

Maria, Mediatrix Omnium Gratiarum

by Leonard Tony Farauanu

PROLOGUS

“Hail, Mary, Mother of God...by whom the human race reaches the knowledge of the truth. Hail, Mary, Mother of God, by whom all faithful souls are saved (sozetai).”¹ . . . “It is through you that the Holy Trinity is glorified and adored, through you the precious Cross is venerated and adored throughout the world . . . through you that churches have been founded in the whole world, that peoples are led to conversion.”²

The liturgy of the Church has always presented Mary as Advocate, Helper, Benefactress and Mediatrix, titles that she rightly deserves in virtue of her universal motherhood in the order of grace. But she is the Mother of all in the order of grace because she is Theotokos (Deipara), for “Genitrix quando non quae saeculorum generavit Auctorem”³ This essay, written in the form of an article from *Summa Theologiae*, wants to show the theological reasons for which Holy Mother Church attributed to Mary the title of “Mediatrix omnium gratiarum”.

OBIECTIONES

Obj. 1) It seems that it is totally inappropriate and contrary to the Holy Scriptures to call Mary “mediatrix”, for it is written that “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” (I Tim. 2: 5-6).

Obj. 2) Furthermore, this mediation belongs to Christ alone, as our unique High Priest, for “He is the Mediator of the New Covenant” (Heb. 9: 15) and He “has offered *for all time a single sacrifice for sins*” (Heb. 10: 12) and “*by a single offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified*” (Heb. 10: 14). If we called Mary

¹ S. Cyril of Alexandria Miravalle, Mark I., ed., *Mary: Coredemptrix, Mediatrix, Advocate: Theological Foundations*, Santa Barbara, CA: Queenship Publishing, 1995, p. 12-13; from MG 77,992, and 1033; also from Ephesus.

² Idem, in Miravalle, *ibid.*, p. 134; from Homilia in Deiparam; PG 65,681.

³ Peter Chrysologus, *Sermon 146*.

“Mediatrix”, then she would be also a “priest”, for mediation is a priestly minister. But the Holy Catholic Church forbids such a title for Mary,⁴ thus she cannot be called “Mediatrix”.

Obj. 3) Furthermore, granted that Mary is in some way a “Mediatrix”, the other saints also intercede and merit graces for the others. Thus, insofar as there are graces merited by some saints, Mary cannot be the “Mediatrix of *all graces*”, since *some* graces are not merited by her, but by other saints. Whence Mary cannot be called “Mediatrix *omnium* gratiarum”.

Obj. 4) Furthermore, as Saint Thomas says (*Summa Theologiae*, Ia IIae, q. 114, a. 5), the first grace cannot be merited by anyone but by Christ alone. Therefore, it seems that it would be false to call Mary “Mediatrix *omnium* gratiarum”, since she cannot merit the first grace for anybody.

Obj. 5) Likewise, nobody can merit the grace of perseverance, which is bestowed on certain men according to God’s own pleasure, as Saint Thomas says.⁵ Thus, the grace of perseverance cannot be mediated by Mary. Consequently, she cannot be called “Mediatrix *omnium* gratiarum”.

Obj. 6) Furthermore, “to mediate” presupposes a *conscious activity of the intellect and will*, for one cannot mediate for another one unless he thinks of him and of the gift mediated for him. But the total number of graces given by God to mankind is immense, and a human intellect is not able to think to all these graces. Consequently, Mary could not mediate all graces, since she was a human being like us and she had a limited intellect.

Obj. 7) Finally, to call Mary “Mediatrix *omnium* gratiarum” would mean to decrease the worship paid to her Divine Son, since this would cause us to turn our attention from Christ, the only Mediator between God and men, to Mary. But it is

⁴ The Holy Office forbids the usage of this title both in 1916 and 1927 (see Ludwig Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogmas*, p. 213).

⁵ *Summa Theologiae*, Ia IIae Q. 114, a. 9.

written “I am the Lord, that is My Name; I will not give My glory to another” (Is. 42:8).

Thus we should not name Mary with this title.

SED CONTRA QUOD DICIT St. Bernard of Clairvaux: “As every mandate of grace that is sent by a king passes through the palace-gates, so does every grace that comes from heaven to the world pass through the hands of Mary.”⁶ And this is said because Mary is called the “Gate of heaven”, since the Eternal King wished to come down to us through her. Thus Mary is rightly called “*Mediatrix omnium gratiarum*”.

RESPONDEO DICENDUM QUOD

Undoubtedly the name and attributes of the *absolute Mediator* belong to no other than Christ; for being both Man and God in one Person He reconciled the human race with the Heavenly Father. That is why Saint Paul says there is “*one* Mediator of God and men, the man Jesus Christ, who gave himself a redemption for all” (I Tim. 2:5-6). However, if we take “mediator” in a *broader sense*, this name can be applied to all those who cooperate by “*predisposing* and *servicing* in the union of man with God.”⁷ They are God’s servants and instruments, since God accomplishes His divine plan of salvation in and through them. They cooperate with their Master, and this cooperation is a free and a responsible one. That is why it can be said that they “mediate” between men and God. There are many examples in the Holy Scriptures that testify this kind of “mediation”: Moses praying God for his people (Ex. 17: 11, 32: 11-13), Abraham praying for Sodoma and Gomora (Gen. 18: 23-32), Elijah praying to prevent or to bring the rain (I Kings 18: 42-45), etc. It is clear therefore that one can use the title of “mediator” in this broader sense for all the servants of the Lord.

Now, as regards Mary, she is a “*Mediatrix*” of all graces in *two ways*:

⁶ Apud. S. Bernarin. Pro Fest. V. M. s.5, c.8; cited in St. Alphonsus de Liguori, *The Glories of Mary*, Brooklyn: Redemptorist Fathers, 1931 ed., ch. 5, p. 160.

⁷ See Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* IIIa, q. 26, a. 1.

First, by being a *Mediatrix of our objective redemption (eius mediatio in universali)*. She mediates through her consent to the Mystery of Incarnation, consent given “in the name of the whole human race.”⁸ Through this free consent she conceives and gives birth to her Divine Son, our Redeemer and *the source of all graces*. She is therefore *a channel through which all graces came into the world; she is “Mater divinae gratiae”*. Also, since Christ is the Head of the Church, His Body, and since Mary is the Mother of the Head, she is also the Mother of the Body. In fact, Mary’s mediation is consequent upon her universal motherhood. Since Christ died for all men without exception, Mary’s objective mediation extends also to all men without exception. In other words, Mary is the Mediatrix of the sufficient grace given to all men “Mediatrix omnium sufficientium gratiarum”. Furthermore, Mary’s mediation is not reduced only to the moment of her consent or to the moment of Christ’s birth. As we have shown above⁹, every kind of cooperation with God’s grace is in fact mediation. Consequently, since Mary was “the handmaid of the Lord”¹⁰ throughout all her life,¹¹ she is Mediatrix through all her *unique* and *continuous* cooperation with God.¹² However, it is obvious, for the reasons given above, that her mediation was an indirect one, subordinated to the mediation of Christ. She is “Mater Mediatoris” and for this reason a worthy and acceptable “Mediatrix to the Mediator”.

Second, Mary is a *Mediatrix of our subjective redemption (eius mediatio in speciali)*. Being in the heavenly glory, she remains the Mother of the Church, and consequently the Mother of *all* the faithful, interceding for them to the Lord. If she is the Mother of all, then she intercedes for all. That is why she is the Mediatrix of

⁸ Idem, *Summa Theologiae*, IIIa, q. 30, a. 1.

⁹ See current essay, p. 3.

¹⁰ Lk. 1: 38.

¹¹ This does not mean that after she left this world she ceased to be “the handmaid of the Lord”, but we speak here about her earthly *meritorious* service to God.

¹² On account of her Immaculate Conception, she is without fault or sin, thus her cooperation is an exceptional one and is not interrupted by anything. That is why she is also named “Coredemprix”, on account of her unique and decisive role in our redemption. However, we will not discuss this subject in the present essay.

everyone's subjective redemption, and consequently the "Mediatrix omnium efficientium gratiarum". Furthermore, since Mary is the prototype of the Church,¹³ and since every grace is distributed to the faithful through the Church, the Mystical Body of Christ, it is fitting that every grace should also be distributed to us through Mary. Finally, we have seen that Mary is the "Mediatrix omnium sufficientium gratiarum", thus it is also fitting that she would be "Mediatrix omnium efficientium gratiarum". Since she is the *channel* of all graces coming to us from Christ, it is fitting that she would be also the one who *distributes* these graces.

However, according to their efficacy, all graces are either sufficient or efficient.¹⁴ Therefore, inasmuch as Mary is both "Mediatrix omnium sufficientium gratiarum" and "Mediatrix omnium efficientium gratiarum", she is rightly called "Mediatrix omnium gratiarum" (Q.E.D.).

AD PRIMUM it is to be said that Mary is called "Mediatrix" in the broader sense of the word, as "Mediatrix to the Mediator". She depends totally on Christ's mediation, since she is the first fruit of His Redemptive work. As we have shown above, anyone who cooperates with God's grace in Jesus Christ can be called "mediator", or "mediator to the true and unique Mediator"; however, Mary has also a unique place in this mediation, since she alone is *Theotokos*, the Mother of God and the Mother of the Mediator. Also, God's salvific action does not depend *intrinsically* on Mary's mediation, but only inasmuch as God himself preordained her to be the "New Eve", the Mother of all living. Thus it is not inappropriate to call Mary "Mediatrix". As regards the Scriptures, the passage taken from I Timothy 2: 5 uses the name "Mediator" in the absolute sense and not in the broader sense. There are many other verses in the Holy Bible in which this mediation is clearly shown. For example, it is written in Job 42: 8: "and my servant Job *shall pray for you, for I will accept his prayer* not to deal with you

¹³ As the Mother of all the faithful.

¹⁴ We are not concerned here about the other distinctions of grace; it is important that according to their efficacy they can be distinguished in sufficient or efficient.

according to your folly; for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has.” Also, in II Mac. 15: 14 it is said: “This is a man who loves the brethren and prays much for the people and the holy city, Jeremiah, the prophet of God”. Saint Paul prays as well for the Christian communities (Phil. 1: 3-4, I Tes. 1: 2-3, II Tes. 1: 11, Eph. 1: 16-17, II Cor. 13:19, II Tim. 1: 3). As regards Mary, she is seen interceding in Cana of Galilee for the spouses: “They have no wine” (Jn. 2: 3), by wine the Fathers understanding the divine love.¹⁵ Therefore, it is not contrary to Scriptures to call Mary “Mediatrix”.

AD SECUNDUM it is to be said that although Christ is our unique High Priest, we have also a share in His priesthood, since Saint Peter calls us “a chosen race, a *royal priesthood*, a holy nation” (I Pt. 2: 9). *Every baptized* participates in this *universal priesthood*, according to what Saint Paul says: “present your bodies as *a living sacrifice*, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship” (Rom. 12: 1). However, this ‘universal priesthood’ is different from the “ministerial priesthood” of those who receive the power to act “in Persona Christi” when conferring the Sacraments and the blessings. The Church forbids to call Mary a “priest” in this latter sense, for she does not participate in the ministerial priesthood. But she participates *more than anybody else* in the “universal priesthood”, since she is the “*most pure*” and “*a living sacrifice*” (Rom. 12: 1),¹⁶ her love surpassing the love of all other creatures. Thus, even if to be a “mediator” is also to be a “priest”, we take both words, “mediator” and “priest” in a qualified sense. Consequently, nothing prevents us to call Mary “Mediatrix”, though we do not call her “Priest” in order to avoid the confusion of those who want to attribute to Mary a “ministerial priesthood”.

AD TERTIUM it is to be said that although all saints merit graces for others, their mediation passes through Mary as well. As Teophanes of Nicaea says, “This neck

¹⁵ Jesus is the One who brings “the new wine” (Mt. 9: 16, Mk. 2: 22, Lk. 5: 37), he really “fills” His apostles with “a new wine” (Acts 2:13). Also, God gives “**wine** to gladden the heart of man” (Psalm 104: 15), wine which is compared with God’s love: “your love is better than **wine**” (Song of Songs 1: 2; 4, 4: 10).

¹⁶ She is entirely a “living sacrifice” on account of her purity of heart, for she offered herself entirely to God. Also, she offered to the Father her only Divine Son and her motherhood, by accepting his sacrifice on the Cross.

[Mary] pleasing to God and illumined by the rays of the divine Spirit, alone truly preeminent over the whole Body, has no equal in order or place, but, as has been said, holds the place second in order, next after the Head, playing the part of intermediary and bond between the Head and the Body. Accordingly since, it has no equal, it becomes capable and receptive of the whole divine, life-giving fullness which from the head is communicated to all the members.”¹⁷ The same comparison is used by Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, in order to explain the unique mediation of Mary. As the head communicates to the body through the neck, so Christ communicates his graces to the Church through Mary. Therefore, the mediation of all saints passes through the mediation of Mary, so there is no grace which, being mediated by a certain saint, is not also mediated by Mary. Wherefore she can be rightly called “*Mediatrix omnium gratiarum*”.

AD QUARTUM it is to be said that the first grace cannot be merited by anyone *for himself*, since grace is *the principle* of all good works and no one can merit something *unless* he is *already* in the state of grace. In this way Mary also cannot merit the first grace for herself (i.e., the Immaculate Conception), and here we see how she is totally dependent on Christ’s merits. Also, no one except Christ can merit *de condigno* the first grace *for another*. However, the first grace can be merited *de congruo* by *all those who have the sanctifying grace*, since they fulfill God’s will and it is written: “*voluntatem timentium se faciet et deprecationem eorum exaudiet*” (Ps. 145: 19, VUL).¹⁸ As Saint Thomas says (*Summa Theologiae*, Ia IIae, q. 114, a. 6), in this case it is “congruous and in harmony with friendship that God should fulfill man’s desire for the salvation of another, although sometimes there may be an impediment on the part of him whose salvation the just man desires.” Therefore, since someone in the state of sanctifying grace can *merit de congruo* the first grace for another, it is right to say that he can

¹⁷ in Miravalle, *ibid.*, p. 139; Sermo in Sanctissimam Deiparam, Lateranum, Nova Series, 1, Rome 1935, V, 55 (Fr. Martin Jugie).

¹⁸ I used here the text in Latin because the English translation seems to be inaccurate.

mediate this first grace. But Mary was in the state of grace from the first instant of her conception, thus she could and did merit *de congruo* all graces for the others. That is why she is truly “Mediatrix omnium gratiarum.” The fact that she did not merit the first grace *for herself* does not contradict this title, but shows that Mary’s mediation is *de congruo* and not *de condigno*. To “mediate” means to stand between *other two*, and Mary stands always as a channel of grace between Christ and all other human beings.

AD QUINTUM it is to be said that the position Saint Thomas takes in this matter is disputed among theologians.¹⁹ However, Saint Thomas says that “we impetrate in prayer things that we do not merit” and “so too may we impetrate of God in prayer the grace of perseverance either for ourselves or for others, although it does not fall under merit.”²⁰ But to pray for the others is also a kind of mediation. Thus, since Mary is the Mother of all those who believe, she asks God in prayer the grace of perseverance for all of them.²¹ Consequently, she mediates this grace for them, thus she is “Mediatrix omnium gratiarum”.

Furthermore, according to Saint Thomas, the grace of perseverance depends solely on the Divine motion, as the first grace does. But someone in the state of grace can merit *de congruo* the first grace for another, thus in the same way he can merit also the grace of perseverance for another.²² Consequently, Mary can and does merit *de congruo* the grace of perseverance for the others, thus she is “Mediatrix omnium gratiarum”.

¹⁹ His position is related to his understanding of predestination and reprobation, for he believed that “why God chooses some for glory, and reprobates others, has no reason, except the divine will” (ST Ia, q. 23, a. 5, third reply). God predestines some men “ante praevisa merita” (unconditional predestination) and decides *not to elect* the others “ante praevisa demerita” (unconditional *negative* reprobation). I am aware that the position of Saint Thomas with respect to reprobation is a disputed point, but for me it seems evident that he defends the “unconditional negative reprobation”. The arguments that try to show him as teaching a “conditional *negative* reprobation” are immediately contradicted (for ex., in ST Ia IIae, q. 79, a. 4 third reply versus a. 3 body).

²⁰ *Summa Theologiae*, Ia IIae, q. 114, a. 9, first reply

²¹ I do not intend here to limit Mary’s motherhood, but I am treating at this point only of the grace of perseverance, which cannot be given but to those who have already received grace. No one can persevere in something he has not.

²² Ludwig Ott qualifies as a “*sententia probabilis*” the statement that the justified can merit *de congruo* for himself the grace of final perseverance (op. cit., p. 269).

AD SEXTUM it is to be said that Mary's mediation presupposes a *conscious activity of intellect and will* in two ways: *first*, in her "*mediatio in universalis*", Mary *freely* cooperates with God for the objective salvation of all, and a free act *presupposes* a conscious activity of intellect and will. However, in this case she does not need to think to all the graces mediated in this way, since by being the Mother of the unique Mediator she mediates *de facto* all graces. *Second*, in her "*mediatio in speciali*", Mary *freely* intercedes for each soul, and in this case she *does* think to each soul and each grace in particular. This is however possible because the graces and the persons to whom she thinks of are not infinite in number, since "it is impossible for an actually infinite multitude to exist."²³ Furthermore, "*eius mediatio in speciali*" occurs while she is already in the heavenly glory, possessing the "*visio beatifica*" and having her intellect strengthened by the "*lumen gloriae*". Therefore, since an intellectual being in the heavenly glory can know in God all things which fall upon its government,²⁴ Mary also can know all persons and all graces she intercedes for. Consequently, it is not wrong to call her "Mediatrix omnium gratiarum".

AD SEPTIMUM it is to be said that this title does not decrease at all the worship paid to her Divine Son, as the veneration of the Apostles does not decrease the glory of their Master, since the Lord himself says "I am glorified in them" (Jn. 17: 10). Moreover, it is written: "The glory which Thou hast given Me I have given to them" (John 17:22), wherefrom it can be seen that the glory of the saints is but a sharing in the glory of Christ Himself (Rom. 5: 2). The text quoted from Isaiah means that nobody is to be glorified *as God*, that is, *on account of himself*. But Mary's glory is in fact the glory of her Son, for she *is the first fruit of His redemptive work*. In nobody does the power of Christ's redemption shine more than in Mary. That is why when the Church calls her "Mediatrix omnium gratiarum" Christ Himself is glorified in her.

²³ See Saint Thomas Aquinas, op. cit, Ia, q. 7, a. 4.

²⁴ Ibidem, q. 106, a. 3.