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Our Lady's Merit de congruo According to Pope Pius X

Joseph A. Moynahan

OUR LADY'S MERIT DE CONGRUO ACCORDING TO POPE PIUS X

The theological writings and encyclicals of the Roman Pontiffs from time immemorial have been the object of much study and the occasion of dissertations, doctoral theses, club discussions, and guild meetings in that they have been an authoritative source of knowledge handed down to us, with great attention lavished on the interpretation of certain texts, and providing not only considerable theological potential for debates but a fund of quotable texts as well. After all, the worthiest object of metaphysical studies is to excite and enlarge the faculties and form deep and thorough thinkers.

Generally speaking, theologians the world over refer constantly and invariably to the teachings of the Popes in the delineation of a certain doctrine as the encyclicals are far from being dead-letter. Obviously we do not refer to infallible Papal teaching, but to the authority of their affirmations and letters. This authority is of such consequence that it may be cited at any time on its own merits to prove and accept a doctrine. This authority increases with the repeated teachings of several Pontiffs on the same doctrine.

Since there is little doubt about the cogency of papal pronouncements on Mary's co-operation in the work of the Redemption, we should like to draw attention to a particular phase of Our Lady's Co-redemption as taught by a particular Pontiff, a theologian, incidentally, in his own right. This paper owes its existence and its inspiration to the encyclical letter *Ad diem illum* of Pius X (Feb. 2, 1904),[1] a brilliantly authoritative dissertation on Mary's mediation and spiritual Motherhood of all Christians. The occasion of this letter was

[1] *Acta Sanctae Sedis,* vol. 36 (1903-1904), p. 453-454.

the golden anniversary of the proclamation of the Immaculate Conception. We are heavily in the debt of Father Dominic J. Unger, O.F.M.Cap., whose poised and impeccable translation [2] has brought us all an accurate knowledge and proper evaluation of the papal pronouncement on the Mother of God.

The Pope's letter, concise, brief, authoritative, clear, while calling attention to the doctrine of the Blessed Virgin's Co-redemption, at the same time has launched one of the keenest theological controversies in modern thought. Does he teach Mary's active co-operation (universal, social, mediative, co-redemptive) in the *objective* Redemption or do his words indicate merely the intercession of graces or her co-operation in the *subjective* Redemption? Does he affirm that Mary merited for us the Redemption itself or does he simply show that she merited for us only the dispensation of graces? The purpose of this paper is to acquaint the general public with the existence of this long-standing controversy, unmatched in intensity, over the interpretation of Pius X's words on Our Lady's merit and to explain the reason for this divergence of thought. I have not pages enough to go into the subject exhaustively, and making no pretense at trying to settle this theological "Donnybrook" here in these limited confines, I should like to correlate the different opinions into one organic whole and then leave the decision to the informed judgment of more learned theologians and more seasoned philosophers.

Some authors say the Pope means active participation (by prayers) or full co-operation in the Redemption at least *by reason of merit*. Others state this merit is universal, mediative, co-redemptive, objective like the merit of her Divine Son. A more recent declaration affirms that Pius X does not teach Mary's universal merit or her participation in objective Redemption but only subjective, i.e., by her prayers in heaven she asks graces for us. Still another school claims the Blessed

[2] *Mary Mediatrix,* St. Anthony Guild Press, Paterson, N. J. 1948.

Mother's social merit can be "de condigno" from Pius' words, but their number is comparatively small and their spirit feeble. The authors draw their arguments from the words contained in the encyclical, so it is a question here of critical interpretation, of logic and philology. We are not discussing the speculative question as to the *possibility* of Mary's meriting for us in the order of objective Redemption; within the limits vouchsafed to us, we are concerned only with what can be drawn from Pius X's text in favor of the doctrine that Mary merited for us Redemption itself (or objective Redemption, as they say these days) and not only the dispensation of graces (or subjective Redemption).

The different solutions to a question so strongly opposed and so tenaciously held by eminent theologians is a typical example of a theological difficulty. But is it an insoluble one? Here are the two famous texts:

> (a) . . . and by this community of pain and will between Christ and Mary, she merited to become in a most worthy manner the Reparatrix of the lost world and consequently the Dispenser of all the gifts that Jesus acquired for us by His death and blood.[3a]

> (b) However, since she surpasses all creatures in sanctity and in union with Christ and since she was chosen by Christ to be His associate in the work of human salvation, *she merits for us conguously, as they say, what Christ has merited for us condignly* and she is the principal minister of the graces to be distributed.[3b]

[3a] ". . . ex hac autem Mariam inter et Christum communione dolorum ac voluntatis, promeruit illa ut reparatrix perditi orbis dignissime fieret, atque ideo universorum munerum dispensatrix quae nobis Iesus nece et sanguine comparavit." Cf. *Acta Sanctae Sedis,* vol. 36, 1903-1904, p. 453.

[3b] "Ea tamen, quoniam universis sanctitate praestat coniunctioneque cum Christo, atque a Christo ascita in humanae salutis opus, de congruo, ut aiunt, promeret nobis quae Christus de condigno promeruit, estque princeps largiendarum gratiarum ministra." *Op. cit.,* p. 453.

Does Pius X in these celebrated texts teach Mary's co-operation in the subjective or objective Redemption, i.e., co-redemptive merits? There are reasons for both interpretations. Although the related words in the text are understood by theologians in various ways, their opinions may be grouped in two classes:

First Opinion — Co-operation in Subjective Redemption

According to this opinion the Pope teaches that Mary, in our behalf, *applies* the fruits of Redemption already completed. Holding this opinion are such celebrated theologians as W. Goossens,[4] H. Lennerz,[5] H. Seiler,[6] G. Smith [7] and many others such as Billot, M. de la Taille, Congar, Ude, Adriensen, etc. They proposed nine arguments to support their opinion.

(1) The entire encyclical has for its principal theme the maternal solicitude of Our Lady who makes us participants in the treasury of grace. In the context preceding our disputed text, the question of merit is presumed to be about Mary's application of the Redemption in our behalf and her distribution of them to us. Why should not the same idea be kept in scrupulous preservation also in the actual text? Therefore, subjective Redemption. Furthermore the context before the second quotation talks about the distribution of gifts, even the right, method and reason for distributing them, first in Christ and His divine Mother, then God and Mary, in the event that the first quotation might seem exaggerated or badly understood.

(2) *Argument of logic.* The Pope affirms: "She merited to become in a most worthy manner the Reparatrix of the lost

[4] *De cooperatione immediata B. V. M.* Parisiis, 1939, p. 58-70.

[5] *Considerationes de doctrina B. V. M. mediatricis* in *Gregorianum,* vol. 19, 1938, p. 427-431.

[6] *Coredemptrix: Theologische Studie zur Lehre der letzten Päpste über die Miterlöserschaft Mariens,* Rom. 1939, p. 32-41.

[7] *Mary's Part in our Redemption,* London, 1938.

world." Inasmuch as he borrows these words from Eadmerus [8] who referred them to the divine maternity and not to Mary's immediate co-operation in objective Redemption, we should use them here in their original sense. He explains how and by what right the distribution of graces belongs to Mary. Therefore, the word Reparatrix must mean *Dispenser.*

(3) *Argument of tense.* The Pope says: "congruously, as they say, she *merits* for us what Christ has merited for us condignly." He uses the present tense ("promeret") for Mary and the past tense ("promeruit") for the Redeemer. *This is intentional and not just by chance.* Our Lord's action, then, is presented as belonging to the order of the objective Redemption *once perfected* and *already completed.* Our Lady's action is taking place now, in the present time, by prayers and intercession. Therefore, the reference is to the subjective Redemption.

(4) Our Pontiff in another place states that the distribution of the gifts which Christ bought for us by His death and blood belongs to Him by His own personal right, because they were acquired for us by His death alone.[9] The word "alone" excludes the immediate co-operation of Mary in the objective Redemption.

(5) Our Lady is called the "Mediatrix" *before Her Son,"* while in the context Christ is called "Mediator of God and man." Therefore Mary's mediation seems to be placed in the order of subjective Redemption. Furthermore, the context immediately following never mentions Co-redemption but speaks about Mary's life from Nazareth to Calvary, knowing His secrets intimately and administering treasures of merit, i.e., impetrative merit.

(6) The Latin particle *"que"* joining the two phrases:

[8] *De excellentia B. V. M.,* caput 9, P.L. 159, 573.

[9] *A.S.S.* 36, 1903-1904, p. 453-454: ". . . siquidem et illa (munera) ejus *unius* morte nobis sunt parta."

"promeret nobis . . . est*que* princeps," seems to connect them and make *one idea* [10] as well as *"ex hac autem"* in the first phrase; hence a consequence of Our Lady's compassion, since the word "autem" introduces a new idea completely different from the first. Thus, first he describes the Blessed Virgin in her compassion, then in her distribution of graces. So, Our Lord dispenses graces by His own right, Mary however, dispenses them in her own unique way. Therefore, in the sphere of subjective Redemption.

(7) The word "de congruo" describes the manner Mary implores and dispenses graces, namely "not by strict right (de condigno), but by reason of some convenience (de congruo). This, however, is rather specious reasoning and nothing more than tissue-thin.

(8) The phrase *"as they say"* (ut aiunt) refers only to the words immediately preceding; in which case the sense is: "Mary merits, i.e., *implores,* graces by that manner which theologians call "de congruo," i.e., by convenience. The location of the phrase proves this, consequently they do not refer to the *entire* sentence but only to the phrase: "de congruo."

(9) Nothing expressly co-redemptive is found about Our Lady's merit in Leo XIII.[11] In fact, nothing is found in any of the previous Papal writings; therefore, why the sudden change in Pius X who had no intention of teaching anything ex professo in favor of Mary's merit? It seems to be just a remark in passing.

This closes the case for the advocates of the merit in the order of *subjective* Redemption.

Second Opinion — Co-operation in the Objective Redemption

To this school of co-redemptive, mediative, universal merit

[10] Lipparini, *La Sintassi latina,* nuova ediz., Milano, 1923, p. 235.

[11] Cf. however, Bittremieux, *Doctrina mariana Leonis XIII,* Brugis, 1928, p. 30, nota 45.

belong such celebrated theologians as J. Bittremieux,[12] Cardinel Lépicier,[13] G. M. Roschini,[14] C. Friethoff,[15] B. Merkelbach,[16] L. Di Fonzo,[17] Van der Meersch,[18] J. B. Carol[19] and L. Leloir.[20] The ten arguments which follow summarize their teaching:

(1) *A priori.* The majority of eminent teachers and writers up until now interpreted the words of Pius X in favor of Mary's merit in the *actual acquisition* of all graces. Why should we run counter to the tested opinions of well-known savants?[21]

(2) The expression *"to merit"* ("mereri") in the theological sense does not mean "to obtain by prayer" ("precando obtinere") or "by entreaty" (inpetrare), so it cannot be referred to the subjective Redemption. It must be remembered that the Pope does not say "to merit" alone, but *"to merit de congruo,"* which differs altogether from intercession. But we know that the blessed now in heaven are no longer capable of such merit; so it must refer to past action, to the time when Mary was on earth. Therefore it is a *special* kind of merit, i.e., "to merit de congruo"; and if it were the ordinary kind of merit it would mean "intercession." So our Blessed Lady

[12] *De mediatione universali BVM quoad gratias,* Brugis, 1926, p. 38. Also *Adnotationes circa doctrinam BVM Coredemptricis in documentis Romanorum Pontificum* in *Ephem. Theol. Lovan,* vol. 16, 1939, p. 745-778.

[13] *L'Immacolata Madre di Dio, Corredentrice del genere umano,* 2 ediz. Roma, 1928, p. 102.

[14] *De Corredemptrice,* in *Marianum,* vol. 1, 1939, p. 365-397.

[15] *De Alma Socia Christi Mediatoris,* Romae, 1936, p. 75-79.

[16] *Revue ecclésiastique de Liège,* 1914-1916, p. 24 sq.

[17] *BVM "de congruo, ut aiunt, promeret nobis quae Christus de condigno promeruit"* in *Marianum,* vol. 1, 1939, p. 418-459.

[18] *Handelingen van het vlaamsch Maria-Congress te Brussels,* I, p. 82 sq.

[19] *Romanorum Pontificum doctrina de BVM Coredemptrice,* in *Marianum,* vol. 9, 1947, p. 168-175.

[20] *La médiation mariale dans la théologie contemporaine,* Bruges, 1933, p. 123-124.

[21] Bittremieux in *Adnotationes . . .,* p. 749.

merits grace for us. The Holy Father emphasizes "merit de congruo," i.e., a special kind of merit distinct from intercession. St. Thomas [22] says: "Prayer has a double value in view of its future effect (1) meritorious value and (2) imprecatory or prayerful value." It must be admitted by our opponents that Pius X in making use of this expression "to merit de congruo" had in mind the full theological sense, knowing the Thomistic difference between "to merit" and "to merit de congruo." The obvious conclusion is that "to merit de congruo" does not mean simple intercession and Pius X had no intention of deviating from the logical, theological and strict sense of the expression. Therefore, actual co-operation in objective Redemption. The Scholastics distinguish between merit (a)*"simpliciter"* (when there is absolute equality between the person meriting and the one rewarding) and (b) *"secundum quid"* (in the case of proportionate equality between the two persons). It can also be (1) merit *de condigno,* when there is absolute equality between the work accomplished and the reward, and (2) merit *de congruo,* if there is inequality between the task and the reward. "Simpliciter" considers the *person,* while "merit de condigno" regards the task, the work accomplished, and not the person; hence man can merit "de condigno" before God and still be infinitely apart from Him; not because of *mercy* (this would be alms), not because of *liberality* (this would be a gift), but because of some congruity, convenience, suitability or equity on the part of the workman who, for example, performed his task with more zeal than was expected, or one who served his employer for twenty-five years, then it would be congruous that he accept a *gratuity.*

There is an axiom in theology:

"Before rewarding a person we look to his worth,
To satisfy a person we must consider his importance."

[22] *Summa Theologica,* IIa IIae, quaestio 83 art. 15.

In like manner:

"Praise is judged by the importance of the one who praises,
While the more prominent the person injured, the greater the injury." [23a]

Friethoff, the eminent Dominican, states [23b] that man can perform a certain task which is equal to the reward offered (thanks to the grace given him); so he merits *de condigno*. But precisely because that merit ultimately depends on divine promise and on the grace of Christ, man cannot merit "de condigno" *before God* unless God so ordains and unless He gives such grace. Hence God does not give man grace as a principle of meriting for others, like He gave to His Son, which is called *"capital grace."* Our Blessed Mother had a greater amount of grace than others, consequently more merit "de condigno." Mary enjoys closer friendship with God, so she has more merit *de congruo* than is given to us. Our Lord's *capital* grace brought merit de condigno, His Mother's *personal* grace brought merit de congruo. It goes without saying that Pius X in making use of technical formulae employed them in their exact sense and in accurate terminology. It would be begging the question and ridiculously imaginative to say that he was here speaking of mere intercession after the clear cut and specific distinction between the two species of merit. Therefore he has in mind the *objective* Redemption.

(3) *Argument of tense.* Father G. M. Roschini [24] explains that the Pope uses the present tense for Mary and the past tense for our Redeemer to avoid "monotonous homophonetics." This is the *historical* present tense so familiar in history and

[23a] "Meritum est in merente; satisfactio est in satisfacto. Honor est in honorante; iniuria est in iniuriato."

[23b] *Op. cit.*, p. 57.

[24] *Op. cit.*, p. 367

often used for emphasis. Father J. B. Carol [25] gives us a biblical example of the historical present. "It was three o'clock and they *crucified* Him and with Him they *crucify* two thieves" (*Mark* 15, 25-27). Since this tense change does not affect the actual Crucifixion, neither should Pius' tense change affect the actual co-operation of Mary. The historical present is nothing else but a sense of past action, completed in *essence,* but still continuing in *effect,* as we see in the Greek perfect. Even disregarding the historical present we still may say that our Lady's action was in the past, from the time of her conception. Pius X does not mean priority of *time* so much as priority of *dignity* and excellence of Christ's merits over Mary's.

(4) The Pope uses the expression: "She merits for us congruously, *as they say* . . .," meaning the theologians who through the years had handed down this doctrine on our Lady's merit. They considered it as past at that time, why not now? Bittremieux [26] insists on this point; answering those who claim that the expression "as they say" refers to "de congruo" only, and not to the entire clause, he points out that the classic division of merit ("de congruo" and "de condigno") is sufficiently well known and hence does not require the explanatory phrase "as they say." In this regard Goossens asks: [27] "Was the opinion in favor of co-redemptive merit ever published in or before 1904?" Bittremieux answers [28] by quoting Hugon, a noted theologian who in 1904 wrote of this doctrine: "This axiom is *commonly received* by theologians." Merkelbach agrees; [30] and Carol [31] gives a virtuoso account of himself proving that this view was established long before Pius X.

[25] *Art. cit.,* p. 170-171.
[26] *Art. cit.,* p. 756.
[27] *Op. cit.,* p. 60.
[28] *Art. cit.,* p. 760.
[29] *La Mère de grâce,* p. 2, c. 2.
[30] *Mariologia,* Parisiis, 1939, p. 328.
[31] *Our Lady's Part in the Redemption according to the 17th Century Writers,* in *Franciscan Studies,* 24 (1943), p. 3-20; 143-158.

(5) The word *"what"* ("quae") is of great importance in the text: "Mary merits for us . . . *what* Christ has merited for us condignly." This specifies the *object* and extension of her merit as it is interpreted to mean "that which, all that" etc. In other words whatever Christ merits for us, His Mother merits for us, although in a different degree. Since our Lord merited for us subjective and objective Redemption, we may conclude that His Mother merited for us the same. Bittremieux [32] and Roschini [33] both concur on this point. Our Holy Father does not say: "Mary merits whatever Christ merits," but adds "what Jesus merited *for us*." That means that whatever Christ merited *for Mary herself* need not fall under the latter's merit. For example, she did not merit the unique grace of her own pre-redemption. Christ alone merited that.

We must remember Mary was not a private person, but was elevated to the company of Christ as Redeemer and so, over and above the increase of value which her merits obtained by this elevation, they received a greater *extension.* With it she performed the work of satisfaction as a universal co-cause. Man's work when infused with grace has a double value. It has not only satisfaction, not only merit, but both together; *satisfaction* because it takes away punishment, *merit* because it makes it worthy of glory. Hence, if Our Lady as a co-cause discharged the duties of salvation in satisfying, she did so in meriting too, not for one but for everyone.

Does the word "quae" imply there are fruits of the mediation of Christ which are not the fruits of Mary's mediation? Friethoff says definitely yes [34] and he reasons thus: in any dispute no mediator can reap the rewards of his own mediation since he cannot belong to either party. He may be praised and might possibly receive a gift from the reconciled parties, but

[32] *Divus Thomas* (Plac.) vol. 42, 1939, p. 166.

[33] *Marianum,* vol. 1, 1939, p. 259.

[34] *Op. cit.,* p. 78.

this is not directly due to his mediation. Our Lord as Mediator received a reward, v.g., the glorification and exaltation of His own Body, not because of His mediation but because of His personal merit or capital grace. So Mary Mediatrix truly merited celestial glory and the increase of grace, not because of her mediation but *because of the mediation of her Divine Son.* These graces as such are not outside Mary's merit, but are outside the *fruits of her mediation.* Mary Mediatrix could not enjoy the fruits of her own mediation but those of the mediation of her Son; so Christ is truly the Saviour of Mary. Bishop John J. Wright, of Worcester, in his Holy Year Pastoral on Our Lady's Assumption [35] emphasizes this in saying: "His Blessed Mother . . . the first redeemed by *His atoning merits.*" Likewise Our Lady's election to Divine Maternity with all the added graces, i.e., Immaculate Conception, plenitude of grace, virginity after the Birth, Assumption, her elevation as associate of the Redeemer, are *all outside* the mediation and merit of Mary since they are pure graces, whereas in her Son they are a just reward for His mediative merit. Our Lady as *associate of the Redeemer* merits for us the first grace, eternal life, increase of grace, reparation after the fall, actual graces, power and act of meriting. All this Pius X affirms the Blessed Virgin merited for us *de congruo* while Christ merited all these for us *de condigno.* So this exaltation of Mary in no way denies the work of One Mediator between God and man. Bittremieux [36] says this doctrine is contained "formally implicitly" in the "principium consortii" which is nothing else but Mary's association with our Saviour as Mediator and Redeemer and includes her merits and satisfaction in our behalf, her free consent to the divine plan of the Redemption, etc.

[35] *Pastoral Letter on the Definition of the Dogma of the Assumption,* Worcester, 1950, p. 4.

[36] *De mediatione universali* . . ., p. 47.

(6) In the text there is a crystal clear distinction between Reparatrix and Dispenser. The former is the cause and the latter the effect. Dispenser therefore depends causally on Reparatrix. In the Pope's words: "she merited to become . . . Reparatrix of the lost world [37] and *consequently* ("atque ideo") the Dispenser of all gifts." Therefore, in a causal and consecutive sense, she is *now* worthy of dispensing graces precisely because *while on earth,* the Co-Redemptrix or Reparatrix took part in the acquisition of their graces. Therefore, because of her co-operation in the objective Redemption.

(7) In the context, our Lady's mediation *before her Son* (apud Filium) has its foundation in her compassion with the Redeemer, i.e., in her co-operation in the objective Redemption. Enlarging on his predecessor, Pius IX, our Pontiff says: "by that community of pain and sorrow between the Mother and the Son, it was granted to the august Virgin to be the most powerful Mediatrix and Conciliatrix of the whole world before her only-begotten Son." [38] When Pius X affirms "before her only-begotten Son," he does not deny that Mary is also Mediatrix between God and man, according to the axiom: the affirmation of one does not necessarily deny the other, unless contradictory.

(8) The words: "She merits *de congruo,* as they say," focus our attention on St. Alphonsus Liguori who teaches that Mary is the Mediatrix of grace by her intercession and merit *de congruo,* since she offered to God her own merits for the salvation of all men (as theologians say with St. Bonaventure) and God accepted them with the merits of Christ.[39] Di Fonzo develops this idea at great length.[40]

[37] Eadmerus, *op. cit.,* cap. 9. P.L. 159-573.

[38] Cf. *Ineffabilis Deus,* St. Anthony Guild Press, Paterson, N. J. 1946, p. 34.

[39] *Glorie di Maria,* Torino, 1880, vol. I, p. 167: "Maria all'incontro è mediatrice di grazie per via di semplice intercessione e di merito de congruo, avendo ella offerto a Dio, come dicono i teologi con S. Bonaventura, i suoi meriti per la salute di tutti gli uomini; e Dio li ha accettati coi meriti di Gesù Christo."

[40] *Marianum,* vol. 1, 1939, p. 432.

(9) Carol [41] states that the clause "which Jesus acquired for us by His death and Blood" is positive and not exclusive; hence Mary is not excluded from participating in the acquisition of graces, i.e., the objective Redemption. Bittremieux in turn draws our attention to the fact that the text does not say "graces acquired for us by the *sole* death of Christ," but 'by the death of Christ *alone*.' " Therefore Pius does not say 'by the *sole* death of Christ' (excluding Mary's co-operation), but 'by the death of Christ *alone*'; i.e., that only Christ died." [42] Furthermore, if the sense were: "graces acquired by the *sole* death of Christ," then we would have to exclude all the meritorious actions of Christ's mortal life, which would be a double crime against Catholic theology and common sense.

Conclusions

In weighing all the arguments we find an adequate appraisal of them most difficult because of the multiplicity of issues involved. One thing certain is that all the authors have used the controversial and disputed phrases to their own advantage as part of their philological arguments. The disputed "promeret" invites deadly differences whichever opinion one happens to hold. We probably would not deny that the words "as they say" refer to the whole sentence and not to one particular phrase. In passing judgment, however, on others' opinions we must study their words and the historical circumstances of their writings. There is inevitably an evolution or, better still, a gradual development of their ideas and perhaps a subsequent clarification of those ideas which becomes more difficult when the writer is not a contemporary. Owing to the profusion of terms and their varied interpretations we would be inclined to agree with Di Fonzo in saying that Pius X did not teach the doctrine of Mary's merit ex

[41] *Marianum* 9, 1947, p. 174.
[42] *Art. cit.*, p. 761-762.

professo but certainly implicitly. We feel certain that our Pontiff clearly had in mind the doctrine of the compassion and participation of Our Lady in the Redemption and the universal dispensation of graces. However, his teaching on Mary's co-redemptive merit is not so obvious. Di Fonzo [43] thinks that *more probably* the first proposition expressly contains a statement on the dispensation of graces. He argues from the general context and from the pivotal idea of the entire encyclical, i.e., the distribution of graces by the Mother of God. The words "ex hac autem" clearly state that Mary's participation in the Passion is contained in the second proposition.

Reviewing all the arguments, it seems to us that the dispute is not yet settled. We do subscribe with Carol and Bittremieux to the theory of Mary's co-redemptive merit and they have earned their vantage ground; nevertheless, we are of the opinion that this doctrine cannot be established with *complete certitude* from the assertion of Pius X because there are cogent arguments on both sides.[44] Those asserting strictly co-redemptive merit, especially from the historical context, have a strong point, but it must be admitted that in Goossens we scent a foeman worthy of our steel, Bittremieux notwithstanding. Di Fonzo proposes still another possible solution: "this merit was neither supposed nor proposed nor intended by Pope Pius X, but only the possible interpretation of the merit and inclusion in these words are freely left to theologians." [45]

It is well to bear in mind the historical fact that theologians from the 17th century commonly held the opinion of the universal and de congruo merit of Mary; currently, however, because of differing opinions, unlike other truths, we are still

[43] *Op. cit.*, p. 445.

[44] Carol arrives at the same conclusion. Cf. *Marianum*, vol. 9, 1947, p. 175.

[45] *Art. cit.*, p. 457: "addimus insuper hic etiam aliam solutionis viam, iuxta quam scil. illud meritum nec supponi nec proponi aut a Pontifice intendi dicatur, sed tantummodo ipsius meriti possibilem interpretationem et inclusionem in illis verbis libere theologis relinqui."

seeking confirmation of it in Papal documents. Differences of opinion are far from being annulled. Moreover, it is one thing to state that the doctrine of co-redemptive merit is held commonly enough by theologians, but quite another thing to affirm that Pope Pius X taught it in so many words. In the word "promeret" (he could easily have said "promeruit") we find that the proximate context and form of syntax are against co-redemptive merit. Furthermore, we believe that there is too much stress placed on "promeret" and that a more generic type of co-redemptive merit should be sought in the preceding context rather than some particular type of merit in a certain phrase.

This effort offers no easy Q. E. D. to the complex problem of Marian merit in papal writings, but whatever it is, the reason for our opinion can be confirmed somewhat by the history of theology. Before the final confirmation of a doctrine is obtained, does not the form of exposition in papal documents and councils, especially in the solemn ones, frequently give rise to conflicting interpretations? And this is not because the wording is ambiguous, but rather because Divine Providence would have us reach the final statement of the truth through a more or less prolonged process of theological development and maturation. The dogma of the Immaculate Conception was finally defined by Pius IX only after a long period of heated debate and controversy in the various schools of thought.

Inasmuch as Pius X indirectly and implicitly proposes Mary's co-redemptive merit, it does not denature our enthusiasm any more than if he speaks *expressly* and *solemnly*. We cannot conclude that the universal merit of Mary was solemnly declared in our pontifical document,[46] neither can we reject it

[46] Hence, we disagree with the illustrious Bittremieux when he says that "Mary's merit is contained '*solemniter*' in the words of Pius X." Cf. *op. cit.*, p. 32.

as totally unrelated to Mary's merit; we do have the conviction that Pius X teaches this doctrine only *implicitly*. If this doctrine of Mary's co-redemptive merit is ever solemnly declared and defined, we must conclude that Pius X was the first Pope to lay its foundation.

Rev. Joseph A. Moynahan, S.T.D., Ph.L.
St. Paul's Cathedral Rectory
Worcester, Mass.