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Unique Co-operator in the Redemption: A Reflection on the Role of Mary in Our Redemption

RICARDO CARDINAL VIDAL

The Gospels gave us three important indications of Mary's unique role in our redemption. In the Gospel of Luke, Mary accepted the role of being Mother of God with the words, "I am the handmaid of the Lord, be it done unto me according to your word" (Lk. 1:38). In the Gospel of John, Mary ushered in the public ministry of Jesus with her order to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you" (Jn. 2:5). In the same Gospel, Jesus entrusted his mother to the beloved disciple, and likewise, the beloved disciple to his mother. Each of these incidents can stand on their own to show Mary as unique cooperator in our redemption; all three enlighten each other as to just how unique that role is.

In the drama of salvation history, the will of man is always an essential part. Salvation is never an imposition on the part of God, it is always an invitation to accept his love or to reject it. While the gift of salvation is offered to each

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and every individual person, however, the accomplishment of God’s plan depends in part on the will of a few individuals whose acceptance or non-acceptance will have implications on the objective realization of the same plan.

Such was the case of Abraham, who was chosen by God to be the progenitor of his chosen people. Such also was the case of Moses, who was chosen by God to liberate his people from slavery in Egypt. In every case, God’s plan depended on the will of individuals whose freedom he respected in every way but whose vocation he has also determined from the very beginning.

The mystery of our redemption is therefore intertwined with the vocation of individuals, and there is no vocation more exalted and more pivotal than that of Mary. She was chosen to be Mother of God. It was through her that the Word became incarnate. Though it could be disputed that her *fiat* carries the *fiat* of all humanity, it is indisputable that her *fiat* made all other *fiats* possible.

Mary’s assent to the plan of God has priority over that of all other Christians, not only chronologically, but also causally. As Saint Irenaeus says, “being obedient, she became the cause of salvation for herself and for the whole human race.” Mary’s *fiat* is cause of our salvation because the vocation to which she responded positively is precisely the way our salvation is to be attained according to the ineffable wisdom of God. All vocations are destined for the salvation of man. We are called to live God’s will for us and to accomplish his mission for our sake and for the sake of others. Yet, while some vocations have only a local value, Mary’s vocation has cosmic and universal implications. Thus, the Church has always exalted her special predestination. Says *Lumen Gentium* of the Second

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Vatican Council: “The predestination of the Blessed Virgin as Mother of God was associated with the incarnation of the divine word...” (*Lumen Gentium*, 61).

Mary’s vocation therefore stands at the threshold of all other vocations. It is through her vocation that all other vocations are made possible. It is through her response that we can hear God’s call and respond to it.

Mary’s role in our salvation, however, did not end with the incarnation. Vocation is not just a matter of saying yes or no to God’s plan, it is also working so that God’s plan may be fulfilled. Hence, vocation is also a mission. This missionary element in the role of Mary is best exemplified in the wedding at Cana, when Mary apparently hastened the revelation of Jesus as the Messiah. As the Gospel of John recounts, the miracle at Cana “was the first of Jesus’ signs... He revealed his glory and his disciples believed in him” (Jn. 2:11).

In the *Magnificat*, Mary is the first human proclaimer of the Good News (cf. Lk. 4:18ff). In the miracle at Cana, Mary no longer speaks as a prophet, she actually points to her son as the fulfillment of the prophecy. Like all the prophets of old who might have called all Israel to listen and obey, Mary also called upon the servants to “do whatever he tells you.”

Yet, in these same words, we again hear of Mary’s docility to the will of God. Some may see in them a presumption of influence, yet, truly, Mary was actually open to Jesus’ decision on the matter. She did not bring up the matter to the Lord already presuming what should be done. Instead, she directed the servants to await instructions from her

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Son, so that what actually happened was Jesus’ decision alone.

In this instance, we see Mary’s subservience to the Lord’s own mission. Her vocation may have been indispensable to the plan of salvation, but it was only ancillary to the mission of Christ himself. It was her vocation to be Mother of God, yet she is not God herself. It is her mission to reveal her Son to others, but she is only the proclaimer, not the Word herself. Her subservience, however, is the very condition of her unique cooperation, for it is precisely man’s openness to God’s will that the fullness of redemption is attained. In Mary, we see the place of man in the plan of salvation acted out exactly in accordance with God’s will. The uniqueness of her vocation is made more special by the way she responded to it. Her vocation was to be the first disciple, and she lived that vocation to the full. Through her discipleship, many others became disciples. Discipleship is the fullness of our response to God’s offer of salvation.

The relationship between Mary and Jesus is highlighted in the incident at the foot of the cross, when Jesus entrusted Mary to the beloved disciple. Mary is the mother of Jesus, but by entrusting her to the beloved disciple, she is made our mother as well. Jesus thus opens up her exclusive filial relationship with Mary to all of us who are his disciples, so that she is truly our mother and we are truly “her children, who obey God’s commandments and have in themselves the witness of Jesus” (cf. Rev. 12:17).

Mary’s relationship with Jesus therefore makes possible all other relationships we have with him. It is through our kinship with Mary, as woman and mother, that we are also kindred with Jesus, who was born of woman and also son

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of the same mother whom we call our own. It is through our kinship with Jesus that we are sons and daughters of God. It is through Mary's motherhood that we are kin of Jesus.

This kinship is by no means a biological one. Yet, to say that it is spiritual falls short of the full reality of that relationship. For it is a relationship forged by the will of Jesus hanging on the cross. It is therefore the wish of a dying man, the last testament that assigns inheritance to his heirs. At the foot of the cross, Mary is entrusted to us, and we are consecrated to her.

In every respect, Mary's role in our salvation is the work of grace. She was prepared for all generations free from the stain of sin. She was chosen to be Mother of God among all women. She hastened the revelation of Jesus as Messiah and Jesus confirmed her role with his miracle at Cana. She was made mother of us all by the will of her Son. Yet, in all these instances of God's predilection, "the Blessed Virgin's salutary influence on men originates not in any inner necessity but in the disposition of God" (*Lumen Gentium*, 60). This makes her vocation all the more remarkable because it is a free act of God.

Lumen Gentium thus recognizes the unique role of Mary in our salvation: "This motherhood of Mary in the order of grace—from the consent which she gave in faith at the annunciation, and which she continued to give unhesitatingly at the foot of the cross—lasts without interruption until all the elect enter into the eternal fulfillment. When she was taken up into heaven, she did not lay aside this saving role but she continues by her intercession for all to gain for us the gifts of eternal salvation" (*Lumen Gentium*, 62).

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In summary, Mary’s role in our redemption is unique, first, because salvation is the universal vocation, and her particular vocation as Mother of God is the key to all other vocations. Second, Mary’s role is unique because salvation is our response to the proclamation of Jesus as Messiah, and her response of faith makes her the first believer and the first proclaimer. Her discipleship opens the door for us to become disciples of her Son. Lastly, Mary’s role is unique because of her special relationship with the Most Blessed Trinity, especially her relationship with the Second Person. When Jesus entrusted her to us as our mother, she did not cease to be his mother, rather, she becomes our way to Jesus just as through her, the Lord “humbled himself to share our humanity” (from the *Roman Missal*).

+ Ricardo Cardinal Vidal
Archbishop of Cebu, Philippines