

Mariology

Co-Redemptrix by participation: the forgotten principle

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Can the theoretical thread be found that led the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, in the Note *Mater Populi Fidelis*, to take a position at odds with the Magisterium's ordinary development on the co-redemption and mediation of Mary Most Holy? In these

attempts at *reductio ad unum*, one must always avoid forcing the issue; yet, even in light of the important observations raised by the [International Marian Association document](#), it seems that the common thread can be found in an insufficient conception of the principle of participation.

St Thomas Aquinas explains participation as follows in a rather technical philosophical treatise: 'When an entity receives in a partial manner what belongs to others in a total manner, it is said to participate in it' (Commentary on De Hebdomadibus, 2, 24). This can be illustrated as follows: since God is being by essence — the *Ipsium Esse Subsistens* — it is only in him that we find every perfection to the highest degree, as he is the principle of all perfection. Conversely, every created entity receives being and therefore has being — and all its perfection — in a participatory manner, since it is not being by essence. Therefore, we can say that every perfection is found absolutely only in God, while in creatures it is found in a participatory way. For example, God is not merely good, he is goodness; God is not merely beautiful, He is beauty. Creatures, on the other hand, are merely good and beautiful, each according to its own 'measure'.

Participation, understood in this way, is also the principle of causality: the participant is causally dependent on the participated, which metaphysically exceeds participating entities. In other words, creatures depend on their Creator, who rises above them with an unbridgeable 'metaphysical gap' because God is being itself, whereas creatures receive being according to a 'measure'. Please forgive the excessive focus on philosophical technicalities, but this point is extremely important because it implies not only the metaphysical distance between God and creatures, but also that every creaturely perfection is caused and participated in by God. Therefore, no creaturely perfection sings the glory of God more than another, because they all derive from, depend on and subsist because of God's permanent causal action.

All creation is therefore like a cascade of shared perfections, ranging from intense to minimal. However, the supernatural order also responds to the same participatory logic. God shares his divine life with angels and humans, who receive it according to their own measure.

This premise alone resolves any objection regarding the possibility that the natural and supernatural perfections of a creature, however great, might detract from God or be considered “parallel” to the divine ones. In the created order, however, every natural and supernatural perfection can only express the greatness and generosity of God, because every perfection present in God absolutely and totally is shared by him with the

creature.

The glory of God therefore resounds throughout creation and, in the order of grace, within every angel and human being who has welcomed divine life. God's greatest masterpiece lies in the fact that he shares not only his being, his perfections and his divine life, but also his own causality. This truth is clearly seen in the order that God has established for the transmission of natural life, in which male and female are true generative causes. The fact that God has made His creatures capable of this causality is a sign of His omnipotence and His desire to ennoble His creatures, each in its own way, by making them capable of not only receiving, but also causing. This capacity to cause good at all levels is also received from God, and is a superior manifestation of his glory and greatness in itself. Put simply, a teacher who has inspired their students to become teachers themselves is more praiseworthy than a teacher who has merely communicated their own knowledge.

In the order of grace, God participates in and therefore causes perfections in different ways and to different degrees. However, there is more: he manifests his almighty goodness by ensuring that creation itself participates in his causality, even in the supernatural order. This is how material creation becomes an effective sign of grace in certain sacraments, how men are associated with the priesthood of Christ to dispense the Word and the sacraments, and how Christians can merit numerous graces for themselves and others. God not only shares His divine life and every grace, but also associates creatures with Himself so that they may participate in his supernatural causality. This is a true causality, but one that is shared and participated in according to the measure established by God.

The question of Mary's cooperation in the Redemption, both objective and subjective — her participation in acquiring the fruits of the Redemption (coredemption) and dispensing them (mediation) — can only be fully understood in light of an adequate understanding of the principles of participation and causality. Affirming, as sound theology and the Magisterium of the popes have always done, that Mary participated actively and immediately in the Redemption wrought by her Son, and continues to participate in the distribution of His graces, means saying that the Son shared His redemptive causality with His Mother. Not only did He redeem her in the unique way confessed in the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, He also shared His redemptive power with her, associating her with Himself. According to the principle of participation, Mary's entire co-redemptive and mediating work is rooted in, dependent on and glorifies Christ. This is why the title 'co-redemptrix' is particularly appropriate:

the prefix 'co-' expresses that her redemptive capacity is indeed hers, but not from her; it is shared. Her causality in the Redemption is real, but being shared, it is secondary — that is, it depends radically on the primary cause, Christ.

From the perspective of participation, any notion of a redeemer parallel to Christ simply disappears. It is also helpful to consider the advantage of the Trinity's decision to involve a creature in the redemptive work of the incarnate Son. According to the vision of the order of grace as a cascade of shared perfections (similar to the natural order), if Mary had not been willed in this way, we could say that the world of human persons would lack a degree of maximum perfection. Christ has indeed ennobled humanity by uniting it with His divinity in a hypostatic union, so nothing higher can be conceived for it. However, it remains true that Christ is not a human person because He assumed human nature in His incarnation as the Word. Therefore, it is fitting, and a cause for gratitude and wonder, that God chose to further ennoble human nature in the person of Mary Most Holy by sharing His redemptive causality with her.

This broad perspective should be grasped and communicated when approaching the mystery of Mary's co-redemption and mediation. Adopting this perspective definitively abandons the narrowness of Protestant theology, which is based on the principle of 'solus Christus', and fails to recognise that one of Christ's greatest attributes is that He shared His redemptive causality with his mother. Once again, the Church will be able to escape the limitations of an either/or approach (Christ or Mary) and embrace the broader perspective of an both/and approach that magnifies the Lord for the great things He has done through the Virgin Mary.