent has been destroyed, for now he has seen her whom he once deceived, become the Mother of the Creator. O abyss of the riches, wisdom and science of God! She who brought death to all flesh as the instrument of sin has become the firstfruits of salvation for all the world through the Mother of God, for from her the most perfect God is born a child: by His birth He seals her virginity, by His swaddling clothes He loosens the chains of sin, and by His infancy He heals Eve's painful pangs. Let all creation dance and rejoice, for Christ has come to recall them from exile and to save our souls.⁹ (Vespers of the Nativity of the Lord)

The work of remodelling and elevating the human person requires, as the liturgical texts first indicated, the "annihilation" that the Creator undertakes, stooping in compassion toward His creature, descending to the abyss of death. This descent into the depths of the earth, which began with the Incarnation and the birth in the cave of Bethlehem, continues with the immersion in the waters of the Jordan, foreshadowing the Passion and the death on the Cross, followed by the burial in the womb of the earth and the descent into the abyss of the underworld.¹⁰

Christ descends into the waves of the river with the human flesh assumed from the Virgin, in order to regenerate Adam's flesh and to elevate him to heaven, anticipating the mystery of the Passion:

⁹ Vespers, idiomela tone 4, by John Damascene the monk. *Anthologhion*, I, 1160.

¹⁰ BEINAERT, "Le symbolisme ascensionnel" [= BEINAERT L., "Le symbolisme ascensionnel dans la liturgie et la mystique chrétiennes", *Eranos Jabrbuch* XIX (1950)], 48.

With material flesh clothed in the immaterial fire of divinity, the Lord incarnate of the Virgin is enveloped in the waves of the Jordan: for He has glorified Himself. (...)

When by Your Epiphany You enlightened the universe, the brackish sea of unbelief fled, and the Jordan, which flowed downward, turned round, *lifting us up to heaven*; therefore, O Christ God, guard us on the heights of Your divine commandments, through the intercession of the Mother of God, and have mercy on us. (Orthros, Feast of the Holy Theophanies of Our Lord Jesus Christ)¹¹

According to primitive baptismal catechesis, such as that of St. Cyril of Jerusalem, the Lord, emerging from the waters of the Jordan, inaugurates the path of the elevation of the souls of the redeemed to the heights of the heavenly kingdom.¹² The ascension is accomplished by climbing the "steps" of the Passion: indeed, in contemplating the mystery of the Cross, homiletic and liturgical texts attribute the image of *the ladder* to the Cross itself, emphasizing the fulfillment of the prophecy announced in the vision of the Patriarch Jacob:

O extraordinary miracle! The breadth and length of the Cross are equal to heaven, for by divine grace it sanctifies the universe. In it the barbarian nations are conquered, by it the scepters of rulers are firmly established. O *divine ladder by which we ascend to heaven*, exalting with songs Christ the Lord! (Orthros, Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross)¹³

Come, faithful, let us worship the life-giving tree: Christ, the King of glory, who voluntarily stretched out His hands upon it, *has raised us to the ancient beatitude*, whom the enemy once made exiles from God, despoiling us by pleasure. (Orthros, Idiomela of Emperor Leo, Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross)¹⁴

¹¹ Odes 1 and 3, Canon of Cosmas, Orthros feast of the Holy Theophany of Our Lord Jesus Christ, in *Anthologhion*, I, 1274-1275. Our emphasis.

¹² BEINAERT, "Le symbolisme ascensionnel", 47, quoting Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechesis* III, 16, PG 33, 448 B.

¹³ Orthros, ode 9, troparion tone pl. 2. *Anthologhion*, I, 626. Our emphasis.

¹⁴ Orthros, idiomela of Emperor Leo, tone 2. *Anthologhion*, I, 628. Our emphasis.

In the light of the Gospel of John, which interprets the Crucifixion of the Lord as an "exaltation" and "glorification" (cf. *Jn* 8:28; 12:32-33), and of the Letter of St. Paul to the Philippians (cf. *Phil* 2:5-9), the Cross is revealed as a *ladder* that goes both ways:¹⁵ the Son of God, who humbled Himself in the Incarnation, now descends into the abyss of sin and death in order to "lift us up to the ancient blessedness". Having ascended the "ladder" of the Cross, Christ chooses to reopen to humanity the access to new life with the collaboration of the New Eve: with the human nature assumed from the Virgin, He is able descend into the darkness of death to trample it underfoot and annihilate its power:

Death, which came upon our race because of the fruit of the tree, is today destroyed by the Cross, for the curse that affected the whole race in the progenitor is annulled thanks to the offspring of the Mother of God: she we magnify all the powers of heaven. (Orthros, Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross)¹⁶

Christ, who overcame the sting of death and descended into the abyss of Hades to bring to the imprisoned there the good news of their liberation and of the opening of the gates of Paradise, opens the way of salvation by ascending with the human nature to the throne of glory which He had before with the Father:

The sword of fire no longer guards the gate of Eden: the tree of the cross has fallen upon it, to arrest it admirably. The sting of death and the victory of Hades have been driven away, and You have come, my Savior, crying to the inhabitants of Hades: Enter paradise again! (Orthros Sunday of the Adoration of the Cross)¹⁷

¹⁵ MIHOC, "Crucea, adânc al deșertării și scară către cer" [= MIHOC P. V., "Crucea, adânc al deșertării și scară către cer" ("The Cross, abyss of self-emptying and ladder to heaven"), in <https://ziarullumina.ro/teologie-si-spiritualitate/evanghelia-de-duminica/crucea-adanc-al-desertarii-si-scara-cartre-cer-94542.html>], accessed the 18.05.23.

¹⁶ Orthros, ode 9, irmos. *Anthologhion*, I, 624.

¹⁷ Orthros, Ode 6, ikos, Sunday of Adoration of the Cross the third Sunday of fasting of Lent. *Anthologhion*, II, 713. Our emphasis.

Descending from heaven to earth, You took up with You, for You are God, the human nature that was in the prison of Hades, and by Your ascension, O Christ, You took it up to heaven and made it a partaker with You of the throne of Your Father, for You are merciful and the friend of men. (Orthros of the Feast of the Ascension of the Lord)¹⁸

Let us recall the words of the Lord in His conversation with Nicodemus on the subject of rebirth from above (cf. Jn 3:13): "No one has ever ascended into heaven except the Son of Man, who descended from heaven". In this double movement of the descent-ascension of the Redeemer, summarized by the image of the *ladder* of the Cross, the presence of the Mother of God, willed by the Lord, at the foot of the Cross is essential. Although the image of the "ladder" is not explicitly used in reference to the Virgin Mother on Golgotha, the reality of her mission of mediation signified by it is reaffirmed and expanded by the Redeemer Himself: that "yes" that Mary pronounced at the Annunciation is fully renewed on Calvary; her mediation in the mystery of the Incarnation now reaches its climax, when the New Adam chooses to extend the motherhood of the New Eve now to all men. The Virgin Mother, praised in the feast of the Annunciation as the "high ladder that Jacob saw" by which God descended, becomes the mediator of men born by the Holy Spirit from the water and blood that flow from the pierced side of the Redeemer:¹⁹

You have become, O Virgin, the great mountain on which Christ has taken up his abode, as the divine David proclaims; *through you we have been lifted up to heaven*, made sons by the Spirit, O most blessed one. (Theotokos Sunday of the Adoration of the Cross)²⁰

¹⁸ Orthros, kathisma tone pl. 1. *Anthologhion*, III, 446.

¹⁹ MIHOC, "Crucea, adânc al deșertării și scară către cer", in <https://ziarullumina.ro/teologie-si-spiritualitate/evanghelia-de-duminica/crucea-adanc-al-desertarii-si-scara-cartre-cer-94542.html>, accessed the 18.05.23.

²⁰ Orthros, ode 9, theotokion Sunday of the Adoration of the Cross on the third Sunday of fasting of Lent. *Anthologhion*, II, 716. Our emphasis. Here the liturgical text uses another image from the ascension repertoire, that of *the mountain*, in reference to the Virgin Mary.

Come near and draw from the inexhaustible rivers that flow through the grace of the Cross: behold, we see before us the Sacred Wood, fountain of gifts, irrigated with the water and blood of the Sovereign of the Universe, *who voluntarily rose on it and lifted up mortals*. (Troparion Sunday of the Adoration of the Cross)²¹

Toward the Mother who accompanies her crucified Son on Calvary are addressed the petitions of the faithful who trust in her maternal intercession:

To you, O Virgin Mother of God, *who are the mediatrix of the salvation of our race*, we give praise: in the flesh which He assumed from you, accepting to undergo the Passion of the Cross, your Son and our God has redeemed us from corruption, as the friend of men. (Theotokia Apolitikia Anastasima)²²

Since we have no *parresia* for our many sins, O Virgin Mother of God, pray to the One who was born of you. For the prayer of a mother can do much to make the Lord merciful. Do not despise the supplications of sinners, O Most Holy One, for He is merciful and mighty to save, who also agreed to suffer for us. (Theotokion Antiphons of the Passion, Good Friday)²³

The privileged role of the Virgin Mother confirmed by her Son on Golgotha is revealed with renewed power at the moment of the birth of the Church in the Upper Room and is prolonged even after the Dormition of the Mother of God. The Virgin is the first creature to follow the ascending path opened by the Risen Son, having conformed her whole life to that of the Savior; she inaugurates the entrance into the heavenly glory prepared by Christ for every baptized person "reborn from above." After the Passion-glorification of her Son through the cross, from being a *heavenly ladder* for God the Virgin

²¹ Laudes, troparion tone 4, Sunday of the Adoration of the Cross on the third Sunday of fasting of Lent. *Anthologhion*, II, 717. Our emphasis.

²² Theotokia Apolitiki Anastasima, Troparion mode III, *Horologhion*, 771, quoted in *TMPM*, I, 926. Our emphasis.

²³ Theotokion 8 of the Antiphons of the Passion, Good Friday, *Triodion*, Rome, 1879, 666ss., quoted in *TMPM*, I, 931.

Mother becomes a *heavenly ladder* for men by her own example and powerful maternal intercession.²⁴

In your birth you preserved your virginity and in your dormition you did not abandon the world, O Mother of God. You have entered into life as the Mother of life, and *by your intercession* you deliver our souls from death. (Troparion of the Feast of the Dormition of the Blessed Virgin Mary)²⁵

The great theologian-hymnographers of the late seventh and early eighth centuries, such as Germanus of Constantinople, Andrew of Crete and John Damascene, who as it were closed the Greek Patristic era,²⁶ emphasize the intercessory role of the Mother of God confirmed by Christ at the culmination of His life. We reproduce some excerpts of great poetic beauty from Damascene's homilies composed for the feast of the Dormition of the Virgin:

I was almost leaving out Jacob's ladder (cf. *Gen.* 28:12). Well? Is it not clear to all that it prefigured and represents your image? Just as that one saw heaven united to earth by means of the extreme points of the ladder and the angels descending and ascending along it and He who is truly the Strong One and the Invincible symbolically wrestling with him (cf. *Gen.* 32:25); so also you, *having become the mediator and ladder for the descent to us of God*, who took on the weakness of our substance, embracing it and uniting it intimately to Himself, and made man a spirit that sees (cf. *Gen.* 32:31), have reunited what was divided. Therefore the angels came down to Him to serve Him (cf. *Mt.* 4:11) as God and Lord, and men, leading an evangelical life, are lifted up to heaven. (Homily I on the Dormition)²⁷

²⁴ MIHOC, “Crucea, adânc al deșertării și scară către cer”, in <https://ziarullumina.ro/teologie-si-spiritualitate/evanghelia-de-duminica/crucea-adanc-al-desertarii-si-scara-cartre-cer-94542.html>, accessed the 18.05.23.

²⁵ *Apolitikion* for the feast of the Dormition of the Holy Mother of God, *TMPM*, I, 939, quoting *Menea*, VI, 40. Our emphasis.

²⁶ TONIOLO E., “Padri della Chiesa”, in DE FIORES S. - DE MEO S., *Nuovo Dizionario di Mariologia*, Paoline, Cinisello Balsamo 1983, 1079.

²⁷ John Damascene, *Homily I on the Dormition*, 8; *TMPM*, II, 515; *PG* 96, 699-722. Our emphasis.

The hymnographer contemplates the Virgin as the compendium and fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies, dwelling on the image of *the ladder* at the end of his homily: ladder-mediation for God's descent to man and ladder for man's elevation to God. Significantly, in other homiletic compositions, the author speaks of the Mother of God's passage to eternal life using the image of death as a ladder to reach immortality. The Mother follows and conforms to the path traced out by her Son, which is the only possible path to full life: the ascent to heaven presupposes the descent into death,²⁸ thanks to the saving action of the Risen Lord, death loses its sting and can neither hold back nor corrupt the flesh of the Ever-Virgin, but is transformed into an instrument, a "ladder," to enter life:

Today *the symbolic and living ladder, by which the Most High, once descended, made Himself visible on earth and lived with men, using death as a ladder has ascended from earth to heaven.* (Homily III on the Dormition)²⁹

The Blessed Mother, who opens the way to the heavenly homeland and intercedes for all humanity, is praised with gratitude by the mouths of the progenitors Adam and Eve in the name of all the redeemed:

Then, yes, Adam and Eve, the progenitors of the lineage, with lips full of joy, cried out loudly: 'Blessed are you, O daughter, who has blotted out for us the penalty of transgression! (...) We had closed the Garden of Paradise, but You have made the Tree of Life accessible. Because of us, from the good things had come pains; because of you from pains greater goods have returned to us. And how will you taste death, o you who are immaculate? For you death will be a bridge to life, *a ladder to heaven*, a passage to immortality. (Sermon II on the Dormition)³⁰

²⁸ BEINAERT, "Le symbolisme ascensionnel", 48.

²⁹ John Damascene, *Homily III on the Dormition*, 2; *TMPM*, II, 538; *PG* 96, 753-761. Our emphasis.

³⁰ John Damascene, *Homily II on the Dormition*, 8; *TMPM*, II, 526-527; *PG* 96, 721-754. Our emphasis.

Iconographic references

The depiction of the Ladder of Jacob's Dream is found sporadically in early Christian iconography, both within the funerary scope (table 1) and in that of ordinary worship church-buildings for as early as the IVth century,³¹ as an expression of the Patristic typological reading of Old Testament passages illuminating the mystery of the Incarnation.³²

The abundant homiletic and hymnic literature, which devoted special attention to typological Marian images during the Christmas season, finds an iconographic synthesis in the depictions of illustrated

³¹ NUZZO D., "Giacobbe", in BISCONTI F., *Temi di iconografia paleocristiana*, Città del Vaticano, 2000, 188-190. See also the reliefs of some sarcophagi such as the one from the catacomb of St. Sebastian, which dates from the IVth century. For the monumental sphere of ordinary buildings of worship, the scholar mentions the mosaics of the basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome from the early Vth century (the scene is the result of later restorations, which most likely respected the original scene), or the mosaic depictions (now lost) of the Vth century basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls. Another work dating from the IVth century, this time a minor art object, is the ivory Brescia Casket reserved in the Civic Art and History Museum. See also CRIPPA M.A. - ZIBAWI M., *Early Christian Art. L'arte paleocristiana. Visione e spazio liturgico*, Jaca Book 1998, Milan, 170, table 56.

³² GRABAR A., *L'arte paleocristiana*, Rizzoli 1967, Milano, 230-231. The antecedent of Christian depictions is the fresco on the Septentrional wall of the Synagogue of Dura Europos, Syria, dating from the first half of the IIIrd century. In the synagogue's iconographic program as a whole, the depiction of Jacob's Dream is part of the cycle of narrative scenes dedicated to the providential history of Israel, in which Yahweh's universal sovereignty is manifested, assuring His saving intervention and revealed in the promised messianic kingdom. See also GRABAR A., "Le thème religieux des fresques de la Synagogue de Doura (245-256 après J.C.)," in *L'art de la fin de l'Antiquité et du Moyen Age*, Paris, Collège de France 1968, II, 59. 689-734, table 6; *Revue de l'histoire des Religions*, CXXIII, 2-3, et CXXIV, 1, 1941; *Las vías de la creación en la iconografía cristiana*, Alianza, Madrid 2003, 96. The scholar recognizes in the composition of the scene inspiration from Daniel's vision of the four beasts, symbolizing the four universal kingdoms, as a reference to the establishment of the Messiah's kingdom after the fall of the last of these four impious kingdoms, the kingdom of Edom. See also BIANCHI D., "Il sogno della scala da Giacobbe a Giovanni Climaco: un percorso tra arte ebraica e cristiana", in BARICCI E., *Sogno e surreale nella letteratura e nelle arti ebraiche*, *Consonanze* 5, (2019), 186ff.

manuscripts from the ninth century onward (table 2),³³ and knows a significant development in the XIIth-XIIth centuries in both East and West. For the East we mention the miniatures in the illustrated manuscripts of the Homilies on the Virgin, composed by James, monk of the monastery of Kokkinobaphos.³⁴ In these miniatures placed as frontispieces before each of the homilies (distinct from the narrative scenes that illustrate the text), the depiction of Jacob's Dream and the vision of the Heavenly Ladder precede the sermon on the Nativity of the Virgin (table 3):³⁵ the ladder that rests on the ground, on the stone

³³ SCHILLER, *Iconography* [= SCHILLER G., *Iconography of Christian Art*, Greenwich 1972], I, 13, 71; NERSESSIAN, "Iconography of Paraclesion" [= NERSESSIAN S., "Program and Iconography of Paraclesion", in UNDERWOOD P., *The Kariye Djami*, New York 1966], 311. The oldest preserved depiction of four of the most common prefigurations dates back to the IXth century: this is the Homilies manuscript of Gregory of Nazianzus MS Paris gr. 510, which depicts the Burning Bush, the Flowering Rod of Aaron, the Closed Door and Gideon's Fleece on the same page where the Nativity scene appears; the depiction of the Jacob's Dream Ladder theme precedes Homily 28 "On Theology," which interprets the Genesis 28:10-15 passage in relation to the mystery of the Incarnation (the angel represents the Word made man, the stone is Christ consecrated for us), without explicitly alluding to the Virgin Mother of God. See BRUBAKER, *Vision and meaning* [= BRUBAKER L., *Vision and meaning in ninth-century Byzantium. Image and exegesis in the Homilies of Gregory of Nazianzus*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2001], 207-209. See also GOTIA, "L'Annunciazione con simboli profetici" [= GOTIA I., "L'Annunciazione con simboli profetici. Le Porte Regali dell'iconostasi della cattedrale della Santissima Trinità di Blaj, Romania", *STUDIA UBB THEOL. CATH.*, LXIII, 1-2, (2018)], 105-144. For the XIth-XIIth centuries, the illustrations in the Evangelary of Vysehrad, Prague (1085-1086), those in the Legendary of Citeaux (1110-1120) or those in the Stammheim Missal (1160-1180) bear witness to this for the West.

³⁴ NERSESSIAN, "Iconography of Paraclesion", 312. There are preserved two copies of these manuscripts: Parisinus gr. 1208 and Vaticanus gr. 1162. See also GRABAR, "Les Sources peintures byzantins des XIII^e- XIV^e siècles" [= A. GRABAR, "Les sources des peintures byzantins des XIII^e-XIV^e siècles", *CabArch* 12 (1962)], 351-380.

³⁵ NERSESSIAN, "Iconography of Paraclesion", 312. The other Old Testament Marian prefigurations depicted are: Moses in front of the Burning Bush, which precedes the sermon on the Presentation in the Temple; Moses distributing the staffs to the high priests and the Flowering Staff to Aaron is the frontispiece for the sermon on the Visitation; and the miracle of Gideon's fleece of wool is the frontispiece for the sermon on the Annunciation.

that Jacob placed it as a pillow, rises up to heaven from where the Word sends His angels to bring His saving message to mankind.

Also dating to the same period is the icon of the Virgin Kykotissa from the Monastery of St. Catherine on Mount Sinai (table 4), which associates the mystery of the Incarnation with Old Testament prefigurations.³⁶ The enthroned Virgin with the Child is depicted in the center, while the upper part of the composition represents Christ in glory, flanked by the four living beings and four seraphim; all around are arranged on five levels the paired figures of the prophets and patriarchs.³⁷ Although these are portrayed accompanied only by the symbol of their prophecies or the scroll with the text of their vaticinium,³⁸ for Jacob the iconographer chose to illustrate the context of the vision, with the sleeping patriarch lying on the ground, with an angel ascending the rungs of the ladder towards heaven. Moreover, the interpretive key to the icon's composition is provided by the

³⁶ IDEM, 313. This Constantinopolitan icon of the enthroned Virgin and Child, called Kykkotissa, is a copy of another icon of the Virgin, sent by Emperor Alexios Comnenos to the Kykko monastery in Cyprus. See WEITZMANN, The Icon [= WEITZMANN K., The Icon, Evans Brothers Limited, London, 1982], 17. See also the twelfth-century icon of the Virgin Kykkotissa from Mount Athos (now in the Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg, Russia), and which bears strong compositional and stylistic similarities to the icon of the Virgin Kykkotyssa from Mon. St. Catherine on Mount Sinai. Both icons depict the enthroned Virgin and Child, surrounded by prophets with Marian symbols. See PIATNITSKY, BADDLY, BRUNNER, *Sinai, Byzantium, Russia* [= PIATNITSKY Y., BADDLY O., BRUNNER E., *Sinai, Byzantium, Russia. Orthodox Art from the sixth to the twentieth century*, St. Catherine Foundation, London, 2000], 110, table B 90.

³⁷ PIATNITSKY, BADDLY, BRUNNER, *Sinai, Byzantium, Russia*, 110. Significantly, the icon's compositional scheme seems to suggest the arrangement of the monumental iconographic program of a church interior: Christ in Glory in the dome, the Virgin and Child in the apse, and Joachim, Anne, and the prophets on the side walls.

³⁸ IDEM. The other patriarchs and prophets depicted are: Moses with the burning bush, Aaron, Ezekiel with the closed door and David with the temple, Balaam points to the star, Habakkuk with the mountain, Isaiah with a cherubim purifying his mouth with the burning carbuncle, Daniel with the stone detached from the mountain, Gideon with the fleece of wool.

inscription placed under the throne of the Virgin with the Child, taken from the Hymn on the Nativity of Mary composed by Roman the Melodist: "Joachim and Ann conceived, Adam and Eve were set free."³⁹ The epigraph, interpreted in connection with the scene of the vision of Jacob's Ladder, would take on the meaning of liberation through the Savior born of the Virgin Mother, who makes possible again man's access to communion with God.

In monumental iconography, we note, on the one hand, that in various church buildings the representation of Jacob's Ladder was included in the extended cycle of Old Testament scenes, arranged in the upper register of the side walls of the nave, which narrates the salvation story of the First Covenant, in parallel with the cycle of New Testament scenes from the life of Christ: this is the case with mosaics of Santa Maria Nuova cathedral in Monreale (table 5), or with those in the Palatine Chapel in Palermo, both dating from the XIIth century and found in Sicily.⁴⁰

On the other hand, we notice, as early as the XIth century, a tendency to reserve for the representation of Jacob's Ladder certain privileged placements, with the intention of emphasizing an explicit connection with the mystery of the Incarnation contemplated in the liturgical

³⁹ THOMAS, "Christian in the Islamic East" [= THOMAS T. K., "Christian in the Islamic East", in EVANS H. C. –WIXOM W. D., *The glory of Byzantium. Art and culture of the Middle Byzantine Era*, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 1997], 372, table 244.

⁴⁰ Other examples: the frescoes of the Marcellina church (Tivoli, Italia, XIIth-XIIIth century); the XIth century frescoes of Saint Angelo in formis basilica, Italy. See QUATTROCCHI, "Strategie artistiche" [= QUATTROCCHI C., "Strategie artistiche per la costruzione ecclesiologica del *patrimonium sancti Petri*. Tre cicli biblici nell'Italia mediana fra XII e XIII secolo", in SCIREA F. *L'Esegesi in figura. Cicli dell'Antico Testamento nella pittura murale medievale*, Publications de l'École française de Rome, 2022], 231-254, footnote 34. <http://books.openedition.org/efr/5030B>. These monuments continue a pattern of arrangement of monumental iconographic programs found as early as the Vth century, as in the case of the mosaics of the basilica Santa Maria Maggiore and that of St. Paul's Outside the Walls, both in Rome. See here footnote 31.

context. Thus we find it depicted in the area of the sanctuary of the cathedral of St. Sophia in Ohrid (1037-1056), Macedonia, in the upper register of the northern side wall (table 6), along with another Old Testament scene (The three Hebrew children in the furnace) and two scenes from the life of St. Basil the Great (St. Basil celebrating the Divine Liturgy and the Vision of St. Basil); on the southern wall of the sanctuary two Old Testament scenes from the life of Abraham (The hospitality of Abraham and the Sacrifice of Isaac, each divided into two episodes) are depicted in parallel.⁴¹ This iconographic choice underscores the significance of the two closely related central themes present in the sanctuary's iconography, namely, the Incarnation (the Virgin Mother enthroned with the Child Jesus, in the upper register of the apse) and the Eucharistic Sacrifice (Christ celebrating the heavenly Divine Liturgy in the presence of the apostles, in the central register of the apse).⁴² Dwelling especially on the interpretation of the scene of the Ladder of Jacob's dream, according to André Grabar's observation, the mystery of the communion of heaven and earth announced in the Old Testament episode is realized through the mediation of the Virgin Mary in the Incarnation, when the divine and the human are united, a mystery that is prolonged in the bloodless Eucharistic sacrifice.⁴³

Let us mention some other later examples with the depiction of Jacob's Ladder in the Proskomidia of the Protaton monastery church in Mount Athos (XIVth century) and the contemporary fresco in the Dečani

⁴¹ GRABAR, "Sainte Sophie d'Ohrid" [= GRABAR A., "Les peintures murales dans le choeur de Sainte Sophie d'Ohrid", *CahArch* 15 (1965)], 260-262. See also QUATTROCCHI, "Strategie artistica", footnote 34.

⁴² GRABAR, "Sainte Sophie d'Ohrid", 259. The scholar interprets this scene as a depiction of the Proskomedia prayer that the priest utters after the Great Entrance procession during the Divine Liturgy.

⁴³ IDEM, 261.

monastery church in Serbia (table 7)⁴⁴ in the same location:⁴⁵ the visual connection between this sanctuary space where the priest prepares the Eucharistic gifts of bread and wine for the celebration of the Divine Liturgy and the painted image of the Old Testament passage reflects the union between the prophesied mystery of the Incarnation and its sacramental actualization in the liturgical celebration. Although in Protaton's fresco the ladder resting on the earth reaches the sky indicated only by the luminous clypeus, at Dečani in the celestial sphere the figure of the Virgin Mary is depicted in a prayerful attitude, prefiguring the realization of the mystery of the Incarnation through her response of assent to the divine will.

Another privileged location for the representation of Jacob's Ladder is that of the *narthex* (or that of the *exonarthex*), which provides access toward the nave of the church building. This passage area between the profane space and sacred space symbolizes the earth-heaven passage and is equivalent in meaning to the facade, the door and the architectural barrier between the nave and the sanctuary.⁴⁶ We recall the frescoes of the church St. Mary Peribleptos in Ohrid (today St. Clement's, 1294-1295)⁴⁷ (table 8) and the slightly later Paraclesion frescoes of the Church of the Holy Savior of Chora in Constantinople (today Kariye Djami in Istanbul, Turkey, 1315-1320) (table 10).⁴⁸ In

⁴⁴ ȘTEFĂNESCU, *L'illustration des Liturgies* [= ȘTEFĂNESCU I. D., *L'illustration des Liturgies dans l'art de Byzance et de l'Orient*, Bruxelles, Institut de Philologie et d'Histoire Orientale, 1936], II, 133-134.

⁴⁵ www.decani.org/en/photo-albums-church/decani-frescoes/fresco-cycles/prophecy-of-salvation, accessed il 14.01.2024.

⁴⁶ CHAMPEAUX – STERCKX, *Symboles*, 152. See also MUZJ, *Mistagogia* [= MUZJ M. G., *Mistagogia ed edificio ecclesiale*, Class taught at the Pontificia Università Gregoriana, Rome, 2006], 26.

⁴⁷ SCHROEDER, "Looking with words and images" [= SCHROEDER R., "Looking with words and images: staging monastic contemplation in a late Byzantine church", in *Word & Image* 28:2 (2012)], 117-134, table 3.

⁴⁸ NERSESSIAN, "Iconography of Paraclesion", 311ss. The scholar also mentions the frescoes in the northern portico of the church of St. Sophia in Trebizond, Turkey, from 1260, depicting the Ladder of Jacob's Dream, Jacob's Struggle with the Angel, the Burning Bush, the Tree of Jesse's and the Hospitality of Abraham. In the

Ohrid the glorious figure of the winged Christ Emmanuel, enclosed within a clypeus sustained by four angels, stands out in the center of the vault, while on the tympanum above the central door one can see the depiction of the Christmas stichera (table 9), with the Virgin Mother enthroned with the Blessing Child Jesus: the shepherds, the magi, the angels, the personifications of the earth and the desert, along with the assembly of the Church, surround the throne of the Virgin, each offering their gifts, as indicated in the text of the Christmas hymn; then, the scenes decorating the other walls of the narthex form a cycle of typologic compositions inspired by Old Testament passages, and recall the role of the Virgin in the economy of salvation as the instrument of the Incarnation: Moses before the burning bush; the Ladder of Jacob's dream (in the tympanum of the west wall); Nebuchadnezzar's dream with the stone detached from the mountain and Daniel explaining the dream to him; Moses and Aaron before the Tabernacle of Meeting; Ezekiel's Closed Door and the episode of the angel purifying Isaiah's lips with burning coal; Wisdom built herself a dwelling place; Solomon's bed.⁴⁹

Significantly, in each of these typological images (also present in a concise formula in the icon of the Virgin Kykotissa of the Monastery of St. Catherine on Mount Sinai mentioned earlier) there is an explicit reference to the mystery of the Incarnation through the depiction of the Mother of God within a clypeus (either half-length alone or with

exonarthex of the Church of the Holy Apostles in Salonica, frescoes from the late XIVth-early XVth century depict, in addition to the Ladder of Jacob's Dream (northeast wall), the Tree of Jesse, the Tent of Meeting, Gideon with Wool, and the Burning Bush. See also www.journeymacedonia.com/churchmonasteries/ohrid-clement-our-lady-the-most-glorious/nggallery, accessed the 26.11.2023. The depiction of Jacob's Dream Ladder and "Wisdom who built herself a house" is also mentioned in the iconographic program of the Western Chapel of St. Theodore Stratilate Church in Novgorod, Russia, dating from the late XIVth century. See LAZAREV V., *L'arte dell'antica Russia. Mosaici e affreschi*, Jaca Book, Milano 2000, 280-281.

⁴⁹ NERSESSIAN, "Iconography of Paraclesion", 314.

the Child Jesus),⁵⁰ or, as in the scene of Jacob's Ladder, through the depiction of Christ alone, placed in the clypeus of the celestial sphere.

At Chora, the dome of the Paraccesion hosts the medallion of the Virgin with the Emmanuel at half-length, surrounded by angels, while the following Old Testament prefigurations are deployed in the lower levels: along with the scene of the Ladder of Jacob's dream and that of God's revelation to Moses in the burning bush (paired on the same north-east tympanum of the Paraccesion), the other compositions center mainly on the theme of the entry of the Ark of the Covenant into the Holy of Holies (the procession with the Ark of the Covenant, the procession with the sacred vessels of the Tabernacle, Solomon and the people of Israel before the Temple, the deposition of the Ark in the Holy of Holies, Aaron and his sons before the altar). Therefore, the role of the Mother of God to be the Ark of the New Covenant in which the incarnate Word of God dwells and to mediate man's entry into the heavenly Tabernacle is emphasized.⁵¹

Before going further, it should be mentioned that in the same period of the XIIIth-XIVth centuries the narthex (or exonarthex) area of the church building was also assigned to the depiction of various liturgical

⁵⁰ In the composition with the Tent of Meeting, the clypeus with the Virgin is depicted several times: on the Ark of the Covenant, on the urn with the manna, on the menorah and on the altar.

⁵¹ NERSESIAN, "Iconography of Paraccesion", 317ss. In addition to the scenes mentioned above, the prophecy of *Isaiah* 37:21 and the defeat of the Assyrians through the intervention of the archangel Michael is also depicted, probably as an expression of the personal devotion of the commissioner Theodore Metochites to the archangel St. Michael. Then, according to scholar Sirarpie der Nersessian observations, the emphasis on the role of "Ark" and "Temple of God" assigned to the Virgin Mary and indicated by the Old Testament typological images of the Paraccesion is also present in the four scenes grouped in the central axis between the two narthexes of the church, which are The Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple, The Virgin in the Temple receiving "the bread of the angels," The Virgin Instructed in the Temple, and The Virgin receiving purple to weave the temple veil. See also anche ARYUREK E., "The Marian iconography of the west bay in the Paraccesion of Kariye", in *Sanat Triji Yilligi* XV, Istanbul 2002, 2-4.

hymns of the Christmas cycle (as we have already seen in the case of the church St. Mary Peribleptos in Ohrid),⁵² and that they often include references to the image of Jacob's Ladder in a more or less succinct formula. In Prizren (1308), for example, in the exonarthex of the church of Bogorodica Ljeviska, Serbia, we find in addition to the extended scene of Jacob's Ladder (on the gable of the northern bay) the composition of the Tree of Jesse and that inspired by the Christmas hymn "From on high the prophets" with the figures of the prophets with the symbols of their prophecies (including Jacob with the symbol of the ladder) grouped around the figure of the Virgin with the Child in half-length in the tympanum above the door leading toward the nave of the church.⁵³ In the exonarthex of the Church of the Virgin Odigitria of the Patriarchate of Pec, Serbia (1334), on the intrados of the arch placed south of the tympanum with the Virgin Source of Life above the doorway are unfolded the figures of six prophets with their

⁵² SENDLER, *Icone Madre di Dio* [= SENDLER E., *Le icone bizantine della Madre di Dio*, San Paolo, Torino 1995], 177-207. See also GRABAR, "Origine" [= GRABAR A., "L'origine des façades peintes des églises moldaves", *AAM*, 1968, II], 906 ; DUFRENNE S., "L'Enrichissement du programme iconographique dans les églises byzantines du XIII^{ème} siècle", in DJURIC V., *L'Art byzantin du XIII^{ème} siècle*. Symposium de Sopocani, Beograd 1967, 43. The liturgical feasts to which these images correspond are the two Sundays preceding Christmas, namely, the Lord's Ancestors Sunday and Christ's Genealogy Sunday. The liturgical texts for the Sunday of the Lord's Ancestors were composed in the mid-XIth century by Christopher of Mytilene and inserted in the XIIIth century in the Menaion for the month of December. See UNDERWOOD, *Kariye Djami* [= UNDERWOOD P., *The Kariye Djami*, New York 1966], 54.

⁵³ NERSESSIAN, "Iconography of Paraclesion", 315. For a more in-depth analysis on the theme of the depiction of the hymns "From Above the Prophets" and the Tree of Jesse see GOTIA, "L'Annunciazione con simboli profetici", 105-144; IDEM, *Quale è la nostra origine? L'Albero di Iesse e l'Iconostasi della Cattedrale della Santissima Trinita di Blaj, Romania*, in *Studi sull'Oriente Cristiano*, 22.1(2018), Roma], 143-169. In great probability, the iconographic motif of the sleeping Jesse from whose side the trunk of his lineage is born (*Isaiah* 11:1) followed the compositional pattern of the scene with Jacob's Dream. See SCHILLER, *Iconography*, I, 17.

symbols, with Jacob standing pointing to the ladder that reaches to the celestial sphere (table 11).⁵⁴

The choice of the location assigned for representation of these iconographic compositions centered on the mystery of the Incarnation is particularly significant: in this zone of transition from profane to sacred space, iconography points toward the mystery of the descent of the Word of God from heaven to earth through the mediation of the Virgin Mother, with a view to the restoration of the communion of man with God. With the movement initiated by the passage from the narthex toward the nave of the church building, symbolizing Christ's descent and entrance into the reality of the human condition that He assumes and saves, is joined by the ascending movement, which reaches its culmination in the zone of passage between the nave and the sanctuary (horizontally) and between the nave and the dome (vertically), and which symbolizes the passage from the earthly to the heavenly sphere.⁵⁵ The re-opening of the access between the two spheres is made possible by the Savior's entry into the heavenly sanctuary through the "veil" of His flesh offered as a sacrifice on the altar of the cross and glorified in the resurrection. When in the apex of the architectural barrier between the two spaces stands the cross, it is made manifest that it is true "ladder" connecting the two worlds by

⁵⁴ NERSESSIAN, "Iconography of Paraclesion", 316. See also www.blagofund.org/Archives/Pec/Narthex/Pictures/EasterNave/5thEasternArch/IMG_3969.html, accessed the 18.01.2024. The most precise location is the intrados of the south arch of the fifth bay of the eastern nave of the exonarthex. The iconographer placed the celestial sphere in the center of the intrados and arranged the figure of Jacob on one side and the figure of Ezekiel with his symbols on the other, so that the staircase and the door touch the celestial sphere. On the south arch are depicted scenes from the Menologion of Dec. 25-28, with the Nativity of Christ in the upper register, then the Phunga in Egypt, the martyrdom of St. Stephen the deacon, and the 20000 martyrs of Nicomedia.

⁵⁵ SCHNEIDER, "Le haut et le bas" [= SCHNEIDER P., "Le haut et le bas. Réflexions sur l'architecture proto-chrétienne et byzantine", *Esprit* 200 (1964)], 23-40. CHAMPEAUX – STERCKX, *Symboles*, 128. MUZJ M. G., *Visione e presenza* [= MUZJ M. G., *Visione e presenza*, Milano, Matriona, 1995], 55.

means of that two-way movement: the descent into the abism of death and the victorious ascent to heaven.⁵⁶

We point out that, especially from the XIIIth-XIVth centuries onward, an iconographic interpretation of the Passion cycle spread in the Byzantine sphere, according to which Christ is depicted in the act of climbing the cross, ascending on a ladder that rests on the horizontal arm of the cross.⁵⁷ It emphasizes the Savior's willingness in the sacrifice of the Passion and His obedience to the Father's will, according to the words of the Savior Himself: "This is why the Father loves Me: because I give My life, only to take it up again. No one takes it away from Me: I give it from Myself. I have the power to give it and the power to take it back again." (Jn. 10:17-18). We recall, for example, the frescoes in the Church of the Virgin Peribleptos in Ohrid (1295), those in the Church of St. Nicholas in Prilep (1298; table 12), those in the Church of St. George in Staro Nagoricane (1317), all three in Macedonia, or those in the Dochiaruou Monastery on Mount Athos (XVIth century). The scene is part of the Passion cycle reproduced on the side walls of the nave of the church building.

⁵⁶ BEINAERT, "Le symbolisme ascensionnel", 48. See also CHEVALIER – GHEERBRANT, "Scala", 890. Generally, in the Byzantine area the cross crowns the iconostasis, even the most simplified iconostases; however, there are churches that have an iconostasis with only one level, that of the despotic icons, without a cross crowning the architrave, as for example in various churches in Cyprus.

⁵⁷ SCHILLER, *Iconography*, II, 87. This iconographic motif originated in the East and spread to the West, mainly to Italy. The oldest preserved example is a miniature from Vehapar's Armenian Gospel Book, Matenadaran, from the XIth century. See the study of Victoria Emily Jones in www.artandtheology.org/2023/03//29/the-ascent-of-the-cross/, accessed the 18.01.2024. See also MILLET G., *Recherches sur l'iconographie de l'Evangile aux XIV^e, XV^e et XVI^e siècles d'après des monuments de Mistra, de la Macédoine et du Mont Athos*, E. de Boccard, Paris 1960, 388; EORSI A., "Haec scala significat ascensum virtutum. Remarks on the Iconography of Christ mounting the Cross on a Ladder", *Arte Cristiana* LXXXV (1997), 151-166. This parallel between Jacob's ladder with Christ's ascending path to His immolation on the cross and resurrection is echoed in the teaching of the monk St. John Climacus on the Ladder of Paradise, an ascetic path of conformation with the life of Jesus. In the present research we do not dwell on the analysis of this topic, which would require a separate study.

Beneath the cross, on which Christ ascended to "draw all to Him" (cf. *Jn.* 12:32), the Virgin Mother stands in a contemplative-prayerful attitude (tables 13-14). With her upright posture, echoing the vertical of the cross, the Virgin expresses her unreserved assent to her Son's mission⁵⁸ and participates in it, converting herself into the "ladder" that unites heaven and earth. The intercession of the Crucified Lord for the salvation of mankind is joined by the intercession of the Mother: chosen by the Savior to be the New Eve, "mother of the living," Mary accepts with a prayerful gesture her mission to lead the children born "of water and the Spirit" to full communion with God.

This mission is made more explicit in the depiction of the Virgin in the midst of the apostles at the moment of Christ's ascension-glorification, a scene placed on the vault of the sanctuary (as at Panagia Araku of Lagoudera, Cyprus, 1192), or in the lower part of the central dome of the church (as at Hagia Sophia of Thessalonica, IXth century; tables 15-16; or at St. Mark's in Venice, XIIth century), thus on the same vertical axis altar-cross-dome.⁵⁹ As the scholar Maria Giovanna Muzj argues, it is, however, not a contemplation of the historical event of Christ's Ascension into heaven (the presence of the Virgin is not explicitly referred to in the Gospels), but a vision of the invisible presence of the glorious Lord in the midst of His Church.⁶⁰ In the mosaic of Hagia Sophia of Thessalonica, the praying Virgin, in a frontal position, is represented in the midst of the apostles witnessing the theophany, enveloped in the light of the glorious Lord. For the interpretation of the composition, it is important to evoke the fact that, in both

⁵⁸ MUZJ, "Maria e i tempi dell'attesa" [= MUZJ M. G., "Maria e i tempi dell'attesa", *Riparazione mariana* 1991/2], 14-15; IDEM, "La Vergine Madre e la Trinità nell'iconografia cristiana", *Acta Congressus mariologici-mariani interantionalis in civitate Romae anno 2000 celebrati*, Pont. Academia Mariana Internationalis, Città del Vaticano 2004, 466-467.

⁵⁹ GRABAR A., *L'Iconoclasmе byzantin*, Flammarion, Paris 1984, 268, 283. According to Grabar, the church of St. Sophia in Thessalonica is said to be the oldest preserved monument that features the depiction of Christ's Ascension in the dome.

⁶⁰ Muzj, "Maria e i tempi dell'attesa", 15.

homiletic and iconographic reflection, the mystery of Christ's glorification and Ascension to heaven has often been paralleled with Jacob's Dream, as the fulfillment of the prophetic vision.⁶¹ In this light, a new nuance of the meaning of the gesture of Mary's arms opened upward in prayer is revealed: it sums up the attitude of her whole life, that of an active openness to the divine will, translated into that "Yes" to the Savior's descent and entrance into the world in the Incarnation, a faithful "Yes" renewed at every step of the redemptive plan, culminating in the return of the victorious Christ to the Father. He was pleased to resort to the same path, climbing "the steps" of the same "ladder" by which He entered the world, associating until the end of time the Virgin Mother in the saving work through her prayerful mediation.

Finally, I would like to mention a particularly eloquent composition depicting Mary praying in Paradise: in the manuscript Parisinus Grec 1208 (fol. 66r; table 17) with the Marian homilies of James of Kokkinobaphos, already mentioned, the composition structured on three levels summarizes the design of salvation, and depicts Christ the New Adam who descends with the victorious cross into the darkness of death and tramples the infernal Hades, liberates the righteous and ascends, taking with Him into the re-opened Paradise the proto-parents Adam and Eve; in Paradise there is Mary the New Eve in praying attitude: after having inaugurated in the Dormition the path of return to the heavenly homeland, she intercedes with her Son on behalf of humanity still on pilgrimage on earth (right side of lower register).

Conclusion

By this exposition, in which the rich tradition of the Church of the East was explored in its liturgical and iconographic expression, the prophetic image of Jacob's Ladder interpreted in a Marian key allowed us to discover with renewed amazement numerous nuances of the

⁶¹ SCHILLER, *Iconography*, II, 128-130.

mystery of the mediation of the Virgin Mother of God in the plan of salvation. The "Ladder" chosen by the Savior for His descent and entry into the world, Mary the New Eve cooperates throughout her life with the redemptive plan of Christ the New Adam. With an attitude of prayerful openness, the Virgin accompanies her Son to the immolation of the cross and intercedes for the return of lost humanity to communion with God the Father: the path of return is the one opened by the crucified Redeemer, who descends "the steps of the ladder" of the cross to the abyss of Hades and, having conquered death and sin, raises with Himself the progenitors Adam and Eve. Moreover, Mary continues to be a "ladder" for humanity from Paradise as well: by divine will, she is the first creature who followed in body and soul the ascending path opened by her Risen Son, and from being a "heavenly ladder" for God, she becomes a "heavenly ladder" for mankind by her own example and powerful maternal intercession.

Tables of Iconography on the Ladder of Jacob



Table 1. Fresco Hypogeum Dino Compagni street, Cubiculum B, Rome, IVth century.

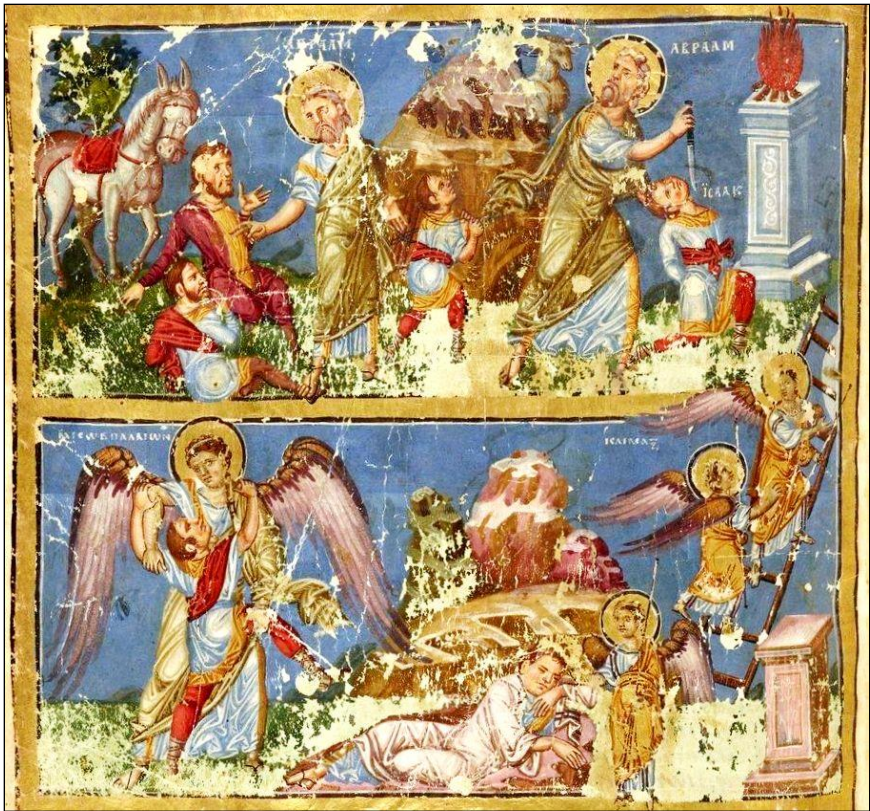


Table 2. Manuscript Homilies Gregory of Nazianzus. MS Paris.gr. 510, f. 174v.
879-882.

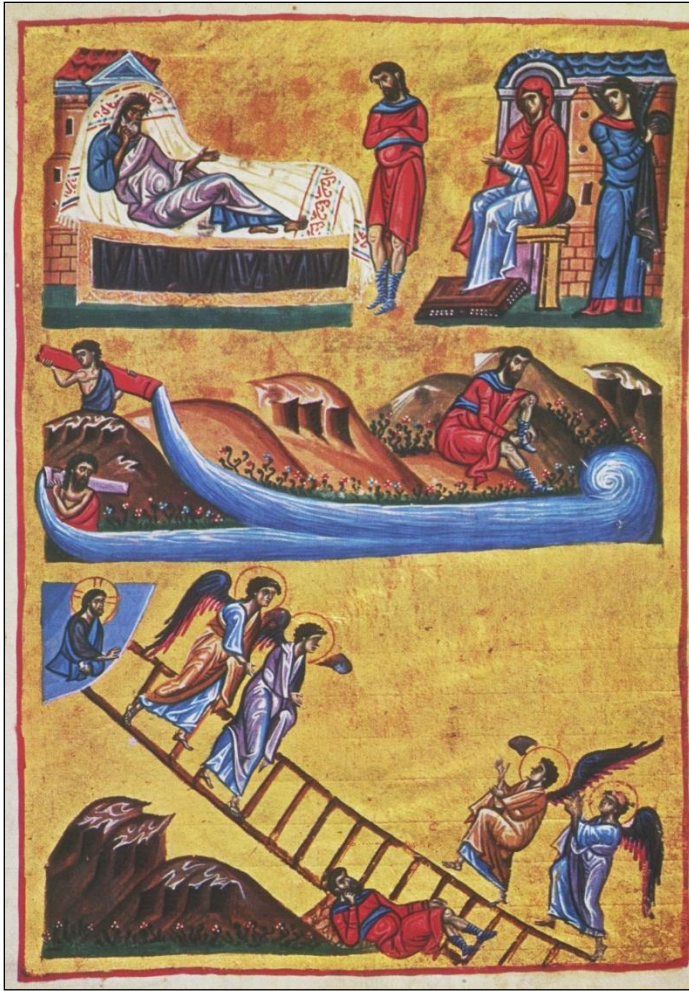


Table 3. Manuscript miniature, Homilies on the Virgin Mary by James of Kokkinobaphos. MS Vaticanus Gr.1162. f.22.v. XIIth century.



Table 4. Icon of the Virgin Kykotissa, S. Catherine of Sinai Monastery. XIIth century.

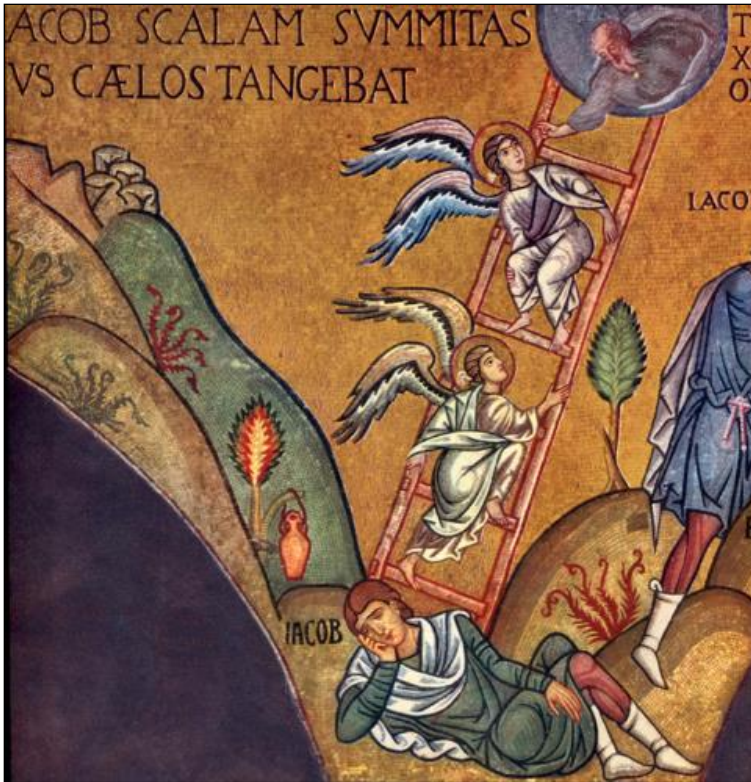


Table 5. Nave Mosaic of the Palatine Chapel, Palermo. 1140.



Table 6. Fresco sanctuary Cathedral St. Sophia Ochrid,
Macedonia. 1037-1056.



Table 7. Fresco Proskomidia of Dečani Monastery Church, Serbia. XIVth century.



Table 8. Narthex fresco of Holy Mary Peribleptos, Ohrid, Macedonia. 1294.



Table 9. Christmas Stichera. Narthex fresco of Holy Mary Peribleptos, Ohrid, Macedonia. 1294-1295.



Table 10. Narthex fresco of the Paraclesion of the Holy Savior's Church of Chora, Constantinople (nowadays Kariye Djami, Istanbul, Turkey). 1315-1320



Table 11. Exonarthex fresco of the Hodigitria Church of the Patriarchate of Pec, Serbia. 1334



Table 12. Nave fresco of Saint Nicholas Church of Prilep, Macedonia. 1298.



Table 13. Iconostasis of the Holy Trinity Greek-Catholic Cathedral of Blaj, Romania. 1765.



Table 14. Iconostasis of the Holy Trinity Greek-Catholic Cathedral of Blaj, Romania. 1765. Detail.



Table 15. Dome mosaic of Hagia Sophia church, Thessalonica, Greece, IXth century.

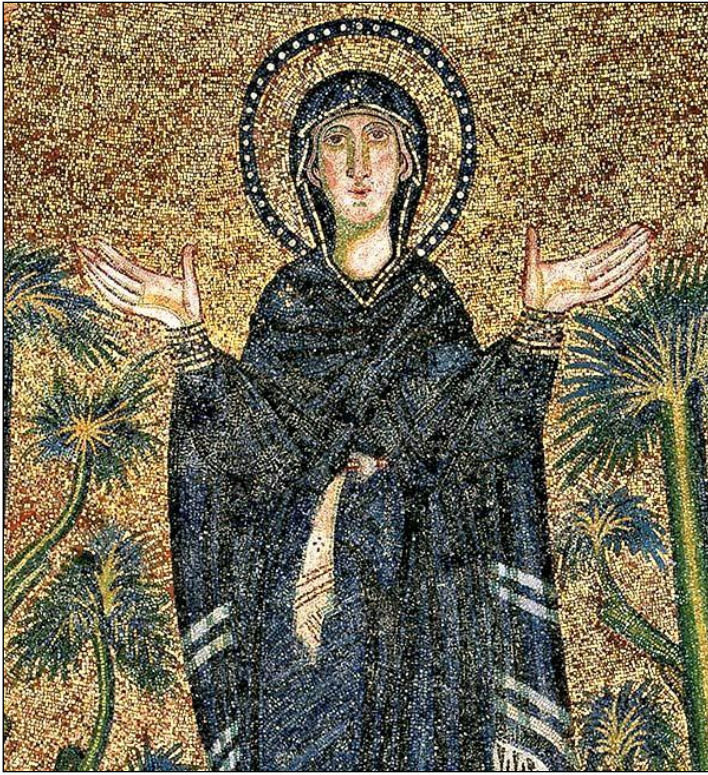


Table 16. Dome mosaic of Hagia Sophia church, Thessalonica, Greece, IXth century. Detail.



Table 17. Manuscript miniature, Homilies on the Virgin Mary by James of Kokkinobaphos. MS Parisinus Grec 1208, f. 66r. XIIth century.

Ecce Mater Tua

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María, Mi Madre: Corredentora, Mediatora, Abogada by Fr. Agustín Giménez González is a work of outstanding scholarship and deep faith. Father Giménez is a priest of the Diocese of Getafe within the Community of Madrid, Spain. He received his doctorate in biblical theology from the Gregorian University in Rome, and he is a professor of Sacred Scripture at the Ecclesiastical University of San Dámaso in Madrid. He is also the director of the diocesan Marian Forum of Getafe, and the members of this Forum have provided him with much spiritual support for the writing of this book. *María, Mi Madre* has an imprimatur from Most Rev. José María Avendaño Perea, the Auxiliary Bishop of Getafe, and a prologue by Most Rev. Ginés García Beltrán, the Bishop of Getafe.

María, Mi Madre is significant because it is a sustained exploration and defense of Mary as co-redemptrix, mediatrix, and advocate. With an imprimatur and an episcopal prologue, it carries the assurance of ecclesiastical approval. Bishop García Beltrán in his prologue notes that Fr. Agustín Giménez supports the proclamation of a fifth Marian dogma even though Pope Francis does not seem so inclined. The Bishop, though, recognizes the right of Fr. Giménez to present his arguments in favor of the dogma but always with respect and adhesion to the Magisterium of the Church.

Fr. Giménez begins his book with some essential insights on the meaning of redemption. He then explores the Virgin Mary's central role as the New Eve and the Mother of the Redeemer. He highlights the titles that express Mary's collaboration with Christ in the work of redemption, including Advocate, Mediatrix, and Coredeptrix. He shows how these titles have been expressed—either explicitly or implicitly—in liturgy, art, songs, and popular piety.

A major contribution of *María, Mi Madre* is its detailed history of the various movements for a fifth Marian dogma. The present four dogmas of Mary's perpetual virginity, divine maternity, Immaculate Conception, and Assumption into heaven relate to the personal privileges God has bestowed upon her in light of her role as the Mother of God. The fifth Marian dogma, however, relates not only to who Mary is but what she has done and continues to do as Coredeptrix, Mediatrix of all graces, and Advocate.

Fr. Giménez provides a detailed and illuminating history of the movements for the fifth Marian dogma that emerged after the proclamation of Mary's Immaculate Conception in 1854. He takes note of the various Marian congresses held as well as the efforts of Cardinal Mercier (1851–1926) for a definition of Mary as the Mediatrix of all graces. He mentions the Spanish, Belgian, and Roman commissions that studied the definability of this dogma, and he highlights the contributions of the Spanish theologian, José Maria Bover (1877–1954).

The historical survey of Fr. Giménez continues with the connection of the 1917–1925 Fatima apparitions to Marian coredeption. He mentions the vows and oaths taken in support of Mary's coredeption, the strong Marian devotion in the city of Seville, and the formation of Marian societies that studied Marian coredeption. He also shows how the proclamation of the dogma of the Assumption by Pius XII in 1950 can be understood as a confirmation of Marian coredeption and her universal mediation of grace.

Fr. Giménez then turns his attention to the years of preparation for Vatican II. He covers the 1962 Marian schema, the Marian debates at the council, the promulgation of *Lumen Gentium*; and Paul VI's proclamation of Mary as Mother of the Church. He then shows how a crisis in Mariology followed the council, which was a crisis that involved Christology and soteriology as well. The crisis, however, was not due to the actual texts of Vatican II but to misinterpretations and misguided ecumenical movements.

The historical survey subsequently turns to the pontificate of St. John Paul II and his explicit support for Mary as Coredemptrix. Fr. Giménez takes note of the movement, “*Vox populi Mariae Mediatrici*,” begun by Dr. Mark Miravalle in the early 1990s to gather support for the fifth Marian dogma. He examines the 1996 statement of the so-called Częstochowa commission of the Pontifical International Marian Academy (PAMI) against the proclamation of the dogma; and he provides responses of various Mariologists to this statement.

One of the most interesting sections of the book is Fr. Giménez’s overview of the symposia organized by supporters of the fifth Marian dogma. He likewise takes note of recent petitions for the dogma by various cardinals and bishops, and the apparent resistance of Pope Francis to these petitions. He explains that Catholics are permitted to raise questions about papal statements that are non-definitive. Moreover, Church history shows that the raising of such questions can lead to future clarifications.

The final parts of the book examine the reasons for the proclamation of Mary as Coredemptrix, Mediatrix of all graces, and Advocate. These sections also respond to the various objections to the dogma. Of special note is the claim made by Fr. Salvatore Perrella, OSM, and others that the push for the fifth dogma is linked to the reported 1945–1959 apparitions in Amsterdam to Ida Peerdeman and to the false revelations of the pseudo-visionary, Marie-Paule Giguère of Québec. Fr. Giménez shows that this claim is not true, and he outlines the many benefits that will come from the proclamation of the fifth Marian dogma.

The appendices provided at the end of this study are very valuable and important. The first appendix details the historical developments leading to the dogmatic proclamations of the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption. This appendix shows how the objections to these dogmas were overcome. The second appendix provides a list of privileged witnesses to the truth of the proposed fifth Marian dogma. This list includes some well-known figures such as St. Pio of

Pietrelcina, St. Maximilian Kolbe, and Sister Lucía of Fatima. The third appendix contains various vows, letters, hymns, and theological texts that affirm Mary as Coredemptrix and Mediatrix of all graces. Fr. Giménez also includes the 1962 Marian schema of Vatican II that refers to Mary as the Mediatrix of all graces and coredemptrix (in two footnotes). Appendix IV provides various prayers and devotions for the fifth dogma, including a special rosary and novena. Appendix V is a subtle theological exposition of various questions related to redemption, merit, and causality, and how these relate to the Virgin Mary.

In my opinion, *María, Mi Madre* is a monumental achievement. I believe it is one of the most comprehensive books on Marian coredemption ever written. It is not only a scholarly achievement; it is also a witness to the full truth about Mary, a truth that includes her role as Coredemptrix, Mediatrix of all graces, and Advocate. Fr. Giménez provides a compelling case for a dogmatic proclamation that affirms the truth of these three special titles. I hope his book achieves a wide readership and is eventually translated into English and other languages. His book is a testimony to his erudition as a scholar and his great love and devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary: the Co-redemptrix, Mediatrix of all graces, and our Advocate before the throne of God.

Laurie Olsen

Mary and the Church at Vatican II: The Untold Story of Lumen Gentium VIII

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Mary and the Church at Vatican II: The Untold Story of Lumen Gentium VIII is a book of great importance for both Mariology and Vatican II studies. The author, Dr. Laurie Olsen, has broken new ground in this volume because of her research into the Vatican Apostolic Archives, the Archivio Apostolico Vaticano (AAV). She began this research while writing her doctoral thesis at the University of St. Thomas in Rome. Over several years, she carefully investigated the contents of over 200 AAV boxes—including audio recordings of closed-door deliberations and discussions that led to *Lumen Gentium*'s final text on the Blessed Virgin Mary. There have been many books about Vatican II, but there have been few that have investigated the process involved in the drafting of chapter VIII of *Lumen Gentium*, which is entitled “The Blessed Virgin Mary in the Mystery of Christ and the Church.”

In the years preceding Vatican II, there were different movements in Mariology. Scholars such as Charles Balić O.F.M. and Gabriele Roschini O.S.M. favored a more Christo-typical Mariology, which focused on Mary's collaboration with Christ in the work of redemption and the mediation of grace. There were other theologians, such as Yves Congar O.P. and Gérard Philips, who favored a more Ecclesio-typical Mariology, which highlighted Mary's role as the type of the Church. There were also liturgical and ecumenical movements, which influenced the discussions on Mariology at the council.

At the Council, the various movements in Mariology became manifest, and the discussions often reflected an effort to balance competing concerns. The deliberations of the experts and bishops sometimes manifested agreement on essential Marian doctrines but

disagreement over how best to express them. There were, to be sure, tensions in the midst of these discussions. The Church is both human and divine, and the human element is presented by Dr. Olsen in an uncensored and objective manner. She presents the various disagreements – e.g., whether to have Mary treated in a separate document, whether to speak of Mary as mediatrix, or whether to affirm Mary as Mother of the Church—and she identifies those who participated in these disagreements and the positions they held. For example, she shows that the famed Mariologist, René Laurentin, was opposed to using the title, *Mater Ecclesiae* (Mother of the Church) for Mary (pages 20–25). She also shows that Cardinal Franz König's arguments for the insertion of the Marian text into the Constitution of the Church were initially drafted by Msgr. Gérard Philips. They were then circulated under the guise of a handout by three South American bishops (p.53). In actuality, though, the handout was authored by René Laurentin, Yves Congar, O.P. and others who were opposed to having a separate Marian document.

There are other revelations in Dr. Olsen's book. She shows how Msgr. Philips was opposed to the expression *virginitas in partu* (p. 89), and he also tried to have reference to Mary as mediatrix removed (pages 91–92). She highlights the important interventions of Archbishop Pietro Parente, who argued in favor of Mary's participation in the mystery of redemption (pages 107–114). She shows how the Jesuit theologian, Karl Rahner, accepted Mary as mediatrix and coredemptrix, but he argued that the council should not speak of her in these terms. Rahner also was opposed to citing St. Irenaeus's affirmation of Mary as *causa salutis* (cause of salvation), which was eventually included in *Lumen Gentium*, 56 (p. 118).

There are some facts brought out in Dr. Olsen's book that might be disturbing. For example, she shows how Msgr. Philips and the Belgian group (the *squadra Belga*) misrepresented the number of council fathers who wanted the paragraph on Marian mediation strengthened. The actual count was 269, but Philips reported the number as 132 (pages 170–174 and 319–320 in Appendix 7). Details such as these are supported by the inclusion of eight appendices that

not only provide tabulations of important votes but also some significant texts (e.g. those of Laurentin and Balić). Appendix 8 (pages 341–352) provides a very valuable chronology of the Marian discussions and decisions of the council.

Much more can be said about this extremely important book. Dr. Olsen deserves a great deal of credit not only for her research but also for her clear and detailed presentation of her findings. Some of the revelations might be disturbing, but other aspects are encouraging. For example, it is clear that the Holy Spirit made use of certain theologians (e.g. Archbishop Parente) to preserve the integrity of Catholic Marian doctrine at the council. We must remember that *Lumen Gentium* §54 states that it is not the mind of the council “to give a complete doctrine on Mary, nor does it wish to decide questions which the work of theologians has not yet fully clarified.”

Dr. Olsen’s exposition of the behind-the-scene discussions at Vatican II shows why and how certain Marian doctrines were viewed at the time of the council. Her monumental study is essential reading for Mariologists who wish to understand what still needs to be clarified in regard to the Virgin Mary’s role in the mystery of Christ and the Church.