

Mater Populi Fidelis

Doctrinal Note on Some Marian Titles

Regarding Mary's Cooperation in the Work of Salvation

Presentation

The present Note responds to numerous requests and proposals that have reached the Holy See in recent decades, and particularly this Dicastery, regarding questions pertaining to Marian devotion and certain Marian titles. These are questions that have concerned recent Popes and have been repeatedly addressed in the last thirty years in various areas of study within the Dicastery, such as Congresses and Ordinary Assemblies. This has enabled the Dicastery to compile an abundant and rich body of material that nourishes the present reflection.

While clarifying in what sense certain titles and expressions referring to Mary are acceptable or not, this text also aims to deepen the proper foundations of Marian devotion by specifying Mary's place in her relationship with believers in light of the Mystery of Christ as the sole Mediator and Redeemer. This entails a profound fidelity to Catholic identity while also requiring a particular ecumenical effort.

The central theme that runs through all these pages is *Mary's motherhood with respect to believers*. It appears repeatedly in the document, with statements revisited again and again, each time with new considerations, enriching and completing them in a spiral fashion.

Marian devotion, which Mary's motherhood engenders, is presented here as a treasure of the Church. The piety of the faithful People of God — who find in Mary refuge, strength, tenderness, and hope — is not contemplated here to correct it but, above all, to appreciate, admire, and encourage it. For this piety is a mystagogical and symbolic expression of an evangelical attitude of trust in the Lord, which the Holy Spirit freely stirs up in believers. In fact, the poor “also find God's affection and love in the face of Mary. In her, they see reflected the essential Gospel message.”^[1]

However, there are some Marian reflection groups, publications, new devotions, and even requests for Marian dogmas that do not share the same characteristics as popular devotion. Rather, they ultimately propose a particular dogmatic development and express themselves intensely through social media, often sowing confusion among ordinary members of the faithful. Sometimes these initiatives even involve reinterpretations of expressions that were used in the past with a variety of meanings. This document considers such proposals to indicate how some respond to a genuine Marian devotion inspired by the Gospel, and how others should be avoided since they do not foster a proper contemplation of the harmony of the Christian message as a whole.

Moreover, various passages in this *Note* offer a broad biblical development to show how authentic Marian devotion is found not only in the Church's rich Tradition but also in Sacred Scripture. This document's prominent biblical imprint is accompanied by texts from the Fathers and Doctors of the Church, as well as from recent Pontiffs. Therefore, rather than proposing limits, the present *Note* seeks to accompany and sustain the love of Mary and trust in her maternal intercession.

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Prefect

^[1] Latin American and Caribbean Episcopal Council, *V General Conference of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean, Concluding Document* (Aparecida, 13-31 May 2007), par. 265. Quoted in par. 78 of this Note.

Introduction

1. [*Mater Populi Fidelis*] The Mother of the Faithful People of God[1] is viewed with affection and admiration by Christians because, since grace makes us like Christ, Mary is the most perfect expression of Christ's action that transforms our humanity. She is the feminine manifestation of all that Christ's grace can accomplish in a human being. In the face of such beauty and moved by love, many members of the faithful throughout history have sought to refer to the Mother using the most beautiful words to exalt the special place she holds at Christ's side.
2. Recently, this Dicastery published the *Norms for Proceeding in the Discernment of Alleged Supernatural Phenomena*. [2] Certain titles [3] and expressions referring to the Virgin Mary are frequently used in connection with such phenomena. Yet, these titles — some of which already appear in the writings of the Church Fathers — are not always employed precisely, and their meanings are sometimes altered or misinterpreted. Beyond terminological issues, some titles pose significant difficulties regarding their content because they can often lead to a mistaken understanding of Mary's role, which carries serious repercussions at the Christological, [4] ecclesiological [5] and anthropological [6] levels.
3. The main problem in interpreting those titles as applied to the Virgin Mary is how one should understand her association with Christ's work of Redemption — that is, "what is the meaning of Mary's unique cooperation in the plan of salvation?" [7] The present document, without intending to be comprehensive or exhaustive, seeks to maintain the necessary balance that must be established within the Christian mysteries between Christ's sole mediation and Mary's cooperation in the work of salvation, and it seeks to show how this is expressed in various Marian titles.

Mary's Cooperation in the Work of Salvation

4. Mary's cooperation in the work of salvation has been traditionally approached from a double perspective: her participation in the *objective* redemption accomplished by Christ during his earthly life — particularly in the Paschal Mystery — and the influence she *currently* has on those who have been redeemed. Indeed, these two questions are interrelated and cannot be considered in isolation from one another.
5. Mary's participation in Christ's saving work is attested to in Scripture, which presents the saving event accomplished in Jesus Christ as a *promise* in the Old Testament and as a *fulfilment* in the New Testament. Mary is foreshadowed in Genesis 3:15 because she is the woman who shares in the definitive victory over the serpent. Therefore, it is not surprising that Jesus addresses Mary as "Woman" on Calvary (*Jn* 19:26). In Cana, likewise, he calls her "Woman" (*Jn* 2:4), referring to Mary and her role, together with him, in the "hour" of the Cross.
6. In that "hour," Mary's cooperation appears as she renews the "Yes" of the Annunciation. In that sacred moment, the Gospel moves from placing on Jesus' lips the word "Woman" (*Jn* 19:26) to presenting her as "Mother" (*Jn* 19:27). When the Gospel explains that, in response, the disciple (who represents all of us) took her in, it uses a verb (*lambanō*) that, in this Gospel, carries the sense of "receiving" from faith (cf. *Jn* 1:11-12; 5:43; and 13:20). The fourth Gospel uses this same verb to convey that the Light came to his own and they did not "receive" him (*Jn* 1:11). In other words, the disciple who took our place beside Mary received her as a mother in faith. Only after entrusting us to Mary as our mother did Jesus acknowledge that "all was now fulfilled" (*Jn* 19:28). This solemn allusion to fulfilment prevents any superficial interpretation of the event. Mary's motherhood in relation to us is part of the fulfilment of the divine plan, accomplished in Christ's Paschal Mystery. In a similar sense, the Book of Revelation presents the "Woman" (*Rev* 12:1) as the mother of the Messiah (cf. *Rev* 12:5) and the mother of "the rest of her children" (*Rev* 12:17).
7. It is worth remembering that Mary of Nazareth can be considered the "privileged witness" [8] of the events of Jesus' infancy [9] that appear in the Gospels (cf. *Lk* 1-2; *Mt* 1-2). In the prologue of his Gospel, Luke informs his readers that "since many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who were eyewitnesses from the beginning," so he also decided to investigate "everything accurately anew" (*Lk* 1:1-3). Among those eyewitnesses, Mary stands out as the direct protagonist of Jesus' conception, birth, and infancy. The same can be said of the accounts of the Passion, since Mary was "standing by the cross of Jesus" as "his mother" (*Jn* 19:25), and also of the period leading up to Pentecost, when the Apostles were "devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus" (*Acts* 1:14).

8. The Gospel of Luke presents Mary as the new “Daughter of Zion,” who receives and transmits the joy of salvation. Luke collects the prophetic promises that foretold the messianic joy (cf. *Zeph* 3:14-17; *Zech* 9:9). In Mary, those promises find their fulfilment, making John the Baptist leap for joy (cf. *Lk* 1:41). Elizabeth presents herself as being unworthy to receive Mary’s visit, saying “who am I that *the mother* of my Lord should come to me?” (*Lk* 1:43). She does not say, “who am I that *my Lord* should come to me?” but refers directly to *the mother*, thereby pointing to the inseparable connection between Christ’s mission and Mary’s mission. Elizabeth speaks filled with the Holy Spirit (cf. *Lk* 1:41), so that her attitude toward Mary is presented as a model of faith. Then, moved by the Spirit, Elizabeth says: “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!” (*Lk* 1:42). It is striking that, under the action of the Spirit, it is not enough for her to call Jesus “blessed”; she also calls his mother “blessed,” perceiving them as intimately united in this moment of messianic joy. Mary appears here as the one who is eminently blessed: “Blessed is she who believed” (*Lk* 1:45); “my spirit rejoices” (*Lk* 1:47); “all generations will call me blessed” (*Lk* 1:48). This description takes on even greater significance when we note that, in Luke’s Gospel, such blessedness is not seen as a state of mind but as the fulfilment of the messianic promises among the little ones (cf. *Lk* 6:20-22), who will receive a “great reward” (*Lk* 6:23).

9. Regarding the theological development of these themes in the first centuries of Christianity, the Church Fathers were primarily concerned with Mary’s divine motherhood (*Theotokos*), her perpetual virginity (*Aeiparthenos*), her perfect holiness as one who was free from sin throughout her life (*Panagia*), and her role as the New Eve,[10] reflecting upon Mary’s association with Christ’s Redemption in the context of the mystery of the Incarnation. Mary’s “Yes” to Gabriel’s message — so that the Word of God might become flesh in her womb (cf. *Lk* 1:26-37) — opens for humanity the possibility of divinization. For this reason, Saint Augustine calls the Virgin “cooperator” in Christ’s Redemption, thereby emphasizing both Mary’s action at Christ’s side as well as her subordination to him, for Mary cooperates with Christ so that “the faithful might be born in the Church.”[11] For this reason, we can call her the *Mother of the Faithful People of God*.

10. During the first millennium, reflection on the Virgin Mary in the Church was inseparable from the liturgy. The great and rich diversity of Eastern Christian liturgical traditions sought to be a faithful echo of Sacred Scripture, the Councils, and the Church Fathers. The *lex orandi*, which developed into the *lex credendi*, shaped Eastern Mariology through its hymnography, iconography, and popular piety.[12] For example, beginning in the fifth century, Marian feasts were first established in the East and later, starting in the seventh century, spread to the West. The Eastern Churches commemorated the participation of the Mother of God in the work of salvation not only in their anaphoras and Eucharistic liturgies but, above all, through the hymnographic texts used in their canonical Hours, which are present across the various liturgical traditions of the Christian East. Their *hymnography* abounds with compositions dedicated to Mary, with biblical allegories,[13] which allow for a deeper engagement with the fundamental mystery of the Incarnation and its meaning for our Redemption in Christ. These hymns employ a language full of poetic symbolism, capable of conveying the amazement and wonder of those who — sharing the same nature as Mary — contemplate the marvels that the Almighty has accomplished in her.[14]

11. The teaching of the first Ecumenical Councils began to delineate the dogma of Mary, Mother of God, which was later proclaimed in the Council of Ephesus. The Christian East has always upheld the dogmas defined by these early councils, at least among those Churches that accepted the Councils of Ephesus and Chalcedon. At the same time, in its liturgical, hymnographic, and iconographic traditions, the Christian East received the popular Marian narratives and legends about Jesus’ infancy and death. Such accounts seek to nourish the piety of the People of God by giving voice to the lyricism of poetic images, whose sole purpose is to awaken wonder. This veneration of the Mother of God is also manifested through *iconography*, which offers a visual depiction of Mary and the Incarnate Word. It is significant that the traditional icons of these Churches — linked to the Councils of Ephesus and Chalcedon — mostly portray Mary as the “*Theotokos*” (“Mother of God”).[15] Icons of this type were created to *contemplate* the Virgin Mother, who presents her Son, the child Jesus, to the world and who embraces him while also interceding for humanity before him. Thus Eastern Marian iconography, as a *kerygma* and full-colour visual reminder of the theology of the early Councils and the Church Fathers, seeks to be a visual translation of the titles that are uniquely applied to the Virgin.[16] For this reason, the icons must be “read” in light of the Church’s liturgy and hymns. Mary is not the object of a devotion that is placed next to Christ, but she is inserted into the mystery of Christ through the Incarnation.[17] She is the icon in which Christ is venerated. She is the *Theotokos*, the Virgin Mother who presents her Son, Jesus Christ, to us. At the same time, she is also the *Odēgētria* who points with her hand to show us the only Way, which is Christ.

12. Beginning in the twelfth century, Western theology[18] turned its gaze to the relationship that connects the Virgin Mother with the mystery of Christ's bloody Redemption on Calvary, associating Simeon's prophecy about the sword with the Cross of Christ. Mary's presence at the foot of the Cross was seen as a sign of Christian fortitude, filled with maternal love. Saint Bernard of Clairvaux spoke of Our Lady's cooperation in the redemptive sacrifice when commenting on Jesus' Presentation in the Temple.[19] Arnold, a friend of Saint Bernard and the Benedictine abbot of Bonneval (X after 1159), was the first to consider Mary's cooperation with the sacrifice of Calvary, standing next to her Son, Jesus Christ.[20]

13. The cooperation of the Mother with her Son in the work of Salvation has been taught by the Magisterium of the Church.[21] As the Second Vatican Council states, "rightly, therefore, the holy Fathers see Mary not merely as a passive instrument in the hands of God, but as freely cooperating in the work of human salvation through faith and obedience." [22] This cooperation is present not only in Jesus' earthly life (at his conception, birth, death, and Resurrection) but also throughout the life of the Church.

14. The dogma of the Immaculate Conception highlights the primacy and unicity of Christ in the work of Redemption, for it teaches that Mary — the first to be redeemed — was herself redeemed by Christ and transformed by the Spirit, prior to any possible action of her own.[23] From this special condition of being the first redeemed by Christ and the first transformed by the Holy Spirit, Mary is able to cooperate more intensely and profoundly with Christ and the Spirit, becoming the prototype,[24] model and exemplar of what God wants to accomplish in every person who is redeemed.[25]

15. Mary's cooperation in the work of salvation has a Trinitarian structure, since it is the fruit of the Father's initiative, who "looked upon the *lowliness* of his servant" (*Lk* 1:48); it springs from the *kenōsis* of the Son, who humbled himself by taking the form of a servant (cf. *Phil* 2:7-8); and it is the effect of the grace of the Holy Spirit (cf. *Lk* 1:28, 30), who prepared the heart of the young woman of Nazareth to respond at the Annunciation and throughout her life of communion with her Son. Saint Paul VI taught that "in the Virgin Mary, everything is in reference to Christ and dependent upon him. It was with a view to Christ that God the Father, from all eternity, chose her to be the all-holy Mother and adorned her with gifts of the Spirit granted to no one else." [26] Mary's "Yes" is not a mere precondition for something that could have been accomplished without her consent and cooperation. Her motherhood is not only biological, nor is it passive in nature,[27] but it is a "fully *active*" motherhood[28] that is joined to the salvific mystery of Christ as an instrument willed by the Father in his plan of salvation. She is "the guarantee that he is truly man, 'born of a woman' (*Gal* 4:4)" and, after the Nicene dogma is proclaimed, she is also recognized as being the "Theotokos, the God-bearer." [29]

Titles Referring to Mary's Cooperation in Salvation

16. Among the titles used to invoke Mary ("Mother of Mercy," "Hope of the Poor," "Help of Christians," "Our Lady of Perpetual Succour," "Our Advocate," etc.), there are some that place greater emphasis on her cooperation in the redemptive work of Christ, such as "Co-redemptrix" and "Mediatrix."

Co-redemptrix

17. The title "Co-redemptrix" first appeared in the fifteenth century as a correction to the invocation "Redemptrix" (as an abbreviated form of the title, "Mother of the Redeemer"), which had been attributed to Mary since the tenth century. Saint Bernard assigned Mary a role at the foot of the Cross that gave rise to the title "Co-redemptrix," which first appears in an anonymous fifteenth-century hymn from Salzburg.[30] Although the designation "Redemptrix" persisted throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, it disappeared entirely in the eighteenth century, having been replaced by the title "Co-redemptrix." Theological research on Mary's cooperation in Christ's Redemption in the first half of the twentieth century led to a deeper understanding of what the title "Co-redemptrix" signifies.[31]

18. Some Popes have used the title "Co-redemptrix" without elaborating much on its meaning.[32] Generally, they have presented the title in two specific ways: in reference to Mary's divine motherhood (insofar as she, as Mother, made possible the Redemption that Christ accomplished[33]) or in reference to her union with Christ at the redemptive Cross.[34] The Second Vatican Council refrained from using the title for dogmatic, pastoral, and

ecumenical reasons. Saint John Paul II referred to Mary as “Co-redemptrix” on at least seven occasions, particularly relating this title to the salvific value of our sufferings when they are offered together with the sufferings of Christ, to whom Mary is united especially at the Cross.[35]

19. In the *Feria IV* meeting on 21 February 1996, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, who was the Prefect of the then Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, was asked whether the request from the movement *Vox Populi Mariae Mediatrici* to define a dogma declaring Mary as the “Co-redemptrix” or “Mediatrice of All Graces” was acceptable. In his personal *votum*, he replied: “Negative. The precise meaning of these titles is not clear, and the doctrine contained in them is not mature. A defined doctrine of divine faith belongs to the *Depositum Fidei* — that is, to the divine revelation conveyed in Scripture and the apostolic tradition. However, it is not clear how the doctrine expressed in these titles is present in Scripture and the apostolic tradition.”[36] Later, in 2002, he publicly voiced his opinion against the use of the title: “the formula ‘Co-redemptrix’ departs to too great an extent from the language of Scripture and of the Fathers and therefore gives rise to misunderstandings... Everything comes from Him [Christ], as the Letter to the Ephesians and the Letter to the Colossians, in particular, tell us; Mary, too, is everything that she is through Him. The word ‘Co-redemptrix’ would obscure this origin.” While Cardinal Ratzinger did not deny that there may have been good intentions and valuable aspects in the proposal to use this title, he maintained that they were “being expressed in the wrong way.”[37]

20. The then Cardinal Ratzinger referred to the Letters to the Ephesians and to the Colossians, where the vocabulary and the theological dynamism of the hymns present the unique redemptive centrality of the incarnate Son in such a way as to leave no room to add any other form of mediation — for, “every spiritual blessing” is bestowed upon us “in Christ” (*Eph* 1:3); we are adopted as sons and daughters *through him* (cf. *Eph* 1:5); *in him* we have been graced (cf. *Eph* 1:6); “we have redemption through his blood” (*Eph* 1:7); and *his grace* has been “lavished on us” (*Eph* 1:8). “*In him*, we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined” (*Eph* 1:11). *In him* “all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell” (*Col* 1:19) and for him and through him, God willed “to reconcile all things” (*Col* 1:20). Such praise for the unique place of Christ calls us to situate every creature in a clearly receptive position in relation to him and to exercise careful, reverent caution whenever proposing any form of possible cooperation with him in the realm of Redemption.

21. On at least three occasions, Pope Francis expressed his clear opposition to using the title “Co-redemptrix,” arguing that Mary “*never wished to appropriate anything of her Son for herself. She never presented herself as a co-Savior. No, a disciple.*”[38] Christ’s redemptive work was perfect and needs no addition; therefore, “Our Lady did not want to take away any title from Jesus... She did not ask for herself to be a quasi-redeemer or a co-redeemer: no. There is only one Redeemer, and this title cannot be duplicated.”[39] Christ “is the only Redeemer; there are no co-redeemers with Christ.”[40] For “the sacrifice of the Cross, offered in a spirit of love and obedience, presents the most abundant and infinite satisfaction.”[41] While we are able to extend its effects in the world (cf. *Col* 1:24), neither the Church nor Mary can replace or perfect the redemptive work of the incarnate Son of God, which was perfect and needs no additions.

22. Given the necessity of explaining Mary’s subordinate role to Christ in the work of Redemption, *it would not be appropriate* to use the title “Co-redemptrix” to define Mary’s cooperation. This title risks obscuring Christ’s unique salvific mediation and can therefore create confusion and an imbalance in the harmony of the truths of the Christian faith, for “there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (*Acts* 4:12). When an expression requires many, repeated explanations to prevent it from straying from a correct meaning, it does not serve the faith of the People of God and becomes *unhelpful*. In this case, the expression “Co-redemptrix” does not help extol Mary as the first and foremost collaborator in the work of Redemption and grace, for it carries the risk of eclipsing the exclusive role of Jesus Christ — the Son of God made man for our salvation, who was the only one capable of offering the Father a sacrifice of infinite value — which would not be a true honour to his Mother. Indeed, as the “handmaid of the Lord” (*Lk* 1:38), Mary directs us to Christ and asks us to “do whatever he tells you” (*Jn* 2:5).

Mediatrice

23. The concept of mediation appears in the Eastern Church Fathers starting in the sixth century. In the following centuries, Saint Andrew of Crete,[42] Saint Germanus of Constantinople[43] and Saint John Damascene[44] employed this title with different meanings. In the West, this expression gained more frequent use starting in the

twelfth century, although it was not formally articulated as a doctrinal thesis until the seventeenth century. In 1921, Cardinal Mercier, Archbishop of Mechelen — with the scholarly collaboration of the Catholic University of Louvain and the support of the bishops, clergy, and laity of Belgium — petitioned Pope Benedict XV to issue a dogmatic definition of Mary's universal mediation. However, the Holy Father did not grant this request; he only approved a feast with its own Mass and the Office of Mary Mediatrix.[45] From then until 1950, theological research on this question continued to develop up to the preparatory phase of the Second Vatican Council. The Council did not enter into dogmatic declarations[46] but preferred to present an extensive synthesis "of Catholic doctrine on the place to attribute to the Blessed Virgin Mary in the mystery of Christ and the Church." [47]

24. The biblical statement about Christ's exclusive mediation is conclusive. Christ is the only Mediator, "for 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). The Church has clarified this unique place of Christ in light of the fact that he is the eternal and infinite Son of God, hypostatically united with the humanity he assumed. This is exclusive to Christ's humanity, and the consequences that derive from it can only be properly applied to him. In this precise sense, the Incarnate Word's role is exclusive and unique. Given this clarity in the revealed Word of God, special prudence is required when applying the term "Mediatrix" to Mary. In response to a tendency to broaden the scope of Mary's cooperation through this title, it is helpful to specify the range of its value as well as its limits.

25. On the one hand, we cannot ignore the fact that the word "mediation" is commonly used in many areas of everyday life, where it is understood simply as cooperation, assistance, or intercession. As a result, it is inevitable that the term would be applied to Mary in a subordinate sense. Used in this way, it does not intend to add any efficacy or power to the unique mediation of Jesus Christ, true God and true man.

26. On the other hand, it is clear that Mary had a real mediatory role in enabling the Incarnation of the Son of God in our humanity, since the Redeemer was to be "born of woman" (Gal 4:4). The account of the Annunciation shows that this involved not only a biological mediation since it highlights Mary's active involvement in asking questions (cf. Lk 1:29, 34) and accepting with a firm resolve: "*fiat*" (Lk 1:38). Mary's response opened the gates of the Redemption that all humanity had awaited and that the saints described with poetic drama.[48] At the wedding feast in Cana, Mary also fulfils a mediating role when she presents the needs of the newlyweds to Jesus (cf. Jn 2:3) and instructs the servants to follow his directions (cf. Jn 2:5).

27. The Second Vatican Council's terminology regarding *mediation* primarily refers to Christ; it sometimes also refers to Mary, but in a clearly subordinate manner.[49] In fact, the Council preferred to use a different terminology for her: one cantered on cooperation[50] or maternal assistance.[51] The Council's teaching clearly formulates the perspective of Mary's *maternal intercession*, using expressions such as "manifold intercession" and "maternal help." [52] These two aspects together define the specific nature of Mary's cooperation in Christ's action through the Spirit. Strictly speaking, we cannot talk of any other mediation in grace apart from that of the incarnate Son of God.[53] Therefore, we must always recall, and never obscure, the Christian conviction that "must be *firmly believed* as a constant element of the Church's faith" regarding "the truth of Jesus Christ, Son of God, Lord and only Savior, who through the event of his incarnation, death, and resurrection has brought the history of salvation to fulfilment, and which has in him its fullness and centre." [54]

Mary in the Unique Mediation of Christ

28. At the same time, we need to remember that the unicity of Christ's mediation is "inclusive." He enables various forms of participation in his salvific plan because, in communion with him, we can all become, in some way, cooperators with God and "mediators" for one another (cf. 1 Cor 3:9). Precisely because of Christ's infinitely supreme power, he can elevate his brothers and sisters to make them capable of a genuine cooperation in the accomplishment of his plans. The Second Vatican Council affirmed that "the unique mediation of the Redeemer does not exclude but rather gives rise to a manifold cooperation which is but a sharing in one source." [55] For this reason, "the content of this participated mediation should be explored more deeply, but must remain always consistent with the principle of Christ's unique mediation." [56] Indeed, the Church extends in time and communicates everywhere the effects of Christ's Paschal Mystery,[57] and Mary holds a unique place in the heart of Mother Church.[58]

29. Mary's participation in Christ's work becomes evident when one begins from the conviction that the risen Lord promotes, transforms, and enables believers to collaborate with him in his work. This does not happen due to some weakness, incapacity, or need on Christ's part but because of his glorious power, which is capable of taking us up, generously and freely, as collaborators in his work. What must be emphasized in this case is that when Christ allows us to accompany him and — under the impulse of his grace — to give our very best, it is ultimately his power and his mercy that are glorified.

Fruitful in the Glorious Christ

30. The following text is particularly illuminating in connection with this theme: "he who believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father" (*Jn* 14:12). Believers united to the risen Christ, who has returned to the Father's right hand, can accomplish deeds that surpass the wonders that were done by the earthly Jesus, but always thanks to their union through faith with the glorious Christ. This was evidenced, for example, in the marvellous expansion of the early Church, as the risen One shared this work with his Church (cf. *Mk* 16:15). In this way, Christ's glory was not diminished but was made all the more visible, showing itself to be a power that is capable of transforming believers and making them fruitful together with him.

31. Among the Fathers of the Church, this idea found a distinctive expression in their commentaries on John 7:37-39, since some interpreted Christ's promise of the "rivers of living water" as referring to believers. In this interpretation, believers themselves, transformed by Christ's grace, become springs for others. Origen explained that the Lord fulfills what he announced in John 7:38 by causing streams of water to flow out from us: "the human soul, made in the image of God, can itself contain and pour forth wells, fountains, and rivers." [59] Saint Ambrose recommended drinking from the open side of Christ, "in order that the spring of water welling up to eternal life may overflow in you." [60] Saint Thomas Aquinas expressed it by saying that if a believer "hastens to share various gifts of grace received from God, living water flows from his heart." [61]

32. If this holds true for every believer — whose cooperation with Christ becomes increasingly fruitful to the extent that one allows oneself to be transformed by grace — how much more must it be affirmed of Mary in a unique and supreme way. For she is the one who is "full of grace" (*Lk* 1:28) and who said, without putting any obstacle in God's work, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be done to me according to your word" (*Lk* 1:38). She is the Mother who gave the world the Author of Redemption and of Grace, who stood firm at the foot of the cross (cf. *Jn* 19:25), suffering alongside her Son and offering the pain of her maternal heart pierced by the sword (cf. *Lk* 2:35). From the Incarnation to the cross and the Resurrection, she was united to Christ in a way that is unique and that far surpasses any other believer.

33. All of this is not on account of her own merits but because Christ's merits on the Cross were applied to her fully — in a particular and anticipatory way — for the glory of the one Lord and Savior. [62] She is, in the end, a hymn to the efficacy of God's grace such that any acknowledgment of her beauty immediately points back to the glorification of the original source of all good: the Trinity. Mary's incomparable greatness lies in what she has received and in her trusting readiness to allow herself to be overtaken by the Spirit. When we strive to attribute active roles to her that are parallel to those of Christ, we move away from the incomparable beauty that is uniquely hers. The expression "participated mediation" can express a precise and valuable sense of Mary's role, but if misunderstood, it could easily obscure or even contradict it. Christ's mediation, which in some respects can be "inclusive" or shared, is in other respects exclusive and incommunicable.

Mother of Believers

34. In Mary's case, this mediation takes place in a *maternal* way, [63] just as she did at Cana [64] and as was confirmed at the cross. [65] Pope Francis explained it in this way: "She is a Mother. And this is the title she received from Jesus, right there, at the moment of the cross (cf. *Jn* 19:26-27). Your *children*, you are *Mother*... She received the gift of being his Mother and the duty to accompany us as Mother, to be our Mother." [66]

35. The title "*Mother*" has its roots in Sacred Scripture and the Church Fathers. It is presented by the Magisterium, and its contents developed gradually up to the teaching of the Second Vatican Council [67] and the use of the term

“*spiritual motherhood*” in the encyclical *Redemptoris Mater*.^[68] Mary’s spiritual motherhood springs from her physical motherhood of the Son of God. By physically bearing Christ — through her free, believing acceptance of that mission — Mary also, in faith, gave birth to all Christians who are members of the Mystical Body of Christ. In other words, she gave birth to the *total Christ*: Head and members.^[69]

36. The Virgin Mary’s participation, as Mother, in her Son’s life — from the Incarnation to the cross and Resurrection — imparts a unique and singular character to her cooperation in his redemptive work, especially for the Church, “when [the Church] contemplates Mary’s spiritual motherhood towards all members of the Mystical Body; in its trusting invocation [of her]; when it experiences the intercession of its advocate and helper.”^[70] This maternal aspect characterizes the Virgin’s relationship to Christ and her collaboration at every moment of the work of salvation. In her mission as Mother, Mary has a singular relationship with the Redeemer and with those who have been redeemed, of whom she is the first: “Mary is the *typos* [model] of the Church and of the new birth that takes place in the Church”; indeed, she is the symbol and “epitome of the Church herself.”^[71] This motherhood is born of her total gift of self and her calling to be the servant of the mystery.^[72] In Mary’s *motherhood*, all that we can say about motherhood according to grace and about her present place within the whole Church is synthesized.

37. Mary’s spiritual motherhood has some defining characteristics:

a) It is grounded in the fact that she is the Mother of God and her *motherhood* is extended to Christ’s disciples^[73] and even to all human beings.^[74] In this respect, Mary’s cooperation is singular and distinct from the cooperation of all “other creatures.”^[75] Her intercession does *not* have the characteristic of priestly mediation (such as Christ’s), but is instead situated in the order and analogy of motherhood.^[76] By associating Mary’s intercession with Christ’s work, the gifts given to us by the Lord are presented with a maternal aspect, imbued with the tenderness and closeness of the Mother^[77] whom Jesus wanted to share with us (cf. *Jn* 19:27).

b) Mary’s maternal cooperation is *in* Christ, and it is, thus, *participatory*. In other words, it involves “a sharing in the one unique source that is the mediation of Christ himself.”^[78] Mary enters into Christ’s unique mediation in a thoroughly personal way.^[79] Her maternal role “in no way obscures or diminishes this unique mediation of Christ, but rather shows its power. All the Blessed Virgin’s salutary influence” on us springs from the “the superabundance of the merits of Christ, rests on his mediation, depends entirely on it and draws all its power from it.”^[80] In her motherhood, Mary is *not an obstacle placed between human beings and Christ*. On the contrary, her maternal role is indissolubly joined to Christ’s role and is directed toward him. Understood in this way, Mary’s motherhood does not seek to weaken the unique adoration due to Christ alone but, rather, seeks to enkindle it.^[81] Therefore, one must avoid titles and expressions that present Mary as a kind of “lightning rod” before the Lord’s justice, as if she were a necessary alternative before the insufficiency of God’s mercy. The Second Vatican Council reaffirmed how the devotion given to Mary should be, namely “a devotion directed to the Christological centre of the Christian faith, in such a way that ‘when the Mother is honoured, the Son... is duly known, loved, and glorified.’”^[82] Ultimately, Mary’s motherhood is *subordinate*^[83] — to the Father’s election, to Christ’s work, and to the action of the Holy Spirit.

c) The Church is not only a point of reference for Mary’s spiritual motherhood, but *it is precisely within the sacramental dimension of the Church that her motherhood always unfolds*.^[84] Mary acts with the Church, in the Church, and for the Church. The exercise of her motherhood is found within the communion of the Church and not outside of it, leading the Church and accompanying her. The Church learns her own motherhood from Mary^[85] — in welcoming the Word of God that evangelizes, converts, and proclaims Christ; in the gift of the sacramental life of Baptism and the Eucharist; and in the maternal education and formation that helps the children of God to be born and to grow.^[86] For this reason, it can be said that “the fruitfulness of the Church is the same fruitfulness as Mary’s; it is realized in the lives of her members to the extent that they relive, ‘in miniature,’ what the Mother lived, namely, they love according to the love of Jesus.”^[87] As Mother, Mary waits for Christ to be begotten in us^[88] and does not take his place; the same is true for the Church. Thus, “thanks to the abundant graces streaming from the open side of Christ, in different ways the Church, the Virgin Mary and all believers become themselves streams of living water. In this way, Christ displays his glory in and through our littleness.”^[89]

Intercession

38. Mary is united to Christ in a unique way by her motherhood and by being full of grace. This is hinted at in the angel's greeting (cf. *Lk* 1:28), which uses a word (*kecharitōmenē*) that is found only here and nowhere else in the Bible. She, who received in her womb the power of the Holy Spirit and became the Mother of God, by that same Spirit, becomes Mother of the Church.[90] Because of this singular union in motherhood and in grace, her prayer for us has a value and an efficacy that cannot be compared to any other intercession. Saint John Paul II connected the title "Mediatrix" with this role of maternal intercession, noting that Mary "puts herself 'in the middle,' that is to say, she acts as a mediatrix not as an outsider, but in her position as mother. She knows that, as such, she can point out to her Son the needs of mankind." [91]

39. The Catholic faith reads in Scripture that those who are with God in heaven can continue to perform acts of love by interceding for us and accompanying us. For example, we see that angels are "ministering spirits sent forth to serve, for the sake of those who are to obtain salvation" (*Heb* 1:14). Scripture speaks of missions carried out by angels (cf. *Tob* 5:4; 12:12; *Acts* 12:7-11; *Rev* 8:3-5). Angels ministered to Jesus in the desert during his temptations (cf. *Mt* 4:11) and in his Passion (cf. *Lk* 22:43). The Psalms promise us that "for you has he commanded his angels, to keep you in all your ways" (*Pss* 91:11).

40. These passages tell us that heaven is not entirely separated from earth, which opens the possibility that those in heaven can intercede for us. The Book of Zechariah presents an angel of God who says, "O Lord of hosts, how long will you have no mercy on Jerusalem and the cities of Judah, against which you have been angry these seventy years?" (*Zech* 1:12). Similarly, Revelation speaks of the "slain," the martyrs in heaven, who intervene by pleading with God to act on earth to free us from injustice: "I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne. They cried out with a loud voice, 'O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?'" (*Rev* 6:9-10). Already in the Hellenistic Jewish tradition, there was the conviction that the righteous dead intercede on behalf of the people (cf. *2 Mac* 15:12-14).

41. Mary, in heaven, loves the "rest of her offspring" (*Rev* 12:17), and so, as she once accompanied the Apostles' prayer when they received the Holy Spirit (cf. *Acts* 1:14), she now accompanies our prayers from heaven with her maternal intercession. In this way, she continues the attitude of service and compassion that she showed at the wedding in Cana (cf. *Jn* 2:1-11) as she still today turns to Jesus to say: "They have no wine" (*Jn* 2:3). In her song of praise, we see Mary as a woman of her people, who praises God because "he has lifted up the lowly, he has filled the hungry with good things" (*Lk* 1:52-53), and because "he has come to the help of his servant Israel, for he has remembered his promise of mercy, the promise he made to our fathers" (*Lk* 1:54-55); and we recognize her promptness when she went without delay to help her cousin Elizabeth (cf. *Lk* 1:39-40). For these reasons, the People of God trust firmly in her intercession.

42. Among those chosen and glorified with Christ, first and foremost is his Mother. Therefore, we can affirm that Mary has a unique collaboration in the saving work that Christ carries out in his Church. With this intercession, Mary can become for us a motherly sign of the Lord's mercy. In this way, because he freely willed it, the Lord gives his action in us a maternal face.[92]

Maternal Closeness

43. The various Marian invocations, images, and shrines show Mary's true motherhood, which draws near to the lives of her children. An example of this can be seen in how she appeared to Saint Juan Diego on Tepeyac Hill and addressed him with the tender words of a mother: "My dearest and youngest son, Juan." When Saint Juan Diego expressed his difficulties in carrying out the mission entrusted to him, Mary showed him the strength of her motherhood: "Am I not here, who am your mother?... Are you not in the hollow of my mantle, in the crossing of my arms?" [93]

44. That experience of Mary's maternal affection, which Saint Juan Diego lived, is the personal experience of all Christians who receive Mary's affection and place "their daily necessities" into her hands, trustfully opening "their hearts to implore her motherly intercession and obtain her reassuring protection." [94] Beyond the extraordinary manifestations of her closeness, there are constant and daily expressions of her motherhood in the lives of all her children. Even when we do not request her intercession, she shows herself near to us as a Mother to help us recognize the Father's love, to contemplate Christ's saving self-gift, and to receive the Spirit's sanctifying action.

The value of this maternal closeness to the Church is so great that pastors must not let it be misused for political purposes. On various occasions, Pope Francis warned about this and showed concern over “various ideological and cultural proposals that seek to appropriate for themselves the encounter of a people with their Mother.”[95]

Mother of Grace

45. This understanding of the title “Mother of Believers” enables us to speak of Mary’s role in relation to our life of grace. However, it should be noted that certain expressions that could be theologically acceptable can easily become laden with concepts and symbolism that convey less acceptable notions. For example, Mary is sometimes portrayed as if she possessed a repository of *grace* separate from God. In such a notion, it is not so clear that it is the Lord who — in his generous and free omnipotence — willed to associate her with the sharing of that divine life which springs forth from the sole centre that is the Heart of Christ, not that of Mary.[96] She is also frequently portrayed or imagined as a fountain from which all grace flows. If one considers the fact that the Trinitarian indwelling (uncreated grace) and our participation in the divine life (created grace) are inseparable, we cannot think that this mystery depends on a “passage” through Mary’s hands. Such notions elevate Mary so highly that Christ’s own centrality may disappear or, at least, become conditioned. Cardinal Ratzinger already affirmed that the title “*Mary, Mediatrix of All Graces*” was not clearly grounded in Revelation.[97] In line with this conviction, we can recognize the difficulties this title poses, both in terms of theological reflection and spirituality.

46. To avoid these difficulties, Mary’s motherhood in the order of grace must be understood as a help in preparing us to receive God’s sanctifying grace. This can be seen in how, on the one hand, her *maternal intercession*[98] is the expression of that “maternal help”[99] which allows us to recognize Christ as the sole Mediator between God and humanity. On the other hand, her *maternal presence* in our lives does not preclude various actions from Mary aimed at encouraging us to open our hearts to Christ’s activity in the Holy Spirit. In this way, she helps us — in various ways — to *prepare ourselves to receive the life of grace* that only the Lord can pour into us.

47. Our salvation is solely the work of the saving grace of Christ and of no one else. Saint Augustine affirmed that “this reign of death is only destroyed in any man by the Savior’s grace,”[100] and he explained this point clearly in light of the redemption of the unjust man: “Who would want to die for an unjust man, for an ungodly man, save Christ alone, he who was so just as to be able to justify even the unjust? So, my brethren, we had no meritorious works, but only demerits. Although the works of men were of such a sort, his mercy did not forsake them and... instead of the punishment that was owed, he gave them the grace they did not deserve... [He did this] to redeem us, not with gold or silver, but at the price of the shedding of his blood.”[101] Thus, when Saint Thomas Aquinas asks whether anyone can merit for another, he answers that “no one can merit for another his first grace, save Christ alone.”[102] No other human being can merit it in the strict sense (*de condigno*), and on this point, there can be no doubt: “no one can be just unless the merits of the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ are imparted to him.”[103] Likewise, Mary’s fullness of grace exists because she received it freely, before any action on her own part, “in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, the Savior of the human race.”[104] Only the merits of Jesus Christ, who gave himself up to the end, are applied to us for our justification — which, since it “ends in the eternal good of divine participation, is a greater work than the creation of heaven and earth.”[105]

48. We can, however, participate by desiring the good of another, and it is fitting (*congruo*) that God would fulfil this charitable desire that can be expressed “in prayer” or by “works of mercy.”[106] Now, it is true that only God can pour out the gift of grace itself since this ability “exceeds the proportion of our nature”[107] and there is an infinite distance[108] between our nature and his divine life. Yet, God can bestow this gift, fulfilling the Mother’s desire, who thereby associates herself joyfully with God’s work as a humble servant.

49. As at Cana, Mary does not tell Christ what he should do. Instead, she intercedes by presenting him with our deficiencies, needs, and sufferings so that he may act with his divine power:[109] “They have no wine” (*Jn* 2:3). Even today, she helps to prepare us for God’s action:[110] “Do whatever he tells you” (*Jn* 2:5). Her words are not a simple suggestion but become a true maternal pedagogy that, under the action of the Holy Spirit, introduces us into the profound meaning of Christ’s mystery.[111] Mary listens, decides, and acts[112] to help us open our lives to Christ and to his grace,[113] because it is God alone who works in our innermost being.

Where Only God Can Reach

50. As the *Catechism* reminds us, sanctifying grace is “first and foremost the gift of the Spirit who justifies and sanctifies us.”[114] It is not simply a help or an energy we possess, but is “the gratuitous gift that God makes to us of his own life, infused by the Holy Spirit into our soul,”[115] which can be described as the indwelling of the Trinity in our innermost being, as friendship with God, and as covenant with the Lord. Only God can accomplish this because it involves overcoming an “infinite” disproportion.[116] That self-giving of the Trinity — by which God himself will “enter into”[117] (*illabitur*) the soul — implies an inherent transformation in the innermost part of the believer.[118] To describe this action of “entering into” our innermost part, Saint Thomas Aquinas uses a verb, *illabi*, which can only apply to God, since only he, not being a creature, can reach that most interior part of us without violating our freedom and identity.[119] Indeed, only God reaches our innermost centre to bring about elevation and transformation when he gives himself as a Friend, and thus, “no creature can confer grace.”[120] Saint Thomas reiterates this point when speaking about sacramental grace: as the *principal cause*, “only God produces the interior effect of the sacrament: first, because God alone can enter the soul wherein the sacramental effect takes place (and no agent can operate immediately where it is not): secondly, because the grace that is an interior effect of the sacrament comes from God alone.”[121]

51. Other authors have expressed themselves in a similar way.[122] In this context, it is worth highlighting Saint Bonaventure, who taught that when God works with sanctifying grace in a human being, he makes that person absolutely *immediate* to himself.[123] By grace, God becomes fully near to the human being, with an absolute immediacy, an “entering into” the person’s innermost part that only God can achieve.[124] Created grace, then, does not work like an “intermediary” but is the direct effect of the friendship that God bestows, which touches the human heart directly. And so, since it is God who brings about the person’s transformation when he gives himself as a Friend, there is no intermediary between God and the transformed person.[125] Only God is capable of entering in so deeply, to sanctify us to the point of becoming *absolutely immediate* to us, and only God can do so without nullifying the person.[126]

52. In the Incarnation, the eternal and natural Son of God[127] assumed a human nature that occupies a unique place in the economy of salvation. Hypostatically united to the Son by a grace that is “undoubtedly infinite,”[128] this humanity received grace “in the highest way; and therefore, from this pre-eminence of grace which he received, it is from him that this grace is bestowed on others, and this belongs to the nature of the Head.”[129] His humanity participates in the outpouring of sanctifying grace, which overflows or “redounds”[130] from it. Hence, “he is, in a sense, the source of all grace *according to his humanity*” as the Head from whom it flows to others (“*in alios transfunderetur*”).[131] This human nature is inseparable from our salvation, since “with the incarnation, all the salvific actions of the Word of God are always done in unity with the human nature that he has assumed for the salvation of all people.”[132] Through this assumed human nature, the Son of God “has in a certain way united himself with each man” and in that nature he “merited life for us by his blood which he freely shed.”[133] By grace, the faithful are united to Christ and participate in his Paschal Mystery, so that they may live an intimate and unique union with him, which Saint Paul expressed in these words: “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me” (*Gal 2:20*).

53. No human person — not even the Apostles or the Blessed Virgin — can act as a universal dispenser of grace. Only God can bestow grace,[134] and he does so through the humanity of Christ[135] since “the man Christ possessed supreme fullness of grace, as being the only-begotten of the Father.”[136] Although the Blessed Virgin Mary is pre-eminently “full of grace” and “Mother of God,” she, like us, is an adopted daughter of the Father and, as Dante Alighieri writes, “daughter of your Son.”[137] She cooperates in the economy of salvation by a derived and subordinate participation. Therefore, any expression about her “mediation” in grace must be understood as a distant analogy to Christ and his unique mediation.[138]

54. In the perfect immediacy between a human being and God in the communication of grace, not even Mary can intervene. Neither friendship with Jesus Christ nor the Trinitarian indwelling can be conceived of as something that comes to us through Mary or the saints. In any case, what we can say is that Mary desires this good for us and she asks for it, together with us. The liturgy, which is also *lex credendi*, allows us to reaffirm this cooperation of Mary, not in the communication of grace but in her maternal intercession. In fact, when explaining in what sense the privilege granted to Mary was ordered toward the good of the People of God, the liturgy of the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception states that she became an “advocate of grace”[139] — that is, she intercedes by asking God that we might receive the gift of grace.

55. As the Second Vatican Council teaches, “the Blessed Virgin’s salutary influence... does not hinder in any way the immediate union of the faithful with Christ but, rather, fosters it.”[140] For this reason, one should avoid any description that would suggest a Neoplatonic-like outpouring of grace by stages, as if God’s grace were descending through various intermediaries (such as Mary) while its ultimate source (God) remained disconnected from our hearts. Such interpretations carry a negative impact on a proper understanding of the intimate, direct, and immediate encounter that grace effects between the Lord and the believer’s heart.[141] The fact is that only God, the Triune God, justifies.[142] Only God raises us to overcome the infinite disproportion that separates us from divine life; only he acts in us with his Trinitarian indwelling; only he enters into us and transforms us, making us sharers in his divine life. It does not honour Mary to attribute to her any mediation in the accomplishment of this work that belongs exclusively to God.

The Living Water That Flows

56. At the same time, since Mary is full of grace and since the good always seeks to communicate itself to others, the idea easily emerges of a kind of “overflow” of grace from Mary — an idea that can only have an appropriate meaning if it does not contradict what has already been said. Such an interpretation poses no difficulty if we are dealing especially with the forms of cooperation that have already been discussed (Mary’s intercession and her maternal closeness that invite us to open our hearts to God’s sanctifying grace), and which the Second Vatican Council presented as a varied cooperation on the part of the creature “who shares in this one source.”[143]

57. The fundamentally preparatory role that believers, and especially Mary, play when they cooperate with God in his communication of grace is expressed in the traditional interpretation of the “rivers of living water” that flow from the hearts of believers (cf. *Jn* 7:37-39). While this powerful image might be interpreted as if believers were channels of a perfecting transmission of sanctifying grace, the Fathers of the Church spoke of this outpouring of the rivers of the Spirit in the context of actions that prepare us to receive God’s sanctifying grace, such as preaching, teaching, and other ways of transmitting the gift of the revealed Word.

58. Origen applies the image of the “rivers of living water” to the study of Scripture or perception of its spiritual senses.[144] For Saint Cyril of Alexandria, this overflowing of waters signifies the teaching of the mysteries of the faith[145] — the “pure mystagogy” in its deepest sense, which is not merely intellectual but pertains to the whole person’s disposition or preparation for God’s grace.[146] Saint Cyril of Jerusalem holds that the image signifies the teaching of Scripture when things come to light.[147] Saint John Chrysostom connects it to Stephen’s wisdom or the authority of Peter’s word.[148] Saint Ambrose affirms: “These are the rivers that hear the word of God with their ears, and they speak, so that they may pour out the word into the hearts of each one;”[149] and he applies it thus: “may the water of the heavenly doctrine gush forth... may dewdrops of the Lord’s word be sprinkled”[150] into hearts of each person.[151] For Saint Jerome as well, the water is the Savior’s teaching,[152] as it is also for Saint Gregory the Great, who additionally teaches that the water signifies “a pious will towards one’s neighbour.”[153] These interpretations of the “rivers of living water,” which believers pour forth, focus on knowledge of Scripture and its mysteries. They do not generally refer to merely intellectual knowledge but to a “sapiential” knowledge and the illumination of the heart, so that the heart may open itself up to the very reality of the Mysteries.

59. Among various Fathers and Doctors of the Church, we also find a broader explanation, which includes — in addition to preaching and catechesis — works that offer others help in their needs or that serve as a testimony of love. In this way, Saint Hilary of Poitiers understands the rivers of living water to signify the works of the Holy Spirit through the virtues that act for the benefit of one’s neighbour.[154] Saint Augustine applies the image to the “good will by which [a person] wishes to look after his neighbour’s interests.”[155] In the Middle Ages, this perspective continued up to Saint Thomas Aquinas, for whom the “rivers of living water” are manifested when someone “acts quickly to help others and to share with them the various gifts of grace he has received from God,” for such a person “will have living water flowing from his heart.”[156]

60. When Saint Thomas speaks of the “different gifts of grace” for the service of one’s neighbour, he is referring to the various charismatic gifts because, he notes, “as it is said (*1 Cor* 12:10), ‘to one is given the gift of tongues, to another the gift of healing, etc.’”[157] This aspect is also present in the thought of Saint Cyril of Jerusalem, who indicates that the rivers of the Spirit’s water — transmitted through believers — are manifested when “the Spirit

makes one man a teacher of divine truth, inspires another to prophesy, gives another the power of casting out devils... shows another how to help the poor, teaches another to fast and lead a life of asceticism.”[158]

61. Something similar can be said about the interpretation of John 14:12, which refers to believers accomplishing “greater works” (*meizona*) than those Christ did during his earthly life. Believers share in Christ’s work insofar as they also, in some way, enkindle the faith of others through the proclamation of the Word, as John 17:20 explicitly states: “those who will believe in me through their word.” The same idea is implied in John 14:6-11, where Christ’s works reveal the Father (v. 8) and the works of believers — focused on announcing the Gospel with their words — are placed alongside his. Indeed, Jesus proclaims: “If they kept my word, they will also keep yours” (*Jn* 15:20c), and just as whoever hears Christ’s Word has eternal life (cf. *Jn* 5:24), so also Jesus proclaims that others will come to believe through the word of his believers (cf. *Jn* 17:20). However, this involves not only their spoken words but also their eloquent witness. This is why Jesus asks the Father that his believers may be united: so that “the world may believe” (*Jn* 17:21).

The Love That Gives Itself in the World

62. The Gospel of John closely links fraternal charity with the sharing of this good. Indeed, the affirmation, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments” (*Jn* 14:15) runs parallel to the statement, “Whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do” (*Jn* 14:12). When Christ speaks of the fruit that he expects from his disciples, he ultimately identifies it with fraternal love (cf. *Jn* 15:16-17). Likewise, after discussing the various extraordinary works believers can perform (cf. *1 Cor* 12), Saint Paul proposes a more excellent way when he says, “earnestly desire the greater [*ta meizona*] gifts, and I will show you a still more excellent way [*kath’hyperbolēn*]”: love (*1 Cor* 12:31, cf. 13:1). Works of love toward one’s neighbour — even daily labours or efforts to change this world — can then become a channel for cooperating with Christ’s saving work.

63. Recent popes have also expressed similar ideas. Saint John XXIII taught that “since they are united in mind and spirit with the divine Redeemer even when they are engaged in the affairs of the world, their work becomes a continuation of his work, penetrated with redemptive power... to extend to others the fruits of Redemption.”[159] Saint John Paul II understood this collaboration as a reconstruction, together with Christ, of the good that has been damaged in the world because of sin, for “the Heart of Christ willed to need our collaboration to rebuild goodness and beauty”; indeed, he continued, “this is the true reparation requested by the Heart of the Savior.”[160] Pope Benedict XVI maintained that “as the objects of God’s love, men and women become subjects of charity; they are called to make themselves instruments of grace so as to pour forth God’s charity and to weave networks of charity. This dynamic of charity received and given is what gives rise to the Church’s social teaching.”[161] Pope Francis taught that, for Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, it was “not only about allowing the heart of Christ to fill her heart, through her complete trust, with the beauty of his love, but also about letting that love, through her life, spread to others and thus transform the world” in a way that “finds expression in acts of fraternal love by which we heal the wounds of the Church and of the world. In this way, we offer the healing power of the heart of Christ.”[162]

64. This cooperation, made possible through Christ and stirred up by the Spirit’s action, is, in Mary’s case, distinguished from the cooperation of any other human being due to the maternal character that Christ himself conferred upon her while on the cross.

Criteria

65. Any other way of understanding Mary’s cooperation in the order of grace —especially if one intends to attribute to her some form of a perfective intervention, perfective instrumentality, or secondary causality in the communication of sanctifying grace[163]— must pay special attention to some criteria that were already implied in the Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*:

a) We must reflect on how Mary fosters our “immediate union”[164] with the Lord — which the Lord himself produces by conferring grace and which we can receive only from God[165]— and not think of our union with Mary as being more immediate than our union with Christ. This risk is present, above all, in the notion that Christ gives us Mary as an instrument or as a secondary and perfecting cause in the communication of his grace.

b) The Second Vatican Council highlighted that “the Blessed Virgin’s salutary influence on men originates not in any inner necessity but in the disposition of God.”[166] This influence can be thought of only in light of God’s free decision, who — although his own action is overflowing and superabundant — freely and gratuitously wills to associate Mary with his work. Therefore, it is not acceptable to present Mary’s action as if God needed her to accomplish salvation.

c) We must understand Mary’s mediation not as a complementary aid that would enable God to work fully, with greater richness, and more beauty; instead, her mediation must be understood in such a way that “it neither takes away anything from nor adds anything to the dignity and efficacy of Christ, the one Mediator.”[167] When explaining Mary’s mediation, it must be emphasized that God alone is our Savior and that it is God alone who applies the merits of Jesus Christ, the only merits that are necessary and entirely sufficient for our justification. Mary does not supplant the Lord in any action he has not already done (i.e., she does not take anything away from him) nor does she supplement him (i.e., she does not add to him). Since she does not add anything to Christ’s salvific mediation in the communication of grace, she should not be regarded as the instrumental agent of that free bestowal.[168] If she accompanies an action of Christ — by virtue of his own work — she should never be thought of as being parallel to him. Rather, being associated with Christ, Mary is the recipient of a gift from her Son that places her beyond herself, a gift that enables her to accompany the Lord’s work with her maternal character. We return, then, to the safest point, which is Mary’s contribution in preparing us to receive God’s sanctifying grace; in that context, one can indeed think of her as acting to contribute something of her own insofar as she “can cause some disposition”[169] to others. For “it belongs to the highest power to reach the last end, while the lower powers contribute to the attainment of that last end, by preparing one for it.”[170]

66. All that has been said above does not offend or humiliate Mary because her entire being is oriented to the Lord: “My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord” (*Lk* 1:46). For Mary, there is no other glory than God’s glory. As Mother, she rejoices all the more in seeing how Christ manifests the inexhaustible, superabundant beauty of his divine glory by healing, transforming, and filling the hearts of those children *whom she has accompanied on their way to the Lord*. Therefore, any gaze directed at her that distracts us from Christ or that places her on the same level as the Son of God would fall outside the dynamic proper to an authentically Marian faith.

Graces

67. Some titles, such as “*Mediatrice of All Graces*,” have limits that do not favour a correct understanding of Mary’s unique place. In fact, she, the first redeemed, could not have been the mediatrix of the grace that she herself received. This is not a minor point since it reveals something central: even in Mary’s case, the gift of grace precedes her and comes from the absolutely free initiative of the Trinity in view of Christ’s merits. Like all of us, she did not merit her justification by a preceding action of her own,[171] nor did she do so by any subsequent action.[172] Even in Mary’s case, her friendship with God by grace is always freely bestowed. Her cherished figure is the supreme testimony of the believing receptivity of one who, more than anyone else, opened herself with docility and complete trust to Christ’s work, and who, at the same time, stands as the greatest sign of the transforming power of that grace.

68. On the other hand, the title “*Mediatrice of All Graces*” risks presenting Mary as the one who distributes spiritual goods or energies apart from our personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, the term “graces,” when seen in reference to Mary’s maternal help at various moments in our lives, can have an acceptable meaning. The plural form expresses all the aids — even material — that the Lord may grant us when he heeds his Mother’s intercession. These helps, in turn, prepare our hearts to open to God’s love. In this way, Mary, as Mother, has a presence in the daily lives of the faithful that is far greater than the closeness any other saint could have.

69. Through her intercession, Mary can implore God to grant us those internal impulses of the Holy Spirit that are called “actual graces.” These are the aids given by the Holy Spirit that operate even in sinners to prepare them for justification,[173] and that encourage those already justified by sanctifying grace to further growth. It is in this specific sense that the title “Mother of Grace” must be understood. She humbly cooperates so that we may open our hearts to the Lord, who alone can justify us through the action of sanctifying grace: that is, when God pours his Trinitarian life into us, dwells in us as a Friend, and makes us sharers in his divine life. This is exclusively the Lord’s own work. At the same time, it does not preclude the possibility that the words, images or various prompts

that we receive through Mary's maternal intercession might help us to persevere in life, to prepare our hearts for the grace that the Lord infuses, or to grow in the life of grace that we have freely received.

70. These aids that come from the Lord are presented to us with a maternal aspect, filled with the tenderness and closeness of the Mother whom Jesus wanted to share with us (cf. *Jn* 19:25-28). In this way, Mary carries out a unique activity to help us open our hearts to Christ and to his sanctifying grace, which elevates us and heals us. Whenever she brings us various "motions," these should always be understood as promptings to open our lives to the One who alone works in our innermost being.

Our Union with Mary

71. The Second Vatican Council preferred to call Mary our "*Mother in the order of grace*,"[174] which expresses well the universality of Mary's maternal cooperation. This title is undeniable in a precise sense, for she is the Mother of Christ: he who is Grace par excellence and the Author of every grace.

72. This motherhood of Mary *in the order of grace* — which flows from Christ's Paschal Mystery — also implies that each disciple establishes with Mary "a unique and unrepeatable relationship." Saint John Paul II referred to a "Marian dimension of the life of a disciple of Christ," expressed as a "response to a person's love, and in particular, to the love of a mother." [175] Indeed, the life of grace includes our relationship with Christ's Mother, for our union with Christ by grace also entails union with Mary in a relationship of trust, tenderness, and wholehearted affection.

The First Disciple

73. She is "the first disciple, the one who best learned Jesus' ways." [176] Mary is the first of those who "hear the word of God and keep it" (*Lk* 11:28). She is the first to place herself among the lowly and poor of the Lord, to teach us confidently to wait for and to receive the salvation that comes only from God. Thus, Mary "as Mother *became the first 'disciple' of her Son*; the first to whom he seemed to say: 'Follow me,' even before he addressed this call to the Apostles or to anyone else (cf. *Jn* 1:43)." [177] She is a model of faith and charity for the Church by her obedience to the Father's will, her cooperation in her Son's redemptive work, and her openness to the action of the Holy Spirit. [178] For this reason, Saint Augustine said that "it means more for Mary to have been a disciple of Christ than to have been the mother of Christ." [179] Pope Francis insisted that "she is more disciple than Mother." [180] Mary is, ultimately, "the first and the most perfect of Christ's disciples." [181]

74. Mary is, for every Christian, "the one who first 'believed,' and precisely with her faith as Spouse and Mother she wishes to act upon all those who entrust themselves to her as her children." [182] She does so with an affection filled with signs of closeness that help them to grow in the spiritual life, teaching them to let Christ's grace act more and more. In this relationship of affection and trust, she, who is "full of grace," teaches each Christian to receive grace, to preserve the grace already received, and to meditate on the work God is doing in their lives (cf. *Lk* 2:19).

75. Should expressions or titles, such as those mentioned above, emerge in cases of alleged supernatural phenomena that have already received a positive judgment from the Church, one ought to bear in mind that "whenever a *Nihil obstat* is granted by the Dicastery... such phenomena do not become objects of faith, which means the faithful are not obliged to give an assent of faith to them." [183]

Mother of the Faithful People of God

76. "Mary, the first disciple, is Mother." [184] On the Cross, Christ entrusts us to Mary, and so "he brought us to her because he did not want us to journey without a mother." [185] She is the believing Mother who has become the "Mother of all believers"; [186] at the same time, she is "Mother of the Church which evangelizes," [187] who receives us as God willed to call us—that is, not only as isolated individuals but as a people on a journey [188]: "Our Mother Mary always wants to walk at our side, to remain close to us, to help us with her intercession and her love." [189] She is the Mother of the Faithful People of God, who "moves in the midst of her people by tender and loving care; she makes her own their anxieties and troubles." [190]

Love Pauses, Contemplates the Mystery, and Enjoys It in Silence

77. The faithful People of God do not distance themselves from Christ or the Gospel when they draw near to Mary; rather, they can see “in this maternal image all the mysteries of the Gospel.”[191] In her motherly face, they see a reflection of the Lord who seeks us out (cf. *Lk* 15:4-8), who comes to meet us with open arms (cf. *Lk* 15:20), who pauses before us (cf. *Lk* 18:40), who bends down and raises us up to his cheek (cf. *Hos* 11:4), who looks upon us with love (cf. *Mk* 10:21), and who does not condemn us (cf. *Jn* 8:11; *Hos* 11:9). In her motherly face, many of the poor recognize the Lord who “has cast down the mighty from their thrones and has lifted up the lowly” (*Lk* 1:52). Her countenance sings the mystery of the Incarnation. In the face of the Mother who was pierced by the sword (cf. *Lk* 2:35), the People of God recognize the mystery of the Cross, and in that same face — bathed in paschal light — they perceive that Christ is alive. And it was she, who received the Holy Spirit in plenitude, who sustained the Apostles in prayer in the Upper Room (cf. *Acts* 1:14). Therefore, we can say that “Mary’s faith, according to the Church’s apostolic witness, in some way continues to become the faith of the pilgrim People of God.”[192]

78. As the Latin American bishops affirmed, the poor “find God’s affection and love in the face of Mary. In it, they see reflected the essential gospel message.”[193] The people, in simplicity and poverty, do not separate the glorious Mother from the Mary of Nazareth whom we find in the Gospels. On the contrary, they recognize the simplicity behind the glory and know that Mary has not ceased to be one of them. She is the one who, like any mother, carried her child in her womb, nursed him, and lovingly raised him with Saint Joseph’s help — but who also experienced the upheavals and uncertainties of motherhood (cf. *Lk* 2:48-50). She is the one who sings of God who “has filled the hungry with good things and the rich he has sent away empty” (*Lk* 1:53); who suffers with the newlyweds who run out of wine for their wedding feast (cf. *Jn* 2:3); who knows how to go in haste to lend a hand to her cousin in need (cf. *Lk* 1:39-40); who allows herself to be wounded, as if pierced by a sword, on account of the history of her people, where her Son is “a sign of contradiction” (*Lk* 2:34); who understands what it means to be a migrant or an exile (cf. *Mt* 2:13-15); who, in her poverty, can offer only two young pigeons (cf. *Lk* 2:24); and who knows what it means to be looked down upon for coming from a poor carpenter’s family (cf. *Mk* 6:3-4). The suffering people recognize Mary as walking side by side with them, and so they seek out their Mother to implore her help.[194]

79. The Mother’s closeness gives rise to a “popular” Marian piety that takes different forms in different peoples. The various faces of Mary — Korean, Mexican, Congolese, Italian, and so many others — are ways the Gospel is inculturated that reflect, in every place on earth, “the paternal tenderness of God,”[195] which reaches into the very core of our peoples.

80. Let us contemplate the faith of the People of God, where multitudes of fellow believers spontaneously recognize Mary as Mother, just as Christ himself encouraged us to do from the cross. The People of God like to go on pilgrimages to the various Marian shrines, finding therein the consolation and strength to persevere — like those who, amid weariness and pain, receive their Mother’s caress. The Aparecida Conference was able to express with clarity and beauty the deep theological value of this experience. Nothing better concludes this Note than its words:

“We highlight pilgrimages, where the People of God can be recognized in their journey. There, the believer celebrates the joy of feeling surrounded by so many brothers and sisters, journeying together toward God, who awaits them. Christ himself becomes a pilgrim, and walks arisen among the poor. The decision to set out toward the shrine is already a confession of faith; walking is a true song of hope; and arrival is the encounter of love. The pilgrim’s gaze rests on an image that symbolizes God’s affection and closeness. Love pauses, contemplates mystery, and enjoys it in silence. It is also moved, pouring out the full load of its pain and its dreams. The confident prayer, flowing sincerely, is the best expression of a heart that has relinquished self-sufficiency, recognizing that alone one can do nothing. A living spiritual experience is compressed into a brief moment.”[196]

Mother of the Faithful People of God, pray for us.

The Supreme Pontiff Leo XIV, in the Audience granted to the undersigned Prefect together with the Secretary for the Doctrinal Section of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, on 7 October, Memorial of Our Lady of the Rosary, approved the present Note, decided upon in the Ordinary Session of this Dicastery on 26 March 2025, and he ordered its publication.

Given in Rome, at the offices of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith
on 4 November 2025, Memorial of Saint Charles Borromeo.

Víctor Manuel Card. Fernández

Prefect

Msgr. Armando Matteo

Secretary

for the Doctrinal Section

Leo PP. XIV

07.10.2025

- [1] Cf. Augustine, *De sancta virginitate*, 6: PL 40, 399.
- [2] Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Norms for Proceeding in the Discernment of Alleged Supernatural Phenomena* (17 May 2024).
- [3] In some of these phenomena, or apparitions, the Virgin Mary is referred to by titles such as “Co-redemptrix,” “Redemptrix,” “Priest,” “Mediatrice,” “Mediatrice of All Graces,” “Mother of Grace,” “Spiritual Mother,” etc.
- [4] Cf. Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Mariæ Cultus* (2 February 1974), 26: AAS 66 (1974), 136-139.
- [5] Cf. *ibid.*, 28: AAS 66 (1974), 139-141.
- [6] Cf. *ibid.*, 37: AAS 66 (1974), 148-149.
- [7] John Paul II, *General Audience* (9 April 1997), par. 3: *L’Osservatore Romano*, 10 April 1997, 4.
- [8] Francis, *Homily for the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy: Holy Mass and Opening of the Holy Door* (8 December 2015): AAS 108 (2016), 8.
- [9] Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Mater* (25 March 1987), 26: AAS 79 (1987), 396.
- [10] The relationship between Adam and Christ found in Saint Paul’s texts (cf. *Rom* 5:18-19 and *1 Cor* 15:22) allowed the Fathers to establish the parallel Eve-Mary. For example, Justin Martyr, *Dialogus cum Tryphone*, 100, 5-6: PG 6, 710CD-711A; Irenaeus of Lyons, *Adversus hæreses*, III, 22, 4: PG 7/1, 959C-960A; Tertullian, *De carne Christi*, 17, 5: PL 1, 782B. This antithetical parallel of Eve and Mary is the first approach the Fathers took to the theme of the Virgin’s cooperation in Christ’s redemptive work: if Eve brought perdition, Mary’s faith brought us salvation. The great abundance of patristic testimony describing the Virgin as the new Eve offers some interesting theological elements: (a) *Mary and “the woman,”* because in Mary, the woman regains her primitive splendor and finds her definitive fulfillment; (b) *Mary and Christ* as spouse-partner, who forms with her Son the exemplary and salvific pair of the Messianic recapitulation or restoration; (c) *Mary and the Church*, whereby a double relationship is established between Mary and the Church: that of being an exemplar (as prototype) and that of being the Mother of the Church.
- [11] Augustine, *De sancta virginitate*, 6: PL 40, 399.
- [12] Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Mater* (25 March 1987), 31: AAS 79 (1987), 402-403.
- [13] For example, cf. Ephrem, *Hymni de Nativitate*: SC 459; John Damascene, *In dormitione Deiparae* I, 8: SC 80, 100-104.
- [14] For example, cf. *Octoëchus magnus*, Rome 1885, 152: “We have become partakers of the divine nature through you, O Theotokos, ever-virgin; for you gave birth to God-made-flesh for our sake. Therefore, as is fitting, we all devoutly magnify you” (trans. from the original Greek of the *Theotokion* of poetic *Kathisma* after the first *stasis*). Another more significant example of Marian devotional expression is the famous twenty-four stanza *Hymnus Akathistos* (fifth century); the title simply means that the hymn is to be heard standing, not seated (as the Gospel is heard standing) as a sign of special reverence for the Virgin-Mother Mary. In that hymn, the poet adorns Mary with the loveliest adjectives and symbolic metaphors, asking her to accept his poetic offering and to intercede for the salvation of humankind from earthly sin (cf. E.M. Toniolo, OSM, *Akathistos Inno alla Madre di Dio*, Rome 2017).
- [15] The oldest evidence of this title dates back to the third century in Egypt. Cf. *Papyrus* 470 of the *John Rylands Library* (Manchester, UK), which includes in Greek much of the Marian invocation. The Latin version of this prayer reads: “*Sub tuum praesidium confugimus, Sancta Dei Genetrix. Nostras deprecationes ne despicias in necessitatibus, sed a periculis cunctis libera nos semper, Virgo gloriosa et benedicta*” (“We turn to you for protection, holy Mother of God. Listen to our prayers and help us in our needs. Save us from every danger, glorious and blessed Virgin”; English trans., *Little Office of the Blessed Virgin Mary*, Catholic Book Publishing, New Jersey 1988, 186).
- [16] Traditional iconographic representations of the Virgin follow a series of well-established models, in particular: the *Odēghētria* (“she who shows the Way”), in which she indicates with her hand the path to her son, Jesus, who is seated in her lap; the *Eleousa* (“Tenderness”), which shows the intimate bond between Mother and Son, with the Child resting his cheek against Mary’s; the *Platytera* (“More spacious than the heavens”), because she carries Christ within herself, depicted as the Child on her breast. From these three models derives most of the others, such as the *Galaktotrophousa*, the one who nourishes the Child with her milk; the *Kyriōtissa* or “Lady,” who holds the Child on her knees as on a throne; the *Panagia* (“All Holy”), robed in a red mantle expressing the fullness of holiness; and the *Deēsis*, where Mary appears to the right of her Son enthroned in majesty (*Pantokrator*) interceding for us, often alongside John the Baptist on her left. In other icons, Mary appears interceding alongside other saints — often including John the Baptist, as the last representatives of the Old Covenant and, at the same time, as the first members of the new people.
- [17] Cf. Benedict XVI, *General Audience* (27 May 2009): *L’Osservatore Romano*, 28 May 2009, 1; Gregory of Narek, *Prex* 26 and 80: *Ad Deiparam*; SC 78, 160-164, 428-432.
- [18] Eastern authors such as Saint Jacob of Serugh (X 521), Saint Romanos the Melodist (X555-562), Saint John Damascene (X749) and John Geometres (X1000) had already addressed the theme of Mary’s cooperation with Christ’s redemptive sacrifice on the cross.
- [19] Cf. Bernard of Clairvaux, *In Purificationem Deiparae*, III, 2: PL 183, 370C.
- [20] Cf. Arnold of Bonneval, *De laudibus B. M. Virginis*, I, 3c. 12,4: PL 189, 1727A.
- [21] In the Magisterium prior to the Second Vatican Council, the following stand out: Pius IX, Apostolic Constitution *Ineffabilis Deus* (8 December 1854): *Pontificis Maximi Acta. Pars prima*, Rome 1854, 597-619; Leo XIII, Encyclical Letter *Iucunda Semper Expectatione* (8 September 1894): ASS 27 (1894-1851), 177-184; Encyclical Letter *Adiutricem Populi* (5 September 1895): ASS 28 (1895-1896), 129-136; Pius X, Encyclical Letter *Ad Diem Illum Laetissimum* (2 February 1904): ASS 36 (1903-1904), 453; Benedict XV, Apostolic Letter *Inter Sodalicia a la Cofradía de Ntra. Sra de la Buena Muerte* (22 March 1918): AAS 10 (1918), 182; Pius XI, Encyclical Letter *Miserentissimus Redemptor* (8 May 1928): AAS 20 (1928), 165-178; Pius XII, Encyclical Letter *Mystici Corporis Christi* (29 June 1943): AAS 35 (1943), 193-248; Encyclical Letter *Ad Caeli Reginam* (11 October 1954): AAS 46 (1954), 634-635.
- [22] Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium* (21 November 1964), 56: AAS 57 (1965), 60.
- [23] Cf. Pius IX, Apostolic Constitution *Ineffabilis Deus* (8 December 1854): *Pontificis Maximi Acta. Pars prima*, Rome 1854, 616 (DH 2803): “[T]he Most Blessed Virgin Mary, at the first instant of her conception, by the singular grace and privilege of Almighty God and in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, the Savior of the human race, was preserved immune from all stain of Original Sin”; Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, 53: AAS 57 (1965), 58: “Redeemed, in a more exalted fashion, by reason of the merits of her Son.”
- [24] Cf. Ambrose, *Exp. Evangelii secundum Lucam*, II, 7: PL 15, 1555.
- [25] Cf. Francis, *Angelus* (15 August 2013): *L’Osservatore Romano*, 17-18 August 2013, 8.
- [26] Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Mariæ Cultus* (2 February 1974), 25: AAS 66 (1974), 135.
- [27] She is not simply a “mother-nurse.” Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Mater* (25 March 1987), 20: AAS 79 (1987), 361-433, 384-387.
- [28] Benedict XVI, *Homily on the Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord* (25 March 2006): AAS 98 (2006), 330; cf. Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Signum Magnum* (13 May 1967), 5: AAS 59 (1967), 469: “Mary, as soon as she was reassured by the voice of the Angel Gabriel that God had chosen her as the unblemished mother of His only-begotten Son, unhesitatingly gave her consent to a work which would have engaged all the energies of her fragile nature and declared: ‘Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to thy word’ (*Lk* 1:38).”
- [29] H.U. von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory: Dramatis Personae: Persons in Christ*, vol. 3, trans. G. Harrison, San Francisco 1992, 295. Cf. Cyril of Alexandria, *Second Letter to Nestorius*: “For this reason [the Holy Fathers] have not hesitated to speak of the holy Virgin as the Mother of God”: DH 251; and Council of Ephesus, can. 1: DH 252.
- [30] As far as it is known to this day, this occurred in the fifteenth century when a Benedictine hymnographer bequeathed to posterity the following handwritten prayer, which is preserved in the Monastery of Saint Peter in Salzburg: “*Pia, dulcis et benigna / nullo prorsus luctu digna / si fletum hinc eligeres / ut compassa Redemptori / captivato transgressori / tu corredemptrix fieres*” (“Loving, sweet, and kind / altogether undeserving of any sorrow / if you henceforth chose to weep / as one suffering with the Redeemer / for the captive sinner / you would be co-redemptrix”): *De compassione BMV*, 20: G.M. Dreves (ed.), *Analecta Hymnica Medii Aevi*, XLVI, Leipzig 1905, n. 79, 127.

[31] Theologians understand the title “Co-redemptrix” in different ways: (a) *Immediate, Christo-typical, or maximalist cooperation*, which places Mary’s cooperation as near, direct, and immediate to Christ’s Redemption (objective redemption). In this understanding, Mary’s merits, although subordinated to Christ’s, would have a redemptive value for salvation; (b) *mediated or minimalist cooperation*, which would be limited to her “Yes” at the Annunciation. This would be a mediated cooperation that makes the Incarnation possible as a preliminary step to Christ’s Redemption; (c) *Immediate but receptive or ecclesio-typical cooperation*, cooperating in the objective redemption insofar as she accepted the fruits of the Savior’s redeeming sacrifice, representing the Church. This would be an immediate cooperation but one that is also receptive, since Mary simply accepted Christ’s Redemption, thereby becoming the “first Church.”

[32] Under the pontificate of Saint Pius X, the title “Co-redemptrix” appears in one document of the Sacred Congregation of Rites and two documents of the Holy Office. Cf. Sacred Congregation of Rites, *Dolores Virginis Deiparae* (13 May 1908): ASS 41 (1908), 409; Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office, Decree *Sunt quos amor* (26 June 1913): AAS 5 (1913), 364, which praises the custom of adding to the name of Jesus the name “of his mother, our Co-redemptrix, the Blessed Mary”; *Oración indulgenciada* (22 January 1914): AAS 6 (1914), 108, in which Mary is called “Co-redemptrix of the human race.” The first Pope to use the term “Co-redemptrix” was Pius XI in a *Brief* dated 20 July 1925 about the Queen of the Rosary of Pompeii: Pius XI, *Ad B.V.M. a Sacratissimo Rosario in Valle Pompeiana*, in *Sacra Paenitentia Apostolica, Enchiridion indulgentiarum*, Rome 1952, n. 628: “Remember also that at Calvary you became the Co-redemptrix, cooperating with the crucifixion of your heart for the salvation of the world, together with your crucified Son;” Cf. *Allocution “Ecco di Nuovo” to Pilgrims from the Diocese of Vicenza* (30 November 1933): *L’Osservatore Romano*, 1 December 1933, 1.

[33] Cf. Pius XI, *Radio Message on the Occasion of the Closing of the Jubilee of the Redemption at Lourdes* (28 April 1935): *L’Osservatore Romano* 28/29 April 1935, 1.

[34] Cf. Pius XI, *Ad B.V.M. a Sacratissimo Rosario in Valle Pompeiana*, in *Sacra Paenitentia Apostolica, Enchiridion indulgentiarum*, Rome 1952, n. 628.

[35] Cf. John Paul II, *General Audience* (10 December 1980): *Insegnamenti III/2* (1980), 1646; *General Audience* (8 September 1982): *Insegnamenti V/3* (1982), 404; *Angelus* (4 November 1984): *Insegnamenti VII/2* (1984), 1151; *Homily at the Shrine of Our Lady of the Dawn in Guayaquil (Ecuador)* (31 January 1985): *Insegnamenti VIII/1* (1985), 319; *Angelus* (31 March 1985): *Insegnamenti VIII/1* (1985), 890; *Address to the Pilgrims of the “Opera Federativa Trasporto Ammalati a Lourdes”* (24 March 1990): *Insegnamenti XIII/1* (1990), 743; *Angelus* (6 October 1991): *Insegnamenti XIV/2* (1991), 756. However, after the then Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith’s *Feria IV* of 21 February 1996, Saint John Paul II stopped using the title “Co-redemptrix.” It is also important to note that this title does not appear in his Encyclical *Redemptoris Mater* of 25 March 1987 — the document par excellence in which Saint John Paul II explains Mary’s role in the work of Redemption.

[36] J. Ratzinger, *Minutes of the Feria IV of 21 February 1996*, in the Archives of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith.

[37] J. Ratzinger – P. Seewald, *God and the World: Believing and Living in Our Time: A Conversation with Peter Seewald*, trans. H. Taylor, San Francisco 2002, 306.

[38] Francis, *Homily on the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe* (12 December 2019): AAS 112 (2020), 9.

[39] Francis, *Daily Meditation on “Our Lady of Sorrows: Disciple and Mother”* (3 April 2020): *L’Osservatore Romano*, 4 April 2020, 8.

[40] Francis, *General Audience* (24 March 2021): *L’Osservatore Romano*, 24 March 2021, 8.

[41] Pius XII, Encyclical Letter *Haurietis Aquas* (15 May 1956), 10: AAS 48 (1956), 321.

[42] Cf. Andrew of Crete, *In Nativitatem Mariae*, IV: PG 97, 865A.

[43] Cf. German of Constantinople, *In Annuntiationem s. Deiparae*: PG 98, 322BC.

[44] Cf. John Damascene, *In dormitionem Deiparae*, I: PG 96, 712B-713A.

[45] On 12 January 1921, Pope Benedict XV — at the request of Cardinal Désiré-Joseph Mercier — granted to the entire country of Belgium the Office and Mass of the Blessed Virgin Mary “Mediatrice of All Graces,” to be celebrated yearly on 31 May. The Apostolic See subsequently granted, upon request, the same Office and Mass to many other dioceses and religious orders: cf. AAS 13 (1921), 345.

[46] Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, 62: AAS 57 (1965), 63; Pontifical International Marian Academy, “A New Marian Dogma? Comment on Marian Academy’s Declaration,” *L’Osservatore Romano* (English Weekly Edition), 25 June 1997, 10: “The Constitution *Lumen gentium*, which by deliberate choice does not contain a dogmatic definition of mediation, was approved by 2,151 votes out of 2,156... Scarcely 33 years after the promulgation of *Lumen gentium*... the ecclesial, theological and exegetical landscape... has not substantially changed.” This affirmation of the Pontifical International Marian Academy was added to the Declaration of the Theological Commission created within the framework of the 12th International Mariological Congress (Czestochowa, 12-24 August 1996), which considered it unfitting to proceed with a dogmatic definition of Mary as “Mediatrice,” “Co-redemptrix,” and “Advocate.” Cf. Theological Commission of the Congress of Czestochowa, “Request for the Definition of the Dogma of Mary as Mediatrice, Coredemptrix and Advocate”: *L’Osservatore Romano* (English Weekly Edition), 25 June 1997, 10.

[47] Paul VI, *Address at the Closing of the Third Session of the Second Vatican Council* (21 November 1964): AAS 56 (1964), 1014.

[48] Cf. Bernard of Clairvaux, *Hom. in laudibus Virginis Matris*, IV, 8: PL 183, 83CD-84AB.

[49] Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, 55-62: AAS 57 (1965), 59-63.

[50] Cf. *ibid.*, 53, 56, 61, 63: AAS 57 (1965), 59; 60; 63; 64.

[51] Cf. *ibid.*, 60, 62, 63, 65: AAS 57 (1965), 62; 63; 64; 65.

[52] *Ibid.*, 62: AAS 57 (1965), 63.

[53] Cf. Francis, *General Audience* (24 March 2021): *L’Osservatore Romano*, 24 March 2021, 8.

[54] Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Declaration *Dominus Iesus* (6 August 2000), par. 13: AAS 92 (2000), 754-755.

[55] Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, 62: AAS 57 (1965), 63.

[56] Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Declaration *Dominus Iesus* (6 August 2000), par. 14.

[57] Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, 1: AAS 57 (1965), 5; Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (24 November 2013), 112: AAS 105 (2013), 1066.

[58] Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, 65: AAS 57 (1965), 64-65; Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (24 November 2013), 288: AAS 105 (2013), 1136.

[59] Origen, *In Numeros homiliae*, XII, 1: PG 12, 657.

[60] Ambrose, *Epist.* 29, 24: PL 16, 1106D.

[61] Thomas Aquinas, *Commentaria super Ioannem*, ch. 7, lect. 5.

[62] Cf. Pius IX, Apostolic Constitution *Ineffabilis Deus* (8 December 1854): *Pontificis Maximi Acta. Pars prima*, Rome 1854, 616 (DH 2803): “by the singular grace and privilege of Almighty God and in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, the Savior of the human race.”

[63] Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Mater* (25 March 1987), 38: AAS 79 (1987), 411.

[64] Cf. *ibid.*, 21: AAS 79 (1987), 387-389.

[65] Cf. *ibid.*, 23: AAS 79 (1987), 390-391.

[66] Francis, *Daily Meditations “Our Lady of Sorrows: Disciple and Mother”* (3 April 2020).

[67] Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, 55-62: AAS 57 (1965), 59-63.

[68] Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Mater* (25 March 1987), 4: AAS 79 (1987), 421.

[69] Cf. Paul VI, *Address at the Closing of the Third Session of the Second Vatican Council* (21 November 1964): AAS 56 (1964), 1015: “Mary, then, as the Mother of Christ, must also be considered the Mother of the faithful and of all pastors; that is, of the Church”; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, par. 963.

- [70] Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Marialis Cultus* (2 February 1974), 22: AAS 66 (1974), 133.
- [71] H.U. von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory: Dramatis Personae: Persons in Christ*, vol. 3, trans. G. Harrison, San Francisco 1992, 333.
- [72] Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, 56: AAS 57 (1965), 60: “[S]he devoted herself totally, as a handmaid of the Lord, to the person and work of her Son, under and with him, serving the mystery of redemption, by the grace of Almighty God.”
- [73] Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Mater* (25 March 1987), 23: AAS 79 (1987), 391.
- [74] Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, 69: AAS 57 (1965), 66: “Mother of God and Mother of humanity.”
- [75] John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Mater* (25 March 1987), 38: AAS 79 (1987), 411; cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution, *Lumen Gentium*, 61: AAS 57 (1965), 63. The content of Mary’s spiritual motherhood is present in the earliest patristic texts and has its biblical foundation primarily in the Gospel of John — specifically, in the account of the Cross.
- [76] Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Mater* (25 March 1987), 21: AAS 79 (1987), 388: “[T]he description of the Cana event outlines what is actually manifested as a new kind of motherhood according to the spirit and not just according to the flesh, that is to say Mary’s solicitude for human beings, her coming to them in the wide variety of their wants and needs.”
- [77] Cf. Francis, *Homily on the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God* (1 January 2020): AAS 112 (2020), 19.
- [78] John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Mater* (25 March 1987), 38: AAS 79 (1987), 411-412; cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, 62: AAS 57 (1965), 63.
- [79] Cf. John Paul II, *General Audience* (9 April 1997), 2: *L’Osservatore Romano*, 10 April 1997, 4: “Mary... co-operated during the event itself and in the role of mother; thus her co-operation embraces the whole of Christ’s saving work.”
- [80] Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, 60: AAS 57 (1965), 62; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, par. 970.
- [81] Cf. Francis, *General Audience* (24 March 2021): *L’Osservatore Romano*, 24 March 2021, 8: “[Mary] indicates the Mediator: she is the *Odigitria*. Her presence is everywhere in Christian iconography, sometimes very prominently, but always in relation to her Son and in connection with him. Her hands, her eyes, her behavior are a living ‘catechesis,’ always indicating the cornerstone, the center: Jesus. Mary is completely directed toward him (cf. CCC, 2674).”
- [82] John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Rosarium Virginis Mariae* (16 October 2002), 4, quoting Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, 66: AAS 57 (1965), 65.
- [83] Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, 62: AAS 57 (1965), 63: “[T]his subordinate role of Mary.”
- [84] Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Mater* (25 March 1987), 40: AAS 79 (1987), 414-415.
- [85] *Ibid.*, 43: AAS 79 (1987), 420.
- [86] Cf. Francis, *Address on the Occasion of the Prayer of the Holy Rosary in the Basilica of Saint Mary Major*, (4 May 2013): *L’Osservatore Romano*, 6-7 May 2013, 7.
- [87] Leo XIV, *Homily at the Mass of the Jubilee of the Holy See* (9 June 2025): *L’Osservatore Romano*, 10 June 2025, 2.
- [88] Cf. Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (24 November 2013), 285: AAS 105 (2013), 1135.
- [89] Francis, Encyclical Letter *Dilexit Nos* (24 October 2024), 176: *L’Osservatore Romano*, 24 October 2024, 10.
- [90] Cf. Francis, *General Audience* (18 November 2020): *L’Osservatore Romano*, 18 November 2020, 11.
- [91] John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Mater* (25 March 1987), 21: AAS 79 (1987), 388-389.
- [92] Cf. Francis, *Homily on the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God* (1 January 2024): *L’Osservatore Romano*, 2 January 2024, 2.
- [93] J.L. Guerrero Rosado, *Nican mopohua: Aquí se cuenta... el gran acontecimiento*, Cuautitlán 2003, nn. 23, 119.
- [94] John Paul II, *General Audience* (13 August 1997), 4: *L’Osservatore Romano*, 14 August 1997, 4.
- [95] Francis, *Homily on the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe* (12 December 2022): *L’Osservatore Romano*, 13 December 2022, 8; cf. *Homily on the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe* (12 December 2023): *L’Osservatore Romano*, 13 December 2023, 11.
- [96] Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, 8: AAS 57 (1965), 11; Francis, Encyclical Letter *Dilexit Nos* (24 October 2024), 96: AAS 116 (2024), 1398.
- [97] Cf. J. Ratzinger, *Minutes of the Feria IV of 21 February 1996*, in the Archives of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith.
- [98] Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Mater* (25 March 1987), 21: AAS 79 (1987), 389. This *intercessory character* of Mary’s maternal mediation is a constant teaching of recent Popes. Cf. Pius IX, Apostolic Constitution *Ineffabilis Deus* (8 December 1854): *Pontificis Maximi Acta. Pars prima*, Rome 1854, 597-619; Leo XIII, Encyclical Letter *Adiutricem Populi* (5 September 1895): ASS 28 (1895-1896), 129-136; Pius X, Encyclical Letter *Ad Diem Illum* (2 February 1904): AAS 36 (1903-1904), 455; Pius XII, Encyclical Letter *Ad Caeli Reginam* (11 October 1954), 17: AAS 46 (1954), 636.
- [99] Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, 62: AAS 57 (1965), 63.
- [100] Augustine, *De peccatorum meritis et remissione et de baptismo parvulorum*, I, 11, 13: CSEL 60, 14.
- [101] Augustine, *Sermo* 23/A: CCL 41, 322.
- [102] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 114, a. 6, co.
- [103] Council of Trent, *Session VI. Decree on Justification*, ch. 7: DH 1530.
- [104] Pius IX, Apostolic Constitution *Ineffabilis Deus* (8 December 1854): *Pontificis Maximi Acta. Pars prima*, Rome 1854, 616.
- [105] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 113, a. 9, co.
- [106] *Ibid.*, q. 114, a. 6, ad 3.
- [107] *Ibid.*, q. 114, a. 5, co.
- [108] Cf. *ibid.*, q. 114, a. 1, co.
- [109] Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Mater* (25 March 1987), 21: AAS 79 (1987), 389.
- [110] Cf. Francis, *General Audience* (8 June 2016): *L’Osservatore Romano*, 9 June 2016, 8.
- [111] Cf. Francis, *General Audience* (24 March 2021): *L’Osservatore Romano*, 24 March 2021, 8; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, par. 2764.
- [112] Cf. Francis, *Remarks of the Holy Father at the Prayer of the Holy Rosary* (31 May 2013): *L’Osservatore Romano*, 2 June 2013, 8.
- [113] Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, 61: AAS 57 (1965), 63.
- [114] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, par. 2003.
- [115] *Ibid.*, par. 1999.
- [116] Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 114, a.1, co.; *Quaestiones disputatae de Veritate*, 27, a. 3, ad 10.
- [117] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, III, q. 64, a. 1, co.: “*solus Deus illabitur animae.*”
- [118] Cf. Council of Trent, *Session VI. Decree on Justification*, ch. 7 (DH 1528-1531), and Canon 11 of the *Canons on Justification* (DH 1561).
- [119] Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones disputatae de Veritate*, q. 28, a. 2, ad 8; *Summa contra gentiles*, II, cap. 98, n. 18; *ibid.*, III, cap. 88, n. 6.
- [120] Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones disputatae de Veritate*, q. 27, a. 3, s.c. 5.

- [121] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, III, q. 64, a. 1, co.
- [122] For example, see Gennadius of Massilia, *De ecclesiasticis dogmatibus*, 83: PL 58, 999B; John Cassian, *Collationes*, VII, 13: PL 49, 683A; Jerome, *Interpretatio libri Didymii de Spiritu Sancto*, 60: PL 23, 158C.
- [123] Cf. Bonaventure, *Collationes in Hexaemeron*, XXI, 18: *Opera Omnia*, V, Quaracchi 1891, 434.
- [124] Cf. Bonaventure, *Sententiarum Lib.* I, d.14, a. 2, q. 2, ad 2: *Opera Omnia*, I, Quaracchi 1891, 250.
- [125] Cf. *ibid.*, q. 2, fund. 3, 251.
- [126] Cf. *ibid.*, q. 2, fund. 4 and 8, 251-252.
- [127] Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 33, a. 3; *ibid.*, III, q. 23, a. 4.
- [128] Thomas Aquinas, *Compendium theologiae*, I, no. 215; cf. *Summa Theologiae*, III, q. 2, a. 10.
- [129] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, III, q. 8, a. 5, co.; cf. *ibid.*, q. 2, a. 12; a. 9; q. 48, a. 1.
- [130] Thomas Aquinas, *Compendium theologiae*, I, no. 214.
- [131] Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones disputatae de Veritate*, q. 29, a. 5, co.
- [132] Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Declaration *Dominus Iesus* (6 August 2000), 10; cf. Francis, Encyclical Letter *Dilexit Nos* (24 October 2024), 59-63: AAS 116 (2024), 1386-1387.
- [133] Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* (7 December 1965), 22: AAS 58 (1966), 1042-1043.
- [134] Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 112, a. 1, co.
- [135] Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *In Ioannes Evangelium*, cap. 1, v. 16, lectio 10; *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 112, a. 1, ad 1.
- [136] Thomas Aquinas, *Compendium theologiae*, I, no. 214.
- [137] Dante Alighieri, *Divine Comedy, Paradiso*, XXXIII, 1.
- [138] Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, 60, 62: AAS 57 (1965), 62-63; Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, III, q. 26.
- [139] United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Preface for the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, *The Roman Missal*, Catholic Book Publishing, New Jersey 2011, 873.
- [140] Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, 60: AAS 57 (1965), 62.
- [141] Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, par. 2002.
- [142] Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 25, a. 3, ad 4. Justification, like creation, “belongs to God alone to do immediately.”
- [143] Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, 62: AAS 57 (1965), 63.
- [144] Cf. Origen, *In Genesim homiliae* XIII, 3-4: PG 12, 232B-234CD.
- [145] Cf. Cyril of Alexandria, *In Ioannis Evangelium*, II, 4, 13-14: PG 73, 300C.
- [146] Cf. Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentarius in Isaiam prophetam*, V, II, 55, 1-2: PG 70, 1220A.
- [147] Cf. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechesis mystagogica*, XVI, 11: PG 33, 932C.
- [148] Cf. John Chrysostom, *Hom. in Ioannem*, 51, 1: PG 59, 283.
- [149] Ambrose, *Explanatio Psalmorum* XII, Ps. 48, 4, 2: PL 14, 1157A.
- [150] Ambrose., *De Noe*, 19, 70: PL 14, 395A.
- [151] Cf. Ambrose, *Explanatio Psalmorum* XII, Ps. 48, 4, 2: PL 14, 1157A.
- [152] Cf. Jerome, *Comm. in Zachariam*, III, 14, 8.9: PL 25, 1528 C.
- [153] Gregory the Great, *Hom. in Ezechielem*, I, 10, 6: PL 76, 888B.
- [154] Cf. Hilary, *Tractatus in Psalmos*, 64, 14: PL 9, 421B.
- [155] Augustine, *In Ioannis Evangelium*, 32, 4: PL 35, 1643D .
- [156] Thomas Aquinas, *Super Ioannem*, cap. 7, lect. 5.
- [157] *Ibid.*; cf. *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 178, a. 1, s.c.
- [158] Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechesis mystagogica* XVI, 12: PG 33, 933B .
- [159] John XXIII, Encyclical Letter *Mater et Magistra* (15 May 1961): AAS 53 (1961), 462.
- [160] John Paul II, *Letter to the Superior General of the Society of Jesus, Paray-le-Monial* (5 October 1986): *L’Osservatore Romano*, 6 October 1986, 7, quoted by Francis, Encyclical Letter *Dilexit Nos* (24 October 2024), 182: AAS 116 (2024), 1427.
- [161] Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Caritas in Veritate* (29 June 2009), 5: AAS 101 (2009), 643.
- [162] Francis, Encyclical Letter *Dilexit Nos* (24 October 2024), 198, 200: AAS 116 (2024), 1432.
- [163] Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 5, a. 6, co. and *ibid.*, ad 1; *Quaestiones disputatae de Veritate*, q. 27, a. 3, s.c. 5. The arguments that Saint Thomas Aquinas used to explain why only God, and no creature, can confer grace cannot be considered superseded, either within his own work or subsequently.
- [164] Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, 60: AAS 57 (1965), 62; cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 25, a. 3, ad 4; *Scriptum super Sententiis.*, II, d. 26, q. 1, a. 2, co.; *ibid.*, IV, d. 5, q. 1, a. 3, qc. 1, ad 1.
- [165] Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones disputatae de Veritate*, q. 27, a. 3, s.c. 5. Once again, one can recall that: “Sed mentem, in qua est gratia, nulla creatura illabitur”.
- [166] Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, 60: AAS 57 (1965), 62.
- [167] *Ibid.*, 62: AAS 57 (1965), 63.
- [168] Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles*, II, ch. 21, par. 7. An instrumental agent contributes something of its own: “Omne agens instrumentale exequitur actionem principalis agentis per aliquam actionem propriam et connaturalem sibi.”
- [169] *Ibid.*, III, ch. 147, par. 6; cf., *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 45, a. 5, co.
- [170] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 5, a. 6, ad 1.
- [171] Cf. Council of Trent, *Sessio VI. Decretum de iustificatione*, 8: DH 1532.
- [172] Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 114, a. 5, co.: “[W]hen anyone has grace, the grace already possessed is not merited.” Although the justified person can merit growth in the life of grace, the fact of being justified, of being a friend of God by grace, will always be absolutely gratuitous.
- [173] What Saint Thomas Aquinas calls the “final disposition,” which occurs simultaneously with the outpouring of sanctifying grace, is itself the immediate work of grace. It is “the final disposition on which the form necessarily follows”: Thomas Aquinas, *Sententia Metaphysicae*, lib. 5, lect. 2, n. 5; cf. *Scriptum super Sententiis*, I, d. 17, q. 2, a. 3, co.; *Summa contra gentiles*, lib. 2, cap. 19, n. 6; *Compendium theologiae*, I, n. 105.
- [174] Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, 61: AAS 57 (1965), 63.

- [175] John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Mater* (25 March 1987), 45: AAS 79 (1987), 422-423.
- [176] Francis, *General Audience* (18 November 2020): *L'Osservatore Romano*, 18 November 2020, 11.
- [177] John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Mater* (25 March 1987), 20: AAS 79 (1987), 387.
- [178] Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, 53: AAS 57 (1965), 58-59.
- [179] Augustine, *Sermo 72/A*, 7: CCSL 41Ab, 117.
- [180] Francis, *General Audience* (24 March 2021): *L'Osservatore Romano*, 24 March 2021, 8.
- [181] Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Marialis Cultus* (2 February 1974), 35: AAS 66 (1974), 147.
- [182] John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Mater* (25 March 1987), 46: AAS 79 (1987), 424.
- [183] Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Norms for Proceeding in the Discernment of Alleged Supernatural Phenomena* (17 May 2024), par. 12: AAS 116 (2024), 782.
- [184] Francis, *General Audience* (16 February 2022): *L'Osservatore Romano*, 16 February 2022, 2.
- [185] Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (24 November 2013), 285: AAS 105 (2013), 1134-1135.
- [186] Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Deus Caritas Est* (25 December 2005), 42: AAS 98 (2006), 252.
- [187] Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (24 November 2013), 284: AAS 105 (2013), 1134.
- [188] Cf. *ibid.*, 113: AAS 105 (2013), 1067.
- [189] Leo XIV, *First Apostolic Blessing "Urbi et Orbi"* (8 May 2025): *L'Osservatore Romano*, 9 May 2025, 3.
- [190] Francis, *Message for the 37th World Youth Day* (15 August 2022): AAS 114 (2022), 1255.
- [191] Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (24 November 2013), 285: AAS 105 (2013), 1135.
- [192] John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Mater* (25 March 1987), 28: AAS 79 (1987), 398.
- [193] Latin American and Caribbean Episcopal Council, *V General Conference of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean* (Aparecida, 13-31 May 2007), par. 265.
- [194] Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Mater* (25 March 1987), 35: AAS 79 (1987), 407.
- [195] Francis, *Homily on the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God* (1 January 2024): AAS 116 (2024), 20.
- ^[196] Latin American and Caribbean Episcopal Council, *V General Conference of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean* (Aparecida, 13-31 May 2007), par. 259.