

Our Lady's Unique Participation in the Priesthood of Christ

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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 fonsal 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'Église et le Sacerdoce*: 1 *Essai sur le Développement d'une Idée Religieuse*, vol. 1 (Paris: Lethielleux, 1952); Id., *Marie, l'Église et le Sacerdoce*: 2 *Étude 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 devoutly.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 Riso, *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, Sacrarium 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 teologia 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 teologia 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.