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MARY AS CO-REDEMPTRIX: WHERE WOULD PAUL STAND?

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This is a study primarily of the concept or theme of "co-redemption" in the letters written by Paul or in living association with him.¹ How does Paul understand the idea of human cooperation in the divine work of salvation? Thus this paper is more a study of the biblical theology of salvation rather than one of mariology. However, an understanding of Paul's soteriology will allow us to sketch how he would have accepted the idea of Mary as Co-Redemptrix.

Paul in fact does not speak of Mary outside the oblique reference to her as "a woman" of whom the Son of God is born (Gal 4:4). However, good critical theology can work out the virtualities of a text via a heartfelt contact with the reality intended by the text and its author, by which contact the reader can shift the perspective even slightly without losing continuity with the original biblical perspective. My conclusion will be that human cooperation in the divine work of salvation through suffering and death is a generally accepted presupposition in Paul. We are all "co-redeemers." In general Paul would have no problem seeing Mary in this role, provided certain aspects of Marian devotion be accentuated and others eliminated.

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¹ I will limit the study to 1 Thessalonians 1 & 2, Corinthians, Galatians, Romans, Philippians, and Colossians.

A challenge for studying Paul for his theology arises from apparent inconsistencies or "lumps" in his thought. Paul is not a systematic theologian. He is struggling at the beginning of Christian theology to understand a mystery which he confesses to be incomprehensible (Rom 11:33-36). He writes letters for very specific problems and questions. He draws unevenly on Hellenistic philosophy, his Jewish heritage, and the historical traditions of the earliest churches about Jesus, including creedal statements formulated before him. Yet a basic insight does seem consistently to color his use of his sources. We will try to grasp that insight and apply it to the particular question of human cooperation in the divine work of salvation.

My approach is to situate this question in Paul's larger perspectives, scanning first all the descriptions of God the Father as primary savior, along with Paul's view of salvation or redemption. Second, we need to look at the descriptions of Jesus in this salvation, where we see the primary sense of human cooperation in the divine work of salvation. Third, we need to look at the descriptions of Paul's understanding of his own role, aspects which he at times assigns also to his readers. These three steps will allow us to sketch briefly Paul's openness to the theme of Mary as co-redemptrix.

God the Father as Savior

The vocabulary Paul uses for the saving work of God is varied. He speaks of salvation (*sōteria*, Rom 1:16) and the act of saving (*sōdzōn*, 1 Cor 1:21), justification (*dikaioynē*, Rom 1:17) and the act of justifying (*dikaiōn*, Rom 3:24), redemption (*apolytrosis*, Rom 3:24), or simply peace (*eirēnē*, Rom 5:1). He speaks also of the action of God as rescuing (*rhyomenos*, Rom 7:24), purchasing (*exagoradzōn*, Gal 3:13), and or reconciling (*katallassōn*, Rom 5:10). Interestingly, apart from one text in Colossians (1:13), Paul does not use the term "forgiveness of sins" (*aphesis tōn hamartiōn*), a favorite expression of Luke.²

² The closest Paul comes to this idea is Rom 3:25 where he speaks of God "over-looking" (*pareisis*) of sins committed in the past, an action which has more the sense of "letting go unpunished" rather than "canceling." But see Luke 1:77, 3:3; 24:47; Acts 2:38, 5:31, 10:43, 13:38, 26:18; see also Luke 5:20-24, 7:47-49, 11:4.

Each word used by Paul suggests distinctive nuances, but in regard to openness to human cooperation the words are more or less equivalent.

For Paul the divine work of salvation or redemption is less a matter of forgiving sins, like a debt, than a work of destroying the power of death. This is the divine work of cosmic transformation and recreation. This salvation is epitomized by the resurrection, which as Paul explains in Romans is not just a matter of the redemption of our bodies but also the liberation of all creation from its slavery to corruption (Rom 8:18-25). As such this work can only be the work of the creator, who is God the Father.

In this view Paul appears to be drawing particularly from contemporary Jewish apocalyptic imagery, where evil appears as a cosmic force infecting all aspects of this world, where salvation involves the destruction of "this world" (*ba-'olam ha-zeh*) and its replacement with "the world to come" (*ba-'olam ha-ba*).³

Special to Paul is the identification more or less of "this world" with "flesh" (*sarx*), not to be confused with "body" (*soma*). As the power of corruption, the flesh is not redeemed. There is no resurrection of the flesh. Flesh cannot inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor 15:50). After death, however, the body can be transformed into a "spiritual body" (1 Cor 15:44). Thus for Paul death has an important theological significance. Death comes about by sin (Rom 5:12; see Wis 2:24). In effect for Paul, death is the face of sin, and death is inevitably part of the process of God dealing with sin.

From his earliest letter, Paul expresses this priority of God the Father in salvation. It is God the Father who destines us to gain salvation (1 Thess 5:9), who calls us into his kingdom and

³ See 4 Ezra 7:50, where the angel interpreter explains to the visionary, "For this reason, the Most High has made not one world but two." Good examples of Jewish apocalyptic can be found also in 1 Enoch, 2 Baruch, the Testament of Moses, writings more or less contemporary with Paul, along with the Jewish Christian Book of Revelation. Perhaps the best access to the non-canonical works is in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (The Anchor Bible Reference Library, 2 vols; London: Doubleday, 1983 & 1985).

glory (2:12), and who at the *parousia* of Jesus raises "those who have fallen asleep" (4:14). In Paul's main epistles the theme of the Father's agency in both creation and salvation is a basic theme. The cross of Christ is a manifestation of God's "power and wisdom" (1 Cor 1:18-25) and demonstrates the love of the Father for us while we are still sinners (Rom 5:8). The Father raised Jesus and will raise us (2 Cor 4:14). God reconciles us and the world to himself (2 Cor 5:17-19). God sends his Son to ransom us (Gal 4:4-5). The Gospel is the power of God for salvation (Rom 1:16-17). In his last epistles Paul remains insistent, "Your salvation . . . is God's doing" (Phil 1:28; see 2:13, 3:9). God delivers us from the power of darkness into the kingdom of his Son" (Col 1:13).

This Pauline focus on the initiative of God in salvation immediately eliminates any view of a creaturely involvement in salvation as an effort to appease God or otherwise dissuade God from destroying us. Death and suffering are part of the drama of salvation, but their role is not to make God feel better. God does not have to be paid off. He is not a rigid accountant, keeping track of debts. He is the loving savior. We are saved by grace.

In an apparent clash with this theme of the loving Father initiating salvation is the theme of God's anger (*hê orgê tou theou*). This theme appears in 1 Thessalonians (1 Thess 1:10; 5:9) and jumps onto center stage in the letter to the Romans (see especially Rom 1:18-3:20). Paul draws this theme from the pre-exilic prophets of Israel (Hos 8:5; Mic 5:14; Isa 5:25; 9:11, 12:1; Jer 4:8, 26; 7:20; Ezek 5:13, 15; 13:13). As in the classical prophets, the theme in Paul brings out the seriousness of sin and the inevitability of God dealing with it.

However, as placed in tension with Paul's view of the saving love of God, this anger appears more as that of a distraught parent deeply upset, painfully involved in the misery of a rebellious child. This theme in Paul appears in close connection with the heritage of the prophets and their theme of the "pathos" of God, God's suffering from the sins of the people (Hos 11:8; Mic 6:3). As such, divine anger is an expression of love, not a vindictive demand for satisfaction.

Christ's Role in Salvation

Paul twice mentions Jesus as a powerful and direct agent in salvation. Both references are in eschatological contexts where Jesus is the glorious Lord coming at the end times. In the opening prayer of his first letter, Paul praises his readers as they "await God's Son . . . Jesus, who rescues us from the coming anger" (1 Thess 1:10). Similarly, in Philippians Paul proclaims, "Our citizenship is in heaven, whence we also await a savior, the Lord Jesus Christ" (Phil 3:20)—the one and only time Paul uses the title "savior" for Jesus.

In the saving action of Jesus on earth, however, he appears less as powerful savior than as a humble agent of God in connection with death or the lowly service leading up to death. "God did not destine us for anger but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ who died for us" (1 Thess 5:9-10). "Jesus Christ gave himself for our sins in order that he might extract us from the present evil age according to the will of God" (Gal 1:4). "God sent his Son born of a woman born under the law in order that he might purchase us from under the law" (Gal 4:4).

Paul goes out of his way to describe the earthly Jesus in tight solidarity with our sinful condition. "God sent his Son in the likeness of sinful flesh" (Rom 8:3).⁴ "Christ bought us from the law's curse by becoming a curse for us" (Gal 3:13). "The one not knowing sin, God made to be sin, that we might become the righteousness of God in him" (2 Cor 5:21). By its parallel with similarly constructed formulas describing the pre-existent Christ, the present participle phrase "not knowing sin" appears to describe Jesus before he becomes human. The entire life on earth of Jesus is thus summed up under the

⁴The Greek word for "likeness" which Paul uses here is *homoioma*. In the literature of the time this word never meant merely an approximation or limited resemblance to some reality. In the Septuagint the word describes a fully adequate and perceptible expression of some reality, in some sense the very model of a reality (4 Kgs 16:10; Josh 22:28; Sir 38:28; Ezek 2:1).

expression "made to be sin." Paul of course is thinking in apocalyptic not ethical categories of sin.⁵

In this solidarity with human sinfulness, the death of Jesus appears as part of the destruction of this sinful world which must pass away to make ready for the world to come. Paul does not explicitly make this connection between the death of Jesus and the apocalyptic theme of salvation coming through the destruction of this evil eon. However, Paul insists on the solidarity of Jesus with human sinfulness and on the physical death of Jesus as essential to the divine saving action. We are saved "by his blood" (Rom 3:25). Christ "died for our sins" (1 Cor 15:3) or "for us" (1 Thess 5:10).

The resurrection of Christ appears then as the new creation by which God completes his salvation. With one exception, the resurrection of Jesus is always the act of God raising Jesus from death (see especially Rom 8:11; 1 Cor 15:3-20). The exception is 1 Thess 4:14 where Paul appears to be citing an early credal formula, "If we believe that Jesus died and rose. . . ." In effect, the resurrection of Jesus according to Paul is the rescue or salvation of Jesus from his sinful condition. Because of this resurrection, death and, therefore, sin no longer rule over him (Rom 6:9). The epitome of God's salvation is thus the risen humanity of Jesus. Thus for Paul, to deny the resurrection is to deny the salvation of God (1 Cor 15:16-19).

The risen Jesus, moreover, is the "first fruits" of a great series to come for all of humanity (1 Cor 15:20). "In Christ" we also share in this salvation. "In Christ" we are a new creation (2 Cor 5:17). If the Spirit of him who raised Christ dwells in our hearts then we too will be raised from the dead by that same Spirit (Rom 8:11).

Human Agency in Salvation

Moving beyond Christ to the rest of humanity as cooperating in the saving action of God, Paul describes himself as a

⁵ An interesting parallel to this Pauline view of Christ's solidarity with sinful flesh is found in the Synoptic Gospels, where the tradition begins the ministry of Jesus with baptism, a ritual for sinners (Mark 1:4), whence the need for a theological interpretation (Matt 3:14-15). The Synoptic stories of Jesus' table fellowship with sinners ties into this same theme (Mark 2:15-17 and parallels).

primary example of the extension of divine saving agency to other human beings. He bases this involvement of himself on his call which involves an experience of the risen Christ. When apparently challenged by the Galatians on the legitimacy of his work, Paul describes his call by God in the manner of Jeremiah the prophet: "When God, who from my mother's womb had set me apart and called me through this grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, so that I might proclaim him to the Gentiles . . ." (Gal 1:15-16; see Jer 1:5). Through several other allusions to Jeremiah, Paul indicates a parallel of his mission to that of the Old Testament prophet. This parallel may help us grasp Paul's understanding of the frustration and apparent failure he sensed in his work.

When elsewhere Paul defends his apostolic status, he alludes especially to this experience of the risen Christ: "Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?" (1 Cor 9:1; see 15:5-7). Through this interplay of God the Father and Jesus the Lord in Paul's life, he can identify himself consistently as "an apostle of Christ Jesus through the will of God" (1 Cor 1:1; 2 Cor 1:1; Col 1:1; see Gal 1:1), where the apostle like an ambassador (2 Cor 5:20) represents and extends the action of the one sending him.

Paul recognizes the special character of the gift of being an apostle, distinguishing it from other gifts (1 Cor 12:28-30). He explains that his gift or mission is above all "to preach the Gospel" (1:17). In the same letter he insists that all the faithful have their gift from God (7:7) and all the gifts work together for the good of the body (12:12-26). The body image here insists on the organic unity of the church as well as the effect any one part has on the whole: "If one member suffers, all suffer. If one member is honored, all the members share its joy" (12:26).

At times he speaks in the first person singular, perhaps thinking of his special role. He is like a pregnant woman in labor pains (*ôdinô*) until Christ is formed in his readers (Gal 4:19). More often he speaks of "we," apparently associating others in his work in cooperation with the saving work of God: "Christ has given us the ministry of reconciliation . . . So we are ambassadors for Christ"—appealing to his readers to be reconciled

to God (2 Cor 5:20). He describes himself and his companions as "co-workers of God" (1 Cor 3:9), as "assistants and stewards" of God's mysteries (4:1). At the same time Paul is consistently clear that the actual power of salvation comes from God. Using agricultural images to describe this cooperation, he pictures himself and other apostles as planting and watering but then insists that it is "only God who causes the growth" (1 Cor 3:6-7).

These images of work and activity in turn tie into the theme of a living union with Christ through whom God saves. Paul speaks of this living union above all as bringing about our salvation but also as establishing Paul's active cooperation in the work of salvation. In 1 Thessalonians, his earliest letter, Paul alludes to the idea of union with Christ by sprinkling the letter with "in Christ" or "in the Lord" expressions (1 Thess 1:1; 3:8; 5:12,18; 4:14). This idea will become a major theme in his theology. In 1 Corinthians Paul introduces the Stoic image of the body of Christ into which we are baptized (1 Cor 12:13, 27). The theme of union with Christ will develop (especially in 2 Corinthians, Galatians, and Romans) as Paul describes his apostolic life and the way in which his readers share in the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Human Continuation of the Crucifixion

Understanding how Paul sees first the way he himself and then others in the body of Christ cooperate in the saving work of God requires focusing especially on the way he sees the crucifixion of Christ continued in his life and in the lives of others. I want to focus especially on the Corinthian letters where Paul sees himself "carrying about in his body the dying of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our body" (2 Cor 4:10). Paul tries to shame the Corinthian desire for honors by insisting on his own weakness. "I will rather boast of my weakness, in order that the power of Christ may dwell with me" (2 Cor 12:9). He includes others around him when he describes his apostolic group as "fools on Christ's account," held in disrepute, "like the world's garbage, the scum of all" (1 Cor 4:10-13). Of course, references to the "life of Jesus" and the "power of Christ" in these texts indicate Paul's confidence in God's saving action, his power to conquer death and

restore life, an action already begun in Paul who is still alive and writing.

In this letter Paul insists that the effectiveness of his work on behalf of his readers is a direct function of his union with the crucified Christ. A certain sarcasm appears when Paul states, "We rejoice when we are weak, but you are strong" (2 Cor 13:9). "Death is at work in us, but life in you" (4:12). However, in these descriptions Paul in fact is tying into the pattern of Jesus who "being rich made himself poor so that you might be enriched by his poverty" (8:9). Paul specifically describes himself and his companions "as poor we are enriching many" (6:10). Using the same grammatical pattern found in descriptions of Christ's saving role (present participle, aorist verb, *hina* clause), Paul describes himself, "*Being free . . . I made myself a slave . . . a Jew . . . under the Law . . . weak . . . all things, in order that I might save (sôsô) some*" (1 Cor 9:19-22).⁶

As he reflects on the frustrations of working with the Corinthian church, he admits "the sufferings of Christ overflow to us" (2 Cor 1:5), but then adds that all this is "for your encouragement and salvation" (1:6). Christ's power arises from the weakness of his death on the cross and this power is "for you" (*eis hymas*, 13:3). So likewise "we are weak in him, but we live with him by the power of God for you" (*eis hymas*, 13:4). Paul humbles himself so that the Corinthians might be exalted (2 Cor 11:7). For all his grumpiness here, Paul sees a saving goodness coming from his sufferings.

Writing to the Galatians Paul is more explicit about his union with Christ, as both crucified and living: "I died to the law to live for God. I have been co-crucified with Christ. . . . Christ lives in me" (Gal 2:19-20). Paul then summarizes this situation by saying, "I live in faith, that of the Son of God" (2:20). It is clear that "living in faith" is equivalent to "Christ living in me."

In his letter to the Colossians Paul makes the bold step to declare that this union with the crucified Christ is in the same

⁶ Compare the grammar in the descriptions of Christ in three texts: a) 2 Cor 5:21, "Not knowing sin, God made him to be sin in order that . . ." b) 2 Cor 8:9, "*Being rich, he made himself poor in order that . . .*"; and c) Phil 2:6-11, "*Existing in the form of God . . . he emptied himself . . . in order that . . .*"

order as the action of Christ on Calvary and actually completes that action: "I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake. In my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ on behalf of his body, the Church" (Col 1:24).

What Paul says of himself he extends to other people of faith. He made the same equivalence between living in faith and Christ living in us in 2 Corinthians when he challenged his readers, "Examine yourselves to see whether you are living in faith. Test yourselves. Do you not realize that Jesus Christ is in you?" (2 Cor 13:5). In his letter to the Romans Paul connects Baptism with this union of the faithful with the crucified Christ: "We who are baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death" (Rom 6:3). "Our old self was crucified with him" (6:6). In this way we are buried with him, waiting and open to the power of God which will raise us from the dead. Of course this openness to a future resurrection means now "living a new life" (6:4); in some way the resurrection has begun. Paul, in his letter to the Colossians, will take the baptismal drama a step further and identify this new life with the resurrection itself: "You were buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead" (Col 2:12). Writing to the Philippians Paul can speak of the hardships of his readers as "suffering for (*hyper*) Christ" (Phil 1:29), just as earlier Paul spoke of his hardships as "for (*hyper*) Christ" (2 Cor 12:10).

In effect Paul describes the human involvement in the work of salvation as parallel to that of Christ, being crucified and allowing God to raise him from the dead. Suffering and death become the specifically human part in the divine action. Thus Paul can poke fun at his own efforts and achievements. His preaching and his own person, along with the Corinthian church, appear to him as a great example of how God chooses "the foolish," "the weak," "the lowly and despised of this world" so that the faith that saves might rest on "the power of God" (1 Cor 1:26-2:5). In prison writing to the Philippians toward the end of his career, Paul admits that his "justice" based on human accomplishment of the law was faultless. But then he declares, "I consider it all as rubbish that I might gain Christ . . . to know him and the power of his resurrection and the sharing

of his sufferings by being conformed to his death, if somehow I may attain the resurrection of the dead" (Phil 3:4-11).

In the same letter to the Philippians there appears a certain lumpiness or tension with these texts that seem to minimize human work and achievement. In this letter Paul speaks of his "fruitful work" (*karpos ergou*) which is "needed" for his readers, the work he could continue if he remains alive in contrast to dying and "being with Christ" (Phil 1:23-24). In the next line he explains that this "fruitful work" is "for your progress in the joy of the faith" (1:25). Paul also urges the Philippians to "work at your salvation" (*tên heautôn sôtêrian kategradzesthe*) precisely because it is God "who works in you (*energôn en hymin*) both to will and to work (*to energein*) according to his good pleasure" (2:12-13). For both Paul and the Philippians, cooperating in the divine work of salvation means work, which appears here as more than dying in any literal or figurative sense.

Of course Paul himself is a great example of this tension. The one who preaches salvation by simple openness to the power of God raising the dead is also the world traveler, preaching before synagogues and philosophical schools, planning his next trip before finishing the one he is on, sending emissaries and anxiously waiting for their return, working with intense toil and hardship (1 Cor 4:11-12; 2 Cor 6:4-5; 11:23-29; 12:10).⁷

What appears clear in this tension between faith and works is that cooperating in the divine work of salvation involves great effort and work. It does not, however, necessarily involve seeing success. It might involve just the opposite. Constraints and failure are crucifying because of the effort and work put in apparently in vain. But Paul states clearly, "I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and constraints, for the sake of Christ; for when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Cor 12:10).

⁷ On this theme of hard work on the part of Paul, we could also recall his own "athleticism" as well as his exhortation to his readers to similar efforts—all this after he describes his own weak and humble condition accepted "to save others" (1 Cor 9:24-27; see 9:19-23).

This paradoxical form of salvation through the suffering and destruction of God's human agent has ties with Jeremiah, who like many prophets appears to be drawn into the suffering God. His failure in life becomes an echo of God's failure. This link between the prophet's suffering and God's pain appears in the association of the two ideas at the conclusion of an oracle to Baruch:

The word which the prophet Jeremiah spoke to Baruch . . . Thus says Yahweh, God of Israel, to you Baruch, "Because you [the prophet Jeremiah] said, 'Alas! Yahweh adds grief to my pain; I am weary from groaning, and find no rest,' say this to him, thus says Yahweh, 'What I have built, I am tearing down; what I have planted, I am uprooting, even the whole land.'" (Jer 45:2-4)

Divine failure could not be more vividly described, and the prophet's life becomes a vivid revelation of that divine suffering. Suffering and death on the part of God's agent is not an attempt of divine appeasement or satisfaction. It is a revelation of God's suffering. Through that revelation, however, God begins his saving action.

Paul's Openness to Mary as Co-redemptrix

Can this Pauline view of cooperating in divine salvation be applied to Mary? It would mean situating her in this drama which is the common lot of the faithful and particularly in the common lot of sharing the crucifixion of Christ, which allows God to begin the work of the resurrection. Paul mentions Mary only once as the "woman" from whom the Son of God was born (Gal 4:4). This role in the divine drama of salvation puts Mary as a striking exemplar for Paul who describes himself as "in labor pains until Christ be formed in you" (Gal 4:19).

This description in Galatians, "God sent his Son born of a woman, born under the law . . . in order that . . ." (4:4-5), parallels the formulaic description in Romans, "God sent his Son in the likeness of sinful flesh . . . in order that . . ." (Rom 8:3-4). Both describe Jesus emptying himself of status as a preparation for the crucifixion. Both describe the redemptive results of this

kenosis,⁸ “in order that he might purchase those under the law, in order that we might receive adoption” (Gal 4:5), and “in order that the just requirement of the law be fulfilled” (Rom 8:4).

In a combined view of these texts, Mary’s role is to provide the “sinful flesh” of Christ, to allow him to die. It is not a glorious role, but it places her in the center of the redemptive process as Paul conceives it.

Later devotion to “the mother of sorrows” extends this portrayal of Mary. Here we see the woman in solidarity with the crucified Christ, like Paul, making up for what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ (Col 1:24). This “making up” or completing action began at the foot of the cross and continues down through the centuries wherever suffering and death occur. The role of “mother of sorrows” puts Mary, like her Son, in solidarity with the misery and sinfulness of humanity.

However, the desire on the part of devotees of Mary to spare her the suffering of death (and childbirth) would seem at odds with this Pauline view of cooperation in the divine work of salvation. It is at death that we are most open to the power of God to raise us from the dead. It is at death that this power can enter the world, a power intended to raise all of humanity from the dead. It is at death that we become most like Christ, through whom God saves the world.

Christian spirituality and theology, of course, is filled with divergent and often conflicting vectors, among which Paul is only one. However, portrayals of Mary somehow supplementing the “satisfaction” which Christ supposedly provides to the Father seem completely outside the scope of Pauline soteriology. Stressing Mary’s freedom from death and wrenching pains of childbirth seems like a logical conclusion from the premise of Mary’s freedom from the sin of Adam and Eve,⁹ whence

⁸ I am using the vocabulary from Phil 2:6-8.

⁹ The idea of Mary’s Immaculate Conception is not in Paul and probably could not be articulated conceptually by Paul in the form into which this dogma has developed. In his apocalyptic framework, Paul did not think of sin as a *macula*. He would be more interested in the solidarity of Mary with sinful humanity as a parallel with her son. We are dealing here with the importance of situating dogmas in their proper frameworks and how the shift of frameworks necessarily involves the reformulation of dogmas.

those curses derive. However, God's logic is not our logic. Understanding Mary in the Pauline view of cooperation with the saving action of God might be better served by placing her among those chosen precisely because, like Paul, they look like people sentenced to death (1 Cor 4:9).

As sentenced to death in and with Christ, Mary opens herself to the power of God raising the dead. I cannot think of a more powerful image than that of the Assumption of Mary. In this image the eschatological salvation enters into this world in a concrete place and time. By his own Spirit who dwelt so fully in Mary, the Father transforms a small piece of creation, Mary's body. However, the salvation of Mary, like that of Jesus, describes the beginning of a process, the "first fruits," that will continue until all of creation shares in "the glorious freedom of the children of God" (Rom 8:21).

In general, a Pauline approach to Mary as co-redemptrix would try to situate her within weak humanity rather than stress her privileges. She is far more a suffering servant than a reigning queen.¹⁰ Paul would certainly recognize the special "spiritual gift" or charism of Mary as mother of the redeemer. This would give Mary's role a very distinct color and intensity. However, Paul would stress how this charism would situate Mary in the interdependence of the members of the "body of Christ."

¹⁰ Even in his eschatological glory, Jesus retains his wounds—to use a Johannine image.