

Blessed Virgin Mary: Unique Cooperator in the Redemption

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Introduction

God's redemptive love of self-gift in Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit and humanity's response to this unconditional love is core of salvation history. In this redemptive schema, human persons at different historical stages have responded either creatively by their life and mission or destructively by their selfishness and pride. Jesus Christ, being God-Man is the perfect response to God's love-gift. Blessed Mary, being the Mother of God and Mother of humanity has, of course, played a unique role in salvation history. That is why, Karl Rahner rightly stated: "Christianity is the only religion that needs a Mother". To highlight her unique cooperation in redemptive history, the title 'Mary as Coredemptrix' has been used in Christian theology for many years. The title as such is highly controversial yet Mary's unique place in salvation history is central to any understanding of the role of humanity, and in particular that of the Church, especially, that of the Syro-Malabar Church. Such understanding would help us to continue Christ's redemptive act in today's world of suffering and exploitation. Our focus therefore is to further explore this mystery of Mary's cooperation in the Redemption, explaining its meaning and modality with a special reference to the life and mission of the Syro-Malabar Church.

Jesus in Salvation History

In abundance of love, the Triune God created human person in His image and likeness to share His love with him/her and through him/her to translate it to others including the cosmos. S/he, misusing God-given gift of freedom, rejected this unconditional love offered to him/her. God decided to be incarnated in Jesus Christ to redeem the whole humanity from sin and to restore the relationship between God and humanity. Jesus Christ, by his unique act of sacrifice on the Cross, fulfilled in resurrection, has become the unique redeemer of the world and thus the unique mediator between God and humanity. St. Paul thus tells us, 'there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all' (1 Tim 2:5-6).

Humanity in Salvation History

Redemption brought about by Christ has yet to become a reality in each individual member of the human race. Jesus Christ objectively accomplished our Redemption but our salvation is not effective in each human person until the grace of Redemption has been experienced. It means that the individual or subjective Redemption as the sovereign gift of Triune God has to be received by human persons. Schillebeeckx states that the state of 'being redeemed' always consists of human co-operation. Each human person, with regard to his own Redemption, may be called a kind of 'co-redeemer'. The individual shares in the Redemption according to the extent of his free consent to the objective gift of redeeming grace. In this sense, he is a 'co-operator' with Christ in the act of Redemption.¹⁰ St Thomas thus says: *Qui creavit te sine te*, which St Augustine reaffirmed saying: *non redemit te sine te*: 'Created without our intervention, we cannot be personally redeemed without our cooperation'. Thus each human person is personally invited to respond to this call of salvation for the realization of God's Kingdom here on earth.

Mary in Salvation History

As seen already, each Christian has been redeemed but s/he has yet to appropriate to herself/himself her/his personal Redemption by responding to God's saving grace. As member of human race, Mary also had to attain her personal Redemption by cooperating with the redeeming grace of Christ.¹¹ Apart from her personal Redemption, it is believed that Mary freely and actively cooperated with Jesus as historical person, in his historical mission, which started from incarnation to glorification.

In the Sacred Scripture there are no passages that directly speak of Mary's cooperation in Redemption. But there are three texts associated with her cooperation in the historical mission of Jesus' Redemption: The Annunciation scene in Luke 1: 26-38, Simeon's prophecy in Luke 2: 34-35, and the 'Woman' at the foot of the Cross in John 19: 25-27. These passages reveal that Mary was uniquely prepared and called by God to be the Mother of God and of Humanity by her faith, obedience and suffering.

¹⁰ See E. SCHILLEBEECKX, *Mary, Mother of the Redemption*, London, 1964, pp.52-53.

¹¹ See *LG*. 53.

Much theological reflection on the unique participation of Mary in Redemption came up only later. In the context of Eve-Mary parallelism, Fathers of the Church indirectly attributed to Mary a positive role in Christ's saving action just as Eve had negative role in regard to the first Adam.¹² St Ephrem compares Eve and Mary to the world's two eyes. The left eye, Eve, darkened the world, but the right eye allowed the humanity to see the way to God. He states: "The world, you see, has two eyes fixed in it: Eve was its left eye, blind, while the right eye, bright, is Mary..... Through the eye that was darkened the whole world was darkened,.... But when it was illumined by the other eye, and the heavenly Light that resided in its midst humanity became reconciled once again..."¹³ For Irenaeus, Mary's role is not limited to her biological motherhood. Her cooperation is also moral and spiritual.¹⁴ However, only from the ninth century there was a gradual growth of understanding of the soteriological character of Mary's association with the Savior of humankind.

During the Middle Ages, Arnold of Chartres (1160) clearly speaks of her cooperation in Redemption: "[Christ and Mary] together accomplished the task of man's Redemption.... both offered up one and the same sacrifice to God: she in the blood of her heart.... He in the blood of the flesh.... so that together with Christ, she obtains the common effect of the salvation of the world."¹⁵ Ambrose Catarino (1553) strongly stated that our blessed Lord and his Mother take on themselves the sins of the world, having merited our Redemption through their joint suffering.¹⁶ It was in the seventeenth century, a golden age for Marian theology, that Mary's direct cooperation in the Redemption first came to be clearly articulated.

In the course of such theological reflection, the title 'Coredemptrix'¹⁷ has often been used to indicate Mary's role in association with her son Jesus

¹² See also LG, 56.

¹³ St. EPHREM, *De Ecclesia*, 5-7, in S. P. BROCK (trans.), *A Garland of Hymns >From the Early Church*, Virginia, 1989, p. 37.

¹⁴ See J. D. MILLER, *Marian Mediation: Is it True to say that Mary is Coredemptrix, Mediatrix of All Graces and Advocate?* New Bedford, 2004, p. 28.

¹⁵ ARNOLD OF CHARTRES, *De laudibus B. Marine Virginis*; PL, 189, 1726-1727.

¹⁶ See J. B. CAROL, 'Our Lady's Coredemption', *Mariology*, vol. 2.ed. J. B. Carol, p.400, note 90.

¹⁷ The first recorded use of the title 'Coredemptrix' is dated to the fourteenth century, found in a liturgical book in St. Peter's, Salzburg. See *Oratione* of St Peter's in Salzburg, in Dreves-Blume, *Analecta hymnica medii aevi*, v. 46, n. 79, p. 126. The first use of the title in official Church documents is found in reply from the Sacred Congregation of Rites in 1908 to a request from the Prior General of the Servite Order for the elevation of the

Christ in his redemptive work. The title may well suggest that she is redeemer coequal with Christ.¹⁸ Today, such a notion is theologically unacceptable, as it would detract from the unique and sufficient role of Christ the Redeemer and the role of the Holy Spirit.¹⁹ The title may indicate her role of cooperating in, of participating in, the unique redemptive saving work of Christ. However, it is to be clearly understood that she is a 'coredemptrix' with Christ and never the equal of the Redeemer. Though the work of Redemption is entirely that of Christ and of the Holy Spirit, his Mother, as human being has 'a secondary and instrumental task actively contributing to the fulfillment of the principal task'.²⁰ *In the Liturgical Oration of the Eastern Church, Mary is thus called "The Second Heaven."*²¹

Mary: Unique Cooperator in Redemption

The Gospels very well tell us that more than any other human being, Mary by her life and mission played a unique and important role in the act of Redemption. *In the Liturgical oration of the Eastern Church, Mary's unique role, though secondary, is evident: "(We praise...) you... who are born from the Father eternally, and in time from the Second Heaven, the Ever Virgin, treasure of Grace, deposit of heavenly riches, fount of heavenly sanctity, mansion of the Holy Spirit."*²² In soteriological reflection, it is said that Christ's salvific work consists of two operations: objective and subjective Redemption. The actual objective Redemption is through his self-gift by the power of the Holy Spirit, culminating on the Cross and Resurrection; and subjective Redemption is the experience of this redemptive love by the individuals. As cooperator in

Feast of the Seven Sorrows of Our Lady to a double of the second class for the whole Church. See *ASS* 1 (1908), 409.

¹⁸ The prefix 'co' coming from the Latin word '*cum*' ('with') means 'joint, mutual, common' as in 'co-education'

¹⁹ Motherhood is a relationship between persons. The person of Mary is related to the person of Jesus as mother - and Chalcedon (451) would specify that the "hypostasis" (person) of Jesus is divine.

²⁰ B. GHERARDINI, 'The Coredemption of Mary: Doctrine of the Church' in *Mary at the Foot of the Cross II*, Acts of the Second International Symposium on Marian Coredemption. England, 2001, p.39.

²¹ See P. J. PODIPARA, "The Mariology of the Church of the East", *Christian Orient* II:4 (1981) 166-183, p.178.

²² See "The Office for the Feast of the Blessed Virgin Mary in August." Quoted in P. J. PODIPARA, "The Mariology of the Church of the East", *Christian Orient* II:4 (1981) 165-182, p.178.

the historical Redemptive mission of Jesus, Mary perfectly cooperated in the act of Redemption both objectively and subjectively. *St. Ephrem using the symbol of Sun for Jesus and eye for Mary clearly expresses this unique cooperation. It is "through her it [Sun] has illumined the whole world, with its inhabitants, which had grown dark through Eve, the source of all evils."*²³ Vatican II states that Mary's 'cooperation' which is "unique and utterly singular"²⁴ has two facets: it is maternal and salvific. It extends to all the disciples of Christ and all people²⁵. This exceptional and extraordinary cooperation entitled her as the 'Unique Cooperator in Redemption'.

Objective Cooperation

God alone can raise a creature to the supernatural order, through a participation in the divine nature. Through a specific intervention of Triune God, Mary was immaculately conceived through 'maternal charism' and was chosen to be the Mother of God in view of realizing God's unique plan of salvation in history.²⁶ God wanted a specific cooperation of human being for this mission, which was exclusively realized through the life and mission of Mary.²⁷

God's specific preparation for Mary to be the Mother of God, even from the moment of conception, indicates that she was objectively destined to participate in the historical act of Redemption. She thus was 'favored' by God attaining 'full of grace' (Lk.1:28). *St. Ephrem thus beautifully states: "Blessed is she, in whose heart and mind You are: she is royal palace – because of You, O Royal Son, she is the sanctuary for You, the High Priest."*²⁸ Mary's cooperation possesses a specifically maternal character, which distinguishes it from the cooperation of other creatures who in various and always subordinate ways share in the Redemption of Christ. *The Oriental Church in the Night Office for the Feast of Christmas prays: "Blessed be the One who is born twice: eternally and in the*

²³ St. EPHREM, *De Ecclesia*, 3, in S. P. BROCK (trans.), *A Garland of Hymns From the Early Church*, Virginia, 1989, p. 37.

²⁴ LG. 61

²⁵ See LG. 53-58, 61, 63, 65, 69).

²⁶ See LG. 53.

²⁷ See LG. 55.

²⁸ St. EPHREM, *De Nativitate*, 5, in S. P. BROCK (trans.), *A Garland of Hymns From the Early Church*, Virginia, 1989, p. 39-40.

human manner: eternally before the worlds, and today (Christmas day) in time."²⁹ Her role is at the same time special and extraordinary and it flows from her divine motherhood. She is his generous companion in the historical work of Redemption.³⁰ Mary's cooperation thus shares, in its subordinate character, in the universality of the mediation of the redeemer, the one mediator.³¹

Subjective Cooperation

Overshadowed by the 'power of the Most High', Mary also subjectively cooperated with God in the historical act of redemption, which began by her unique response to the angel's message: 'Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.' (Lk 1: 38). When Mary gave her assent at the Annunciation she became the handmaid and associate of the Redeemer.³² *St. Ephrem poetically speaks of her maternal cooperation: "In her virginity, Eve put on leaves of shame, but your mother has put on, in her virginity, a robe of glory that encompasses all men, while to Him who covers all she gives a body as a tiny garment."*³³ Mary then extended this subjective and personal cooperation in the act of Redemption by giving us the Redeemer, by accompanying him through the whole of his life, which was itself salvific, and by remaining faithful to the end, sharing in his Passion. The consent Mary gave to the angel at the Annunciation is consummated at the foot of the Cross.³⁴

Pope Pius XI, the first pope to use the title 'Coredemptrix' explicitly states: "We invoke her under the title of Coredemptrix. She gave us the Savior, she accompanied Him in the work of Redemption as far as the Cross itself, sharing with Him the sorrows of the agony and of the death in which Jesus consummated the Redemption of mankind."³⁵ Pope Leo XIII writes: "When Mary offered herself completely to God together with her son in the temple, she was already sharing with Him the painful atonement on behalf of human race... at the foot of the Cross, she willingly offered

²⁹ Quoted in P. J. PODIPARA, "The Mariology of the Church of the East", *Christian Orient* II:4 (1981) 165-182, p.176.

³⁰ See POPE JOHN PAUL II, *Redemptoris mater*, 38.

³¹ See POPE JOHN PAUL II, *Redemptoris mater*, 40.

³² See *LG*. 56.

³³ St. EPHREM, *De Nativitate*, 4, in S. P. BROCK (trans.), *A Garland of Hymns From the Early Church*, Virginia, 1989, p. 39.

³⁴ See *LG*. 56, 57 & 58.

³⁵ See D. BERTETTO, SDB (ed), *Discorsi di Pio XI*, 2: 1013; OL n. 326.

Him up to the divine justice, dying with Him in her heart, pierced by the sword of sorrow.”³⁶ Pope Benedict XV further explicates Mary’s cooperation in the Redemption. “To such extent did Mary suffer and almost die with her suffering and dying son; to such extent did she surrender her maternal rights over her Son for man’s salvation, and immolated Him – insofar as she could – in order to appease the justice of God, that we may rightly say she redeemed the human race together with Christ.”³⁷ Mary directly participated in the Passion, offering her son as a sacrifice, ‘insofar as she could’ for the sins of the world. This offering is to be understood as a surrender of her maternal rights. Pope Pius XII avoiding the use of the title ‘Coredemptrix’ stated that Mary is ‘inexorably united with her Son’. Mary, who was the physical mother of our Head, became the spiritual mother of His members also through a new title of suffering and glory.³⁸

Vatican Council II affirmed Mary’s cooperation in the Redemption while avoiding the use of the title ‘Coredemptrix’.³⁹ Mary’s collaboration, as a handmaid of the Lord, is a total commitment to the Lord in His historical work of Redemption. This collaboration was fruit of God’s grace by which she freely and actively cooperated in the work of the salvation of humanity through faith and obedience.⁴⁰ Pope John Paul II also clearly speaks of Mary’s participation in the act of Redemption as “intimately linked with her motherhood” (RM 38). He states that accepting and assisting at the sacrifice of her Son, Mary is the dawn of Redemption. Crucified spiritually with her crucified Son (cfr. Gal 2:20) she contemplated with heroic love the death of her God. In fact, at Calvary she united herself with the sacrifice of her Son that led to the foundation of the Church. ⁴¹

Problematic of Mary’s Unique Cooperation

There is however a serious problem with regard to Mary’s unique cooperation in Christ’s Redemption. How to understand her unique

³⁶ POPE LEO XIII, *Jucunda semper*, (Encyclical), *AAS* 27 (1894), p.178.

³⁷ POPE BENEDICT XV, *Inter Sodalicia*, *AAS* 10 (1918), pp.181-182.

³⁸ See POPE PIUS XII, *Mystici Corporis Christi*, *AAS* 35 (1943), 247-248.

³⁹ See *LG* 53, 56, 61, 63

⁴⁰ See *LG* 56-58, 61.

⁴¹ See *Insegnamenti de Giovanni Paolo II*, VIII/1 (1985), pp.318-319. Pope John Paul II has used the term ‘Coredemptrix’ or its cognate forms: ‘coredeemer’ or ‘coredemption’ in the course of addresses to various groups. See A. B. CALKINS, ‘The Mystery of Mary Coredemptrix in the Papal Magisterium’ in *Mary Coredemptrix: Doctrinal Issues Today*. (ed.) MARK I. MIRAVALLE, Goleta, 2001, pp.41-50.

cooperation in the context of Christ's unique act of Redemption? The cause of merit cannot be the result of merit. Let us explain it further. In order to cooperate in the Redemption, Mary must first be redeemed which will render her cooperation acceptable to God. Now that Redemption of Mary is of course, the *effect* of Christ's redemptive work. Therefore, the latter must have been already completed *before* Mary received its effect. If so, how could she aid Christ in producing something, which was already produced?⁴²

An explanation to this apparent contradiction is that the Redemption as applied to Mary was complete as regards herself but as yet unaccomplished as regards humanity in general. There is only one Redemption but two modes of operation taking place at one and the same time. Christ redeems his mother with a preservative Redemption: Mary was eternally preserved from the stains of original sin. And then together with her, Christ redeems humankind with a liberative Redemption: liberation of humankind from its sins. There was a twofold intention on the part of the Redeemer. The first intention of Christ in his saving action was the Redemption of his mother. The merits of this first intention were applied to Mary at her conception to enable her to cooperate historically with God's salvific plan. Thus Christ first redeemed his mother, and then, with her active cooperation in Jesus' historical mission, the rest of humanity at Calvary. This cooperation, on her part, with God's redemptive action in the Incarnation, and her compassion with her son at Calvary, entitled her to be the 'Unique Cooperator in Redemption'.⁴³

Second argument against Mary's coredemption is this. Jesus Christ was able to redeem humanity because he possessed both a human and divine nature. It would not be possible for Mary to take an active part in the Redemption, as she was merely a human being. However, it is possible for an active, though subordinate, human participation in the theandric redemptive activity of Jesus Christ. Such participation does not require a divine and a human nature, as it is a cooperation and not an independent or parallel work. Thus it is possible for Mary to take an active, though subordinate part, in the Redemption. Of course, here we do not minimize the unique role of the Holy Spirit in the salvific work of God. Rather, the maternal life and mission of Mary is strongly presented within the

⁴² See J. B. CAROL, 'Our Lady's Coredemption', *Mariology*, vol. 2.ed. J. B. Carol, pp.417-419.

⁴³ See J. B. CAROL, 'Our Lady's Coredemption', *Mariology*, vol. 2.ed. J. B. Carol, p.418.

redemptive act of the Triune God because she is Daughter of the Father, Mother of the Redeemer and Temple of the Holy Spirit.⁴⁴

The third argument is that Christ alone could merit our Redemption, because of the equality between his meritorious action and the reward. It was argued that nobody could add to the infinite merit of Christ's Redemption. If Mary's cooperation adds anything to Redemption, it is an enhancement of Christ's merit, which is impossible. If not, then it is superfluous and unnecessary. However, it is true that Mary can make no quantitative addition to the plenitude of God's perfection. Yet, there is a sense in which Mary did make a positive contribution to the Incarnation and to the Redemption. Vatican II states: "This, however, is so understood that it neither takes away anything from, nor adds anything to, the dignity and efficacy of Christ the one Mediator."⁴⁵ She gave her assent enabling the Word of God to take to himself a human nature. Though dependent on God's grace, it was her decision to cooperate with God. Her decision was something she did by obedience and faith, rather than something God did to her in which she was but a passive agent.⁴⁶ Thus the singular merit of Mary's cooperation as a purely human representative of humanity constitutes an additional reason why God might cancel our debt. Thus her unique cooperation in the redemptive mission of Jesus is accepted by the Father as an integral part of the universal Redemption.⁴⁷

Mary: Model for the Church and Humanity

Mary is the Mother of humankind in the order of grace.⁴⁸ In conceiving her son she conceived the whole Christ, she conceived the Mystical Body of Christ. At the foot of the Cross, she was commissioned to become the spiritual Mother of humanity in general and of all disciples in particular. Her new maternal responsibility of developing and nurturing the spiritual life of the Church can only be fulfilled by the actual experience of redemptive grace by her children. This she did in a wholly singular way by her obedience, faith, hope and burning charity in the work of the Savior in

⁴⁴ See *LG*. 53.

⁴⁵ See *LG* 62.

⁴⁶ See *LG* 56; *Mary at the Foot of the Cross II*, Acts of the Second International Symposium on Marian Coredeemption, England, April 2001, p.440.

⁴⁷ See J. B. CAROL, 'Our Lady's Coredeemption', *Mariology*, vol. 2.ed. J. B. Carol, p.420.

⁴⁸ See *LG*. 61.

restoring supernatural life to souls.⁴⁹ In this, Mary had a privileged but dependent cooperative role in the transmission of life. It is a mediating maternity and in the Pauline sense a coredemptive one.

Mary's spiritual motherhood is defined as a supernatural activity, received and subordinate, in the work of Redemption of another human being by which a created person receives and transmits to another person the divine life. Spiritual maternity presupposes divine paternity and human fraternity.⁵⁰ Such a notion of maternal mediation includes the mediation of the Church and its individual members. It is the willing cooperation of all the baptized with Christ in the salvation of humankind under the influence of the Holy Spirit. Mary, after participating in the redeeming sacrifice of the Son, now continues to fulfill from heaven her maternal function as the cooperator in the birth and development of divine life in the individual souls of redeemed persons.⁵¹ Today Mary continues to cooperate in the act of Redemption through her mediation of enabling humanity to experience Christ's redemptive grace.

The divine mystery of salvation is revealed to us and continues in the Church. Mary's role in salvation history is unique and it is primarily as Mother and associate of Christ but simultaneously she is the representative of humanity, and type of the Church. Mary as a wholly unique member of the Church shares with us her experience of redemptive grace of her Son. It is also possible that the Church and its members can associate themselves with Christ's redemptive work, cooperating with God's will for the salvation of the world. St. Paul makes this very clear when he exhorts us that 'we are God's fellow workers' (I Cor 3:9) 'in Christ' (Rom 16: 9) and 'co-workers for the Kingdom' (Col 4:11). He says that God invites all Christians to become co-workers with Christ for the sake of the Kingdom. This work involves a renunciation of self and often much suffering (Col 1: 24). Mary is our role model and a type of the Church and humanity because she by her maternal compassion shared in the suffering of the Redeemer. The Church as the sacramental presence of Salvation of Christ in the world, in a secondary and subordinate way, mediates Christ's redemptive grace to

⁴⁹ See *LG*, 61.

⁵⁰ See DE MARGERIE, 'Can the Church Define Dogmatically the Spiritual Motherhood of Mary? Objections and Answers', *Mary: Coredemptrix, Mediatrix, Advocate. Theological Foundation Towards a Papal Definition?* ed. M. I. Miravalle, Santa Barbara, 1995, p.194.

⁵¹ See PAUL VI, *Signum magnum*, *AAS* 59 (1967), 468.

the members of the mystical Body through the sacraments and to all people of humanity through a life of love.

Today, we too are called to join our suffering to those of Christ on the Cross so that in a mysterious way our suffering may become redemptive. By offering all what we are and do, our work, our suffering and joy to God through Jesus for the salvation of the world, our lives take on a new meaning. Through our personal suffering, we make up that which is lacking in Christ's suffering (Col 1: 24). We bear witness to his perfect sacrifice making it ever present in a broken world. Our saints, martyrs, stigmatists and victim souls in their suffering identified themselves with Jesus crucified. In this sense, the Church as a whole and all members of the Body are coredeemers with Christ, always subordinate to him and dependent on the maternal mediation of grace by the Mother of the Church.⁵²

Mary and Syro-Malabar Church

The life and mission of Syro-Malabar Church clearly reveal the fact that for centuries, our Church has been actively and creatively cooperating in the redemptive act of Christ. One of the reasons for the ecclesial growth of our Church is her active devotion to Blessed Mary, the Mother of the Mystical Body of Christ. It is said that St. Thomas the Apostle had a special devotion to Blessed Mary and when he came to India in AD 52, he brought with him a painting of Blessed Mary drawn by St. Luke. It was lost with his martyrdom, but later found out from the tomb of St. Thomas at Mylapoor.⁵³ It reveals that from the time of St. Thomas, there has been passionate devotion to Blessed Mary. This is very clear also from the Letter of Fr. Louis Pazheparambil, (later Bishop) written to Pope Leo XIII, requesting to get indigenous bishops: "Holy Father, we love our parents... We always remain faithful and loyal to the Popes. We strongly believe in Blessed Mary, Mother of God. Our main churches are dedicated to Blessed Mary. There is neither a family that does not recite rosary every day nor a girl in the family without a name after blessed Mary."⁵⁴ Our Church thus has always been experiencing Blessed Mary as the best model of Cooperation in the Redemption of Christ, our Mediator and our Advocate

⁵² See J. D. MILLER, *Marian Mediation: Is it True to say that Mary is Coredeemprix, Mediatrix of All Graces and Advocate?* New Bedford, 2004, pp. 42-43.

⁵³ See 'Blood on the Mount', p.27.

⁵⁴ See J. VELLIAN, *Marian Sabdbadhara* Encyclopaedic Dictionary on Blessed Virgin Mary, (Malayalam), Kottayam, 2004, p.126.

in our ecclesial as well as social life. In the Apostolic Constitution “Romani Pontifices” erecting a hierarchy for the Syro-Malabar Catholics, Pope Pius XI speaks of their “singular devotion to the Most Blessed Virgin Mary”.

The Spirituality of Syro-Malabar Christians includes constant invocation to Mary for her mediation of Christ’s redemptive grace in our daily life. Our spirituality is always related to the spirituality of Blessed Mary. ‘Through Mary to Jesus’ is the core of our spirituality. This is very well obvious in our liturgical, devotional, ecclesial, missionary and social life.

Liturgical Life

Liturgical prayers are the official prayers of the Church, and as such they manifest the faith of the Church: *Lex orandi, lex credendi*. In our Church, Marian devotion is integrated within the Liturgical celebration: in the Eucharist and the Prayer of the Church. In the prayers of the Holy Qurbana, there are prayers that speak of the relationship between Jesus and Mary and Mary’s significant role in the act of Redemption.⁵⁵ A homiletic hymn sung before the reading of the Gospel goes like this: “The only begotten, the Son of God came to the world, was born from the Virgin in a manner above nature and extra-ordinary.”⁵⁶ Blessed Mary is also invoked for the protection of humanity. We pray on the Feast of the Blessed Virgin Mary after Christmas: “(O) Christ who made us worthy to celebrate the commemoration of your Mother who carried You in her womb nine months and *brought you forth in virginity*, have mercy on us.”⁵⁷ Another prayer goes like this: “A cloud overshadowed the people (of Israel) and Mistress Mary (overshadows) the Christians; may her good remembrance procure for us goodness and mercy and consolation.”⁵⁸ An oration from the Vespers of ordinary Wednesdays throughout the year runs thus: “(O) our

⁵⁵ See the prayers and hymns of Wednesdays in the “Prayer of the Church’. See also J. VELLIAN, *Marian Sabdhadhara* Encyclopaedic Dictionary on Blessed Virgin Mary, (Malayalam), Kottayam, 2004.

⁵⁶ Quoted in P. J. PODIPARA, “The Mariology of the Church of the East”, *Christian Orient* II:4 (1981) 165-182, p.175.

⁵⁷ Quoted in P. J. PODIPARA, “The Mariology of the Church of the East”, *Christian Orient* II:4 (1981) 165-182, p.177.

⁵⁸ See Divine Office: Christmas: Oration at the end of the Night Office. Quoted in P. J. PODIPARA, “The Mariology of the Church of the East”, *Christian Orient* II:4 (1981) 165-182, p.182.

Lord and *Our God*, arm us with the powerful and unconquerable weapon (that is) *with the prayers of your blessed Mother*, and give us with her a part and participation in your heavenly chamber, Lord of all for ever. Amen.”⁵⁹ The prayers and the hymns in the liturgical texts are thus presented not as mere prayer of petitions or intercessions, but they also clearly reveal the unique maternal cooperation of Mary in the act of Redemption.

Devotional Life

We also intercede with Mary by different devotional practices especially by praying rosary, novenas, fasting in preparation for the great Feasts of Nativity and Assumption, celebrating her feasts, Marian retreats, wearing Marian medals and scapulars etc. Wednesdays are dedicated to Blessed Mary and the months of May and October are specially dedicated to her. On these occasions, many of our Christians make special prayers and do fasting too. The source and end of Marian devotion is Jesus himself and thus the best way to imitate Jesus Christ is by a total dedication to the Sacred Heart of Mary.

Traditionally, Syro-Malabar Christians’ vibrant devotion to Rosary is famous. The members of family used to gather together every morning and evening to recite the Rosary and to invoke Mary’s mediation, by meditating upon the mysteries of Christ’s Redemption and Mary’s unique participation in the same. In the month of October, there is an intensive 10 days Rosary devotion at every parish and religious institution. Now a days, many Syro-Malabar Christians wear rosary around their neck and many others keep the rosary with them while traveling. It is also noteworthy to mention that many Marian devotees recite rosary while traveling. In Kerala, it is really inspiring to see that a rosary is hung in front of every vehicle for the sake of protection from dangers. It is very special to Syro-Malabar Christians that on the occasion of the marriage, rosaries are also blessed and given to the couples so that Blessed Mary may protect the marriage and help the couples to lead a holy and committed family life.

Our Church is famous for its Carmelite Devotions, which she inherited from the foreign Carmelite missionaries. The Carmelites of Mary Immaculate (C.M.I.), the First indigenous Congregation of India and

⁵⁹ Quoted in P. J. PODIPARA, “The Mariology of the Church of the East”, *Christian Orient* II:4 (1981) 165-182, p.175.

Congregation of the Mother of Carmel (C.M.C.) promoted this Carmelite Devotion. Blessed Chavara Kuriakose Elias was a strong Marian devotee and the promoter of Carmelite devotion. Almost all Christians of Kerala wear scapular to be protected by Blessed Mary especially from the dangers of death. The Scapular devotion reached to the extent that it has been called as the ‘Sacrament of Mary’. On the occasion of 7th Centenary celebration of the Reception of the Scapular by Fr. Simon Stock on July 16, 1251, the bishops of Thirukochi issued a common pastoral letter in which we read: “Scapular is the sign of our moral unity with the Blessed Mary. This is the proof that Mary is the strongest mediator for us.”⁶⁰ On the occasion of the reception of the First Communion, the children are dedicated to Blessed Mary and the Scapular is officially given to them to wear.

Ecclesial Life

The ecclesial life and institutions reveal our special devotion to Mother Mary. In many of the Churches in Kerala, there exists ‘Kombriya’ (*Dbarsana Samoobam*) which has special devotion to Blessed Mary. The members are supposed to lead holy life after the model of our Mother Mary. Today, we also have Marian retreats, which help us to understand Mary’s role in salvation history and to enable us to realize our redemptive mission in and outside the Church. All Kerala Marian Congresses was conducted at Ernakulam from December 29th to 31st, in 1950, to properly understand the person and mission of Mary and also to promote Marian devotion. On that occasion, there was also ‘Scapular campaign’ which advocated wearing of scapulars. Recently, the warm welcome given to the statue of Blessed Mary from Fatima brought to Kerala really revealed our Marian devotion and further promoted Marian devotion. It is also a common custom in Syro-Malabar Church that in preparation for the Feast of Nativity, the young girls fast for 8 days invoking Blessed Mary to protect them from all the dangers of impurity.⁶¹

⁶⁰ See J. VELLIAN, *Marian Sabdbadhara* Encyclopaedic Dictionary on Blessed Virgin Mary, (Malayalam), Kottayam, 2004, pp.70-72.

⁶¹ For details, see G. KURUKOOR, *Kraisthava Sabdha Kosam* (An Analytical Historical and Comparative Study of Foreign Words in Christian Literature), Kerala, 2002, 179-180.

Many Churches,⁶² Convents and Institutions dedicated to Blessed Mary, Marian Pilgrim centers, Marian grottos, Rosary Village, Marian Tower also reveal the vibrant Marian devotion of our people. The thousands of pilgrims flock to the Marian shrines for obtaining her motherly protection and to get courage to lead an authentic Christian life. The icons in the Eastern Churches also reveal their Marian spirituality. In every icon, Mary is pictured with Jesus, which speaks of the Christological basis of Mariology and Marian spirituality. This reveals explicitly Christians' faith in Mary's unique role in the continuous redemptive act of Jesus Christ in today's shattered world.

Missionary Life

Our Church is really blessed with numerous vocations to Priesthood and Religious Life, which is precisely the fruit of her unique devotion to Blessed Mary. Our church is really lively because of the ministry of our young priests and religious. Blessed Mary is the inspiring model of service and protector of Priests and Religious. Mary's unique cooperation in Redemption through her maternal life and mission inspire many to commit their lives to continue her mission of cooperation in the act of redemption in today's world. The missionary enthusiasm to proclaim the salvation of God to the whole nation, shown by the visit of Mary to Elizabeth, has very much inspired many of our priests and religious to go to different parts of the world for missionary work ready even to lay down their lives for the Gospel.

Social Life

Drawing inspiration from Mary's *Magnificat*, our Church is committed to manifest God's preferential love for the poor and the downtrodden. Our Church is thus seriously engaged in various charitable as well as empowering activities in order to uplift the poor. Blessed Mary as the most perfect image of freedom and of liberation of humanity and of the universe, is the model of liberation of women who are in bondages. Her life and mission encourages many women movements to work for the liberation of women who are persecuted and humiliated by a male-dominant family and society. The Syro-Malabar Synod having taken up and discussed the theme

⁶² On the Church-bell of Kuruvilangad Church, in Kerala, '*Emme'dbalaha*' (Mother of God) is inscribed which also indicates our special devotion to Mary.

of 'family', now instructs all the members of the Church to seriously work for the betterment of families with the Gospel values and the example of Blessed Mary. Our Lady is presented as the best protector of purity amidst all types of sinful deviations among the youth. Blessed Virgin Mary who walked with Jesus till the foot of the Cross is also a great example for humanity who lives in the midst of suffering and tragedies. Mother of God being the perfect protector of our faith and morality, will help us to cooperate with the continuous redemptive work of Jesus Christ in today's world of sin and suffering.

Conclusion

In salvation history, Blessed Mary is said to be the first and the best-redeemed person.⁶³ Being the first and the best disciple of Jesus Christ, she is the one on the one hand, who has uniquely been redeemed by the preservative-redemptive act of Christ and on the other, who had been actively cooperating in the liberative-redemptive act. We can thus say that by the grace of God she gave her informed consent to be the Mother of the Redeemer, thus actively cooperating in the work of redemption and so becoming a unique cooperator in the Redemptive act of Christ. As Spiritual Mother in the order of grace, Mary 'participates' with the one Mediator in transmitting the Redemptive grace of Christ through her intercession and advocacy. Being 'full of grace' Mary as representative of humanity and the Church, thus made a total commitment of cooperation in the act of Redemption.

This is a doctrine of profound theological and pastoral significance. Apart from other Marian dogmas, this doctrine would be very helpful to understand the vocation and mission of the Church, clarifying the role of the Church and its members in the work of redemption. The salvation of humankind is entirely the initiative of God. Yet, He does not impose salvation on his creatures but requires our active cooperation, for which He gives us His redeeming presence.

We are invited to cooperate, by our own free decision, with God's act of our own redemption and the redemption of others by becoming genuine cooperators in the redemptive act of Christ. We are redeemed to the extent that we belong to the Church. Our redemption is mediated to us through

⁶³ See *LG*. 54.

the sacramental Church, the Mystical Body of Christ. Mary as its representative and exemplary member is a model of redemptive suffering. By offering our sufferings, prayers and good works, we can also become real cooperators in Christ's Redemption.

From a Christological view-point, we understand that Mary, by her life and mission, uniquely cooperated in the act of Redemption and from an ecclesiological and anthropological view, she is presented as the Mother of the Church and humanity who intercedes for us in our daily life of struggles and sufferings. Though both the christological and ecclesio-anthropological perspectives of Mariology are necessary to correctly understand the unique life and mission of Mary in salvation history, the spirituality and theology of Syro-Malabar Church would reveal more the ecclesio-anthropological dimension of Mariology stressing on Mary as the Mother of the Church and of Humanity than the christological aspect, namely Mary as a unique cooperator in Redemption.