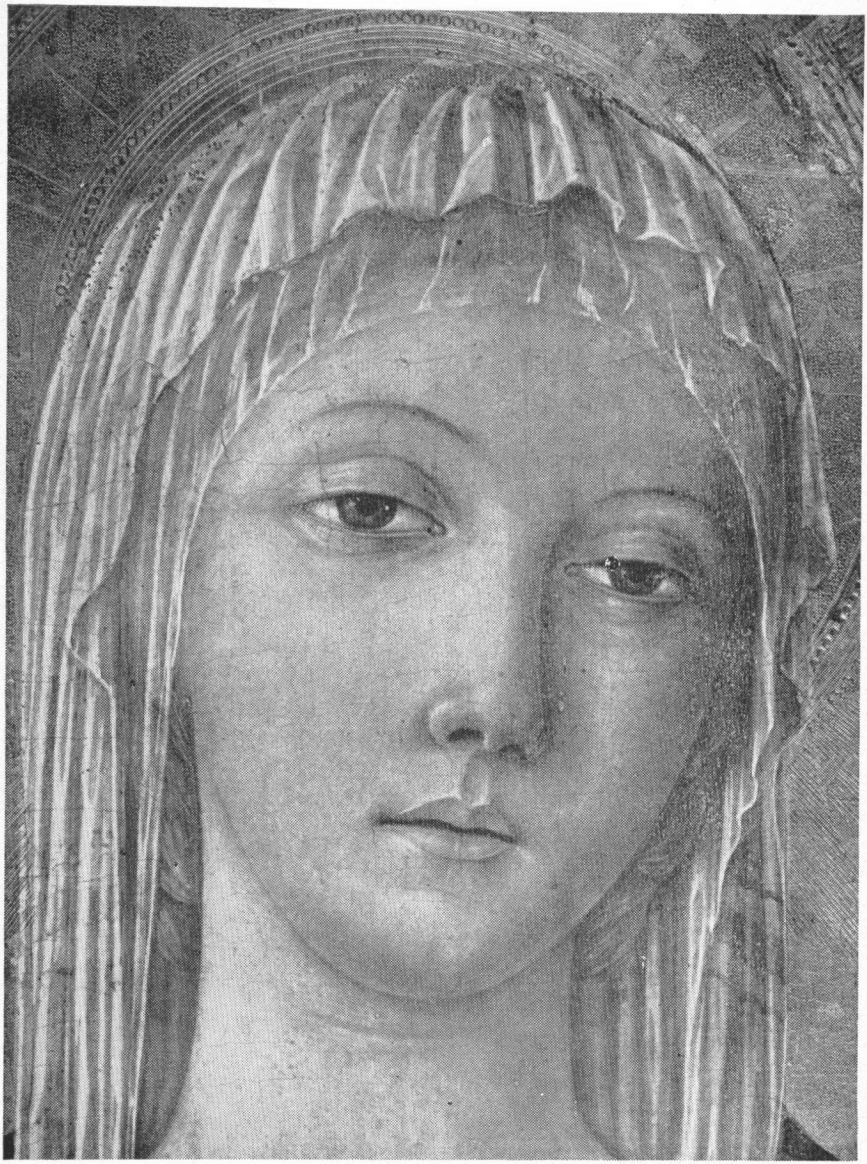

THE VIRGIN: Detail from the Assumption of the Virgin by Matteo di Giovanni

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MARY MEDIATRIX

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THE DOCTRINE of the mediation of Our Blessed Mother on our behalf before Christ, and together with Christ before the Father, is one of the most consoling truths that Holy Church presents for the contemplation of the faithful. It is a doctrine that is radically connected with a network of other doctrines, on some of which it completely depends, others of which it supposes in the manner of prenotes. Thus, the mediation of Mary is unthinkable in divorce from the redemptive Incarnation of Christ. It makes no sense if the entire doctrine of the relationship existing between primary and secondary causes is not understood. It presupposes an understanding of the spiritual maternity of Mary, of her Immaculate Conception, of the nature of her causality with regard to grace. In short, it is so intimately connected with so great a complexus of natural and supernatural truths that any attempt to explain it breezily would be at best oversimplification, at worst a distortion of a beautiful truth.

Accordingly, in this article we have established a very modest goal. All we shall do is demonstrate in what sense it can be said that Mary is a mediator between God and man. We shall analyze primarily the *ratio* of mediation, and the exercise of that mediation only to the extent that it illumines and amplifies the exposition of the *ratio*. In this endeavor we shall follow the plan followed by St. Thomas in the brief treatment he gave to the subject of mediation in the *Tertia Pars* of his *Summa Theologiae*. In this place St. Thomas is treating of the mediation of Christ. Nowhere in his works does St. Thomas treat of the mediation of Mary. The principles upon which the doctrine of her mediation rests are, nevertheless, clearly exposed in his writings.

What we shall do accordingly is to consider precisely what a mediator is, then examine the teaching of St. Thomas regarding the mediation of Christ, and finally determine how far we can go in applying the principles of Christ's mediation to that of Mary.

WHAT IS A MEDIATOR?

A mediator, very simply, is one who acts as a medium. The rôle of a mediator, says St. Thomas, is to join those between whom he is a mediator, since extremes are always united in a medium. (". . . *mediatoris officium proprie est coniungere eos inter quos est mediator: nam extrema uniuntur in medio.*"[1]) He says further 1) that a medium is removed from each of the two extremes, and 2) that the medium must communicate with each of the extremes or terms, transmitting to each things which properly belong to the other.[2]

These are aspects of a medium that are familiar to all of us. We call the deceiver who pretends to be in contact with a life beyond the grave a medium because he supposedly stands in a middle position between the living and the dead, acting as a channel of transmission between the two. Any of the modern instruments of communication is a medium, things like the radio and the telephone, each with its own positive identity, distinct from those who use them, used for transmitting messages, each constituting some third thing by which the two extremes are joined. One of the fundamental indictments commonly made of the motion picture is that it is a medium of communication which too often has nothing to communicate. The medium, then, connects parts that are not connected. The parts themselves cannot or at any rate do not join of their own initiative; there is required the intervention of some third party through whose agency the union is effected. Industrial disputes in recent times have acquainted all of us with this function of the mediator, that disinterested third party who enjoyed the confidence of both the Labor and Management disputants and who sought to accomplish the *rapprochement* between them.

CHRIST THE MEDIATOR

Our Saviour beautifully exemplified this notion of the mediator because He stood as the perfect ontological medium between God and man.[3] Since there is an infinite distance between God and the creature,

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[1] *Summa Theologiae*, III, q. 26, a. 1, c.

[2] III, q. 26, a. 2, c.

[3] Cf. Friethoff's excellent article in the *Angelicum*, 1933, p. 469: *Utrum B.V. M. dicatur Mediatrix in sensu proprio.*

there is no repugnance, in the very nature of things, in there being an infinite number of beings interposed between God and man. Only Christ, however, is both God and man. Not only God, but man; not only man, but God. Still, although this ontological character is an added perfection, it is not necessary for the basic constitution of a medium that he be a true and perfect ontological medium. In the order of mathematics, 5 is the perfect medium between 3 and 7, but this does not prejudice the fact that 4 and 6 are likewise located between 3 and 7. Christ is the perfect medium between God and man but this similarly does not prejudice the fact that there can be others. The minimum requirement is that the mediator stand apart from the two extremes which are to be united.

There is a text in St. Paul which it delights the Protestants to quote against this doctrine of the mediation of Mary. "For there is one God, and one mediator of God and men, the man Christ Jesus: Who gave Himself for a redemption for all, a testimony in due times."[4] We shall have more to say about this text later. For the present we wish to use it to invite attention to the fact that Christ was mediator not as God, but as man: ". . . the man Christ Jesus. . . ." Christ was distinct from God, not by reason of His divinity, but by reason of His humanity. This is elementary. It is required, however, that the mediator be removed from both of the extremes. Christ is distinct from God by His humanity. How will He be distinguished from men? By reason of His divinity? St. Thomas answers this for us, Christ is distinct from men, not by nature since He shares their nature, but in dignity of grace and glory.[5]

In addition to being distinct from each of the terms, in this case from God on the one hand and man on the other, Christ communicated to each what came forth from the other. This is fundamental to the essence of mediation. If an aspiring mediator cannot do this, no matter if he be truly distinct from them and otherwise qualified, he cannot exercise the office of mediator. He must be able to communicate the goods of one to the other. This power he must obtain, not from himself, but from the two parties he is seeking to reconcile, by their free acceptance of him and their delegation of him to act as mediator. Note that both parties must do this. If there be delegation by only one party, there is had nothing more than mere representation. For this reason no lawyer is a mediator. He merely represents his client. He is not usually empowered to speak for the other disputant as well.

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[4] I *Tim.* 2/5-6.

[5] III, q. 26, a. 2, c.

Christ was acceptable both to God and man. He was acceptable to God because He had been expressly sent by the Father. "As the Father has sent Me, I also send you."[6] His mission, moreover, was that of a mediator. "For God was truly in Christ, reconciling the world to himself by not reckoning against men their sins and by entrusting to us the message of reconciliation."[7] He was acceptable to man since Mary, at the time of the Annunciation, had consented for all men.[8]

It is the doctrine of St. Thomas that only Christ is the perfect mediator between God and man.[9] This is the sense, too, in which the words of St. Paul: ". . . and one mediator of God and men . . ." must be understood. One *perfect* mediator, that is to say. To understand this it is necessary to recall the original sin of Adam and Eve. Something more is demanded of the medium between God and man than is demanded of the ordinary medium. In the case of God and man, it is not merely necessary to unite parts that are not connected: it is necessary to *re-unite* parts that were once harmoniously joined and whose union was broken by the free violent act of one of the members. Man voluntarily in Adam broke his bond of union with God, an act of infinite gravity since every act of injury is measured by the dignity and nobility of the one injured. Man. therefore, immediately incurred in justice an obligation of satisfaction that he could not meet. Moreover, in order that the stain of guilt might be removed, grace was required. Whoever would mediate between God and man must, therefore, render adequate satisfaction to God and merit grace for man. Since only Christ, as the Incarnate Divine Person could render adequate satisfaction in justice to God and merit grace for man, only He could be perfectly the mediator between God and man.

For St. Thomas it follows then that everyone else is deficient in this particular mediation. Anyone else must necessarily be a creature. Immediately, therefore, and by this very fact, there can be no proportion in justice between the one offended and the offender. It follows simply and strictly that anyone else who is able to exercise mediation between God and man can do so only imperfectly and dependent on the more exalted mediation of Christ.

St. Thomas, however, does go on to say: "There is no reason why there should not be, after Christ, other secondary mediators be-

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[6] *John* 20, 21.
[7] II *Cor.* 5, 19.
[8] III, q. 30, a. 1.
[9] III, q. 26, a. 1, c.

tween God and men, who coöperate in uniting them in a ministerial and dispositive manner."[10]

On these two words, *ministerialiter* and *dispositive,* is constructed the Thomistic exposition of the mediation of Our Lady and of the Saints. Clearly, the mediation of the Blessed Virgin is made subordinate, not coordiante, to that of the incarnate Christ. Whoever is mediator *ministerialiter* or *dispositive* disposes man for the action of the principal mediator or assists in the joining of the separated parts.

St. Thomas cites as examples of what he means by ministerial and dispositive mediation the prophets of the Old Law and the priests of the Old and New Law.[11] The prophets of the Old Testament were mediators of this kind in an anticipatory way, in the sense that they prophesied the coming of the Messiah and offered sacrifices which prefigured the Sacrifice of the Cross. St. Paul, explaining his words, ". . . and one mediator of God and men, the man Christ Jesus," adds, "Who gave Himself for a redemption for all," that is, by dying on the Cross. The mediation of Christ was completed on Calvary.

The priests of the New Law may likewise be said to be mediators, continues St. Thomas, in a ministerial way. For to them have been entrusted the wonderful instruments of salvation, the sacraments, which continue Christ's mediation and unite men to God.

But St. Thomas here makes no mention of the Blessed Virgin, at a point where he might have been expected to. In the very next question he begins the consideration of the prerogatives of Mary[12] It is idle to speculate on the reason for this apparent oversight. From what he did say, nevertheless, it is manifest that any consideration of the Blessed Mother under the formality of mediator or mediatrix between God and men must be made precisely at this point, under the *ministerialiter* and *dispositive* heading. Whatever may be said of other mediators, it is perfectly clear from the teaching of both St. Paul and St. Thomas that only Christ is *simpliciter* and *perfective* mediator, to such an extent, indeed, that without Christ, there could be no other mediation, of whatever subordinate nature, between God and men.

It may be that we are explaining this truth in a more severe way than might be adopted. Basically, it is a question of emphasis. You

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[10] *"Nihil tamen prohibet aliquos alios secundum quid dici mediatores inter Deum et hominem: prout scilicet cooperantur ad unionem hominum cum Deo dispositive vel ministerialiter."* III, q. 26, a. 1, c.

[11] III, q. 26, a. 1, ad 1.

[12] III, q. 27.

can say, "He's a wonderful golfer but he beats his wife unmercifully," or "He beats his wife unmercifully but he's a wonderful golfer." The different emphasis does not at all change either of the two truths expressed in the sentence. The juxtaposition of the clauses serves only to change the emphasis. We have chosen in this article to emphasize the mediation of Christ, its primacy, its necessity. If first things belong first, it is right to do this. Loving clients of Mary will not be grieved that the subordinate mediation of Mary is properly subordinated to the mediation of her divine Son.

Having examined so far the nature of mediation in general and the conditions upon which true mediation rests, and having considered as well these conditions as they were realized in the mediation of Christ, it remains now to investigate in what way Mary can be called Mediatrix.

THE MEDIATION OF MARY

That Mary is truly Mediatrix is beyond question.[13] The ordinary magisterium of the Church has taught it for centuries, most recently and most forcefully through the composition of the Office of Our Lady Mediatrix of All Graces. "O Lord Jesus Christ, our Mediator with the Father, who hast vouchsafed to make Thy most blessed Virgin Mother our Mother also and our Mediatrix with Thyself: grant, we beseech Thee that whoever shall beg Thy favor may be gladdened by obtaining the same through her prayers."[14] Moreover, from the earliest times this mediation was understood and taught by the Fathers of the Church. Our aim, then, is not to expose the fact but to show how it happens that Mary is mediator between God and us.

We have indicated that the first requirement for a true medium is that he or she be distinct from both of the extremes that are to be conjoined. Can this be said of Mary? One of the remarks of St. Thomas comes instantly to mind to urge a negative answer to this question. St. Thomas, in showing that the Holy Ghost cannot possibly be a mediator between God and man, points out that the Holy Spirit, equal to God in all things, is not separate and distinct from the Father.[15] Remember that St. Thomas founded the mediation of

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[13] For a review of Tradition on this question, cf. Merkelbach, *Mariologia*, (Desclee, de Brouwer et Soc., Paris, 1939). pp. 314-318.

[14] Translation of the Collect taken from the Dominican Missal, Revised edition, Blackfrians, Oxford, 1948.

[15] ". . . *Spiritus Sanctus, cum sit per omnia Deo aequalis, non potest dici medius vel mediator inter Deum et homines . . .*" III, q. 26, a. 1, ad 3.

Christ upon the distinction of Christ from the Father, which in turn is built upon the humanity of Christ. Of the three Persons of the Holy Trinity, only Christ is mediator. The Holy Spirit is, to be sure, distant from man, but not from God.

Does it not seem that the same argument can be applied in the case of Our Lady? Obviously Mary is far beneath, and therefore distinct from God. But is she not one with all created nature, in the same way that the Holy Spirit is one with God? It is only by extension that Mary is called divine. As far as basic nature goes, she is indeed one with us. The answer, of course, is that Mary was elevated far above other men by her Immaculate Conception, with the consequent flood of grace that filled her soul. Moreover, she was elevated far above other men by her acceptance of the divine maternity. Distinct from God by nature, she is distinct from men in her plenitude of grace, in the honor bestowed upon her by God, in the glory she returned to Him. Merkelbach, following Cajetan, explains the point nicely by saying that Mary advanced to the very boundaries of divinity when she became Mother of God.[16]

Does she then communicate to men what is of God, and to God what is of men? Without even referring to the constant intercession of this Mother in heaven now, or to her distribution of graces—things which pertain to the exercise of mediation rather than to the *ratio* itself—surely she has given to man the Son of God. Mary is seen clearly from this vantage point as the medium by which the Word was united to human nature. She indeed communicated to man what was of God, namely, His Son. Holy Mother Church has ever taught the fittingness of our approaching to Christ by that same beautiful Mother through whom He came to us. In the Rosary we repeatedly ask: "Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us." We recognize her prerogatives as Mother of the Redeemer and we acknowledge her as our mediatrix by asking her to pray to God for us. Hence she offers to God our prayers.

That Mary was delegated mediatrix between God and man by the common consent of both parties seems difficult to establish. It is obvious that God willed her to be the Mother of His Son, and accordingly, His mediatrix in the presentation of His Son to men. But did men name her, an unknown little Jewish girl, to be their mediatrix before God? It seems not. It seems rather to be a case of men having accepted her as their mediatrix in view of God's *fait accompli.* Since God had chosen her to be His mediatrix, how could it be that men

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[16] Merkelbach, *Mariologia,* p. 313.

should seek elsewhere for someone to represent them before Christ, and together with Christ before God the Father? Who could be a better advocate for us with Christ than His own Mother? It appears, therefore, that we have asked her to be our mediatrix, as Christ certainly intended that we should. She stands in this way by mutual consent mediator between God and man not only by her physical maternity of Christ, but also by her spiritual maternity of men. She is Mediatrix because she is Mother, Mother of God, Mother of men.