

There is no Salvation without the Woman: The Virgin Mary's Coredemptive Role in Salvation History

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Introduction

In his homily for the Solemnity of Mary, January 1, 2020, Pope Francis reflected on the importance of Mary for salvation history:

On 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 the 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. That is why we begin the year by celebrating Our Lady, the woman who wove the humanity of God. If we want to weave humanity into this our time, we need to start again from the woman.¹

The Incarnation of the Word of God came in the “the fullness of time” (Gal 4:4). There is no salvation without the woman because God chose to join humanity to divinity through her mediation. Because God chose to come to us through her we must, as Pope Francis says, take the same path to God “through Mary, woman and mother.”

¹ Pope Francis, homily (January 1, 2020): https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2024/documents/20240101_omelia-madredidio-pace.html. I have slightly adjusted the translation changing “there is no salvation without **a** woman” to “there is no salvation without **the** woman” in light of the original Italian: “*non c’è salvezza senza **la** donna.*”

St. Louis de Montfort (1673–1716) also recognized the centrality of the Blessed Virgin for salvation history. He made it clear, however, that God had no absolute need of Mary:

With the whole Church I acknowledge that Mary, being a mere creature fashioned by the hands of God is, compared to his infinite majesty, less than an atom, or rather is simply nothing, since he alone can say, "I am he who is". Consequently, this great Lord, who is ever independent and self-sufficient, never had and does not now have any absolute need of the Blessed Virgin for the accomplishment of his will and the manifestation of his glory. To do all things he has only to will them.

However, I declare that, considering things as they are, because God has decided to begin and accomplish his greatest works through the Blessed Virgin ever since he created her, we can safely believe that he will not change his plan in the time to come, for he is God and therefore does not change in his thoughts or his way of acting.²

The key insight of both Pope Francis and St. Louis de Montfort is that it was God's choice to accomplish his greatest works through her. The Blessed Virgin Mary is at the center of salvation history because God chose to redeem the human race through her active role as Mother of the Word Incarnate and the New Eve. God had no absolute need of Mary just as He had no absolute need to create. He did, though, decide to create the universe—not out of any necessity but freely and out of love.

Mary: Predestined from Eternity

When, though, did God decide to include the Virgin Mary in his plan for the universe? The answer is that God chose Mary to be the

² St. Louis de Montfort, *True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary* (Bay Shore, N.Y.: Montfort Publications) numbers 14–15, p. 6.

Mother of God from eternity. This is clear from Bl. Pius IX's papal bull, *Ineffabilis Deus*, defining the Immaculate Conception:

God Ineffable — whose ways are mercy and truth, whose will is omnipotence itself, and whose wisdom “reaches from end to end mightily, and orders all things sweetly” — having foreseen from all eternity the lamentable wretchedness of the entire human race which would result from the sin of Adam, decreed, by a plan hidden from the centuries, to complete the first work of his goodness by a mystery yet more wondrously sublime through the Incarnation of the Word. This he decreed in order that man who, contrary to the plan of Divine Mercy had been led into sin by the cunning malice of Satan, should not perish; and in order that what had been lost in the first Adam would be gloriously restored in the Second Adam. From the very beginning, and before time began, the eternal Father chose and prepared for his only-begotten Son a Mother in whom the Son of God would become incarnate and from whom, in the blessed fullness of time, he would be born into this world.³

Vatican II, in *Lumen Gentium*, 61, also affirms the predestination of the Blessed Mother from eternity, and it links Mary's predestination to that of the Incarnate Word:

Predestined from eternity by that decree of divine providence which determined the incarnation of the Word to be the Mother of God, the Blessed Virgin was on this earth the virgin Mother of the Redeemer, and above all others and in a singular way the generous associate and humble handmaid of the Lord. She conceived, brought forth and nourished Christ. She

³ Pius IX, papal bull, *Ineffabilis Deus* (December 8, 1854), <https://www.papalencyclicals.net/pius09/p9ineff.htm>.

presented Him to the Father in the temple, and was united with Him by compassion as He died on the Cross. In this 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. Wherefore she is our mother in the order of grace.⁴

The Motive for the Incarnation, the Rebellion of the Bad Angels

Why did God decide to become man? St. Thomas Aquinas (c. 1225–1274) recognized that there are different opinions on this question, but he believed that Scripture presents redemption from sin as the main reason for the Incarnation (cf. *Summa theologiae* III q. 1 a. 3). God, however, could have become man even if there had not been original sin. The Franciscan, Blessed John Duns Scotus (c. 1266–1308), however, believed that God would have become man even if Adam and Eve had not sinned. Scotus' key argument for the predestination of the Incarnation is found in his *Ordinatio* III, dist. 7 q. 3. His main point is that something as great as the Incarnation should not depend on something less like sin.

The Jesuit, Francisco Suárez (1548–1617) agreed with Scotus, and he also argued that God's revelation of his intent to become man was the reason for the rebellion of Lucifer and the bad angels.⁵

The Spanish mystic, Ven. Maria of Ágreda (1602-1665), describes the fall of the bad angels as the result of their rejection of God's plan to become incarnate through the Virgin Mary. She also describes the great enmity of Lucifer towards Mary, the Woman:

⁴ Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium* (November 21, 1964), 61:

https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html

⁵ Francisco Suárez, *De angelis* 7.13, in *Opera omnia*: Vivès edition, vol. 2 (1856) pp. 881-891.

The angels were created in the empyrean heavens and in the state of grace by which they might be first to merit the reward of glory. ... They were informed that these were to stand in high favor, and that the second Person of the blessed Trinity was to become incarnate and assume their nature, raising it to the hypostatic union and to divine Personality; that therefore they were to acknowledge Him as their Head, not only as God, but as God and man, adoring Him and reverencing Him as God-man. ... To this command all the obedient and holy angels submitted themselves and they gave their full assent and acknowledgment with a humble and loving subjection of the will. But Lucifer, full of envy and pride, resisted and induced his followers to resist likewise, as they in reality did, preferring to follow him and disobey the divine command. ... When it was revealed to the angels that they would have to obey the incarnate Word, another, a third precept was given them, namely, that they were to admit as a superior conjointly with Him, a Woman, in whose womb the Only begotten of the Father was to assume flesh and that this Woman was to be the Queen and Mistress of all the creatures. The good angels by obeying this command of the Lord, with still increasing and more alert humility, freely subjected themselves, praising the power and the mysteries of the Most High. Lucifer, however, and his confederates, rose to a higher pitch of pride and boastful insolence. In disorderly fury he aspired to be himself the head of all the human race and of the angelic orders, and if there was to be a hypostatic union, he demanded that it be consummated in him.

The decree constituting him inferior to the Mother of the Incarnate Word, our Mistress, he opposed with horrible blasphemies. ... This proud boast so aroused the indignation of the Lord that in order to humble it, He spoke to Lucifer: "This Woman whom thou refuseth

to honor, shall crush thy head and by Her shalt thou be vanquished and annihilated (Gen. 3, 15). And if, through thy pride, death enters into the world (Wis. 2, 24), life and salvation of mortals shall enter through the humility of this Woman.⁶

We see in this vivid passage how God's free decision to become incarnate of the Virgin Mary set in motion the cosmic struggle between good and evil, which is concentrated in the enmity of Satan towards Mary, the Woman, who was predestined to be the Mother of the Word Incarnate from all eternity.

The Mystical Marriage Between God and Humanity and the Free Consent of Mary

God had no absolute need of the Virgin Mary just as He had no absolute need to create. God, however, in keeping with his goodness, chose to create, and He chose to unite himself to humanity through the Blessed Virgin Mary. The predestination of Mary was the free and sovereign choice of God. Through Mary, the Word of God became incarnate, and God was joined to humanity. God, however, did not wish to become incarnate without the free consent of the Virgin Mother. Pope Leo XIII, in his 1891 encyclical, *Octobri mense*, describes the Incarnation as a "mystical union" between Himself and the human race:

The Eternal Son of God, about to take upon Him our nature for the saving and ennobling of man, and about to consummate thus a mystical union (*mysticum ... conubium*) between Himself and all mankind, did not accomplish His design without adding there the free consent of the elect Mother, who represented in some sort all human kind, according to the illustrious and just opinion of St. Thomas, who says that the Annunciation

⁶ Ven. Maria of Ágreda, *The Mystical City of God*, Book One, chapter III, trans. Fiscar Marison, abridged edition (Charlotte, NC: Tan Books, 1978), pages 19–22.

was effected with the consent of the Virgin standing in the place of humanity (cf. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* III, q. 30 a. 1).⁷

The actual text of St. Thomas Aquinas uses the term “*quoddam spirituale matrimonium*” to express the union between the Son of God and human nature, but the reference to the Blessed Virgin Mary in Leo XIII’s encyclical is directly from the text of the *Summa theologiae*: “Through the Annunciation the consent of the Virgin, in the place of all human nature (*loco totius humanae naturae*) was awaited.”⁸

This passage from St. Thomas—cited in Leo XIII’s encyclical—shows that the Incarnation is a type of mystical union or marriage between God and the human race. The Incarnation, as we know, is the “new and everlasting covenant” between God and the human race. This covenant can be understood in light of the Church as the Bride of Christ who joins with Christ, the Bridegroom. Mary assumes the role of the Bride. She is Israel saying yes to the coming of the Messiah. She is the Church saying yes to the coming of the Word made Flesh. She is the New Eve saying yes to the entrance of the New Adam into human history.

God’s free decision to unite himself to the human race through a type of mystical marriage required the free consent of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Just as in a human marriage there must be free consent on the part of the bride and the bridegroom so in the mystical marriage between God and the human race, Mary needed to give her free consent “in the place of all human nature.”

Vatican II, in *Lumen Gentium*, 56, highlights Mary’s free consent as the New Eve:

⁷ Leo XIII, encyclical, *Octobri mense* (September 22, 1891), as cited in Heinrich Denzinger and Peter Hünermann, eds, *Compendium of Creeds, Definitions, and Declarations on Matters of Faith and Morals* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2012) [henceforth D-H], no. 3274.

⁸ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* III, q. 30 a. 1 (Editio Leonina 11:315b).

The Father of mercies willed that the incarnation should be preceded by the acceptance of her who was predestined to be the mother of His Son, so that just as a woman contributed to death, so also a woman should contribute to life. That is true in outstanding fashion of the mother of Jesus, who gave to the world Him who is Life itself and who renews all things, and who was enriched by God with the gifts which befit such a role. It is no wonder therefore that the usage prevailed among the Fathers whereby they called the mother of God entirely holy and free from all stain of sin, as though fashioned by the Holy Spirit and formed as a new creature.⁹

Mary's free consent to be the Mother of the Word Incarnate was an active contribution to the work of redemption. She was predestined to say yes freely to the invitation to become the Mother of the Word Incarnate. God insured her free consent by her Immaculate Conception so she would not be impeded by any sin, original or personal. Mary was free from sin and full of grace. Her Immaculate Conception does not make her less free but more free. God, after all, is free of all sin, but He is absolutely free. Vatican II, in *Lumen Gentium*, 56, expresses this truth beautifully:

Embracing God's salvific will with a full heart and impeded by no sin, she devoted herself totally as a handmaid of the Lord to the person and work of her Son, under Him and with Him, by the grace of almighty God, serving the mystery of redemption. Rightly therefore the holy Fathers see her as used by God not merely in a passive way, but as freely cooperating in the work of human salvation through faith and obedience. For, as St. Irenaeus says, she "being obedient, became the cause of salvation for herself and for the whole human race." Hence not a few of the early Fathers gladly

⁹ Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, 56.

assert in their preaching, "The knot of Eve's disobedience was untied by Mary's obedience; what the virgin Eve bound through her unbelief, the Virgin Mary loosened by her faith." Comparing Mary with Eve, they call her "the Mother of the living," and still more often they say: "death through Eve, life through Mary."¹⁰

Mary's free assent to be the Mother of the Word Incarnate was active not passive. Her causality is not merely "receptive" but active.¹¹ Just as the first Eve freely sinned and became the "co-peccatrix" with Adam so Mary freely said yes to become "the cause of salvation for herself and the whole human race."¹² In this way, she became the co-redemptrix with Christ, the New Adam.

Mary as the Bridge Between God and Humanity

In giving her *fiat* to be the Mother of the Word Incarnate, Mary also became the mediating bridge between God and humanity. Pope Francis affirmed this truth in his homily for the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God, on January 1, 2021:

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 between us and God (*il ponte tra noi e Dio*); she is more. She is the road that God travelled in order to reach us, and the road that we must travel in

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ The notion of Mary's "receptive causality" is linked to the German theologian, Otto Semmelroth, S.J. (1912–1979). See Otto Semmelroth, S.J., *Mary Archetype of the Church*, trans. Maria von Eros and John Devlin (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1963), 86.

¹² St. Irenaeus, *Adv. Haers.* III, 22, 4: PG 7, 989A (A. Harvey 2, 123), as cited in *Lumen Gentium*, 56.

order to reach Him (*la strada che dobbiamo percorrere noi per giungere a Lui*). 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!¹³

As the bridge between us and God, Mary is the Mediatrix between God and the human race. Because she is the source of the human nature assumed by the Word of God, she enabled the “Lord of Majesty” to become our brother. She is the Mediatrix to the Christ, the one Mediator (1 Tim 2:5). In her own way, though, she is the Meditarix between God and us. This is because Christ, the Word of God, became man through her active mediation as the Mother of the Word made flesh.

To God through Mary, Mary as the Mediatrix of All Graces

In his January 1, 2021 homily Pope Francis says that Mary “is the road that God travelled in order to reach us, and the road that we must (*dobbiamo*) travel in order to reach Him.” Why is Mary the road we must travel to reach God? The answer is found in the will of God. Because God freely chose to enter into human history through Mary’s free and active cooperation, He also wills that Mary serve as the Mediatrix of all the graces merited by her divine Son. Mary’s mediation of grace is not separate from Christ, the one Mediator (1

¹³ Pope Francis, homily for the Solemnity of Mary and the World Day for peace (January 1, 2021): https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2021/documents/papa-francesco_20210101_omelia-madredidio-pace.html (I made some slight adjustments to the translation in light of the Italian original).

Tim 2:5). Her mediation is a participation and cooperation (*cooperationem*) in her divine Son's mediation.¹⁴

Since the eighteenth century, multiple popes have affirmed Mary as the Mediatrix of all graces. Benedict XIV, in his 1748 apostolic constitution, *Gloriosae Dominae*, refers to Mary as the “heavenly stream which brings to the hearts of wretched mortals all God’s gifts and graces.”¹⁵ In his 1854 bull defining the Immaculate Conception, Pius IX speaks of Mary as “the most powerful Mediatrix and Conciliatrix in the whole world.”¹⁶ In his 1891 encyclical, *Octobri mense*, Leo XIII states “that absolutely nothing from this immense treasury of all the graces brought forth by the Lord ... is imparted to us by the will of God, except through Mary.”¹⁷ In his 1894 encyclical, *Iucunda Semper Expectatione*, Leo XIII refers to Mary as the Mediatrix of all graces by citing St. Bernardine of Siena (1380–1444): “Thus is confirmed that law of merciful meditation of which We have spoken, and which St. Bernardine 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.’”¹⁸ St. Pius X, in his 1904 encyclical, *Ad Diem Illum*, extols Mary as the “Dispensatrix of all the gifts that Our Savior purchased for us by His death and by His blood.”¹⁹ Pius XII, in his 1954 encyclical, *Ad Caeli Reginam*, says that Mary, by her union with her Son, “receives the royal right to dispose all the treasures of the Divine Redeemer’s kingdom.”²⁰ St. John Paul II referred to Mary as the Mediatrix of all

¹⁴ See *Lumen Gentium*, 62.

¹⁵ Benedict XIV, apostolic constitution, *Gloriosae Dominae* (September 27, 1748) in *Our Lady: Papal Teachings*, trans. Daughters of St. Paul (Boston: St. Paul Editions, 1961), p. 26, n. 4.

¹⁶ Pius IX, papal bull, *Ineffabilis Deus* (December 8, 1854): <https://www.papalencyclicals.net/pius09/p9ineff.htm>

¹⁷ D-H, 3274.

¹⁸ Leo XIII, encyclical, *Iucunda Semper Expectatione* (September 8, 1894), no.5: https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_08091894_iucunda-semper-expectatione.html

¹⁹ Pius X, encyclical, *Ad Diem Illum* (February 2, 1904), no. 12:

²⁰ Pius XII, D-H, 3916.

graces at least nine times.²¹ Benedict XVI, in his January 10, 2013 letter to Archbishop Zimowski, commended his mission—as the Holy See’s representative for the World Day of the Sick—to Mary “the Mediatrix of all graces (*Mediatricis omnium gratiarum*).”²² More recently, Pope Francis, in his May 13, 2023 message for a Marian celebration in Sardinia, stated that “one of the ancient titles by which Christians have invoked the Virgin Mary is precisely ‘Mediatrix of all graces’” (*Uno degli antichi titoli con cui i cristiani hanno invocato la Vergine Maria è appunto “Mediatrice di tutte le grazie”*).²³

Mary’s Unique Participation in the Work of Redemption as Co-redemptrix

Mary’s mediation of all graces is certainly grounded in her role as the bridge between God and the human race. Her participation in the work of redemption, however, cannot be limited merely to her being the Mother of the Redeemer. As the New Eve she played an active role in the triumph over Satan. Bl. Pius IX, in his 1854 bull, *Ineffabilis Deus*, explains how Mary’s immunity from original sin enabled her, as the New Eve, to triumph completely over the Devil:

And, indeed, it was altogether fitting that so venerable a mother, aglow with radiance, ever adorned with the splendors of a most perfect holiness and entirely immune from the stain of original sin, should have the most complete triumph over the ancient serpent. It was she to whom the Father willed to give his only Son, generated from his heart and equal to himself and whom

²¹ See article by Msgr. Arthur Calkins, S.T.D.: <http://www.motherofallpeoples.com/2010/11/mary-mediatrix-of-all-graces-in-the-papal-magisterium-of-pope-john-paul-ii/>.

²² 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.

²³ Pope Francis, Message to Archbishop Gian Franco Saba of Sassari, Sardinia, May 13, 2023, <http://www.arcidiocesisassari.it/2023/05/28/festa-del-voto-il-messaggio-del-santo-padre/>.

he loves as himself. And He wished to give Him in such a way that he would be, by nature, one and the same common Son of God the Father and the Virgin. And as the Son himself actually chose her to be his mother, just so the Holy Spirit willed and ordained that she should conceive and give birth to the one from whom he himself precedes.²⁴

As can be seen, Mary's immunity from original sin and most perfect holiness enables her to be the Co-redemptrix who triumphs over the ancient serpent, the Devil.

The recognition of Mary's unique participation in the work of redemption is testified by numerous Church Fathers, theologians, and spiritual writers. Here are a few examples:

- St. Ephraem of Syria (c. 306–373) says that God chose Mary to be “the instrument of our salvation.”²⁵ (*Opera Omnia*, Vol. III, Assemani, ed., 1832: 607);
- St. Epiphanius (c. 315–403) sees Mary as bringing forth ‘the Cause of life’ to the human race just as Eve brought the cause of death (*Adversus Haereses* 1. 3, t. 2; PG 42, 729);
- St. Cyril of Alexandria (d. 444) exclaims that, through the Mother of God, “the devil is cast down from heaven” and “the fallen creature is raised up to heaven’ (*Hom. In Deiparam*; PG 65, 681).
- St. Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153) speaks of the Virgin Mary’s “offering the divine Victim in the temple for our reconciliation with God” (*Serm. 3 de Purificatione*; PL 183, 370). Bernard also sees Mary making “satisfaction’ for the transgression of Eve” (*Homilia 2 super Missus est*; PL 183, 62).
- Bernard of Clairvaux’s disciple and friend, Arnauld of Chartres or Bonneval (d. ca. 1160) believed that Mary made a moral contribution to the work of redemption. Only Jesus

²⁴ D-H, 2801.

offers a bodily immolation on Calvary, but Mary unites her heart to her Son's offering. There is a complete union of wills between Jesus and Mary. At Calvary, Christ presents "both his own offering and that of his Mother to the Father" (Arnauld of Chartres, *De laudibus B. Mariae Virginis*; PL 189, 1694B–1694C).

- St. Catherine of Siena (1347–1380) speaks of Mary as the "Redemptrix of the human race" because she provides flesh to the Word and unites herself to her Son's sacrifice with "sorrow of body and mind" (*Oratio XI*).
- St. Bridget of Sweden (c. 1303–1373), in one of her revelations, hears Jesus say: "Therefore I can well affirm that my Mother and I saved man, as it were, with a single heart—I, by suffering in my heart and flesh, and she with the suffering and love of her heart" (*Revelationes*, IX, c. 3)

Many popes have also highlighted Mary's coredemptive role. Here are some notable examples (with emphases added):

- Benedict XV (1918): "... the fact that she was with Him crucified and dying, was in accord with the divine plan. For with her suffering and dying Son, Mary endured suffering and almost death. She gave up her Mother's rights over her Son to procure the salvation of mankind, and to appease the divine justice, she, as much as she could, immolated her Son, **so that one can truly affirm that together with Christ she has redeemed the human race.**"²⁶
- St. Pius X (1904): "When the supreme hour of the Son came, beside the Cross of Jesus there stood Mary His Mother, not merely occupied in contemplating the cruel spectacle, but rejoicing that her Only Son was offered for the salvation of mankind, **and so entirely participating in His Passion**, that if it had been possible she would have gladly borne all the torments that her Son bore (S. Bonav. 1. Sent d. 48, *ad Litt. dub.* 4). **And from this community of will and**

²⁶ Benedict XV, Letter, *Inter Sodalicia*, March 22, 1918, AAS 10 (1918), 182.

suffering between Christ and Mary she merited to become most worthily the Reparatrix of the lost world (Eadmeri Mon. *De Excellentia Virg. Mariae*, c. 9) and Dispensatrix of all the gifts that Our Savior purchased for us by His Death and by His Blood.”²⁷ ... We are then, it will be seen, very far from attributing to the Mother of God a productive power of grace - a power which belongs to God alone. Yet, since Mary carries it over all in holiness and union with Jesus Christ, and has been associated by Jesus Christ in the work of redemption, she merits for us *de congruo* (in a congruous manner) in the language of theologians, what Jesus Christ merits for us *de condigno* (in a condign manner) and she is the supreme Minister of the distribution of graces.”²⁸

- Pius XI (1928): And now lastly may the most benign Virgin Mother of God smile on this purpose and on these desires of ours; for since she brought forth for us Jesus our Redeemer, and nourished Him, and offered Him as a victim by the Cross, by her mystic union with Christ and His very special grace she likewise became and is piously called a **reparatress** (*reparatrix*). Trusting in her intercession with Christ, who whereas He is the "one mediator of God and men" (1 *Timothy* ii, 5), chose to make His Mother the advocate of sinners, and the minister and mediatrix of grace, as an earnest of heavenly gifts and as a token of Our paternal affection we most lovingly impart the Apostolic Blessing to you, Venerable Brethren, and to all the flock committed to your care.²⁹

²⁷ Pius X, encyclical, *Ad Diem Illum* (1904), no. 12:

https://www.vatican.va/content/pius-x/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-x_enc_02021904_ad-diem-illum-laetissimum.html.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, no. 14. Congruous merit is fitting or appropriate merit, which God is willing to accept. Condign merit is absolute merit in which there is a strict claim of justice between the meritorious act and the effect. Only Christ could merit redemption in a condign manner.

²⁹ Pius XI, encyclical. *Miserentissimus Rex* (May 8, 1928), no. 21:

https://www.vatican.va/content/pius-xi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_19280508_miserentissimus-redemptor.html.

- Pope Pius XI (1933): "**By necessity, the Redeemer could not but associate His Mother with His work, and for this reason, we invoke her under the title of Co-redemptrix.** (*Il Redentore non poteva, per necessità, non associare La madre Sua alla Sua opera, e per questo noi la invociamo col titolo di Corredentrica*) She gave us the Savior, she accompanied Him in the work of Redemption as far as the Cross itself, sharing with Him the sorrows of the agony and of the death in which Jesus consummated the Redemption of all mankind."³⁰
- Pius XII (1954): "For just as Christ, because He redeemed us, is our Lord and king by a special title, so the Blessed Virgin also (is our queen), on account of the unique manner in which she assisted in our redemption, by giving of her own substance, by freely offering Him for us, by her singular desire and petition for, and active interest in, our salvation. ... From these considerations, the proof develops on these lines: **if Mary, in taking an active part in the 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," in which **a virgin was instrumental in the salvation of the human race, just as a virgin had been closely associated with its death;** ... and if, in truth, "it was she who, free of the stain of actual and original sin, and ever most closely bound to her Son, on Golgotha offered that Son to the Eternal Father together with the complete sacrifice of her maternal rights and maternal love, like a new Eve, for all the sons of Adam, stained as they were by his lamentable fall."³¹

³⁰ Pius XI Allocution to some pilgrims from Vicenza (November 30, 1933): (*L'Osservatore Romano*, December 1, 1933, p. 1.

³¹ Pius XII. encyclical, *Ad Caeli Regnam* (October 11, 1954); D-H, 3914–3915.

The Title Co-Redemptrix

A French hymnal of the 10th century includes in its litany of the saints an appeal to Mary in these words: “Holy redemptrix of the world pray for us”.³² The term ‘redemptrix’ was understood in subordination to Christ, the Redeemer just as *mediatrix* was understood in subordination to Christ, the one mediator (cf. 1 Tim 2;5; *Lumen Gentium*, 62). By the 15th and 16th centuries it became more common to speak of Mary as the *co-redemptrix* to show that she cooperates in the work of redemption with and under Christ. The use of *co* (derived from the Latin *cum* or with) was reflected in other medieval expressions about Mary such as she who ‘co-suffered’ with her Son and she who was ‘co-crucified’ with him.³³ A liturgical hymn from Salzburg of the 14th or 15th century might be one of the earliest usages of the term co-redemptrix when it addresses Mary as “*corredemptrix*.”³⁴

Papal approvals and references to the title, co-redemptrix

Since the nineteenth century, the Marian title, co-redemptrix, has been approved or used by popes. Here are the relevant references:

- On July 18, 1885, Pope Leo XIII approved a prayer of praises (*laudes*) to Jesus and Mary with an indulgence of 100 days granted by the Congregation for Indulgences and Sacred Relics. In the Italian version of the praises to Mary, she is referred to as “coredemprix of the world” (*corredentrice del mondo*). In the Latin version, she is referred to as the “*mundo redimendo coadiutrix*”. Leo XIII approved both the Italian and Latin versions of the prayer (*Acta Sanctae Sedis [ASS]* 18 [1885] p. 93).

³² Mark Miravalle, “*With Jesus*” *The Story of Mary Co-Redemptrix* (Goleta, CA: Queenship Publishing, 2003), 82.

³³ René Laurentin,, *Le Titre de Corédemptrice: Étude historique*. Paris: Nouvelles Editions Latines (1951), 15.

³⁴ Miravalle, 110, note 20.

- During the pontificate of Pius X, the Holy See three times gave approval to prayers invoking Mary as co-redemptrix (cf. *Acta Sanctae Sedis* [ASS] 41 [1908], p. 409); *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* [AAS] 5 [1913], p. 364; *AAS* 6 [1914], pp. 108–109).
- Pius XI was the first pope to publicly use the title: once on November 30, 1933 (*Discorsi di Pio XI*, 2, p. 1013); 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).
- John Paul II publicly used the title, Co-redemptrix, at least six times: 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-redemptrix” 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*.

Why Did Vatican II Not Speak of Mary as Coredeptrix?

The drafting committee of the Marian schema at Vatican II decided to omit the term from what would become chapter VIII of *Lumen gentium*. The term, however was not rejected because it was false. In the *praenotanda* or explanatory note that accompanied the first Marian schema of 1962, we are told that: “Certain terms and expressions

used by Roman Pontiffs have been omitted, which, although most true in themselves (*in se verissima*), may be difficult for the separated brethren (as in the case of the Protestants) to understand. Among such words the following may be enumerated: ‘Coredemptrix of the human race’ [St. Pius X, Pius XI]; ‘Reparatrix of the whole world’ [Leo XIII] ... etc.”³⁵ The title co-redemptrix, however, appears in two footnotes of the 1962 schema. Footnote 11 states that “the compassion of Mary has a connection with the redemption in such a way that she may rightly be called co-redemptrix.”³⁶ In the 1962 schema there was also a lengthy footnote explaining the meaning of terms such as Mediatrix and Coredemptrix as applied to Mary. This draft, with the *praenotanda*, was approved by the Council’s Theological Commission on November 10, 1962. The footnote (no. 16) reads as follows:

In Christian antiquity it was customary to refer to Mary as Eve, a title which seems to be taken from the principle of “re-circulation” or parallelism between Mary and Eve. Witness in this regard is found already in St. Justin’s Dialogue with Trypho: “And since we read that he is the Son of God... and made man from the Virgin, so that in the way that the disobedience spawned by the serpent took its beginning, it would receive its dissolution in the say way” Based on the same principle, St. Irenaeus (*Against Heresies*) explicitly calls Mary the cause of salvation for the entire human race. After the Council of Ephesus, the very title of Mediatrix, or as the Greeks say, Mesites or Mesetria, is attributed to Mary. In a work of a quite ancient author (some say of the 5th century but certainly before the 8th century) we read: “For she is the Mediatrix of heaven and earth, who naturally accomplishes their union.” This title became more

³⁵ *Acta Synodalia Sacrosancti Concilii Oecumenici Vaticani II, Volumen I, Periodus Prima, Pars IV* [Vatican City, 1971], p. 100..

³⁶ *Acta Synodalia Sacrosancti Concilii Oecumenici Vaticani II, Volumen I, Periodus Prima, Pars IV*, 1971, p.105.

common day by day, as can be seen in the writings of St. Andrew of Crete, St. Germanus of Constantinople, St. John Damascene, etc. Nor are there lacking Fathers who greet Mary as “Helper of the Redeemer” or “Mother of the living” in reference to Gn 3:15.

All these have been further developed by theologians and Supreme Pontiffs, and a nomenclature was created in which Mary is at different times called the Spiritual Mother of Men, the Queen of Heaven and Earth, and at other times the New Eve, the Mediatrix and Dispenser of All Graces, and even, in fact, the Co-redemptrix. With regard to the title “Queen”, cf. Note 14; with regard to the title Spiritual Mother, cf. Note 12. With regard to the title, Co-redemptrix”, and “Companion of Christ the Redeemer”, some explanations need to be added here:

The title Redemptrix occurs already in the 10th century: “Holy Redemptrix of the world, pray for us.” When this title came into use in the 15th and 16th centuries and the immediate co-operation of the Blessed Virgin in the work of our redemption was already perceived, “con” [cum] was added to “redemptrix,” so that the Mother of God was called “corredemptrix,” [Co-redemptrix] whereas Christ continued to be called “Redemptor” [Redeemer]. Accordingly, from the 17th century onward, the title of “Co-redemptrix” was in common use not only in works geared to piety and devotion, but also in very many theological treatises [cf. Carol J., *The Co-redemption of the Blessed Virgin Mary*, Rome, 1950, p. 482]

With regard to the Roman Pontiffs, the word occurs in certain texts of St. Pius X and Pius XI in contexts of lesser importance. Pius XII purposely wished to avoid this expression by frequently using formulas such as “Companion of the Redeemer,” “Eminent companion of

the Redeemer,” “Loving companion of the Redeemer,” “Companion in the work of the Divine Redeemer.”

The cooperation of Mary with Jesus in the economy of our salvation is very, very often extolled by Supreme Pontiffs. Leo XIII: “the great Mother of God and likewise the companion in repairing the human race.” Pius XI: “The Redeemer was not able, due to the necessity of the work, to not associate his Mother with his work, and that is the reason why we invoke her with the title of Co-redemptrix.” Pius XII: “Mary, in procuring spiritual salvation with Jesus Christ, from the very beginning of salvation, was associated by God’s will...”

In addition to the titles mentioned, there are very many others with which Mary is greeted by the faithful of Christ. ...³⁷

Vatican II Teaches Marian Coredemption Without Using the Title

While Vatican II chose not to use the term, Coredemptrix, a number of theologians, including Jean Galot, S.J and Georges Cottier, O.P. (the former theologian of the papal household), believe Vatican II’s *Lumen Gentium* affirms the doctrine of Mary as Coredemptrix without using the term.³⁸ Vatican II, though, in *Lumen Gentium*, 58 and 62, affirms Mary’s coredemptive role under the Cross in this manner:

³⁷ *Acta Synodalia Sacrosancti Concilii Oecumenici Vaticani II, Volumen I, Periodus Prima, Pars IV*, 1971, pp., 108–109. Translation of note 16 by Fr. Joseph Komonchok, available at: <chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcgclefindmkaj/https://unamsanctamcatholicam.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Blessed-Virgin-Mary.pdf>

³⁸ See J. Galot in *La Civiltà Cattolica* [1994] III: 236-237 and G. Cottier, in *L’Osservatore Romano*, June 4, 2002).

... 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, and lovingly consenting to the immolation of this Victim which she herself had brought forth.** 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" (no. 58).

This maternity of Mary in the order of grace began with the consent which she gave in faith at the Annunciation and which she sustained without wavering beneath the cross, and lasts until the eternal fulfillment of all the elect. **Taken up to heaven she did not lay aside this salvific duty, but by her constant intercession continued to bring us the gifts of eternal salvation.** By her maternal charity, she cares for the brethren of her Son, who still journey on earth surrounded by dangers and difficulties, until they are led into the happiness of their true home. Therefore the Blessed Virgin is invoked by the Church under the titles of Advocate, Auxiliatrix, Adjutrix, and Mediatrix. This, however, is to be so understood that it neither takes away from nor adds anything to the dignity and efficaciousness of Christ the one Mediator. (no. 62).

Some Catholics, though, maintain it is ecumenically more prudent to speak of Mary as the unique "associate" or "cooperator" with Jesus in the work of redemption rather than refer to her as "Coredemptrix." In 1951, the Marian scholar, Fr. René Laurentin, believed it would be "gravely temerarious" for a Catholic to attack the legitimacy of calling Mary "Coredemptrix" because of its papal

endorsement.³⁹ Msgr. Brunero Gherardini (who taught ecclesiology and ecumenism for 37 years at the Pontifical Lateran University) argued that, although the doctrine of Marian Coredemption has not been solemnly defined, it nevertheless deserves the theological note of a teaching “close to the faith” [*sententia proxima fidei*].⁴⁰ (cf.).

Conclusion

This essay began with Pope Francis’s statement that “there is no salvation without the woman.” This is most certainly true. The Blessed Virgin, as the predestined Mother of God, New Eve, and co-redemptrix was part of God’s salvific plan from eternity. There are several more reasons why the Virgin Mary was necessary for redemption according to the ordained will of God. The following can be mentioned:

- Mary was prepared for her role as the Mother of the Word Incarnate by being preserved from all stain of original sin in her Immaculate Conception.
- To be fully human Jesus, as the Word Incarnate, needed a human mother.
- God in his omnipotence could have redeemed the human race in many ways, but it was most fitting that He redeem us by becoming incarnate of the Virgin Mary.⁴¹
- Mary spoke on behalf of all human nature when she freely and actively said yes to the invitation of the angel to be the Mother of the Word Incarnate.
- As the New Eve, Mary is obedient and a cause of salvation for herself and the whole human race.

³⁹ René Laurentin, *Le Titre de Corédemptrice: Étude historique* (Rome: Editions “Marianum”; Paris: Nouvelles Editions Latines, 1951), p. 28: “*Il serait gravement téméraire, pour le moins, de s’attaquer à sa légitimité.*”

⁴⁰ Rev. J.B. Carol, OFM and Rev. Paul M. Haffner, in “Mary, Blessed Virgin (in Theology),” *New Catholic Encyclopedia, Supplement* 2010, p. 750.

⁴¹ See St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* III q.1, a. 2.

- Under the Cross Mary united herself to the sufferings of her divine Son and she also offered Him to the Father; she offered her sufferings and those of her Son.
- Mary's participation in the Passion of Christ is meritorious in a congruous or fitting sense.⁴²
- Mary's association with Christ in the work of redemption can be described as co-redemption.
- Mary can be rightly called the co-redemptrix. This title highlights her unique cooperation in God's plan of salvation; it neither takes away nor adds anything to Christ's dignity as the one divine Redeemer.
- In light of God's eternal plan of salvation, Mary played and still plays an essential role as spiritual Mother, Mediatrix of all graces, and Advocate with and under her divine Son.

⁴² See St. Pius X, encyclical, *Ad Diem Illum* (February 2, 1904); D-H, 3374.