

# The *mediatio unionis*:

## Elements of Mariology and Ecclesiology for our Time

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**ABSTRACT** • *Mediatio Unionis* is the title of a book which the Blessed Edward Poppe (1890–1924), a young Flemish priest, was planning to write but of which we have only a draft.<sup>2</sup> Poppe wished for the Church to proclaim Mary’s mediation as a new dogma; it seemed particularly relevant to him following so many inhumane acts of the “Great War.” This, he hoped, would bring about profound spiritual renewal in a world on the way to secularization and dehumanization. Mary’s maternal action is an ever-present concern, but especially in the current context within the Church, and also in the world, where peace among nations and true unity are urgently sought. The article exposes Poppe’s intuition concerning the Virgin Mary’s *mediatio*, and extends this theological topic by relying on my own recent research in the field of Mariology.

**KEYWORDS** • Mary, Mediatrix, Edward Poppe, Mariology, salvation, mediation, ecclesial unity, spiritual renewal, grace, Incarnation

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The beginning of the 20th century is a period of great flourishing for the Catholic Church in Belgium. The Primate, Cardinal Mercier, is a dedicated pastor famous for his resistance to the World War I German occupation; he is also a great philosopher and a strong promoter of the devotion to the Virgin Mary.

Belgium is a small country with a history somewhat similar to that of Romania: This composite nation became officially independent only in the 19th century. Before that, it had been subjected in modern times to Burgundy, Spain, Austria, and lastly to revolutionary France and the Calvinist

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<sup>2</sup> Edward Poppe, *Mediatio Unionis*, Manuscript, c. 1910–24, Diocesan Archives of Ghent, Belgium; Gerald Duroisin, “La *Mediatio Mariae* d’Edward Poppe (1890–1924): expérience poétique et développement dogmatique” (Romae: Pontificia Universitas Antonianum, 2021).

Netherlands. King Albert I was a hero during World War I. The country also courageously fought to preserve its neutrality during the Nazi invasion. Baudouin, the beloved king of Belgium, who was very Catholic, died of a heart attack in 1993; he is believed to have offered his life for the unity of his country, but he also left a marvelous example of integrity and civilization for the whole world.

At the end of the winter of 1912, Poppe arrives in Leuven (Louvain). During his philosophical studies, Poppe embraces the Aristotelian distinction between two forms of activity of the human mind, *theoria* and *praxis*. He recognizes the distinction between natural and revealed truths and how they originate in the one true God who, by his providence, makes everything turn out for the best. After several months of intensive studies in Thomism at the Catholic University, he writes a philosophical work in epistemology; he aims at reconciling intellectual knowledge with the sensible experience, in opposition to the trend of Cartesian dualism.<sup>3</sup> True realism entails a deep respect for creation and all the realities it contains.

Very early, Poppe discovers the writings of Louis-Marie Grignion de Montfort whose great Marian devotion will never cease to inspire him throughout his life. In addition, Poppe's *mediatio* arises from his own religious life and his devotion to his country. As a Belgian native, he deplores how the civil authorities stifle the new cultural movement taking shape in his country.

Poppe knows the experience of being loved by God; he notices that this love includes characteristically maternal traits, and he soon feels that it contrasts with a certain *theologia crucis* in which religion is reduced to a severe morality; in his pastoral activity, especially with children, Poppe expresses God's mercy through Mary in a wonderful way. The recent memory of the proclamation in the Church of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception

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<sup>3</sup> "Les rapports entre le Pragmatisme de William James et le Néo-Criticisme de Charles Renouvier" (Louvain : École Saint Thomas, 1913 [Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Bibliotheek Inst. Wijsbegeerte]).

(1854) and his reading of Saint Therese of Lisieux (1873–1897), with her “little way” of confidence and love, help the maturation of his thinking.<sup>4</sup>

Poppe’s *mediatio* is in fact an extension of the mystery of the Incarnation. He instinctively seeks to safeguard the common realities which he feels are beginning to be undermined. Temse, the little town where he is born and spends his youth, has a beautiful and very ancient church dedicated to Our Lady. Family values are unquestioned, and the relationship between a mother and her child is so beautifully witnessed that Poppe has only to use his experience when he has to speak about the mystery of salvation. And, when confronted with the pessimism of contemporary thinking, Poppe easily upholds the triumph of goodness and beauty!

At one point during his formation,<sup>5</sup> Poppe’s spiritual director, Father Claeys, advises him to consider Mary as merely an aid in his spiritual life. Because of this, Poppe undergoes a great crisis we find expressed in his poetry: “Now it’s quiet, now it’s bare / Now it’s dead, like in a grave.”<sup>6</sup> Later, after he has managed to free himself from this limitation imposed on him, Poppe resumes his reading of Louis-Marie de Montfort, recovers the fullness of his Marian devotion, and a great feeling of liberation ensues. During the

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<sup>4</sup> Her *Histoire d’une âme*, appeared in 1898. Therese was declared “venerable” in 1921, beatified 1923, and canonized in 1925, one year after Poppe’s death.

<sup>5</sup> The texts quoted or translated from Poppe are those reproduced by F. Van de Velde, his best biographer. Four volumes cover the entire life of Poppe: Fernand Van de Velde, “De wereld van Edward Poppe (1890–1916)” (Antwerpen: Mercator-Plantijn, 1983); “Priester Poppe op Sint-Coleta, 1916–18” (Antwerpen: Mercator-Plantijn, 1985); “Priester Poppe te Moerzeke, 1918–1922” (Antwerpen: Roeselaere, 1987); “Priester Poppe te Leopoldsburg 1922–1924” (Antwerpen: Kultur en Wetenschap, 1988). In these, we find letters and personal notes (“Geestelijke Dagboeken”). Other books of Van de Velde include: “De binnenweg van Edward Poppe en Thérèse Martin” (Moerzeke: Colofon, 1997); “De Zalige Edward Poppe Kind van Maria” (Antwerpen-Köln: Werkgroep Kultur en Wetenschap, 2001); “Edward Poppe en de Vlaamse beweging” (Veurne: De Klaproos, 1994); “Poppe Edward Joannes Maria Een terugblik op: III zijn causa” (Antwerpen: Medea dpt. Cultuur & Wetenschap, 2010); “Edward Poppe een terugblik op: II zijn uitstraling” (Antwerpen: Medea dpt. Cultuur & Wetenschap, 2008); “Verlangen en Vervulling Het levensverhaal van Edward J.M. Poppe 1890–1924” (Antwerpen: WKW, 1991).

<sup>6</sup> “Nu is het stil, nu is het kaal, / Nu is het dood, lijk in een graf.” (Van de Velde, “Priester Poppe op Sint-Coleta,” 41.)

Marian Congress of Brussels in September 1921, with a striking expression, he affirms: “We live with Mary as the child at the breast.”<sup>7</sup>

As a priest, Poppe continues to study the Church Fathers. The fundamental Mariological dogma is that of *Mater Dei*; Christ’s salvation always remains central; Mary’s maternity is real, and all her action is “in Christo.” Conversely, the deepening of the theology of the Holy Spirit and all the gifts coming from this divine Person highlight Mary’s dignity, her free will, and autonomy, according to the principle that “grace does not destroy nature but perfects it.”<sup>8</sup>

Mary is really Mother, and her beneficial action is inscribed in her deep physical relationship to the Redeemer. She is not merely “passive,” as she was seen in many of the writings of Antiquity and into the Middle Ages; Poppe likes to focus his attention on her person: Her transparency and her humility favor her action as Mediatrix. He feels that the theological conception of Mary as a mere instrument cannot be held. Moreover, unlike in the dualistic Cartesian conception, personhood has a deep substantial individual content, and its religious dimension is always taken into account.

In a letter to his brother, where Edward explained his thesis entitled *Mediatio Unionis*, he stressed that Mary’s mediation is “relativa ad Christum,”<sup>9</sup> whereas the classical scholastic thought would not go beyond “subordinata.” This means for Poppe that Our Lady plays a part of her own when distributing graces. He sees this from the perspective of the faithful, who are Mary’s children, and whom she unites to the Savior. She is the “greatest light, the Light of the world.”<sup>10</sup> His devotion is not merely sentimental. As a woman, in the Mystical Body of Christ, Mary is the “heart.” Her close relation to the Holy

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<sup>7</sup> In several churches in Belgium, we can read the inscription “Monstra te esse Mediatricem (Show thyself to be Mediatrix),” early 20<sup>th</sup> and perhaps 19<sup>th</sup> century, which is certainly inspired by the more common expression “Monstra te esse Matrem (Show thyself to be a mother),” found at least as early as the 9<sup>th</sup> century in the hymn “Ave Maris Stella.”

<sup>8</sup> “Gratia non tollat naturam, sed perficiat.” See St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, Q. 1, 8, ad 2.

<sup>9</sup> Van de Velde, “Priester Poppe te Leopoldsburg 1922–1924,” 746. This letter is the main direct source of knowledge of the draft outline of Poppe’s book.

<sup>10</sup> See Van de Velde, “Priester Poppe te Leopoldsburg 1922–1924,” 308.

Spirit enables her to act secretly in the interior of the faithful. If the 20th century is a time for reflecting on the nature of the Church, on the relationships within this Mystical Body of Christ, Blessed Edward can really be seen as a pioneer when he introduces his *mediatio* in theology!

As far as the *unio* is concerned, it has ever been an ideal of the utmost importance, to families, societies, and among Christians: Jesus prayed “that they all may be one, as thou, Father, in me, and I in thee; that they also may be one in us.”<sup>11</sup> Poppe lives after the First Vatican Council, when the pope is positioned at the center of attention. This is still made clear some decades later (1944), when Pius XII affirms that “the work of faith and charity would remain incomplete and powerless to establish unity firmly in Christ Jesus, unless it rested upon that unshaken rock upon which the Church is divinely founded, that is, upon the supreme authority of Peter and his Successors.”<sup>12</sup> The Pope further stressed the importance of the consecration to Our Lady and of her intercession, which we might see as an integral part of this “internal” and “universal” unification. Whilst the concept of “patronage” is used to describe Mary’s mediational relationship for humankind before God,<sup>13</sup> Poppe’s *mediatio* seems more personal, relational or social. On the other hand, it differs from J. A. Möhler in the 19<sup>th</sup> century who, for the sake of the “unio,” drowns out the proper characters of individual persons.<sup>14</sup>

Mary’s *mediatio* is no real novelty in the development of dogma; the person of Mary has an essential role in the mystery of salvation. Analogically, the arguments against Mary as Mediatrix with Christ are the same as those against the Person of the Holy Ghost with the Trinity. For a description of this, St. Basil the Great of Caesarea is famous for his “Treatise” on the third divine Person composed toward the end of his life (d. 379), in which he

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<sup>11</sup> See Jn 17:21.

<sup>12</sup> See “*Orientalis Ecclesiae*,” n° 28 (9.4.1944).

<sup>13</sup> See *ibid*, n° 40.

<sup>14</sup> See Johann Adam Möhler, *Die Einheit in der Kirche, oder Das Prinzip des Katholizismus* (Geiselman: Cologne, 1957).

defended the dignity and divinity of the Holy Spirit.<sup>15</sup> Because the Macedonians, or “Pneumatomachians,” considered the Holy Spirit to be a mere “servant,” they could not accept a doxology in which the Spirit is equally honored with (καὶ) the Father and the Son.<sup>16</sup> Holding the Holy Spirit to be the greatest creature among the Angels, these heterodox theologians reasoned that even if the Angels are spiritual creatures, they remain much less than the “Lord of life.” Opposing these, Basil would affirm the equality of the three Eternal and Uncreated Divine Persons and the Oneness of God.

At the time, a suitable expression for the relation between the Divine Persons had still to be found: When Basil was once presiding over a ceremony in the Church of Caesarea, as he reports in his “Treatise,” some accused the bishop of using “strange, contradictory expressions,” when they heard him pronounce the doxology “Glory to the Father, *with* (καὶ) the Son, *with* (καὶ) the Holy Spirit,” rather than saying “*by* the Son, *in* the Holy Spirit.”<sup>17</sup> According to these Caesarians, describing each Divine Person as “with” rather than “by” or “in” the other Person, Basil was granting too much space to the third Person. However, through his doxology Basile was only developing the riches of the ineffable divine mystery. The Trinitarian affirmation that the Spirit is inseparable from the Father and the Son can be analogically transposed to Mariology to show how the Mother is not “alien” to her Son. Like the Holy Spirit who is “with” (καὶ) the Father and the Son, Mary is “with” (καὶ) her Son, even if there is here no oneness of being between the two.

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<sup>15</sup> The quotations we shall give are translated from the Greek text of B. Pruche: Basile de Césarée, “Sur le Saint-Esprit” (Paris: Cerf, 2002). See also: Hildebrand Stephen M., “The Trinitarian Theology of Basil of Caesarea A Synthesis of Greek Thought and Biblical Truth” (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 2007); Radde-Gallwitz Andrew, “Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa, and the Transformation of Divine Simplicity” (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Silvas Anna M., “The Asketikon of St Basil the Great” (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

<sup>16</sup> Macedonius was a 4th century bishop of Constantinople contemporary to Basil who held this position. Πνευματομάχοι, from late Greek, meaning Spirit-fighters. Also called Semi-Arians or Tropici.

<sup>17</sup> See Basile de Césarée, “Sur le Saint-Esprit,” 256–58.

Basil also fought against Eunomius' conception that God the Father, the Unbegotten, can in no way engender; from such a system, no real mediation is possible. Basil's *κοινωνία* (communion) enabled him to preserve the truth of the mystery of the three Persons, and it is significant that Basil used the same word to characterize the relationship between Jesus and Mary: between them there is a "community (*κοινωνία*) of nature."<sup>18</sup> "Nature (*φύσις*)" must of course be understood here as the human nature, but this is rich of future theological developments. Moreover, in Basil we still find another important concept, that of the "economy" which unfolds the divine mystery of salvation, in a more intimate way than in Irenaeus, because it introduces the soul "into the familiarity (*οἰκεῖωσις*) of the Spirit."<sup>19</sup> Consequently, by giving birth to the Savior, the Virgin Mary also enters into this "familiarity" with the whole economy of salvation, assuming an important role.

In Eastern Christianity, the "icon" is very important; it is no mere representation of heavenly realities. Basile's famous principle is that "the honor due to the image goes to the prototype,"<sup>20</sup> and this "prototype" is no "ob-ject" but is personal. He also liked to comment and dwell on the biblical conception of man "created in the image of God." For him, the "image" is constantly being perfected, but it should not be confused with the "technological" or "artistic" activity that brings about a glimpsed model at the end of a process of creation. Our Savior is no mere "ex-pression" (*λόγος προφορικός*). Basil's thought has been a rich source of inspiration for Poppe's thesis; it approached Augustine's "mentalism" with its emphasis on the interiority of the spiritual life, as we are now going to see.

During his formation, Poppe also studied Augustine of Hippo (354–430) who has contributed several theological dimensions which can be applied to our consideration of mediation. Like for Basil above and the whole of Catholic tradition, the Holy Spirit is sent by Christ, who promised that he would

<sup>18</sup> See Basile de Césarée, "Sur le Saint-Esprit," 284.

<sup>19</sup> See Basile de Césarée, "Sur le Saint-Esprit," 326.

<sup>20</sup> See Basile de Césarée, "Sur le Saint-Esprit," 406. Poppe knew and quoted this phrase of St. Basile, and he liked to remember it as a principle of authentic devotion.

not leave us as “orphans”,<sup>21</sup> but Augustine especially dealt with the action of the Spirit dwelling within the Christian soul, and he wrote on that his “Confessions”, a very famous work of the end of the 4th century. Afterwards, he deepened our understanding of the mystery of the Holy Trinity and described the Holy Spirit as a *donum* (gift). This is a step further towards making more explicit the riches of God’s mercy in the mystery of the Incarnation where Our Lady, who was filled with grace, has a great role to play.

Mary’s Immaculate Conception would not be proclaimed until much later than Augustine, but the great Latin doctor already spoke about the *civitas Dei* as a “Mother.” When this idea is be transposed to Mary, the *mediatio* of the Virgin acquires immense proportions. Moreover, Augustine’s controversies with the Donatists compelled him to go beyond the “external” element of religious experience and to seek “purity” in the light of faith and in a supernatural sphere where the grace of God operates. As an outstanding mystic, Augustine understood the “universality” of the *Catholica* much better than his opponents. His mighty love runs through all his work, and it is more encompassing than Ambrose’s “formalism” which excludes any help for the Savior.<sup>22</sup>

The Members of the Mystical Body of Christ are not only as citizens relative to the larger πόλις, but are also persons relative to one another. This occurs within the marital bond in the family; here, the African pastor can then stress the dignity of the persons and the *fides*, the fidelity towards one another. Concerning the matrimonial contract, despite any cultural prejudices, Augustine in no way devalued the free will of the wife, which is also an important element for the Mariological development. Finally, by excluding any *divortium*, this sacrament is a wonderful source of unity.<sup>23</sup> However, all this will

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<sup>21</sup> See Jn 14:18.

<sup>22</sup> “Jesus non egebat adiutore ad omnium redemptionem (Jesus did not need any help for the Redemption of all).” See Ambroise de Milan, “Traité sur l’Evangile de S. Luc,” (Paris: Cerf, 1976) 200.

<sup>23</sup> Variations of this analogy of spousal mediation are found throughout Sacred Scripture: From the Canticle of Canticles where the Church is the lover of her Beloved Christ, to the New Testament parallel which demonstrates the matrimonial union to be a symbol of the greater union of the Church to her Spouse, the individual Christian to Christ, or, by



be deepened much later after the time of Augustine whose Mariology will be enriched.

The Middle Ages was a deeply religious era. The title of *Mater misericordiae* attributed to Mary at that time is a source of progress toward enhancing the work of Our Lady in the mystery of Redemption: She is Mother of Christ, and Mother of the Christian for whom she can mediate mercy from her Divine Son. For the faithful, there is a closer relationship to Mary. In the Cartesian system, man is considered alone; with the stress on his “conscience”, he is at the center of the universe and “reconstructs” it. On the contrary, for Saint Catherine of Siena, whom Poppe liked very much, the divine Word incarnate is all the Wisdom she is striving for, and conscience, following a strong medieval image, is like the dog which barks to awaken the man who sinks into sin.<sup>24</sup> In her “Dialogo”, the Italian mystic also highlights the fundamental link that connects humans to each other: Our neighbor is even the necessary means of our spiritual progress, a key idea also present in Poppe. *Unio* is then by no means to be equated with a sort of standardization – a temptation to which a human being is exposed. According to me, it even goes further than the principle of “unity in diversity.”

The *mediatio* certainly cannot fit the requirements of an unnatural world. We remember Lear, that old king of Britain, who in the middle of the storm, returns to the true world after glimpsing the vanity of artificial relationships: Through Lear, Shakespeare then speaks of the “thing itself,” sensing as a poet what Poppe would later develop as a theologian.<sup>25</sup> Only after Lear has found

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extension, Mary to Christ, since Mary is the Christian most perfectly united to Christ. See, for example, Eph 5:22–33.

<sup>24</sup> Marcel De Corte, the great Belgian thinker speaks of the “hypostasierung of consciousness” leading to subjectivism: “Starting with Kant, all morality, instead of depending on the virtue of prudence, will depend on conscience. It is from the bosom of conscience, separated from all that it is not, that moral values will spring. The objectivity of prudence will gradually be replaced by the subjectivity of individual conscience; hence the origin of the moral chaos in which contemporary humanity is struggling (....)” See “De la prudence: la plus humaine des vertus,” (Jarzé (Maine-et-Loire, France): Dominique Martin Morin, 1974) 4.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. William Shakespeare, ed. G. Blakemore Evans, *The Riverside Shakespeare*, vol. 2 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974), *King Lear*, Act 3, Scene 4, line 104.

self-knowledge and reunited with the others, the same communion (κοινωνία) of which St. Basil speaks, makes the king sane and healthy again. In Belgium, a heavenly reminder of the need to be grounded in reality and to develop genuine relationships is when, after Poppe's death, in 1933, Our Lady appears at Banneux under the title of the "Virgin of the poor," a title which suggests to modern man the need for living again the first of the Beatitudes revealed by Our Lord!

During his formation, Poppe encounters the opinion of a Ghent theologian, Kamiel Van Crombrugghe (1876–1940), who holds that because of the need to avoid drawing attention away from Christ, in the process of mediation, "there is no room for Mary."<sup>26</sup> In his view, all honor must go to Christ, leaving then none for Mary. Instinctively Poppe feels that this is not in conformity with true "natural" theology: If Mary is Jesus's Mother, she cannot be excluded from his "familiarity," as Basil says. The *unio* also comes from "the inside." Following St. Augustine and the whole of Christian tradition, Poppe stresses how the interior life is a prerequisite for true charity; his "binnenweg,"<sup>27</sup> indicates an "inner way" in the interior life, and there is an extension of love to all mankind.<sup>28</sup>

Because of his sinful condition, man must pass through a process of purification in order to detach himself from external goods; his true happiness is not found in these realities considered as self-sufficient. Poppe's *mediatio* is not directed to lifeless idols; on the contrary, it takes place on the level of relationships between existing people. Before his Creator, upon whom he entirely depends, man must exit from himself; moreover, after the "original fault," all attention has now to be directed to the Savior who redeems humanity from sin. In Christ, man regains a relational plenitude in himself. In

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<sup>26</sup> See Van de Velde, "Priester Poppe te Moerzeke, 1918–1922, 472." Kamiel Van Crombrugghe is a theologian who taught Poppe in Ghent; according to him, Mary's mediation cannot be "physical."

<sup>27</sup> This word in the Dutch language means "the inner way." Poppe's idea is close to the "little way" of Saint Therese of the Child Jesus.

<sup>28</sup> In Banneux, salvation is also promised to "all nations." Banneux is in Belgium (in the Liège province); it is the "Belgian Lourdes".

contrast, with their godly appearances, the celestial beings, which have great importance in antiquity, do not have a human face, or they present only a mask of humanity; here no mediational relationship can be fully constitutive.

The Middle Ages ends when lawyers returned to Roman law. By the 14th century, we find Catherine of Siena, during her stay in Avignon, who experiments with different modes of government in the royal chancellery, and which, through their pragmatic perspective, anticipate some of the modern practices of government: Language is not referred to the human being, or simply to reality; it sinks into a hollow rhetoric that imposes an undifferentiated mediational order, people are no longer taken into consideration, and material interests prevail. Authority, which becomes merely the instrument of a political order, recalls the Irenaean “knots” or the impersonal technocracy of the contemporary world!

True wisdom is already praised in the Old Testament. The early Church Father, Clement of Alexandria (c. 150 – c. 215), while upholding the supernatural value of the Christian faith, already recognizes the divine gift of Greek philosophy which is an “icon” of Truth. Similarly, for Poppe following this tradition, the New Eve, ever-living and Life-giving “Mediatrice,” is the new paradigm who prolongs Providence’s gift in the future centuries. The understanding of this title of Mary is enlightened by her act of free will, which is at the same time a deference to God’s will. Without her humble disposition, any action of her, in the economy of salvation, would be a mere construct. However, the concept of “mediation” for Mary does not directly refer to the theological atonement which the word “redemption” entails. What is highlighted seems to be rather the gift, which goes along with what Mary really is: “full of grace.”<sup>29</sup>

In the view of St. Irenaeus (2nd c.), or St. Ambrose (4th c.), Mary’s obedience is not “perfect”, in this sense that it remains on a “moral” level; and her status is similar to that of the child heir. If Mary were subject to this limitation, she would belong to the identical predicament of every other human

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<sup>29</sup> Lk 1:28.

who, according to St. Paul, “differs in no way from a slave,”<sup>30</sup> and who awaited a fulfillment yet to come. Tradition, however, deepened Mary’s dignity yet further, explaining that she is immaculately conceived, therefore born sinless, and that she remains perpetually sinless. She is the most perfect among the created persons, and is entirely carried by the grace of God, once she gives her assent to the announcement of her vocation. The doctrine of the Roman Church defines Mary’s conception as immaculate. From the Annunciation and Incarnation of Jesus inside her womb, a real motherhood begins for her, and the divine action of the Holy Spirit who is Creator cannot be emphasized enough: A mysterious personal and special grace is given to Mary; it comes for God, whose Love extends infinitely. His *Amor* is indeed *diffusivum sui*.

The *mediatio* on the part of Mary is no abstract construct. Our Lady manifests herself as Mother and communicates the living Existence. As far as the supreme Being is concerned, divine Nature is, in the strict sense, incommunicable. Incommunicability for a Person who is God, however, does not constitute an ontological withdrawal of the divine Being. On the contrary, the distinction constitutes a mutual gift, and therefore a continuously “supplementary” immanent Light and Love. This seems “obvious” for the Third Person “spirated” by the Father and the Son, and constituting their reciprocal Love, while fully being between the *Ingenitus* and the *Genitus*. Especially through the Spirit working in her, Mary by her *mediatio* hence offers easier access to God’s favor and mercy.

Sacred Scripture notes that “there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.”<sup>31</sup> This key quotation stresses the humanity of Christ as the means of mediation. On the other hand, we cannot ignore that there are many created mediators, functioning as secondary causes willed by God in the economy of salvation, including Angels and Saints of the militant and triumphant Church. In a special way the Church that Christ founded, through its ordained sacred ministers, and through the sacraments and tradition of

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<sup>30</sup> Gal 4:1.

<sup>31</sup> 1 Tim 2:5.

Revelation, mediates between God and men. As Eve becomes the channel through which grace is lost, in a most special manner, the Virgin Mary, by all appearances, has been willed by God, to be now the person through whom all the graces of God come to mankind. She, who gives the Mediator to the world, is chosen from among the daughters of Israel. She presides over the union of the Son of the Highest with the humanity who is to be saved. Her intervention is between the Almighty and indigent people. If we think again about Mary as the New Eve, when S. Paul speaks about the “one mediator” and the “man Christ Jesus,”<sup>32</sup> in order to maintain the harmony between man and woman, we are inclined to say: “There is one God, there is one mediator, Jesus, and one mediatrix, Mary.”

Compared with the classical authority of the Mother, in St. Catherine of Siena, we notice Mary’s close “physical” communion with Jesus. Like many of her contemporary theologians, St. Catherine ignored the Immaculate Conception. In the “Dialogo”, the powerful image of the bridge symbolizes the Mediator. Under that bridge there are people struggling with the “knots” that humanity has contracted. On the bridge, pilgrims walk freely, each having one’s own vocation. Mary is one of them, but she benefits from a “amore singolare” from the Father.<sup>33</sup> By the light and fire of her charity, and the oil of her humility, Mary “drew and inclined his [the Father’s] divinity”<sup>34</sup> to come into her. We are witnessing here a reversal due to the initiative of the Virgin, and unlike in Augustine, the person of Mary is highlighted. The close relationship between the Savior and her Mother appears when Catherine praises Mary, saying, that “your [Mary’s] flesh suffering in the Word, the world was saved.”<sup>35</sup> In his Mariology, Poppe would never forget this “physical” union.

The Dutch priest not only embodied an existence of deep Marian piety, but he also laid the groundwork for in-depth reflection. Confronted as one is

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<sup>32</sup> 1 Tim 2:5.

<sup>33</sup> Caterina da Siena, “*Le Orazioni*,” 120.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid. The idea is so strong that *the word “divinity” does not appear, but “humility,”* in the Latin text: “*Inclinasti humilitatem ipsius ad veniendum in te (....)*” (Caterina da Siena, “*Le Orazioni*,” 121.)

<sup>35</sup> See Caterina da Siena, “*Le Orazioni*,” 118.

with so many artificial distractions, including even such devices as so-called Artificial “Intelligence,” Poppe’s prophetic *mediatio* offers the religious soul of the modern era a liberation from the new knots of modern “science” which tempt humans to seek redemption through some form of gnosis, rather than from the personal and all-loving God. Within this unnatural atmosphere, even human relationships tend to reproduce less humane, and increasingly robotic, conversations. Man forgets that he is created in the image of God and prefers to follow malignant-minded false doctors. From this dialogue, no real salutary mediation can ensue. The closed world of gnosis plunges human beings into a “discreet” representation of the universe, i.e., the latter becomes a “construct.” Instead of recognizing the different created beings as they are, and God as the Creator and Redeemer, man makes himself the center of all things. In the process of transformation in which he is engaged, one’s life goal becomes only a question of developing the appropriate algorithms; a new man, a new society must come into existence – all this being a parody of the Redemption brought by the Savior.

The “spontaneous” procession of the divine Persons plunges us into a great mystery which helps us to understand a little the Saints’ impetuous love during their lives. In God, there is an “action” of one subject upon another, or rather in another; this plurality of Persons cannot be accepted in the Neoplatonic unity. But God is three real Persons, or He is not! These are no “accidents” in Him; as it has just been recalled, they are really distinct, without prejudice to monotheism. The being of Jesus has the “substance” or the subsistence of the mystery of God. The Father and the Son are not one Person, although they are one Being. Because human nature is not perfectly simple like God’s nature, human relations and actions, on the contrary, are accidental to our being, and interpersonal relationships with others are also integral to the fulfillment of human personhood in the economy of salvation.

As close as Mary is to her divine Son, she is of course ontologically unequal to him: She is a created person. There is a strong spiritualist temptation to Monophysitism which strives for a unity or construct that satisfies the human mind. Mary, as a created being, does not identify herself with her

essence; she nevertheless constitutes a subject. Her human nature remains what it is. She enjoys full autonomy and freedom. She is not passive but eminently active – how else could she also be part of the communion of Saints? Her *mediatio* goes beyond a “moral” obedience because through grace she has a particular living *unio* with a divine Person, who is her Son.

The fourth Gospel is invaluable in order to better know Mary during Jesus’s last moments on the Cross: “Now, there stood at the foot of the Cross of Jesus, his mother... When Jesus had therefore seen his mother and the disciple standing whom he loved, he saith to his mother: Woman behold thy son. After that, he saith to the disciple: Behold thy mother...”<sup>36</sup> Western Christianity has traditionally located this moment as Christ’s last and marvelous gift: His Mother offered to humanity. Jesus at that moment sees his “Mother.” She deserves this title, despite what Gnostics think. Jesus’ gaze is important. The “Good News” thus shows the Man-God who honors the one who, as his Mother, is closest to him on earth. The spiritual legacy that Christ confers on Mary is of great importance. Her maternal “function” is not affected by an abandonment or by a cessation due to death; on the contrary, the evangelist brings out the messianic accomplishment. The Virgin, the first named as present at the Cross, shows a dignity and a strength expressed by the verb “to stand.” She is also the first to be seen by Jesus, and then given to “the disciple whom Jesus loved.”<sup>37</sup>

The feelings of Jesus and Mary are surely very intense at that moment. Mary becomes, as Mother, according to the developments of piety, a figure of protection or of maternal presence with a young man and with all humanity. This important moment at the Cross, which is no happenstance, is a great consolation for faithful souls, with theological depth and a sacramental meaning. The mediation that Mary exercises emanates freely from her entire person. She was asked for her consent some thirty years earlier; with greater reason, her *mediatio* is now fully deliberate and it spreads within the primitive Christian community.

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<sup>36</sup> See Jn 19:25–27.

<sup>37</sup> Jn 13:23.

The image of the disciple who remains, while the Mediator is about to disappear, is eloquent. Only a few people are present. With due respect to St. Augustine, the attention is also on the Mother, whereas John is qualified as “disciple” and is situated “close to her.” A few hours before, the numerous and noisy crowd had demanded the death of Jesus. Cruel, dehumanized world and exchanges without any mediation of life! At the sacrifice of the Cross, John is alone among the chosen disciples; he represents all men, as the Virgin at the Annunciation pronounces her *fiat* in the name of all humankind. He is a member of the nascent Church destined for all peoples. Mary’s being goes beyond the symbol; so does the life she continues to engender. To her, as the Mother, falls a new mission of a great spiritual order. The Church is endowed with the power of the Holy Spirit, and Mary herself is enriched by the gifts of Pentecost. Through her *mediatio* the prophecy comes true: “He has filled the hungry with good things.”<sup>38</sup>

The traditional litanies of the Catholic Church, especially the “Litanies of the Blessed Virgin Mary,” where the titles of the Virgin appear endlessly, similarly belongs to the register of the icon-image. We know how much the artist strives to generate a work that expresses what he is ineffably experiencing; existential knowledge is not achieved without an “ex-expression”, but the artistic creation – even going so far as being universal – always falls short of the ideal. By multiplying their creations in the hope of producing a masterpiece, poets, writers, and composers are easily accused of idolatry, as are the pious souls!

The Passion is the moment of Christ’s mediation. This time in history is recorded by the last evangelist. The Passion does not have the “false” character of the theater, and the people present at the foot of the Cross are those of an authentically relational, and not a fictional universe. While the “world” neither sees nor knows the Paraclete, the persons mentioned with Jesus during his Passion have an authentic relation with one another. As for the Mediatrix, we contemplate her – “alive” –, while her Son dies. She sustains the disciple,

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<sup>38</sup> Lk 1:53.



and then later the members of the Church, whom the Holy Spirit enlivens at Pentecost. She has a mission which is not essentially different from that of the apostles, but which is proper to her. Her presence at the Cenacle, as we have seen, is noteworthy.

When theology unfolds in the form of a poeticization of the universe, the conceptual content is “indifferent,” the bridge or the vine in itself having no importance. What counts is what these existential objects evoke, contrary to the empirical or philosophical knowledge of beings where, for example, although a tree might be compared metaphorically to a man, a tree is not a real man, and where the individual that is really Peter is not to be confused with another disciple who is not Peter. When there occurs within the lifetime of this individual an important (though accidental, relational) change, a distinction is even made between Simon and Peter. In the latter, the new function comes under a divine authority, man being unable to arrogate to himself a power that exceeds him. In this case, by Christ’s commission, “thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church...,” Simon is transformed from an ordinary man to the possessor of the office of the papacy which empowers him to lead Christ’s Church forward in his name.<sup>39</sup>

However, Jesus does not change his Mother’s name. The multiplication of titles (e.g., Spouse, Empress) which we observe in the Litanies and throughout history, only highlights the inability to “actualize” the glimpsed model which is the only “universal” or “real” thing. This Idea, however, does not achieve the “communication of idioms” and does not yet constitute a saving mediation. The authentically universal character of mediation cannot be contained in this human experience and in external works produced, however abundant they may be.

Poppe’s *mediatio unionis* belongs, therefore, above all, to the world of faith. The young Belgian theologian, however, takes the opposite position of an anti-intellectualist: Abstractions are harmful only when they lock the human mind in itself; if not, they are an ordinary means of human knowledge that reaches the universal, starting with acquired experience of the senses.

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<sup>39</sup> Cf. Mt 16: 16–18.

Mary's person and actions are known to us from the Scriptures, from our life as Christians, and from what the Church teaches us. She then appears not only a model. She performs an act of freedom that extends to all of humanity. The divine Child – the Logos made flesh – that she engenders, is the source of universal salvation. St. Basil, in the 4th century, already affirms that there is “no mediation of an interval” as regards “the physical union (on the part of) the Father and the Son,”<sup>40</sup> there is a familiarity between Jesus and Mary. Catherine sometimes speaks of the Holy Spirit as “mediator,” i.e., the divine Person unites the divine nature with the human nature. When Mary, as Mother, presides over this union, we note the “physical” attachment she has to her Son and to the members of his Mystical Body. Finally, when the Sienese calls the Spirit a “servant,” the bond between Mariology and the third divine Person is made obvious. Mary's mission therefore acquires an unimaginable dimension.

The theologoumenon of the *mediatio unionis* emerges between different tendencies, for instance, one that considers the role of motherhood and another that exalts femininity. The Holy Spirit through its gifts, however, is not dependent on the limits of the creature, and, while respecting the nature of the latter, it “perfects” it in an admirable way. Temporal modalities are also part of the economy of the Incarnation. At Pentecost, Our Lady is enriched with a supernatural and universal mission. She responds to this grace as a free person.

While Catherine succeeded in bringing the papacy back to Rome and reconciling the city-states, as far as the *unio*, is concerned, a more crucial and crucifying objective confronted her, namely, resolving the Great Western Schism.<sup>41</sup> By her sacrifice, we understand better Mary's suffering. Poppe also experienced the division of his people in his very flesh, when trying to reconcile the different parties in the linguistic, cultural and political conflicts of his country. Unlike the later nineteenth century age described by H.D. Thoreau

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<sup>40</sup> See Basile de Césarée, “Sur le Saint-Esprit,” 288.

<sup>41</sup> History records this struggle as officially beginning with the election of Antipope Clement VII in the fall of 1378, and St. Catherine dies in 1380 offering her life for the unity of the Church.

(1817–1862) when “you can opt out of the system,”<sup>42</sup> in the Italy of St. Catherine, society is organic.

Moreover, in Catherine one finds social justice and moral objective truth,<sup>43</sup> without which no true unity can be achieved. Man is a rational creature; the pilgrims on the bridge we spoke about are united “from within.” In the era of rationalism, as a person, man – the “thing itself” for Shakespeare – finds himself absorbed in the new world of science; when realities such as “link,” “chain” or numbers are present, they are but a secularized version of the poetic metaphors of St. John Damascene and St. Bernard.

Progressing in time, we meet Pierre de Bérulle (1575–1629), founder of the Congregation of the Oratory (ordained a priest in the last year of the sixteenth century), whose writings are well-known to Poppe. In his writings, the French cardinal very often speaks about unity. His thought reflects the philosophical tendencies of his time, with the birth of modern idealism. In Bérulle we even find a certain depersonalization of Mary as a Sovereign with the subjects devoted to her; there is not much room for a personal action of her own. Bérulle’s idea is that of the Father, in heaven, and of the Mother, on earth: they are holy and linked together. Mary’s dignity is reinforced, she has tremendous “maternal rights” which establish Jesus’s “dependence.” In many texts, Bérulle puts such an emphasis on the authority of the Mother that Jesus’s submission to her often also sounds artificial. Poppe retained from Bérulle a great concern for unity and the person of Mary, while his own approach was more empirical and well-founded.

Poppe’s greatest influence was undoubtedly the Breton missionary St. Louis-Marie Grignion de Montfort (1673–1716). His main work on the devotion to the Blessed Virgin was published more than one century after his

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<sup>42</sup> Caterina da Siena, “*Le Orazioni*,” 190. Jeannette Winterson, “The Gap of Time” (London: Vintage, 2015), 175

<sup>43</sup> In Catherine’s writings, there are “dati dogmatici quasi scolastici (almost scholastic dogmatic data).” See Giocondo Pagliara, “Caterina da Siena,” (Bologna: Edizioni Dehoniane Bologna, 2015), 19.

death.<sup>44</sup> If Poppe had lived longer, he would have translated Montfort into his mother tongue. With his favorite author, Poppe shared the idea that Mary must be known and revealed by the Holy Spirit, and that the consequence of this would be a greater love for Christ.<sup>45</sup> In St. Louis-Marie's French lyrical devotion, "life" rhymes with "Mary": "Qui trouve Marie, trouve la Vie (He who finds Mary will find life.)"<sup>46</sup> Poppe cannot exploit in his text the genius of Montfort's language, but he affirms that his *mediatio* is "embracing life" ("levensomvattend").<sup>47</sup> For the French missionary, Mary's mediation is necessary, otherwise "Jesus Christ is not known as he should be."<sup>48</sup> He also adds that he does not believe "that a person can acquire an intimate union with Our Lord and a perfect fidelity to the Holy Spirit, without a very close ('très grande') union with the Most Blessed Virgin."<sup>49</sup> The term "union" appears here twice, which links Jesus and Mary in a particular way; it is not only "iconic," but the Virgin sets in motion what comes under the register of the person and of freedom. We also note the pneumatological "framework" in Montfort's Mariology, compared to that of Bérulle's; the attention is now more directed towards the third Person, and Mary, who is "full of grace," benefits from this.

Thanks to Montfort, Poppe made a definitive transition from the *theologia crucis* to the *theologia gratiae*. Mary fashions "living images of God," and she does this "at little expense and in a short time."<sup>50</sup> Marian devotion is

an easy path, it is a path that Jesus Christ paved in coming to us, and where there is no obstacle to reach him; one can, indeed, arrive at the divine union by other paths, but it will be by many more crosses, strange deaths and with much difficulty (...) by the way of Mary, one passes more gently and more quietly (...)<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> See Louis-Marie Grignion de Montfort, "Traité de la Vraie Dévotion à Marie," 48–671, *Œuvres complètes* (Paris: Seuil, 1966).

<sup>45</sup> See Grignion de Montfort, "Traité," 515.

<sup>46</sup> See Grignion de Montfort, "Traité," 516.

<sup>47</sup> See Van de Velde, "Priester Poppe te Leopoldsburg 1918–1922," 589.

<sup>48</sup> See Grignion de Montfort, "Traité," 494.

<sup>49</sup> See Grignion de Montfort, "Traité," 511.

<sup>50</sup> See Grignion de Montfort, "Traité," 662.

<sup>51</sup> See Grignion de Montfort, "Traité," 582–583.

St. Louis-Marie did not address the question of the of the *Virgo sacerdos*.<sup>52</sup> If Mary is “Mediatrice of all graces,” must she not have that of the priesthood? Although Poppe was first influenced by this common misconception from the French School, at the end of his life he changed his mind, and we do not think that, for him, the action of the Mediatrice was limited within the sacramental framework, when he wrote that “the name of Mediatrice is only the name of Mother applied to the work of Sacrifice.”<sup>53</sup> We must keep in mind the context and the spirituality in which the young theologian evolved; we then discover unsuspected depths about Mary: She is part of the mystery of the redemptive Incarnation, in which the virtue of humility is combined with the highest wisdom. This “wisdom” is no human knowledge, but the revealed mystery of the Word incarnate; Mary’s “secret” is wholly the Son, and her *mediatio* is then boundless.<sup>54</sup> Poppe advocated to his faithful the Marian devotion “because Mary presents Jesus Christ as he is [true to nature] (‘natuurgetrouw’), and to follow her means to follow Jesus in a more appropriate way” (...) <sup>55</sup> This implies that there is a physical (of “nature”) bond between Jesus and Mary at this level of the work of salvation.<sup>56</sup> Even if there is a close link between

<sup>52</sup> In Belgium, Oswald van den Berghe publishes “Mary and the Priesthood” in 1872; this work is inspired by Charles de Condren (1588–1641), a famous French Oratorian and Olivier’s spiritual director.

<sup>53</sup> “Le nom de Médiatrice n’est que le nom de Mère appliqué à l’œuvre du Sacrifice.” See Van de Velde, “Priester Poppe te Leopoldsburg 1922–1924,” 350. This sentence is written in French; for the English translation, in order to render Poppe’s idea as accurately as possible, we kept the capital letter for the word “Sacrifice.”

<sup>54</sup> Along the same lines, Saint Catherine calls Mary a “mare pacifico (peaceful sea).” See Caterina da Siena, “*Le Orazioni*,” 118.

<sup>55</sup> See Van de Velde, “Priester Poppe te Leopoldsburg 1922–1924,” 588. “Natuurgetrouw” means “true to nature.” The verb “trouwen” in Dutch also means “to marry,” also related to the English “betroth.”

<sup>56</sup> For a more detailed analysis of the differences between Bérulle and Montfort, see our research: “*La Mediatio Mariae* d’Edward Poppe,” 18–38; we note here again in Bérulle the lack of consideration for the person of Mary herself, as a consequence of his conceptual approach: “La ‘nature seconde’ [de Bérulle], qui est l’aboutissement d’un processus, n’a pas une autonomie propre, tandis que la ‘pure nature,’ pour Montfort et Poppe à sa suite, a en elle-même une ‘causalité’ explicite qui doit être reconnue afin que l’œuvre du salut s’accomplisse (....)” (Ibid, 36.) We concluded the paragraph as follows: “Montfort s’éloigne ainsi, quant à la nature humaine, d’un certain ‘pessimisme’ qui est un courant de pensée du XVIIe siècle (....)” (Ibid.)

Mary's action and the sacramental fulfillment, Poppe follows Montfort who refuses to forget the "friendliness" of the Mother at Cana.<sup>57</sup>

Poppe's Marian devotion turns out to be a way of liberation for the world which otherwise risks being trapped by ideologies. These tend to plagiarize the universality of Christ's Good News, but they no longer leave space for the human person and its development. For its true life, our soul needs a free and personal conversation with Jesus and his Mother. Otherwise, man must live in a "society" which drives out the *homo sapiens* and invades the most intimate spheres of the person; the world of "emotions" is repressed, and there remains only a projection of a universe mastered by a false science. Human beings become interchangeable with forever revocable contracts which govern their relationships. No real *mediatio* and spiritual progress can result from living in such a manner.

Poppe foresaw the advent of an era in which authority becomes "fluid" and many "markers" are erased. However, the Virgin with all her maternal attention, will never be absent, and she opens new paths. Despite an unprecedented movement of secularization, Mary is still given to us as a way of fidelity and security. Hope shines again; it is mingled with divine mercy or "clemenza," as the Spirit is called by Catherine. Another important point about the *mediatio* is found in a letter to Julia Ronse in 1920: "A slave of Mary is very sure of her Mother, and without turning back on oneself." This apparently simple phrase is actually the fruit of an important stage, when Poppe charted his new path, that of an abandonment ("geloof")<sup>58</sup> to Mary, "the faithful Virgin," without "reflecting on the consequences."<sup>59</sup> Poppe's biographer, reassessing the influence of this abandonment dictated by St. Thérèse of Lisieux, treats of this stage as a "Copernican revolution."<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> See Grignion de Montfort, "Traité," 556.

<sup>58</sup> In Dutch, "geloof" means "faith." In the relationship with the B. Virgin Mary, there is undoubtedly for Poppe a connexion with the theological virtue. Likewise, in Banneux, where Our Lady appeared in the 20th century, in one of her messages she says: "Believe in me, and I will believe in you."

<sup>59</sup> See Van de Velde, "Priester Poppe te Leopoldsburg 1918–1922," 190.

<sup>60</sup> See Van de Velde, "De binnenweg van Edward Poppe en Thérèse Martin," 36.

One consequence of this “revolution,” in Poppe’s Mariology, consists in avoiding the movement towards the “representational” pole; following Augustine’s mentalism, Poppe’s quest is for the “naturalness” of the person. The “*binnenweg* (inner way)” does not erase the person’s “originality,” i.e., it leaves intact what comes to or is given to the person at its “origin.” In Trinitarian theology, the Persons are distinguished from their “origin.” As for a created person, it is all the more luminous when the Lord’s singular love for each person shines. Transparency is what characterizes the Immaculata herself, although she is also perfectly free. Poppe goes so far as to call Mary a “being of grace.”<sup>61</sup>

According to Poppe, we are living not only in a “Marian era” but in the “era of the Mediatrix.”<sup>62</sup> Yet, at a time when greater attention is given to the human person, it is not surprising that the Holy Spirit is paving the way for a “new” or “other” mediation, that of a resplendent human creature of inner beauty, the Immaculate Virgin who triumphs over darkness. Gloominess can be all-too present in man and in society. Speaking of the Jansenists, Poppe wrote that they are ascetics, give an impeccable intellectual formation, and yet they have no authentic Christian life: they are poison for souls and institutions.<sup>63</sup> The modern world awaits a spiritual renewal and Poppe directs believers towards this being of light, who is the Immaculate Virgin. She is so close to humans and to the “poor.”

Thanks to the development of Basil’s pneumatology, after the deepening of the relationship between Jesus and His Mother, the recognition of Mary’s holiness and of her motherhood, the question is now about the Mediatrix. In

<sup>61</sup> In Dutch: “*genadewezen*”. See Van de Velde, “Priester Poppe in Leopoldsborg 1918–1922,” 766. According to Poppe’s thought and by analogy with the invocation “*Mater misericordiae*”, the word could easily be translated by “being of mercy.”

<sup>62</sup> Poppe indeed affirms: “We are experiencing the ‘*seizoen* (season)’ of Maria-Mediatrix (Middelares).” He then adds that this “season,” which the Holy Church has entered, is “sunny.” (The Dutch adjective “*zonrijk*” means literally: “rich of sun.”) See Van de Velde, “Priester Poppe te Leopoldsborg 1922–1924,” 302.

<sup>63</sup> See Van de Velde, “Priester Poppe te Leopoldsborg 1918–1922,” 778.

the 20th century, Poppe defended it as a new dogma to be defined.<sup>64</sup> This truth of the Catholic Church would mean an inner reconciliation of man through a salutary process. Tragedies are caused by human madness; man's religious indigence is more and more experienced in the depths of himself. All this pushes him to address himself to the most accessible mediational figure who is Mary: She prophesied God's Mercy "from generation to generation."<sup>65</sup>

Pronouncing his last words, the Lord on the Cross gave his Mother to John as his last testament. As another disciple of Jesus, Poppe collected this precious donation – a treasure all the more precious because it is a person, the Virgin Mary. Through Mary's faith, in this essential moment of the story of mankind, she is the only visible person who is the guarantee for the existence of the Mystical Body of the Savior. Irenaeus had evoked the antithetical human attitudes in the course of time and he already emphasized Mary's "obedience" compared to Eve's "disobedience" which led the way for the loss of original grace. In his Mariology, Poppe did not deem it necessary to return to this antithesis and remember Eve.

In St. Catherine, we have a Saint who, although she was still very young, became a spiritual mother for many of her contemporaries; she labored for Church unity in close relationship with the visible head of the Church, and ultimately died in Rome, the center of Christianity, amidst a terrible division. In her "Dialogo," union is shown to be infinitely desirable, and St. Catherine's symbols are very strong, especially the Blood of the Savior; her *affetti* are

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<sup>64</sup> For some details concerning the conciliar debates on the subject of "mediatrix," see Cesare Antonelli: "Il dibattito su Maria nel concilio Vaticano II Percorso redazionale sulla base di nuovi documenti di archivio" (Padova: Messaggero di Sant'Antonio, 2009). There is one occurrence of "mediatrix" in the constitution *Lumen Gentium*: "Materna sua caritate de fratribus Filii sui adhuc peregrinantibus necnon in periculis et angustiis versantibus curat, donec ad felicem patriam perducantur. Propterea B. Virgo in Ecclesia, titulis Advocatae, Auxiliatricis, Adjutricis, Mediatricis invocatur." (*Lumen Gentium* (AAS 57 (1965), n° 62.) We note the context of piety, where the "title" of "mediatrix" is mentioned. About an intervention linked to the substitution of "mediatrix" by "maternum munus," Antonelli notes: "Riprende ([Gérard] Philips) il testo ufficiale modificandolo in ciò che riguarda la mediazione de Maria. Egli lascia cadere: 'Maria enim in Christo est mediatrix' e al posto di 'mediatio' usa l'espressione 'maternum munus' (...)" See Antonelli, "Il dibattito," 338.

<sup>65</sup> See Lk 1:50.



physical, and the holy mystic of the Trecento has a close relationship with the pope. Mary, the Mother, is in reality very present in the “Dialogo,” and we perceive that her sacrifice at the Cross was for love of the members of the Mystical Body and that she still vitally cares for them.

Poppe’s *unio* has an ineffable theological depth and at the same time it retains the most natural foundation at the level of humanity. Mary’s “nature” has a strong consistency; towards her converge all the beams of spiritual light which express the harmony of Creation and the even more marvelous work of Salvation. All things are by her intervention “recapitulated,” “repaired,” and “restored.” In the Old Alliance, confronted with multifaceted polytheisms, monotheism must prevail; in the economy of the Mediator, the Man-God henceforth surpasses all the prophets, all the priesthoods and all the wisdoms. Mary with the divine Child offer, in a place on the globe, a rallying point towards which innocent humanity is directed by a “multitude of the heavenly host;”<sup>66</sup> the precious Gospel accounts highlight her. However, only the “little ones” recognize her and have real access to her.

The icon of Mary Mediatrix indicates a mysterious and intimate transmission of grace coming from the “heart” of the Virgin herself. This conforms to the Belgian representation of Our Lady of Beauraing who, standing alone, by opening her arms, spreads a light of grace emanating from her Heart of Gold. The outpouring of grace is the personal work of the Spirit, and it is therefore important to “return” to the third Person as the source of this donation, which is however also the work of the Blessed Virgin. This is corroborated by the fact that mediation takes place at the level of humanity. In the syntagma “Mother of Unity,” unity goes beyond human harmony, it is deeply personal. We are thankful to Father Poppe that he enhanced Mary’s essential action within the Church. His founded piety escapes sentimentalism and he is no official who applies to the letter the severe moral rules of an established institution!

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<sup>66</sup> See Lk 1:13.

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In conclusion, Poppe's mediation fundamentally directs the faithful towards the supernatural found in no religion so abundantly as in that which, within the supreme mystery of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, integrally professes the Incarnation. A renewal of ecclesial *communio* will be brought about, once man converts to that Virgin who was so humble when she assented to the sublime universal vocation proposed to her. We think that Poppe's *mediatio unionis* is a prophetic theological statement of the Queen of Peace for all humanity.