

Pope Francis Affirms the Essence of Marian Co-redemption and Mediation

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Some people believe Pope Francis has rejected the teaching of Marian co-redemption because he has made several statements that suggest he prefers not to call Mary, the co-redemptrix. We need, though, to ask what the title means. The great Mariologist, Fr. Gabriele Maria Roschini, O.S.M. (1900–1977), gave a very brief but accurate explanation of what it means to call Mary, the Co-redemptrix of the human race:

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.¹

From prior statements of Pope Francis, it's clear that he affirms this doctrine. In his morning meditation for the Solemnity of the Annunciation in 2016, the Holy Father states: "Today is the celebration of the 'yes'... Indeed, in Mary's 'yes' there is the 'yes' of all of salvation history and there begins the ultimate 'yes' of man and of God: there God re-creates, as at the beginning, with a 'yes', God made the earth and man, that beautiful creation: with this 'yes' I come to do your will and more wonderfully he re-creates the world, he re-creates us all". Pope Francis recognizes Mary's "yes" as an expression of her active role in salvation history—a role that we can call coredemptive. During his January 26, 2019 vigil with young people in Panama, the Holy Father spoke of Mary as "the most influential woman in history." He also referred to the Blessed Virgin as the "influencer of God." Mary influenced God by saying yes to his invitation and by trusting in his promises.

Pope Francis also affirms Mary's union with the salvific mission of Christ up to his death on Cross and in the life of the Church. In his general audience of October 23, 2013, he notes that every action of the Blessed Virgin "was carried out in perfect union with Jesus. This union finds its culmination on

¹ Padre Gabriele Maria Roschini, *Chi è Maria? Catechismo Mariano* edited by Carlo DiPietro (Pignola: Sursum Corda, 2017) question 83, page 47. My translation of the original Italian, which reads: "Il titolo di *Corredentrice del genere umano* significa che la Virgine SS. ha cooperato con Cristo alla nostra riparazione, come Eva aveva cooperato con Adamo alla nostra rovina." Fr. Roschini's Marian Catechism was originally published in 1944.

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.” The Holy Father also points out that “Mary’s ‘yes’, already perfect from the start, grew until the hour of the Cross. There her motherhood opened to embrace every one of us, our lives, so as to guide us to her Son.” Here we see Pope Francis affirming not only Mary’s fruitful participation in Christ’s suffering and sacrifice on the Cross but also her universal spiritual motherhood that embraces every one of us.

Other statements of Pope Francis show that he recognizes Mary’s central role in salvation history. In his November 21, 2013 address to some Camaldolese Benedictine Nuns he exclaims: “We owe so much to this Mother! She is present at every moment in the history of salvation, and in her we see a firm witness to hope. She, the mother of hope, sustains us in times of darkness, difficulty, discouragement, of seeming defeat or true human defeat.” In an impromptu address given to the Servants of Mary on October 25, 2019, Pope Francis affirms Mary’s central role in the work of redemption. He tells the Servants of Mary that their founders “left everything to become servants, servants of Our Lady, because they understood the role of Our Lady in redemption, a role that so often the so-called ‘modern’ theologies forget. But Our Lady brought us Jesus! And your Founders understood this, they understood and they became servants. “

Pope Francis likewise affirms Mary’s role in the mediation of grace. In his prayer of December 8, 2017 he refers to the Blessed Virgin as “Mother of grace and mercy” whose “open hands ... let the Lord’s grace come down to the earth.” He has also referred to Mary as “auxiliatrix” and as the “Queen of the Saints and the Gate of Heaven.”

All of these references—which can be multiplied— show that Pope Francis accepts and affirms Catholic teaching on Marian coredemption and the mediation of grace. He clearly sees Mary’s “yes” as a central moment in salvation, history and he recognizes her union with Christ’s sacrifice on the Cross as spiritually fruitful. In his August 13, 2019 letter to the people of Genoa on the first anniversary of the terrible collapse of the Morandi Bridge he points them to Mary under the Cross suffering with her Son: “But I would also like to tell you that Jesus on the Cross was not alone. Under that scaffold, there was his mother, Maria. *Stabat Mater*, Mary was under the Cross, to

share the suffering of the Son. We are not alone, we have a Mother who from Heaven looks at us with love and is close to us. Let us cling to her and say to her: ‘Mother!’ as a child does when he is afraid and wants to be comforted and reassured.”

Two of the strongest statements of Pope Francis on Mary’s co-redemptive and mediatorial roles have come in his January 1 homilies for the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God in 2020 and 2021. In his homily for January 1, 2020, the Holy Father affirms Mary’s essential role in salvation history:

The first day of the year, we celebrate this nuptial union between God and mankind, inaugurated in the womb of a woman. In God, there will forever be our humanity and 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. In her, God was united to us, and if we want to unite ourselves to him, we must take the same path: through Mary, woman and mother.

In his homily for January 1, 2021, Pope Francis highlights the central role of Mary as the Mediatrix between God and the human race:

The heart of the Lord began to beat within Mary; the God of life drew oxygen from her. Ever since then, Mary has united us to God because in her God bound himself to our flesh, and he has never left it. Saint Francis loved to say that Mary “made the Lord of Majesty our brother” (Saint Bonaventure, *Legenda Maior*, 9, 3). She is not only the bridge joining us to God; she is more. She is the road that God travelled in order to reach us, and the road that we must travel in order to reach him. Through Mary, we encounter God the way he wants us to: in tender love, in intimacy, in the flesh. For Jesus is not an abstract idea; he is real and incarnate; he was “born of a woman”, and quietly grew. Women know about this kind of quiet growth. We men tend to be abstract and want things right away. Women are concrete and know how to weave life’s threads with quiet patience. How many women, how many mothers, thus give

birth and rebirth to life, offering the world a future!
(emphasis added).

In his homily of January 1, 2020, Pope Francis reminds us that there is no salvation without a woman. This is the core of the doctrine of Mary as the New Eve, who cooperated in our redemption just as the first Eve cooperated in our ruin. According to Fr. Roschini, this is what the Marian title, co-redemptrix, ultimately means.

In his homily of January 1, 2021, Pope Francis points to the Virgin Mary as “the bridge joining us to God” and “the road we must travel to reach Him” (la strada che dobbiamo percorrere noi per giungere a Lui). This is the core of the doctrine of Mary as the unique Mediatrix between God and the human race. If she is “the road we must travel to reach Him,” she is also the Mediatrix who joins us to God, the source of all grace. In this sense, she is the Mediatrix of all grace.

If we read carefully the words of Pope Francis, we see that he affirms the Virgin Mary’s essential role in God’s plan of redemption. We also see that the Holy Father affirms the Blessed Mother’s role of mediation between God and the human race. She is the bridge who joins us to God and the road we must travel to reach Him.

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