



# Co-Redemptrix

Our Lady as Necessary but Secondary Cause of Redemption

by Fr. Paul Robinson, SSPX

A mother has two roles, one by which she nourishes her children and the other by which gives her own being to them.

The first role is material, and includes carrying the child in the womb for nine months, feeding it at the breast, and burping it on her shoulder.

The second is formal, and demands that she identify herself with her child in the totality of its life: its aspirations, its choices, its goals, its destiny. To accomplish the first role, she sacrifices material resources; to accomplish the second, she sacrifices herself.

When it comes to the most perfect of mothers, Our Lady, Protestants limit the scope of her caring of the Divine Child to the first role. She was the material means for Our Lord to come into this world and be taken care of until He reached adulthood. At that point, her work was finished. She had transported Our Lord to the shores of His earthly mission and now could wave goodbye, wishing Him the best for His future life. In a sense, for them, she was at that point no longer His mother, and so she has no direct bearing on man's salvation. In Protestantism, religion lost the best of mothers, and today's families are cut to the pattern of its individualistic notion of motherhood.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Fr. Garrigou-Lagrange, *Mother of the Savior* (Dublin: Golden Eagle Books, Ltd., 1949), p. 147: "There is a very intimate connection between compassion and motherhood, for the deepest compassion is that of a mother, and Mary would not have been a worthy mother of the Redeemer had she been lacking in conformity of will with His redemptive oblation."

<sup>2</sup> See the chapter entitled "The New Eve" in Frank Duff's *Mary Shall Reign* (Glasgow: John Burns & Sons, 1961) for a use of this expression; for a comparison of the elements of the Fall and Redemption, see Fulton Sheen, *Old Errors and New Labels* (New York: Garden City Books, 1931), p. 138.

For Catholics, it is impossible for the *Mater Admirabilis* to be Mother of Our Lord without participating in every aspect of His life, and most especially the act for which He came upon this earth, the Redemption of mankind.<sup>1</sup> It is for this reason that St. Pius X says in his encyclical *Ad Diem Illum* that "Mary's community of life and sufferings with her Son was never broken off." Let us see how this may be shown.

## The Divine Revenge

The third chapter of Genesis narrates intensely dramatic events with shocking rapidity. The human race had a tragic fall. A man, a woman, a tree, and the devil were involved. But God already had a solution in mind, one worthy of the divine Wisdom, and which He pronounced in solemn tones. The serpent had deceived the woman and the woman had scandalized the man by getting him to eat of the tree. God would reverse everything: a woman and her offspring would conquer the devil through a tree. It was to be a Divine Revenge.<sup>2</sup>

Adam and Eve were the greatest of all human beings, created in the state of Original Justice, the parents of the whole human race. By sin, they became the authors of both physical and spiritual death, communicating them to all their children, who are all born in Original Sin and are doomed to die. Such was the origin of the "culture of death."

After them, in the fullness of time, came greater human beings, one of them being a God-man. These two were the only to be conceived without sin besides our first parents. Our Lord came into this world without a father, like Adam. Our Lady came into this world without spiritual parents, in that Saints Joachim and Anne did not pass on their fallen spiritual traits to her. The First Eve was named "Mother of all the living" because she was source of physical life for all. The Second Eve was to be the Mother of all those living the divine life of her Son. Adam and Eve were two in one flesh, in that Eve's body was formed from Adam's, but also in that, by the plan of God, they formed one unit from the beginning of Creation in the institution of marriage. Similarly, the New Adam and the New Eve were of one flesh, in that Our Lord took His body and all of His genetic material completely from Our Lady, while she resembled Him spiritually as closely as was possible for a mere creature by her fullness of Christian grace.

In the Fall, Eve played a secondary but necessary role. Without her capitulation to the devil and tempting of Adam, there would be no Original Sin. And while that Sin was transmitted to the entire human race by Adam, to whom pertained the active power of generation, yet that Sin passed through the womb of Eve. They committed the first sin together and they transmitted it together. They were one in their Creation, one in their Fall, and one in the fallen race they engendered.

And so, just as Eve united with Adam completely in the drama of humanity's Fall, so too, by God's eternal plan, Our Lady united completely with Our Lord in the drama of its redemption. The Sacred and Immaculate Hearts were one physically and spiritually, they were one in the act of >



<sup>3</sup> Cf. St. John Eudes quoted in Daniel Sargent's *Their Hearts be Praised* (New York: P. J. Kenedy and Sons, 1949), p. 108: "Even though the Heart of Jesus be different from that of Mary, and that it surpass her Heart infinitely in excellence and sanctity, yet God has united so closely the two Hearts that one can say in truth that they are one Heart, for they have always been animated by a same spirit, and filled with the same sentiments and affections."

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 189.

<sup>5</sup> Canon Ildefonso Rodriguez Villar in *To Jesus through Mary* (Cebu City, Philippines: Sacred Heart School, 1962), p. 181.

Redemption, and they are one in begetting of the redeemed human race, that of the elect.<sup>3</sup>

Just as the devil corrupted the head of the woman Eve with pride, so is his head definitively crushed underfoot by the heel of the humble woman Mary, by her accomplishing the act of Redemption with her Son in a necessary though secondary role. "It can be said," says St. Pius X, "that with [her Son] she redeemed the human race."

## What It Takes to Be Co-Redemptrix

Having seen that Our Lady's role included actual participation in the act of Redemption, we now must consider what that participation involved. How did Our Lady help redeem the human race, beyond bringing Our Lord into this world and nurturing Him?

The first thing to be understood is that Redemption involves payment. Etymologically, it is a "buying back," *re-emptio* in Latin. Men had committed innumerable crimes that disastrously tipped the scales of justice and demanded satisfaction. This satisfaction had to come in the form of meritorious, supernatural acts, which are the only acts worthy of God. But to make payment, these acts had to be painful. With every payment, there is a cost involved.

Our Lord paid by offering Himself; Our Lady paid by offering her Son. Our Lord paid by shedding His Blood; Our Lady paid by presenting that Blood to the Eternal Father. All throughout her life, she was united with her Son by a perfect conformity of will in humility, poverty, and suffering. But she was particularly united to Him in His mission of Redemption and, "when the time came, led Him to the altar of immolation." Standing at the foot of the Cross and "uniting herself to the Passion and Death of her Son, she suffered almost unto death" (St. Pius X).

This suffering of compassion is what earned her the titles of "Co-Redemptrix" and "Queen of Martyrs." It is a truism that those who love most suffer most. Suffering is not possible without love. But Our Lady had a triple love that no other creature could possess: she had the pure love of an undefiled virgin, the natural love of a tender mother, and the innocent love of a sinless creature. For the rest of the human race, only one of these is possible, for she alone is Virgin and Mother, and she alone is the Immaculate Conception. The Immaculate Heart is the most loving heart and so the most suffering heart.

Our Lady had to witness the brutal murder of her most innocent Son, receive His dead body into her arms, lay Him in the stone cold tomb, and walk away without Him.

"Of old," says Fr. Garrigou-Lagrange, "an angel had descended to prevent Abraham's immolation of his son Isaac. But no angel came to prevent the immolation of Jesus."<sup>4</sup> "Remember," says a spiritual author, "that the Son Mary lost on Calvary was the only one she had on earth, that this only-begotten Son was the best of all sons, loving His Mother as no other son had ever loved or ever would love his."<sup>5</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Quoted in Pope Leo XIII's Rosary encyclical *Magnae Dei Matris* of September 8, 1892.

What was the measure of this satisfactory merit on the part of Our Lady? How much did she pay? Enough for the Redemption of the whole world, though she did not, as her Son did, pay such a price by way of justice (*de condigno*), but rather by a certain proportion to her finite condition (*de congruo*). "It is a great thing in any saint," St. Thomas Aquinas tells us, "to have grace sufficient for the salvation of many souls; but to have enough to suffice for the salvation of everybody in the world is the greatest of all; and this is found in Christ and in the Blessed Virgin."<sup>6</sup>

## Conclusion

The doctrine of Our Lady Co-Redemptrix flows directly from a clear understanding of God's plans for our Redemption. It was His intention to reverse the Fall completely by making a woman, as well as a God-man, necessary for its accomplishment. He wanted to provide a new and better mother for the human race, one who not only refuses to give any quarter to the devil, but who also destroys him by her humility and selflessness. Instead of bringing forth death for her children, she brings them eternal life by sacrificing her own Son for their sakes. The context of the Fall, in which both Adam and Eve were involved, called forth from the Eternal Wisdom a New Eve as well as a New Adam for its full remedy. And how wonderfully good God is to provide for us this complete remedy, such that we can truly say, "O happy fault, that gave us such a Redeemer... and such a Redemptrix!" "A Child is born to us...and a Mother is given to us!"



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Just as Christ, the Mediator between God and man, assumed human nature, blotted the handwriting of the decree that stood against us, and fastened it triumphantly to the cross, so the most holy Virgin, united with him by a most intimate and indissoluble bond, was, with him and through him, eternally at enmity with the evil serpent, and most completely triumphed over him, and thus crushed his head with her immaculate foot.

Pope Pius IX, *Ineffabilis Deus*

# A Second Eve

“It is true, most dearly beloved, that the first man and the first woman did us grievous harm, but—thanks be to God!—by another Man and another Woman all that was lost has been restored to us...Instead of breaking that which was injured (Matt. 22:20), the Almighty Creator in His infinite wisdom and goodness restored it to its original perfection, yea, made it better than it had been before, forming a new Adam from the ancient and giving us in Mary a second Eve. Christ alone would have been sufficient...but it was not good for us that the Man should be alone (Gen. 2:18). It seemed more congruous that as both sexes contributed to the ruin of our race, so should both have a part in the work of reparation...[I]t ought to appear evident that the Woman pronounced ‘blessed among women’ (Luke 1:28) is not without her proper function: for her also is found something to do in the work of reconciliation. So great a Mediator is Christ that we have need of another to mediate between Him and us, and for this we can find none so well qualified as Mary. A most cruel mediatrix was our mother Eve, through whom the ‘old serpent’ (Apoc. 12:9) communicated the mortal poison of sin even to the man; but Mary is faithful, Mary offers the remedy of salvation both to men and women. The former became the means of our seduction, the latter co-operated in our reconciliation; the former was made the instrument of temptation, the latter the channel of redemption.”

St. Bernard's Sermon on the Twelve Stars. Translation taken from *St. Bernard's Sermons on the Blessed Virgin Mary* (Devon: Augustine Publishing Company, 1984), pp. 206-207.

Photo: Crowning of Mary, High Altar, cathedral of Freiburg, Germany

