DAILY COMPASS
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MADE FOR THE TRUTH

CO-REDEMPTION

Is it Mary a model of the redeemed and nothing more? The dogmatic truth is different

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The *Note Mater Populi Fidelis* of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, along with the interventions of His Excellency Monsignor Antonio Staglianò in L'Osservatore Romano and of the *Daily Compass*, are of considerable importance in deepening

Mariological doctrine relating to the soteriological titles of the Virgin Mary. The most interesting development is that, until recently confined to a narrow field of theology known mainly to experts, Marian co-redemption and mediation are now arousing widespread interest among the people of God. A new and very promising debate is emerging. We must not stop this emerging reflection. Instead, we must relaunch the key points that emerge from the analysis of the President of the Pontifical Academy of Theology above all.

Monsignor Staglianò's reflection clearly takes an anthropological approach. Rather than offering co-satisfaction by paying the price of a forensic ransom with Christ and giving voice to the Anselmian theology of vicarious suffering, Mary is the one who receives Christ's love, allowing herself to be transformed by it and transmitting it to believers. Mary is certainly singular. But this singularity lies in her receptivity, not her actions. Mary is the Mother of Christ and the first of the redeemed. She is redeemed in a unique way, without pretension. She is a model of redemption. That is all. However, if we start from the dogma of Ephesus (431), we should not be satisfied with a merely receptive Mariological model, which ultimately would ascribe to the Virgin the title 'Christotokos' favoured by Nestorius, rather than the dogmatic title 'Theotokos', 'Dei Genitrix', strenuously defended by St Cyril of Alexandria.

In fact, the debate on Mary's participation in salvation must be connected to this first great Mariological dispute, which was resolved by the dogma of Divine Motherhood. Mary is the Mother of God, not just of Christ, even though she gave birth only to his human nature. Motherhood ends with the person of the Son, not nature. Since there is only one divine person in Jesus, and not two as Nestorius wanted, Mary is the mother of the person of the Son, who was begotten according to human nature. Mary is therefore *Dei genitrix* and not *Christi genitrix*. Although the latter title sounds less redundant and more anthropological, it does not express the dogmatic truth. Incidentally, *Dei genitrix* is much more difficult to accept than *Co-redemptrix*. Even E. B. Pusey had to realise this when he was rebuked by St. John Henry Newman.

Defending the *Theotokos* and inscribing Mary in the hypostatic order of the Incarnate Word — an order of singular grace realised by virtue of her divine motherhood, made fruitful by grace — meant rejecting a minimalism that was more plausible on a rational level but not real. Nestorius did not aim at the res, but at the statement. However, the problem was Christological rather than Mariological. Mary, Mother of God, maintained the unity of the person of the Word and the truth of the human nature that Christ assumed from the Virgin. This avoided the gross error of 'two

sons', as St Cyril reiterated in his second letter to Nestorius. This was also accepted by the Council. A similar situation arises when we correctly understand Mary's co-redemption. The Virgin helps us to reconcile the divine truth of redemption with the necessary human contribution, primarily that of Jesus' human nature, and then that of Mary. She is not merely a recipient of salvation, but an active worker in and for Jesus, by virtue of her maternal bond with the Lord. Thus, while safeguarding the truth of redemption through the flesh, the Virgin preludes the associative participation of every other human being in Christ's salvation through merit in a unique and still analogical way. To deny Mary's real and active co-redemption ultimately entails rejecting the doctrine of merit as true human association with and cooperation in Christ's salvation, made possible by grace.

The problem in this debate is undoubtedly ontological. We must focus on the metaphysical aspect of participation in salvation. What does participation mean in our case? It is the ability to collaborate with Christ in achieving salvation. Invited by His grace and enabled by His love, man is capable of cooperating in his own salvation and that of others in Christ. Participation consists of the grace of the One who invites and enables such an act. In turn, the participant joins in this work, contributing what he has of his own: his freedom and merit. Although there is a hierarchy of participation among creatures by virtue of merit and dignity, there is no need to minimise the differences, because ultimately, there is no gradual or quantum participation. Metaphysics should not be transformed into a theory of quantity in order to ascertain the minimum degree of participation of Mary and other creatures, lest the work of Christ be disturbed.

Metaphysical participation is the participant's causal dependence on the One who admits them to participation. In other words, participation is dependence and subordination in itself. As a creature, Mary depends on the Creator because she participates in being. She participates in it fully, just as every other creature participates in it according to its capacity for being. As Mother of God and *Co-redemptrix*, Mary participates in her Son's saving work with all her capacity as Mother and New Eve. This unique and unattainable participation is based on the two aforementioned unique soteriological connotations. As Mother of God and soulful partner of the true Adam, her participation does not diminish the precedence and excellence of the Son, but rather displays it. Mary poses no threat to Christ; she is the Mother who glorifies him in the most excellent way. To call her *Co-redemptrix* is to acknowledge that she cooperates uniquely in the work of redemption, actively and metaphysically, through her unique grace. There is no need to ascertain the 'minimal' extent of Mary's participation in salvation, nor to make her as 'dissimilar' as possible. The dissimilarity, whether major or

minor, lies in Mary's being rather than her actions, in her participation in grace rather than the quantity of the action performed.

This may finally clarify another point that is often raised in the debate, almost as if to cut short the discussion in a very un-synodal way. 'Mary could not be *Co-redemptrix* because she herself needed redemption.' How could one be redeemed and co-redeem at the same time? It seems that there is a 'contradiction that does not allow it'. It seems. In reality, however, it is not a contradiction, because Mary's redemption is on a more perfect and earlier level of metaphysical participation than the role of *Co-redemptrix*. Mary is redeemed *singularis modo*, as the dogma of the Immaculate Conception tells us. She is redeemed in a way that befits her alone. She was preserved from original sin by a special privilege of Christ's grace. Indeed, Mary received a unique privilege that no other creature possesses: the privilege of being immaculate and without sin. This gives her the ontological capacity to crush the head of the infernal serpent alongside Christ, and to play a role in the redemption of humanity. If Mary truly participates in grace and salvation through being the Immaculate Mother, then she must also be the *Mediatrix* of grace and salvation. This is expressed by the theological term '*Co-redemptrix*'.