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MARY, MOTHER OF GRACE

A Thomistic study of the Blessed Virgin's mediation

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Abstract

Since Pope Paul VI's official declaration of Mary as "Mother of the Church" at the Second Council, one of the most pertinent questions in Mariology has been *how* Mary continues to exercise her spiritual motherhood of the Church now that she has been gloriously assumed into heaven and reigns as Queen at her Son's side. In the school of Thomism, this question has taken the particular form of whether or not Mary mediates grace to the Church as an *efficient instrumental cause* in a way which is analogous but subordinate to that of her Son.

Among contemporary Thomists, theological opinion on the matter has been divided with some advocating the theory, seeing it as perfectly consonant with traditional Mariology and authentic doctrinal development, while others have argued that the basis for such a theory cannot be found in Church Tradition and is not compatible with Mary's traditionally perceived role in salvation history. With these starkly conflicting views in mind, the present investigation set out to examine the question further. While several extensive empirical studies on the evidence for such Marian instrumental mediation in the lives of the saints have been conducted in recent years, it was felt that a comprehensive theoretical and speculative examination of the subject which adequately evaluated the plausibility of the various arguments for and against the theory had yet to be conducted.

The methodology employed by the current study was thus quite specific. It began by examining the Church Fathers' understanding of the person of Mary and her role in salvation history in an attempt to establish if there were certain theological principles present in the various ideas that they had about her that could conceivably constitute a basis for the future development of a theory of Mary's instrumental mediation. These included the idea of Mary as the 'New Eve,' her divine motherhood and her associated spiritual motherhood of mankind, the notion of Mary as 'type' or exemplar of the Church and her heavenly mediation of grace. The development of these ideas in the works of later theologians in history was then traced to see how the Church's understanding of the nature of Mary's salvific mission had evolved down through the centuries. Specifically, this study focused upon the Marian theology of Saint Thomas Aquinas and of two contemporary theologians, namely, Matthias Scheeben and Charles Journet, who were chosen as being representative of the Thomist tradition, broadly speaking.

In this regard, the analysis undertaken aimed to address several questions pertinent to contemporary Mariology: Do a number of distinct ideas and teachings about the Blessed Virgin Mary exist in the Catholic faith that are logically convergent and mutually reinforcing insofar as they all point to the fullest possible participation of Mary in her Son's work of redemption? Do these concepts suggest that Mary's mediatory role has always been understood by the Church as being both *ontological* and *moral* in nature and thus different from that of the saints which is characterised by moral causality only? Should attribute to the Blessed Virgin Mary all types of mediation that are compatible with, and full expressive of her present gloriously assumed condition as Queen of heaven and as Mother of the Church? Does the Blessed Virgin form her spiritual children in the image and likeness of her Son by communicating *her* spirit to each one of them thus making her truly the *Mediatrice of all Graces* and *Mother of the Church* in the fullest sense possible?

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