

## Probing the Mystery of Our Lady's Co-redemption in Christ

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### Introduction

Jesus tells us, “Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother, and sister, and mother” (Mt 12:50). The context of this quote is a short incident recorded in all three synoptic Gospels.<sup>1</sup> Jesus is engaged in teaching a group of disciples. When informed that his mother and other relatives from Nazareth are outside the house, wishing to speak with him, Jesus points to the disciples around him as his true kinfolk.

It would be easy to read this incident according to our everyday experience. Given the fourth commandment to honor one's mother, surely Jesus meant no disrespect towards Mary. But children grow up, leave home, and make their way in the world. Mary did her part in giving birth to Jesus; now he must leave her behind to devote himself totally to the mission given to him by the Father. Others, recalling Our Lady's *fiat* at the Annunciation, might reach a different conclusion. Far from distancing himself from his mother, Jesus is indirectly pointing out her true greatness. More than any other disciple, she always listens attentively to the Word of God, giving to it the obedience of faith.<sup>2</sup>

In like fashion, there are two ways we might view Our Lady's presence at the foot of the cross as given in John 19:25-27. One way is to draw upon our human experience: “Can a woman forget her suckling child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb?” (Is 49:15) According to a natural bond of kinship, Mary is supporting her son in his great hour of need, as any kind, loving mother would do. However, since only Jesus can satisfy God's justice by meriting *de condigno*, Mary is not contributing anything to our redemption. Another way to view Our Lady's presence there is to look more closely at the text, carefully noting what Jesus first

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<sup>1</sup> Mt 12:46-50; Mk 3:31-35; Lk 8:19-21

<sup>2</sup> One comment on this passage: “Far from undermining the role of Mary, Jesus reveals the true greatness of her divine maternity. After all, she was not merely his *natural* mother through generation, but she became the Mother of God precisely by embracing the Father's will (Lk 1:38, 43). Her relationship to Jesus—physical and spiritual—is thus magnified by Jesus' statement.” *The Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The New Testament*, intro., commentary, and notes by Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2010) 30.

says to his mother (Woman, behold, your son!) and then to his beloved disciple (Behold, your mother!). It would seem that Jesus is asking Mary to become the mother of all his beloved disciples, whom the unnamed Saint John merely represents here.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, in her subordinate, feminine role as “woman” and “mother,” and in a way not yet formally defined by the Church, Our Lady is cooperating with Jesus in our redemption.<sup>4</sup>

Which view is correct? Based on John 19:25-27 can Our Lady rightly be called the “Co-redemptrix,” or is this a pious overstatement of her role in the Church based on a misguided reading of the text? Without an authoritative definition of its true meaning the term “Co-redemptrix” could carry a negative connotation, as if putting a created person on the same level with a divine Person, or by implying that Jesus’ sacrifice was somehow not enough to save us. It could raise valid concerns that Jesus’ unique place as the one mediator between God and man might be obscured if another person was said to participate in the Redemption. On the other hand, there is something clearly special about Mary’s relationship with Jesus, and this is reflected in the many ways she is given hyperdulia by the faithful. Four of Mary’s special privileges have been solemnly defined by the Church, three of which—her divine Motherhood, her Immaculate Conception, and her Assumption—are celebrated with major liturgical feasts. The popular devotion of the Rosary invites the faithful to ponder with Mary the primary mysteries of Jesus’ life on earth. The Douay translation of Genesis 3:15 reflects an ancient tradition that a woman will one day crush the serpent’s head, a view supported by the interpretation of various Old Testament figures—such as Jael, Esther and Judith—as types foreshadowing Our

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<sup>3</sup> One example of this view: “The dying Christ, addressing Mary and John, saw in John the personification of all men, for whom He was shedding His blood. As this word, so to speak, created in Mary a most profound maternal affection, which did not cease to envelop the soul of the beloved disciple, this supernatural affection extended to all of us and made Mary truly the spiritual mother of all men.” Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *The Three Ages of the Interior Life: Prelude to Eternal Life*, trans. M. Timothea Doyle, vol. 1 (St. Louis: B. Herder Book, 1947)125-126.

<sup>4</sup> “For no creature could ever be counted as equal with the Incarnate Word and Redeemer. Just as the priesthood of Christ is shared in various ways both by the ministers and by the faithful, and as the one goodness of God is really communicated in different ways to His creatures, so also the unique mediation of the Redeemer does not exclude but rather gives rise to manifold cooperation which is but a sharing in this one source. The Church does not hesitate to profess this subordinate role of Mary.” Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, 62. [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va).

Lady's eventual victory over Satan.<sup>5</sup> Our Lady is hailed as "Holy Queen," again an honor foreshadowed by an Old Testament type, that of the Queen-Mother in Israel's Davidic dynasty.

I believe Our Lady should be crowned as the Co-redemptrix, but that John 19:25-27 is not, in itself, sufficient to explain why she has this role within the Church. It is necessary to probe what lies hidden beneath the obvious human relationship Mary has with Jesus as his mother. Scripture assures us "God has done great things" for Mary (Lk 1:49). What are these great things? Surely the greatest one is her divine maternity, her flesh and blood relationship with the Incarnate Son of God.<sup>6</sup> But we must not overlook the plenitude of graces needed to fulfill such a high office as Queen-Mother to the King of kings and Lord of lords. Of this plenitude Pope Pius IX once wrote that "under God, one cannot even imagine anything greater, and which, outside of God, no mind can succeed in comprehending fully."<sup>7</sup> Such fullness of grace, by making Our Lady an adopted "son" of God—and a perfect, sinless adopted son at that—also establishes spiritual and mystical bonds between herself and Jesus *as the Christ*. These, in turn, have a direct bearing upon her ability to cooperate with Jesus in our redemption. If Our Lady is immediately placed "in" Christ at her immaculate conception, then she is empowered to always work "with" Christ, even at the foot of the cross. But of course this remains always—and only—"under" the headship which Christ enjoys over his whole Mystical Body, the Church. What is said of all Christians especially applies to Our Lady, the preeminent member of the Church: "The Son of God is one with God by nature; the Son of Man is one with him in his person; we, his body, are one with him sacramentally. Consequently those who by faith are spiritual members of Christ can truly say that they are what he is: the Son of God and God himself. But what Christ is by nature we are as his partners; what he is of himself in all fullness, we are as participants.

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<sup>5</sup> These three women all defeated an enemy of Israel by striking at the head of their opponent. See Jgs 4:21; Esth 7:10; Jdt 13:8.

<sup>6</sup> "All the titles and glories of Mary stem from her divine maternity. She is immaculate, full of grace, co-redemptrix and mediatrix because she is the Mother of God. Her divine maternity places her on such an exalted level that St. Thomas did not hesitate to say that it bestowed upon her a certain infinite dignity. And Cajetan says that Mary touches the boundaries of divinity. There is no other creature that has as great an affinity with God." Antonio Royo and Jordan Aumann, *The Theology of Christian Perfection* (Dubuque, IA: Priory Press, 1962) 212.

<sup>7</sup> Pius IX, *Ineffabilis Deus*, 1854.

<https://www.papalencyclicals.net/pius09/p9ineff.htm>.

Finally, what the Son of God is by generation, his members are by adoption.”<sup>8</sup>

Through this paper I hope to allay any fears that honoring Mary could take something away from Jesus. On the contrary, because all that she ever does is *in Christ*, the Holy Spirit who ever *anoints Christ*, enters into the Redemption in a way which I suspect many overlook. At least I know I have overlooked it. It is only after many years of wrestling to explain why I believe Our Lady is the Co-redemptrix that I can present my thoughts here. But once we see that the Holy Spirit is busy at the heart of the Redemption, it all makes sense that Our Lady should not be excluded from this saving act, since all God ever does is a work of love, and such divine and perfect love always generously makes room for the other.

### **Mary’s Threefold Relationship with Jesus**

From the opening chapter of the Gospel of Saint Luke it is clear that Mary of Nazareth is the human mother of Jesus. On the surface there is nothing extraordinary about a woman bearing a child, not even an exceptionally gifted child. What sets this relationship apart from all others is something we cannot see: the holiness of both mother and child.

To probe this unique relationship let us turn again to the text of John 19:25-27 and note how there are three other persons standing by the cross with Mary.<sup>9</sup> One can be considered a blood relative, though most likely by

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<sup>8</sup> Isaac of Stella, *Sermo* 42, as given at “Office of Readings, Friday of the Fifth Week of Easter” in *The Liturgy of the Hours: According to the Roman Rite*, trans. International Commission on English in the Liturgy, vol. 2 (New York: Catholic Book Publishing, 1976) 856-857. Scripture assures us God the Father has “destined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ” (Eph 1:5). In the Incarnation, Jesus remains what he was—a divine Person with a divine nature—and becomes what he was not—a human being participating in our human nature. When the grace of Christ is bestowed upon us, we remain what we were—human persons with a human nature—and become what we were not—the children of God (1 Jn 3:1) participating in Jesus’ divine nature. “O marvelous exchange!” the Church sings at Christmas, “Man’s Creator has become man, born of a virgin. We have been made sharers in the divinity of Christ who humbled himself to share in our humanity.” Antiphon 1 at “Evening Prayer 1 for January 1” in *The Liturgy of the Hours*, vol. 1, 477. Also see *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 460.

<sup>9</sup> It is not certain if “his mother’s sister, Mary, the wife of Clopas” is one or two women. But, in either case, some kind of blood relationship is being indicated.

marriage, an extended family member: his mother's sister, Mary, the wife of Clopas. Another is a notorious sinner, a woman who had once fallen into grave sin but had been released from bondage to Satan when Jesus cast out from her seven demons: Mary Magdalene. The third is the beloved disciple, John, one of the first disciples of Jesus, and the one privileged to lean upon Jesus' breast at the Last Supper. We have here examples of three ways one might relate to Jesus. The first way is seemingly by chance to be one of his relatives according to the flesh. This type of bond doesn't guarantee oneness of mind and heart, as demonstrated by Jesus' extended family thinking him mad (Mk 3:21), or trying to throw him off the brow of a cliff (Lk 4:29). The second way is in the spiritual realm, a bond of love and gratitude towards one's savior, as demonstrated by Mary Magdalene washing Jesus' feet with her tears and wiping them with a costly ointment. The third way is that of discipleship. John and the other apostles were called to follow Jesus during his public ministry. It was a training period preparing them for the time when the Holy Spirit would empower them to carry on Jesus' mission of preaching. Thus after Pentecost they became cooperators in the work of saving souls.

If we think about it, these three relationships correspond to the three sacraments of Christian initiation, though in a slightly different order. First is the spiritual bond: one must be baptized, thus becoming an adopted son of God. To the newly baptized is then granted the great privilege of eating the flesh and blood of Jesus in the Eucharist. Finally, through Confirmation one is strengthened by the gift of the Holy Spirit to give faithful witness to Jesus; one is empowered to cooperate in the life and mission of the Church as a mature Christian, regardless of chronological age.

If we view Mary's relationship to Jesus in a linear fashion, according to historical events, it would seem that she follows this same progression. First, in view of the foreseen merits of Jesus, the grace of filial adoption is extended to her as she is conceived without the stain of original sin. Then, after her consent at the Annunciation, Jesus is conceived within her womb as her flesh and blood Son. Finally, she is present in the upper room with the other followers of Jesus as the Holy Spirit descends at Pentecost (Acts

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Likewise, it is not certain if Mary Magdalene is the same woman who anointed Jesus' feet in the home of a Pharisee, but surely she must have been grateful to Jesus for casting out the seven demons, or she would not have helped to provide for his means. See Lk 7:36-38; 8:2-3. Also see William P. Barker, *Everyone in the Bible* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1966) 230.

1:14; 2:1-4). From this time onwards, even after her Assumption into heaven, she has cooperated in the mission of the Church through her powerful intercessory prayer, which the Church has never ceased to implore.

This is all true as far as it goes, but we have to be careful here not to misconstrue why this similarity between Mary and the rest of us as members of the Church exists. She needed to be redeemed from the stain of original sin; so do we. She was privileged to receive Jesus into her body; so are we through the Eucharist. She had a life-long journey of faith to make; so do we. She ever advocates for us in heaven, thus cooperating in the spread of the Gospel; we, too, according to our various personal vocations, are called to cooperate in the apostolic work of the Church. “Obviously,” we might conclude, “there is no difference between Mary and us. She is just one more member of the Church, no better than any of us. That means, of course, that she could never contribute anything to our redemption, because no descendent of Adam ever could. She most definitely is *not* the Co-redemptrix!”

The problem here is that we do not think out what this downplaying of Mary’s role in the Church implies. If, as the children of Adam we are all sinners, then Mary, too, at the deepest part of her being, must also be a sinner. God foresaw that she would be like all of us and sin, but this would prove no obstacle, for his grace would dress her up in holiness and prevent her from committing what she would have done if he had not intervened. It is as if any woman would do to bear God’s son; by random God chose Mary. But the *sensus fidei* recoils at the thought of Mary having any connection, however remote, with sin! She is the Immaculata, the ever holy Mother of God. By attempting to bring Mary down to our level, we miss the whole point of the Redemption. Through Jesus’ sacrificial death upon the cross, God wants to make us *like Mary, to bring us up to her level*, “holy and blameless before him” (Eph 1:4). This is why Mary is a type of the Church.<sup>10</sup> The more we realize “who” she is, the more we will come to see “who” we are in Jesus Christ! Sin does not have the last word—Jesus Christ does. His grace can recreate us to be what God intended us to be from all

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<sup>10</sup> “As St. Ambrose taught, the Mother of God is a type of the Church in the order of faith, charity, and perfect union with Christ. For in the mystery of the Church, which is itself rightly called mother and virgin, the Blessed Virgin stands out in eminent and singular fashion as exemplar both of virgin and mother.” *Lumen Gentium*, 63.

eternity: a human family of adopted sons in the Only-Begotten Son, Jesus Christ.

We can therefore confidently accept Mary as our Co-redemptrix, or spiritual mother, because, through sheer grace, she is the exemplary Christian, the one with the closest familial ties to Jesus, hence the one who, after Jesus, always perfectly fulfills the Father's will. Jesus is a divine *Person*; Mary is *personally* the Mother of God. What we have through our baptism—a personal and loving relationship with the Father, through the Son, in the Holy Spirit, such that we can cry out, “Abba! Father!” (Gal 4:6)—Our Lady has in virtue of her essential role in the Incarnation. Jesus is truly God. Mary, through the plenitude of grace bestowed upon her in view of her divine maternity, is truly the most godlike creature. In a most wondrous fashion, and through the power of the Holy Spirit, she is like the Father in bringing forth the Son. But the Father is *always* generating the Son; hence Mary not only brings forth the Son in the flesh at a unique historical moment, but is also granted the grace to always cooperate with the Holy Spirit in bringing forth Jesus Christ *in her soul*. She lives in Jesus because Jesus lives in her.<sup>11</sup> In this sense, she is a *spiritual brother* to Jesus, because, alongside Jesus, and through that sheer grace lavished upon her, she is always a partaker of the divine life and nature of the Father.

Finally, although he is God, Jesus is also *fully human* and not a demigod, or some strange being half-God and half-man. As our Redeemer he is the New Adam, sent to repair the harm our human nature incurred through the sin of the first man. But Adam did not act alone. The woman also clearly sinned, even handing the forbidden fruit to her husband. And Mary is also *fully human*, but as “woman”, specifically designed by God to be a helper fit for the man, Jesus Christ. Since there is an ontological difference between man and woman, there is no threat to Jesus' divine person in him receiving Mary's help.<sup>12</sup> Woman comes forth from man; the man is clearly the origin

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<sup>11</sup> “Supernatural life is the life of Jesus Christ Himself *in my soul*, by Faith, Hope and Charity . . . By this life, Jesus Christ imparts to me *His Spirit*. In this way, He becomes the principle of a superior activity which raises me up, provided I do not obstruct it, to think, judge, love, will, suffer, labor with Him, by Him, in Him and like Him. My outward acts become the manifestations of this life of Jesus in me.” Jean-Baptiste Chautard, *The Soul of the Apostolate*, trans. A Monk of Our Lady of Gethsemani (Trappist, KY: Abbey of Gethsemani, 1946) 12.

<sup>12</sup> “When the Book of Genesis speaks of ‘help’, it is not referring merely to *acting* but also to *being*. Womanhood and manhood are complementary *not only from the*

and head of the woman, and in that sense always holds first place in the natural hierarchy established by God at our creation.

We come here to the heart of the “great mystery” of the marriage covenant between the Lamb and his Bride, the Church.<sup>13</sup> As the New Adam, Jesus bears the penalty assigned to the man and dies upon the tree of the cross. As the New Eve, Mary bears the penalty assigned to the woman and suffers alongside her Son. It is the pangs of childbirth, something *only a woman by nature* can endure. So Jesus’ agony resonates within the depths of Mary’s most compassionate being, and becomes her agony. A soldier’s lance pierces his side and the prophesied sword mystically pierces her soul. Water and blood gush forth from Jesus’ Sacred Heart; as his lifeless body is taken down from the cross, Mary enfolds him once more in her arms, pressing his wounded, bloodied body against the altar of her Immaculate Heart. There are two hearts, but one sacrifice engendering grace within souls, for God’s infallible Word has declared it so, “Behold, your son; behold, your mother.” Yet all remains wrapped in mystery as the three sacraments of Christian initiation are unveiled: Baptism, in the water; the Eucharist, in the blood; Confirmation, in the handing over of the Spirit of Jesus. And Mary is there, not as a “poor sinner” under the dominion of Satan, but as the free-woman already redeemed by Christ. She is there precisely as the predestined New Eve, formed from the side of Christ, flesh of his flesh and bone of his bone,<sup>14</sup> *mystically Jesus’ sister*, in her one person representing all the redeemed who will ultimately form *the corporate New Eve*, the Church. For if the mother comes forth from the side of Christ immaculately pure, then all the children mystically within her come forth from the side of Christ immaculately pure, discovering their true self as the adopted children of God through the one sacrifice of Jesus and Mary. *And that’s the Redemption, the buying back of spiritual relationships broken and seriously wounded by sin.*

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*physical and psychological points of view*, but also from the *ontological*. It is only through the duality of the ‘masculine’ and the ‘feminine’ that the ‘human’ finds full realization.” John Paul II, 1995 *Letter to Women*, 7. [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va).

<sup>13</sup> See Eph 5:21-33 and Rev 19:7 for the marriage feast; Gen 3:16-19 for the penalty due to sin; Jn 19:34 and Lk 2:33-35 for the piercing of the two hearts; Jn 19:30 for the handing over of the Holy Spirit.

<sup>14</sup> Remember: no male seed was involved in the conception of Jesus. The Holy Spirit acted directly upon Mary’s body to create the Sacred Humanity of Jesus; the bodily mother-child relationship between Mary and Jesus is therefore purer than of that which exists when a child is conceived in the ordinary way.



If Mary is ever crowned then as the Co-redemptrix, it will certainly include recognition of her role as the New Eve.<sup>15</sup> This in turn rests upon her unique relationship to Jesus, who—at one and the same time—is her Son, her God and Savior, and the origin and head of her own graced-filled humanity, because he is the perfect man, whose very flesh is ever holy and life-giving.

### **Mary, the Woman Created as Jesus' Helper**

Having considered the similarities between Mary and all the other members of the Church, *it is crucial to now consider what sets her apart from everyone else.* If we don't grasp this difference, we will find it very difficult to concede that she is rightly called the Co-redemptrix. Simply put, Our Lady is uniquely the Spouse of the Holy Spirit. Those who agree that this term (Spouse of the Holy Spirit) fittingly applies to Mary commonly assume it is because of her role in the Incarnation, as given in Scripture: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God" (Lk 1:35). Or, as we profess in the Apostle Creed, "He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit, and was born of the Virgin Mary." But something is being overlooked here. Although Mary is *personally* the mother of Jesus, the Holy Spirit is not *personally* the father of Jesus. Only the Eternal Father fulfills the role of begetting the Son. So where does that leave Mary in relation to the Holy Spirit? What union exists between them such that it is fitting for Jesus to be conceived in the womb of Mary?

Note how the word "fitting" is deliberately being used here. There is no need for God to create anything, much less a woman full of grace. All of creation is sheer gift and we must humbly bow in adoration before God's absolute freedom to bring forth such a gift by his almighty power and infinite goodness. Nonetheless he has been pleased to act "outside" of himself this way, and has given us the means of probing so deep a mystery by speaking in terms of "fittingness." Here one could go off in endless directions, for everything God wills, or permits to be, will in the end be

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<sup>15</sup> "Mary is called in all Greek and Latin tradition the new Eve, Mother of all men in regard to the life of the soul, as Eve was in regard to the life of the body. It stands to reason that the spiritual mother of all men ought to give them spiritual life, not as the principal physical cause (for God alone can be the principal physical cause of divine grace), but as the moral cause by merit *de congruo*, merit *de condigno* being reserved to Christ." Garrigou-Lagrange, *Three Ages*, 124.

seen to “fit” together. Therefore, to keep within the scope of this paper, I must limit my remarks to points judged most relevant to Our Lady as Co-redemptrix. Creation, of course, involves more than material objects. Sanctifying grace, a supernatural quality of the soul, something we cannot see or measure, is a created reality. The Sacred Humanity of Jesus—his body, blood and soul—is also a created reality. As part of the divine economy it is therefore a “common work of the three divine persons. For as the Trinity has only one and the same nature, so too does it have only one and the same operation: ‘The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are not three principles of creation, but one principle.’ However each divine person performs the common work according to his unique personal property.”<sup>16</sup> In the Incarnation the Eternal One enters into time, without, however, disturbing the inherent relations between Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Father, as the First Person of the Trinity, continues to generate the Son. So he remains the origin of this common work by sending the Son to redeem us. At the same time the Father remains the head of this common work by accepting, on behalf of the whole Trinity, the Son’s sacrifice *according to the flesh*, as expiation for the sins of the whole world. The Holy Spirit continues to proceed from the Father through the Son, and is therefore likewise sent by the Father, such that, wherever the Son is, the Holy Spirit also is. In his personal property as the Holy *Spirit*, the Third Person of the Trinity does not become incarnate. For, as his name suggests, his personal property is to forever exist as “spirit”, eternally *dwelling in* other persons—first of all, in the Father and the Son—but without any materiality. In a profound mystery, one before which we must tread lightly, the Holy Spirit anoints Jesus, making him uniquely “the Christ,” and, *precisely as man*, forever bonded to the Father in an unbreakable love-union of perfect holiness.

How does the Second Person of the Trinity perform his contribution to this common work, according to his personal property? We are drawing closer now to considering the fittingness of Our Lady as Co-redemptrix with the one Redeemer. To do so we need to turn to the figure which, in the eternal plan of God, most closely foreshadows the ever sinless Jesus, namely Adam, *but in his pristine state*, before the Fall marred what had started out as so good and beautiful.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> CCC, 258

<sup>17</sup> In terms of time, Adam precedes Jesus; because Adam sinned, we needed to be redeemed. We therefore tend to assume that Adam came first in the mind of God and Jesus came second, as a way of rescuing the fallen human race. But in terms of

Adam is created in the image of God because Jesus, as the Eternal Son, is the Uncreated Image of God. Adam is given dominion over all other creatures on the earth because Jesus, as God, is above all creatures in the whole universe. Adam is given the task of high priest in the sanctuary of the Garden of Eden<sup>18</sup> because Jesus, in his sacrificial death, is destined to be the High Priest through whom all creation will be offered back to the Father in love. Adam is extended the preternatural gift of immortality because Jesus, through his resurrection, will receive the gift of unending life as a man. Adam receives a full measure of grace through the original justice because Jesus, as the God-man, will have the absolute fullness of grace possible. Adam, as the first man, has primacy of place over all other human beings to be created because Jesus, as the firstborn of all creation, is the ultimate reason why anything else is created, for as Scripture tells us, “all things were created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together” (Col 1:16-17).

So when God declares that it is not good for Adam to be alone, he is revealing that it is not good for Jesus to be alone; Adam needs a helper because Jesus needs a helper. From God’s point of view, there is a big problem *with only one Person* of the Trinity standing out (as it were) as *somehow different* from the other Two by taking human flesh, when Father, Son and Holy Spirit are co-eternal, co-equal, consubstantial, in a perfect unity of operation. But, as previously mentioned, it is not fitting for the Holy Spirit to become incarnate. For a similar reason, it is not fitting for the Father to become incarnate. The Father generates the Son in a most pure, and wholly spiritual and virginal way; there is no materiality to his begetting of the Son. It is, however, fitting for the Son to take human flesh because his personal

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the dignity of their persons, Scripture assures us that in “everything” Jesus is “pre-eminent” (Col 1:18). To try to see things from God’s point of view, it is necessary to “read” Adam in the light of Jesus. “Only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light. For Adam, the first man, was a figure of Him Who was to come, namely Christ, the Lord.” Vatican II, *Gaudium et spes*, 22. [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va).

<sup>18</sup> From Genesis 1:27-28, man is created in God’s image and given dominion over the other creatures. But “Genesis is also depicting Adam as a *priestly* figure, commissioned to serve in Eden, the primordial garden-sanctuary.” John Bergsma and Brant Pitre, *A Catholic Introduction to the Bible: the Old Testament*, vol. 1 (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2018) 103. See CCC 375, 376 for the original justice and accompanying gift of immortality.

property is to image the Father, and an image can be stamped into a created nature.

We might not think any of this is a big deal, and likewise judge it as having little relevance to the Redemption. Because of the Fall, we are very protective of the ego; it seems that only being “number one,” or being seen as above others in one way or another, is important. But all the power plays we so easily fall prey to—jealousy, envy, rivalry, jockeying for the number one spot—are foreign to the mindset of the Trinity. God is only “above” creation because he chose to bring into being something outside of his Trinitarian life. Therefore, regardless of how marvelous it is, all creation gives God but an accidental glory. God’s true glory, one he will never set aside, is his inner life as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. So what matters to God is love, not any kind of love, but divine love, his very own being as a perfect communion between Persons in one nature. In this communion, or “family,” each Person is known, cherished, and respected for his unique personhood (or “place”) within the whole. The Father eternally delights in the Son he begets, who so perfectly images himself, the source of all good as God. The Son eternally delights in the Father from whom he receives all that is good, namely his very being as God. Father and Son delight in their one Spirit eternally breathed forth in love, finding in this Spirit a divine conception of their likeness to each other, which is so holy, perfect and good, because it is God. The Holy Spirit eternally delights in the Father and the Son from whom he proceeds as sheer gift uniting the Two as One, finding in himself the power which animates the whole, because he, too, is God. What a mystery!

So a solitary Jesus simply will not do! He is coming from a world vastly different from the one we know, with a whole different set of values than what we hold dear. Here we also bump into God’s omniscience. What we laboriously try to grasp through distinctions and discursive reasoning is simply all of one piece in the mind of God. God sees the Incarnation and the Redemption as inseparable because both are equally and freely chosen by him to happen in time. It is fitting that the Redemption be rooted in the Incarnation, for only one who is both God and man can atone for sin. At the same time the Redemption perfects the Incarnation; which is to say, the need to redeem us makes it fitting for the Incarnation to take place, so that the Son’s personal property of imaging the Father can be brought to full perfection in the flesh.

To try to unpack this further consider: just as the Son eternally comes forth from the Father, it is fitting that *in the flesh* he be seen as coming forth from another person. Hence he is born of the Virgin Mary. This much all agree upon, but let's push the matter further. As Son, Jesus eternally images the Father. It is fitting that *in the flesh* he, in turn, has a created image of himself; which is to say that he “fathers” (or is the origin of) another in divine life, without losing his place as “number two” within the Trinity. God is pure spirit; it is fitting that this image of the Son be in essence *a spiritual reality*, a participation in the life and nature of God, a supernatural quality imparted to the soul of the created image. But grace is not a person; the point of the fullness of grace is to make *the whole person*, body and soul, eminently holy, virginal as the Eternal Father is virginal, and thus shielded from contracting any sin, whether in thought or in deed. Jesus though true man *remains true God*; it is fitting that there be some kind of *clear distinction* between Jesus and his created image, as Jesus is a divine Person and the created image is a created person; hence the ontological distinction between “Bridegroom” and “Bride.” Although the Father begets the Son solely by his own Person, he does not bring forth the Holy Spirit without the help of the Son, their mutual bond of love being so utterly intimate and perfect as to breathe forth but one Spirit between them. *It is fitting therefore that in the flesh Jesus does not redeem us solely by himself*, but following the pattern inherent within the Trinity, he has the help of another person—his most beloved, grace-filled Mother—to breathe forth in love his whole Mystical Body the Church at the cross. Father and Son breathe forth the Holy Spirit. Jesus and Mary breathe forth the Church. It is a pattern established in human nature from the very beginning of time in the institution of human marriage from which springs our familial life.

If Adam prefigures Jesus, then Eve prefigures Mary. It is easy to see that Jesus is much greater than his type, for Jesus is God and Adam is merely a man. It is also easy to see that Eve is in a marriage covenant with Adam, for Scripture explicitly calls her Adam's wife (Gen 2:25). It is not so easy to see how Mary is much greater than her type, for both are women. Nor is it easy to explain exactly what type of marriage covenant Mary is in, such that she is rightly called the Holy Mother of God. Who is her spouse?

If Mary is the mother of Jesus, and Jesus is God, then she is personally the Mother of God. The first thought might be to conclude she is somehow wedded to God the Father, the one who personally begets the Son. They both bring forth the same Person. But, of course, this simply cannot be

true. As previously mentioned, God the Father has no spouse when he begets his Son. Furthermore there is no materiality to his virginal generation of the Son within the Godhead, and, as a created reality, the Sacred Humanity of Jesus is a common work by all Three Persons of the Trinity.

We might then turn to the Son in the search for Mary's spouse. This seems to make more sense. Adam and Eve are known to be in a marriage covenant, and since they foreshadow Jesus and Mary, Jesus and Mary must also be wedded together somehow. The "somehow" is still mysterious, for though Mary is the mother of Jesus, Eve is not the mother of Adam. The foreshadowing does not seem to exactly match. It must be in a hidden way, as something "mystical," that the two—Almighty God and his little handmaid—become one.

Remember it is God who judges it most fitting for Jesus to have a helper. God thinks up the idea, not any man. Accordingly Adam, here representing all mankind, is cast into a deep sleep (Gen 2:21). We are all passive before God's absolute freedom to give his gifts as he desires. Each divine Person, according to his unique personal property, performs the common work of creating a perfect woman. From all eternity the Father predestines Mary to be the human mother of his Incarnate Son. Since like comes from like, he further wills that she, in her very person, be a partaker of the divine nature, so that a most godly man might come forth from a most godly woman. Her soul, envisioned by God as so full of grace and lightsome, rightly makes her whole person an adopted son of God, even though she is feminine to the core of her being as "mother," for here "sonship" refers to the divine filiation which is a spiritual reality. This grace is extended to her through *the foreseen merits of the Incarnate Son*. Hence Eve's birth (coming forth) from Adam in time foreshadows Mary's predestined spiritual birth (coming forth in grace) from Jesus. Eve is formed from Adam's rib, from his bosom, because Mary's grace-filled person is a sheer gift from the heart of God, just as Jesus' divine Person eternally resides in the bosom of the Father (Jn 1:18).

But to speak of Jesus' infinite merits being applied to Mary may trigger an immediate association with the Redemption, and all that I have been saying here may suddenly be cast into doubt. Aha! That old problem! Mary cannot be the Co-redemptrix because (remember!) she needed to be redeemed like everyone else from the stain of original sin. But Jesus' death upon the cross is not the only source of his infinite merits. It is the

crowning act of his life, but everything else Jesus does as God-made-man merits, because it is God who is using his human nature to do it. His baby coos and cries merits. His first faltering steps merits. His hard labor beside Saint Joseph merits. His contemplative prayer in solitude merits. His ministry of preaching and healing merits. There are plenty of infinite merits to draw upon by the very fact of the Incarnation itself.<sup>19</sup>

What is the source of Mary's fullness of grace? Her relationship with Adam is true but quite remote. Centuries have passed since Adam sinned. Her relationship to Jesus, by contrast, is the closest one any creature can ever have with God. She is his true mother; he took flesh within her womb and nestled there for nine months. Only one life was between them on both the natural and supernatural level. Mary's blood nourished her own body and that of the growing enfant within, while Jesus' plenitude of grace as the New Adam ever overflowed to nourish Mary's soul. In other words, Mary never *becomes* a Christian; she simply *is* one from the moment of her conception in time. As the Most Holy Mother of God, the perfect adopted son of God, she receives her life from the Father through the Son, just as the Holy Spirit receives his life from the Father through the Son. "Image" connotes a one-to-one relationship; the Son directly reflects the Father. "Likeness," on the other hand, is associated with a pattern,<sup>20</sup> the Holy Spirit being the Uncreated Pattern of how divine life is extended beyond the Father-Son relationship: through the gift of love between the Father and the Son. The Holy Spirit, we might say, is the sweetness, the unction, the holy oil enflaming the love between the Father and the Son. We are treading here on very deep waters, but it is important to try to grasp the source of Our Lady's holiness. Mary is the created pattern of how divine life is extended in time beyond the eternal Father-Son relationship existing within the Trinity itself. All grace—which in essence empowers created persons to participate in the inner life of God—comes from the Father, through the Son, in the Holy Spirit. To make clear this unique pattern, upon which the Church as a communion of the elect will be modeled, the Holy

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<sup>19</sup> "Nothing is little in the life of Jesus. The Eternal Father looks upon the smallest action of Christ with more delight than He looks upon the whole universe." Columba Marmion, *Christ in His Mysteries*, trans. M. St. Thomas, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (London: Sands, 1939) 7.

<sup>20</sup> According to the Word Study for Gen 1:26 in the *Ignatius Study Bible: Genesis*, image often denotes a physical "representation" of something in two or three dimensions, while likeness refers to a "pattern," or visible "resemblance" of something. This distinction between the two terms is being utilized here.

Spirit takes Mary into a spousal relationship with himself. She is always “full of grace” because the Spouse of her soul is the Holy Spirit, who, unlike a mere human spouse bound by time and matter, is never without the power to make her fruitful with more and more grace.

Let’s examine this more closely. All human beings, even Adam, are not totally created out of nothing. God takes a preexisting material—some mud—and breathes into it to make Adam a living being. God takes Adam’s rib and forms out of it the woman. In the mystery of new life, when any man and woman come together in the marital act, we now know that sperm and egg come together to form the material element of a new human being. There is still not a human person until God does his part and, out of nothing, creates the human soul which he immediately infuses into the body.<sup>21</sup> God cannot create anything sinful. The human soul is therefore without any sin at its creation, but once infused into a body genetically connected to Adam and Eve it is immediately stained with the original sin. This sin affects the whole person. If Adam and Eve had not sinned, but stayed in friendship with God, God would have judged it fitting to likewise grace with original justice the children produced within this communion of love between himself and man.<sup>22</sup> But since Adam and Eve listened to the Serpent and did his bidding—eating from the forbidden tree—they placed themselves, and all their descendents, in a bond of friendship with the Serpent. It is certainly not fitting that the children of such an unholy alliance receive grace at the creation of their souls. Hence the “original sin” of Adam and Eve is passed onto their children as a lack of something which God intends to be there but which has been lost: namely an intimate loving union with God. Though physically alive such progeny are spiritually dead, because they are deprived of the gift of sanctifying grace. But there is also the wound to our nature caused by the original sin, which makes itself felt in the flesh of the human person through the disordered downward pull towards concupiscence—a sorry state indeed for the whole person. One can never climb out of the mire of sin and death.

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<sup>21</sup> “The Church teaches that every spiritual soul is created immediately by God—it is not ‘produced’ by the parents.” CCC, 366

<sup>22</sup> “All know that the father of the whole human race was constituted by God in so exalted a state that he was to hand on to his posterity, together with earthly existence, the heavenly life of divine grace. But after the unhappy fall of Adam, the whole human race, infected by the hereditary stain, lost their participation in the divine nature.” Pope Pius XII, *Mystici Corporis Christi*, 12. [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va).



What I am proposing is this: when God creates Mary's soul, in view of the infinite merits of Jesus and her personal connection to him as his mother, he immediately floods *her soul* with the grace of her divine motherhood. The Holy Spirit, unbounded by time or matter, exercises his personal property of dwelling in another person. He does this by uniting himself to Mary's soul, sanctifying it and making it fully alive with his grace. Since the soul is the form of the person, the most essential part, it takes precedence over the bodily material she is about to be infused into. It is simply not fitting for so holy a soul, one anointed with the Holy Spirit's power, to be infused into material tainted with original sin, and which would pass onto her a downward tendency to concupiscence, making it very difficult for her to stay in a state of grace. But this is no problem for God. Again, in view of the infinite merits of Jesus Christ, and foreseeing that Jesus will be conceived within Mary's womb, God redeems *the flesh* into which Mary's soul is about to be infused into. Jesus will stay begotten of the Father, but, at the same time, will be miraculously conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit at work within Mary's body. For remember: although the spiritual marriage between the Holy Spirit and Mary's soul is a mystical, or hidden reality, Mary's complete person is a body-soul composite. In a marriage covenant there is an exchange of goods, namely that of the two persons in the marriage itself. The Holy Spirit does not become Incarnate, but takes to himself a "body", the holy material or "seed" of the Church, through his spiritual marriage bond with the predestined Mother of God, just as Saint Joseph will become the virginal human father of Jesus through his human marriage with Mary.

It is important here to stress the marital relationship between the Holy Spirit and Mary, which is one of complete freedom. The Holy Spirit never *uses* Mary to bring about the Incarnation. Rather, he *loves* Mary, and lavishes his choicest graces upon her person, thus empowering her to utter, in all simplicity, and with fully loving cooperation, her *fiat* at the Annunciation.<sup>23</sup> It is also important to stress the *indissolubility* of this marriage between the Almighty one and his little handmaid: "What therefore God has joined together, let no man put asunder" (Mt 19:6). The least sin would destroy this marital union; therefore the grace of Mary's divine motherhood is immediately granted to her soul even before its infusion into her body,

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<sup>23</sup> "The king loved Esther more than all the women, and she found grace and favor in his sight more than all the virgins" (Esth 2:17). "Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and she exclaimed with a loud cry, 'Blessed are you among women'" (Lk 1:41-42).

preventing any entryway to Adam's sin to through her human parents.<sup>24</sup> By not waiting for the Incarnation, but immediately consummating the marriage at Mary's conception, the Holy Spirit would never think of acting in so an ungodly way as to abandon his Beloved at any future moment in time. For such an action on his part would be a betrayal of his commitment to love her as his Spouse. It would leave her bereft of his power to ward off the temptations of the evil one and require her to act on her own, in a merely human mode, which might produce some good works but without any merit in God's eyes. So when Mary stands by Jesus at the foot of the cross, what we outwardly behold is the human mother of Jesus. What we don't so easily behold, unless we read the scene through the window of the Incarnation, is the mystical reality of Mary's spousal union with the Holy Spirit. This spiritual relationship with the Holy Spirit empowers her to fully and lovingly cooperate with Jesus in the redemption of mankind, to merit *de congruo* what Jesus merits *de condigno*. The Church teaches, "It is love 'to the end' that confers on Christ's sacrifice its value as redemption and reparation, as atonement and satisfaction. He knew and loved us all when he offered his life."<sup>25</sup> Our Lady, as the Spouse of the Holy Spirit, was likewise filled with such overflowing divine love.<sup>26</sup> She had no need to merit her own salvation; she was confirmed in grace at the moment of her conception. All of her merits, therefore, could be joined to Jesus' infinite

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<sup>24</sup> In a natural marriage, husband and wife might physically consummate their union in a way open to life, but without being able to conceive a child for many years. They are not any less married for that, for it is God who ultimately opens the womb with the gift of a child. The Holy Spirit's union with Our Lady is of a much higher order, being a spiritual and supernatural reality, yet it does not seem unreasonable to suggest they are indeed "wedded" together long before Jesus is conceived in Mary's womb. Note, too, how at the Annunciation Gabriel does not ask Mary if she wants to bear God's Son—he simply announces that she will do so (Lk 1:31), as if knowing that she is already in a love-union with the Holy Spirit. Our Lady's faith-filled, unconditional *fiat* is another indication that the Holy Spirit is at work in her soul.

<sup>25</sup> CCC, 616

<sup>26</sup> "Herein lies the essence of the mystery of the redemption. In union with her Son on Calvary, Mary satisfied for us by a satisfaction based, not on strict justice, but on the rights of the infinite friendship or charity which united her to God. . . . she was a martyr, not only for Christ but with Christ; so much so, that a single cross sufficed for her Son and for her. She was, in a sense, nailed to it by her love for Him. She was thus the co-redemptrix, as Pope Benedict XV says, in this sense, that with Christ, through Him, and in Him, she bought back the human race" Garrigou-Lagrange, *The Three Ages*, 123-124.

merits in obtaining our redemption. Truly, not only as “Woman,” or the New Eve, but also as the Immaculate Conception, the woman in a unique spousal relationship to the Holy Spirit because she is the Holy Mother of God, Our Lady is rightly called the Co-redemptrix.

### **Co-redemptrix in Order to Become Our Mother**

If sound theological reasons can be offered to show why it is fitting that Our Lady participates in Jesus’ sacrifice as the Co-redemptrix, there is now the lived experience of two thousand years in which Our Lady’s maternal presence has been active within the Church. She has appeared in numerous places, times and cultures to invigorate the Faith in hearts grown cold. She has converted millions of people to Christianity (think of Guadalupe!), won crucial battles for the survival of Christendom, and produced miraculous springs to heal both body and soul. She has inspired the founding and renewal of numerous religious orders, given us the Rosary to help us meditate upon the mysteries of her Son, and provided tangible proofs of her motherly concern through various sacramentals, one being so powerful as to be dubbed “the miraculous medal.” She has been the mainstay of persecuted families, such as the Catholic Irish during the penal days, and even in our own times when many churches became shuttered due to the coronavirus. As any good mother would do, she has not been afraid to warn of us the consequences which will befall us if we persist in our sinful ways, but always urges us to repent, to make reparation, to receive Jesus worthily in the Eucharist, and to pray, pray, pray, but with fervent faith, hope, love and devotion, after her own example.

But how can Our Lady *act* as our mother unless she *is, in fact*, our mother? And how can she truly be our mother unless she somehow gave birth to us? And since it is through baptism into Jesus’ death and resurrection that we are born again, how can Our Lady give birth to us unless she is present at the cross, actively participating in Jesus’ sacrifice as his Co-redemptrix? When Abraham demonstrated his intent to obey God’s command to sacrifice his son, Isaac, God said to him, “Because you have done this, and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will indeed bless you, and I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore” (Gen 22:17). When Our Lady likewise did not withhold from God the one treasure she loved most in this world, but obediently offered her flesh and blood Son to the Father in expiation for the sins of the world, uniting her own sufferings to his, how much more

could God bless her and multiply her children, which is to say, make her the mother of his family of adopted sons in the one Son, Jesus Christ!<sup>27</sup>

But why do we need a spiritual mother? It is because grace builds on nature, and God has so designed human nature that we all need a mother. Actually, since our nature is stamped with familial relationships, we need both parents: a father and a mother. We need our parents because God will not create us without their cooperation in providing the material he infuses our souls into. We need our parents because we cannot flourish as persons without them protecting us, providing for us, nurturing us, teaching us and correcting us, for years and years on end, until we finally grow into mature adulthood.

In the First Letter to the Corinthians we read that “he [man] is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man. (For man was not made from woman, but woman from man. Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man)” (1 Cor 11:7-9). Given today’s cultural milieu, with its preoccupation of pushing inclusiveness, it can seem outdated, even insulting, to bring up such a text. But this is the holy Word of God and must be taken seriously. What great truth is Saint Paul expounding here?

If we read in between the lines and see in “man” the perfect man, Jesus Christ, then certainly he is the image and glory of God. If we see in “woman” the perfect woman, Mary, then certainly she is the glory of the whole human race, for she is higher than the angels, next only to her Son in the whole created universe. But it is also true in a general way of our human nature. Man images God in the sense that he has a self-contained inner life through a rational soul which is able to know and love. But the glory of God is his personal begetting of divine life in other persons. Man is therefore also the glory of God because his body is ordered to fatherhood, entrusted with an exterior capacity to beget new life, with the accompanying role of protector and provider, of teacher and law giver. Woman, on the other hand, is the glory of man because she is ordered to love and to

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<sup>27</sup> “It was she, the second Eve, who, free from all sin, original or personal, and always more intimately united 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, according to the flesh, was the mother of our Head, through the added title of pain and glory became, according to the Spirit, the mother of all His members.” Pius XII, *Mystici Corporis Christi*, 110.

interpersonal relationships. It is through loving woman, and being loved by her in return, and by the further gift of God blessing their union with a child, that what is in potency—an image of God’s fatherhood—comes to perfection in act. Without woman man cannot find his true self as an image of God, but woman herself is patterned on God’s inner Trinitarian life, a life of receiving in love from the other and giving back in love to the other. The woman receives from the man and, with “the help of the Lord” (Gen 4:1), gives back to the man a child in the man’s “own likeness” and after his “image” (Gen 5:3).

But the woman also needs the man in order to go from potential motherhood to actually bearing a child, thus bringing to perfection a potential little trinity we call the family. Herein lays a grave danger. The woman’s very body is always in potency to receive from another. Who she receives from should be her husband and ultimately God himself, since new life ultimately comes from the Creator. What is true in bodily terms is likewise true about the human soul, regardless of the sex of the person. The soul is in potency to receive truth and love from God. Sanctifying grace, with all the infused virtues and gifts, raises this potency to the supernatural level. In order for this potency to be in act, the human person must continually cooperate with actual graces until the happy moment when the soul is confirmed in grace as one of the elect in heaven. Before the soul is confirmed in grace there is always the possibility of rejecting actual graces and losing a loving relationship with God. This is because one chooses to accept a lie instead of the truth, which leads one to love in a disordered way. God is the greatest good and should be loved first, above all else. A soul tainted with sin makes self the greatest good and the highest authority and so loves self above God.

We know the first man was put into the Garden of Eden “to till it and keep it” (Gen 2:15). He was also told, along with the woman, to “be fruitful and multiply” (Gen 1:28). Finally, he was told to *not* eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil *or he would die* (Gen 2:17). In the Fall all three commandments, two positive and one negative, were broken. It is important to note this. If we jump immediately to the man taking the forbidden fruit we miss the triple concupiscence at work here, namely “the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life” which are “not of the Father” (1Jn 2:16). In a threefold descent Adam went from imaging God the Father to imaging the one whom Jesus calls a “murderer” and the “father of lies” (Jn 8:44).

The first fall is through the pride of life. A humble person obeys; a proud person stiffens his neck and cannot do so, imitating Lucifer's defiant boast, "I will not serve!" The Garden of Eden is a sanctuary, a holy place where God and man commune together (Gen 3:8). The exterior garden perceived by the senses points to an interior reality: the garden of Adam's soul. "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God?" (1 Cor 6:19) Adam is not only to guard this sacred place—to keep his thoughts chaste and centered on God—but to also give attention to its flourishing with life, by putting into act virtuous deeds which merit an increase in grace. How can we tell that this inner sanctuary has been defiled by pride? It is through the presence of the evil Serpent, who suddenly appears in the exterior garden conversing in a friendly way with the woman, for she shows no fear of him. Adam is present but silent. Therefore, although Adam has the obligation to engage the Serpent in spiritual combat, he disobeys God and chooses not to. This leaves the woman alone to defend herself against the vile creature's seductive, though seemingly innocent question, which subtly hides a deadly poison.

By not exercising his manly role of protecting the garden, Adam's soul becomes fertile ground for the next fall in the lust of the eyes. The woman sees that the forbidden tree is "good for food" and "a delight to the eyes," that it is desirable "to make one wise" (Gen 3:6). Why does she see it this way? It is because through her unguarded intercourse with the Serpent she has just been bitten by him. The poison he carries is in his mouth; he has just uttered a lie in total contradiction to God's word. God had said you will die; the Serpent says you won't die (Gen 3:4). Again Adam is silent. Why shouldn't the woman swallow the Serpent's lie if Adam, the head of their relationship, does nothing to uphold God's word? Adam's on-going silence, therefore, indicates that he, too, finds the forbidden fruit good, delightful and desirable. Lust starts to mar their once loving relationship because he cunningly lets the woman be the first to take the fruit they both want. In a reversal of roles she initiates their mutual rebellion against God. Instead of the man giving his seed to the woman to bring forth new life, the woman takes the seed-bearing fruit of a death-dealing tree and hands it to the man

for him to eat.<sup>28</sup> Without any protest Adam does so—another indication that he wants what she is offering.

“You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons” (1 Cor 10:21). By *eating* the forbidden fruit in the *presence* of the Serpent *they seal their relationship with him* and break their covenant with God.<sup>29</sup> The evil one has now clearly “fathered” them with his own rebellious spirit. As a consequence they are now marked with the lust of the flesh because their very bodies have been used in a way contrary to their marital covenant. We know this because before they eat they are unashamed of their bodies (Gen 2:25). After they eat they try to cover their same bodies with fig leaves (Gen 3:7). Their relationship as male and female cannot be broken, for it is stamped into their nature as body-soul composites. Instead the intimate communion between them is wounded by a basic insecurity and the fear of being used. “Where are you?” (Gen 3:9) God asks the man and the woman. They hide from this question because they have fallen from the “place” they were originally created in—a state of grace—and therefore no longer know “who” they are meant to be. Shame and guilt leads each one to defensively blame the “other” to somehow prove “I am still good and loveable.”

Scott Hahn has suggested “the reason why Adam succumbed to pride and disobedience was because of his fear of suffering and his unwillingness to die, even for the love of his Father and bride.”<sup>30</sup> I would nuance this and say it was because of Adam’s unwillingness to *die to self in becoming a father*,

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<sup>28</sup> “A general theme of chapter 3 is the *inversion of norms*. Everything is turned upside down.” Bergsma and Pitre, *Catholic Introduction to the Bible*, 105.

<sup>29</sup> “But ungodly men by their words and deeds summoned death; considering him a friend, they pined away, and they made a covenant with him” (Wis 1:16). I am suggesting Adam and Eve broke their covenant with God by forging a new covenant with the Serpent. “When one of the parties to a covenant was a group of people, one person could step forward to represent the group and undertake the rituals on their behalf; such a person may be termed a mediator. A familial meal typically followed, which consumed the sacrificial animal and expressed the covenant kinship that had just been established by means of the oath.” Bergsma and Pitre, *Catholic Introduction to the Bible*, 64. Adam has always been understood as the first mediator between God and the human race; Eve, in turn, can be thought of as a mediatrix, for as the first person coming forth from Adam’s body, she represents all of Adam’s descendants.

<sup>30</sup> Scott Hahn, *A Father who Keeps his Promises: God’s Covenant Love in Scripture* (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Publications, 1998) 64.

just as Eve selfishly didn't want to *die to self in becoming a mother*. They listened to the Serpent seductive lie—they could decide for themselves what was good and bad for them to do—and therefore *redefine their marriage*. Clinging to their idyllic existence in the garden, having the freedom to do whatever they wanted to and whenever they wanted to do it, staying the number one man, king of the garden, and the number one woman, the sole object of Adam's desire—all this was good. Having children, shouldering the burden of caring for the little ones, having their time and energy consumed by teaching their offspring how to live a holy life, incurring the moral obligation to lead a perfectly holy life themselves in order to teach by their example, perhaps losing their cherished number one spot by bearing someone greater than themselves (for who knew what God might think up in the future), or, on the other hand, facing the heartache of a rebellious child who would not obey them no matter how hard they tried to teach them the right way (and how would they ever fix such a horrible situation?)—all this was bad, for it meant sacrificing themselves over and over again, and even making themselves vulnerable to suffering. So they made the choice to keep their delightful mini-paradise all for themselves by remaining childless, refusing to consummate their marriage in a godly way, one open to the gift of new life, in clear opposition to God's command to be fruitful and multiply.<sup>31</sup> In other words, through some bodily action, such as the sin of Onan (Gen 38:9), our first parents indicated they did not want to be tied down with children. Like the Serpent they would not serve. Like so many couples today they would enjoy sex while seeking to avoid the conception of a child. They would make room for us neither in the Garden of Eden nor in their hearts. But in trying to save their life this way they of course lost it, and likewise frustrated God's purpose in creating us in the first place.

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<sup>31</sup> The scope of this essay does not permit a more detailed discussion of the Fall of our first parents. Suffice to note, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is not necessarily a literal tree, or its fruit something like an apple. Ps 1:3 compares a man to a tree; in Prov 3:18 wisdom, personified as a woman, is said to be a "tree of life"; sons in Ps 127[126]:3 are spoken of as "the fruit of the womb." The language of Genesis 3 is understood to be symbolic, so why overlook the obvious? There is a man and a woman who, clearly cooperating together, fall into sin, a sin so grave as to mark all their children with the sign of their original disobedience to God. Whatever the Fall actually entailed, its deadly consequences has clearly been passed onto the whole human race through human procreation.



“A garden locked is my sister, my bride, a garden locked, a fountain sealed” (Song 4:12). In reparation for Adam’s neglect of protecting the sanctuary, the Holy Spirit zealously guards the enclosure of Mary’s Immaculate Heart from the first instance of her conception. A new dwelling place of God with mankind has secretly begun, something virginally pure, holy, and totally at enmity with the evil one. It is the consecrated Ark of the New Covenant, which no man is to touch and mar with the sin of Adam, because into this chosen vessel of grace will be placed the living manna, the very Word of God come in the flesh, the One who is destined to be both Victim and High Priest in a new and everlasting covenant between God and man.

At the proper time the angel Gabriel is sent from God to speak his word to Mary. The angel says, “Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you!” (Lk 1:28) He could have just as easily have said, “Hail, New Eve,” or “Hail, Immaculate Conception,” or “Hail, Mother of God,” or “Hail, Immaculate Heart.” All these words point to the same mystical reality, but he knows it will take centuries of theological debate to properly understand such sublime titles and wisely points to the underlying source of all her titles: “full of grace.” Eve had listened to a fallen angel and swallowed his lie. Mary listens to a holy angel, believes God’s word, utters her total obedience to God’s will and conceives the Son of God.

The mystery unfolds further and now it is the just man, Joseph, who has his part to play in the Redemption by his virginal fatherhood over Mary’s son. Adam let the lust of the eye sully his relationship with the woman; he used her to get the forbidden fruit. Joseph ever remains the chaste husband of Mary, loves her with all his heart, and treats her with utmost respect as his sister. At the same time he fulfills the manly role of protector and provider for the Holy Family, which he humbly does not presume upon, but only undertakes once God’s will is made clear to him through the word of an angel. Remember, Adam had swallowed the Serpent’s lie, just like Eve had. Joseph believes an angel, just like Mary does. The wound between masculinity and femininity begins to heal within the basic unit of human society—the family—through God blessing Joseph and Mary with a child, albeit in a most wondrous and miraculous way.

Eve had handed her husband Adam the forbidden fruit with its deadly poison. Mary hands her human husband, Joseph, and all the children of Adam he symbolizes, the fruit of her womb, her life-giving seed, Jesus the

Redeemer. Not just once, but always. Where she is, the Holy Spirit, her Spouse, is. Where the Holy Spirit is, Christ is, in the sense of his Mystical Body being made present through grace. So everything Our Lady does for Jesus, she does for us, the Church; everything she does for the Church, she does for Jesus, her God. Whatever merits she has belongs to her, but also to the Holy Spirit through his marriage bond with her. Whatever graces he gives to souls come from him, yet also from Our Lady through her marriage bond with him.

Who can fully understand the depths of such a profound relationship? But likewise, who can fully understand the Holy Spirit, much less his action within souls? How do we picture him who is all spirit? How can we come to know him who, unlike the Word, is personally silent, yet speaks through the prophets? The Redemption gives us a window into God as love. It puts a face, as it were, to the Holy Spirit, not through an incarnation of his person but by a marriage covenant with Our Lady. The Redemption is primarily a work of love, but how would we know this unless Mary is there by the cross, participating in Jesus' sacrifice?

Thus, when the time for Jesus' public mission arrives, Mary sends him away in peace, with her motherly blessing. We know this from her attitude at Cana. She doesn't reproach him for leaving the carpenter shop to form a preaching band of disciples, but shows her loving concern for all, "They have no wine" (Jn 2:3). True, physically they will be separated as Jesus preaches near and far, but spiritually Mother and Son are of one mind and heart in fulfilling the Father's will. So when the time comes for the immolation of the Lamb, she bravely follows her Son along the painful way of the cross. The insults, the mockery, the derision heaped upon him likewise fall upon her most compassionate and sorrowful Heart. Gladly she would have suffered in his place, but knows that only he, as God, can make complete satisfaction for all sin.

Finally Jesus is lifted up upon the cross, making it the true tree of life. Outwardly we perceive but a man who, as both Victim and High Priest, is offering himself to the Father, agreeing by this to bear the full weight of our sins. In his very real thirst and anguish he cries out, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Mt 27:46) But this true man does not cease to be true God, even at this supreme moment of apparent abandonment. The Father continues to fulfill his mission of generating his Son, and so is present at this sacrifice, not as one sent, but as one doing the sending. The

Holy Spirit, ever proceeding from the Father and Son, continues to fulfill his mission of anointing the humanity of Jesus, binding Jesus and the Father together in one perfect act of merciful love, while making Jesus' flesh the sacramental source of all grace.

Jesus, as the New Adam, thus fulfills his mission of imaging the Father, the source of all life, by giving his own flesh "for the life of the world" (Jn 6:51). He dies upon the cross and his heart is pierced open. The veil separating God and man is abolished; atonement is made. The power of the Holy Spirit is poured forth in water and blood to cleanse the world of its sin and to sanctify souls for eternal life in heaven. It seems nothing needs to be added to the sacrifice—but what about Our Lady, standing there by the cross? What is her mission as the most grace-filled creature, higher even than the seraphim, those "burning ones" ever standing before the throne of God? Can she have no part in the Redemption, when she has already come forth from the heart of Jesus at her immaculate conception, anticipating the grace to be offered to all at Jesus' death? Is she unable to merit, when she has never committed the least sin or imperfection, and is always supernaturally moved by the Holy Spirit, her faithful Spouse?

At the Incarnation Mary is told, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God" (Lk 1:35). At the cross Mary is told, "Woman, behold your son!" (Jn 19:26). At Jesus' birth Mary's bodily integrity is not disturbed; she remains a virgin before, during and after bringing forth her child, without any birth pangs. But it is different with Mary's virginal motherhood over these children "born of water and the Spirit" (Jn 3:5). Outwardly her body is not rent, but rather it is the depths of her being, her "soul" (Lk 2:35) or Immaculate Heart, which is mystically pierced open by a sword of sorrow, in order to receive a new spiritual motherhood over all people. She mystically dies *with Christ* because she is always *in Christ*; which is to say, by obediently bearing the pangs of childbirth, Our Lady has crushed every temptation to self-seeking under her foot, and so is no longer Mary of Nazareth, but truly the New Eve, or "mother of all living" (Gen 3:20), called to exercise a maternal role within the Church until the end of time. What good mother abandons her little ones once they are born? If she should ever do so, they would wither and die. No, a good mother sacrifices herself over and over for the good of her children: teaching them, nourishing them, loving them, consoling them, encouraging them to be good and to do good. If God had excluded Mary

from participating in the Redemption, then she would not really be our mother in the order of grace, and we would have been deprived of her ongoing mothering of the Church. What a tragedy! We would still be deprived of something precious—the pure, unconditional love of a mother, which is so close to the heart of God, because God is not only omnipotent power but love.

### **In Conclusion: Why a Fifth Dogma on Mary's Co-redemption is Timely**

In the Protestant Reformation we have an example of what happens when Our Lady's maternal influence is mistakenly rejected. Sacramental life is weakened, or disappears all together. Division follows division, for although Scripture is still revered, there is no authoritative interpretation of it all can agree upon. Surely one benefit we will receive from the proclamation of a fifth Marian dogma defining Our Lady's role within the Church as our Co-Redemptrix, or spiritual mother, has to do with reclaiming Christian unity. And since the Catholic Church itself is now beset with much turmoil and confusion, such a dogma would likewise bring clarity and unity among all the faithful.

But another important reason for such a declaration has to do with the current diabolical attack against the family. In the widespread acceptance of artificial contraception which has taken hold of the once Christian West, we have an example of where the rejection of children leads human society. All sorts of deviant sexual behavior become the legalized norm, abortion becomes the ultimate birth control, and children grow up with the constant insecurity of divorce and remarriage, if they even feel welcomed at all. Human persons, created in the image and likeness of God, are manufactured through artificial means (i.e. test tube babies), or killed to harvest their stem cells and body parts. Such inhumanity can only be stopped by the power of God, awakening in us the horror of what we have become through such blatant self-seeking. Our Lady has such power to awaken us, for she is the Spouse of the Holy Spirit and can always obtain from him that which is for our good. Furthermore, as our mother, the mother of all peoples, she certainly wants us to repent of these evils and turn back to God, or she would not have manifested herself in recent times through so many apparitions and locutions.

And finally, because Our Lady's Co-redemption is always carried out *in* Christ, crowning her with this title will actually *reinforce* Jesus' unique place as the one Redeemer. For if in the past there was a strong, though necessary, emphasis on the satisfactory aspect of Jesus' sacrifice, stressing how only he as both God and man could appease God's justice, now there seems to be a much too great emphasis on God's mercy, with even the worship due to God labeled a "non-essential" activity. God is so good he will overlook everything, and somehow, in the end, everyone will be saved. So there is no need to actually be *in* Christ, as the only way to eternal life with the Father, or, once baptized, to work *under* Christ and *with* Christ for the salvation of souls. Our Lady's Co-redemption demonstrates how all of us are called, as the adopted sons of God in Jesus Christ, to "make up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, the church" (Col 1:24). For if Jesus tells us, "Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother, and sister, and mother," he likewise assures us that "this is the will of my Father, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in him should have eternal life" (Jn 6:40). Our Lady invites us to have such faith in Jesus and, according to our various personal vocations, help to spread this faith to others.