

THE DEFINABILITY OF THE ASSUMPTION

IN the Encyclical *Deiparae Virginis Mariae*, dated May 1, 1946, Pope Pius XII announces that over a long period of years the Holy See has received many petitions to define the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin as a dogma of faith. These petitions, he says, were submitted by Cardinals and Patriarchs, by Archbishops and Bishops, by priests, religious, and a host of the laity, most notably of all by nearly two hundred Fathers of the Vatican Council.

Since the beginning of his Pontificate, the Holy Father continues, he has been pondering the question whether it be right and fitting and opportune to comply with these petitions by an act of his supreme authority. With this in mind he has been offering up fervent prayers that the divine will may be made known to him.

He now turns to the Bishops of the Catholic world with an appeal to assist him in gaining light from heaven. Following the example and the method of his predecessors, especially of Pius IX before he defined the dogma of the Immaculate Conception,¹ the Pope urgently requests that the Bishops inform him upon two points. First, with what devotion do their flocks honor Mary in the mystery of her Assumption? Secondly (and this is far more important), do the Bishops themselves, in their wise and prudent judgment, think that the Assumption can be defined; and do they, together with their clergy and people, desire the definition?

It does not seem rash to regard this act of the Holy Father as the last step before a solemn definition. The supreme teacher, with whom the final decision rests, has asked for an official report on the state of belief in the Assumption throughout the Catholic world. He has also asked his fellow Bishops, who with him as their head constitute the magisterium of the Church, to render their judgment as to definability of this doctrine. We know that the Bishops, the clergy, and the laity are overwhelmingly in favor of the definition, but the extreme gravity of such an act and its momentous consequences demand that the basis of the Catholic belief be clearly set forth. This involves a care-

¹ Encyc. "Ubi primum," *Pii IX Acta*, pars I, vol. I, pp. 162 ff.

ful review of the whole case and a precise statement of the reasons for affirming that the doctrine of the Assumption is contained in the deposit of revelation entrusted to the Church through the Apostles.

This task pertains in a special way to the Catholic theologian. With due subordination to the magisterium, the theologian is a witness and a guardian of the divine deposit lodged in the bosom of the Spouse of Christ. He is a scribe instructed in the Kingdom of Heaven, a householder who brings forth from his treasury things new and old—the old being the truths of the Gospel which change only as a living thing changes, ever unfolding their inherent vitality, and the new being the same ancient and changeless truths in fuller growth.

In past ages the vigorous and persistent thought of the theologians of the Church was a potent factor in the development of the doctrine of the Assumption. Throughout the Assumptionist movement, which is now approaching its climax, the theologians have been counsellors to the Bishops and guides to the faithful. And now, as a result of the Pope's appeal, they are engaged in making the final summation of the case for a solemn definition of the Assumption. My task on the present occasion is to give a brief outline of the case as it stands today.

It will be useful at the outset to clear the ground by stating what has been gained in a negative way.

I

First, we must realize that there is no authentic, circumstantial history of the Assumption. However strange it may seem, it is a fact that the earliest written accounts of our Lady's death and its sequel are a number of apocryphal works which must be treated with the greatest caution.² The primitive texts, written in Syriac, Coptic,

² The apocrypha have been studied in reference to the Assumption by A. Le Hir, *De l'Assomption de la sainte Vierge et des livres apocryphes qui s'y rapportent* (Etudes Religieuses, X, 1866), pp. 514-55; M. Bonnet, "Bemerkungen ueber die aeltesten Schriften von der Himmelfahrt Mariae," *Zeitschrift fuer wissenschaftliche Theologie*, XXIII (1880), 222-47; H. Juergens, S.J., "Die kirliche Ueberlieferung von der leiblichen Aufnahme der seligsten Gottesmutter in den Himmel," *Zeitschrift fuer katholische Theologie*, IV (1880), 595-650; A. Vitti, S.J., "Libri apocryphi de Assomptione," *Verbum Domini*, VI (1926), 225-34; A. C. Rush, C.S.S.R., "The Assumption in the Apocrypha,"

Greek, and Latin, passed through many adaptations and versions, with bewildering variations in the main features and in details. However, apart from the rather fantastic framework of the story, they agree as to the reality of Mary's death and portray it as an exception to the common lot of mankind, accompanied by some marvelous divine intervention. With a few late and negligible exceptions, they also agree in declaring that Mary's body was preserved incorrupt. Some of them, however, exclude her anticipated resurrection. They describe the translation of her body to the earthly paradise, where it is placed under the tree of life to be preserved incorrupt till the general resurrection.³ Pseudo-Cyril, a Nestorian, places the incorrupt body permanently in the heart of the earth.⁴ A few describe a temporary resurrection in the earthly paradise for the purpose of conducting Mary through the abode of the dead and the realm of divine glory. She is then brought back to paradise and there dies a second time, after which her body is preserved incorrupt under the tree of life.⁵ The rest of the apocrypha describe her definitive resurrection and bodily Assumption, some enacting the resurrection at the tomb, others in the earthly paradise, and still others in heaven.

While most of these documents, especially the most ancient ones,

American Ecclesiastical Review, CXVI (1947), 5-31; M. Jugie, "La mort et l'Assomption de la sainte Vierge dans la tradition des cinq premiers siècles," *Echos d'Orient*, XXV (1926), 300-305; "La littérature sur la mort et l'Assomption de Marie à partir de la seconde moitié du VI^e siècle," *Echos d'Orient*, XXIX (1930), 265-95; *La mort et l'Assomption de la sainte Vierge: Etude historico-doctrinale* (Studi e Testi 114, Città del Vaticano, 1944), pp. 103-171. Jugie's treatment of the apocrypha and other early references to the Assumption is severely criticized by C. Balic, O.F.M., *De definibilitate Assumptionis B. V. Mariae in coelum*, Romae, 1945; O. Faller, S.J., *De priorum saeculorum silentio circa Assumptionem B. Mariae Virginis* (Analecta Gregoriana, XXXVI), Romae, 1946; Pierre Charles, S.J., in *Nouvelle Revue Théologique*, LXIX (1947), 884-85.

³ See L. Carli, *La morte e l'Assunzione di Maria santissima nelle omilie greche dei secoli VII VIII* (Roma, 1941), p. 114; A. C. Rush, *op. cit.*, pp. 25-26.

⁴ *The History of the Blessed Virgin Mary* (E. A. Wallis Budge, in *Luzac's Semitic Text and Translation Series*, V, London, 1899), p. 131.

⁵ E. A. Wallis Budge, *Miscellaneous Coptic Texts* (Oxford, 1915), pp. 642 ff.; F. Robinson, *Sahidic Fragments of the Life of the Virgin IV* (Coptic Apocryphal Gospels), pp. 25 ff.

are in substantial accord with the Catholic concept of the Assumption, all of them have a pronounced legendary character. Our Lady's passing is attended by the most improbable prodigies. The Apostles make prolix and inept speeches. Incidents occur which are unbecoming the sublime dignity of the Mother of God. In many details the apocrypha are inconsistent among themselves and with the canonical Scriptures. In the *Transitus Mariae*, for example, St. Bede the Venerable, finds several contradictions with the Acts of the Apostles. He thus expresses his low opinion of this book: *Haec ideo commemorari curavi, quia nonnullos novi praefato volumini contra auctoritatem Lucae incauta temeritate assensum praebere.*⁶ We might say of all these apocrypha that it is *incauta temeritas* to accept them as authentic history, except insofar as there is at least some probable confirmation from more reliable sources.

The second negative result that has been gained is much more important from a theological point of view; namely, that there is no explicit apostolic tradition of the simple fact of the Assumption, or at least there is no real proof of such a tradition.

Some authors treat the problem as if the Assumption can be defined only if it be distinct and explicit in divine revelation as taught by the Apostles. In the absence of any authentic written records, these authors have recourse to an indirect argument. For many centuries, they say, the whole Church has believed in the Assumption, and today her belief is more firm and more manifest than ever. But this consensus of the universal Church could have arisen only from the explicit testimony of the Apostles as eye-witnesses of the Assumption and guarantors of its truth.

The obvious fallacy in this argument is the implied postulate that a doctrine cannot be an object of universal belief in the Church and definable as a dogma unless it be explicitly revealed. This, of course, is not true. A doctrine may be defined as a revealed truth if it be implicit in the apostolic deposit—contained there in such a way that we must say God intended to reveal it and bring it to the knowledge of the Church by way of a progressive development.⁷

⁶ *Liber Retractationum in Actus Apostolorum*, cap. viii. PL 92, 1014.

⁷ See the concise and lucid statement of the conditions required for a dogmatic definition as formulated by the special commission appointed by

Hence, the age-old tradition and the present consensus of the Church do not justify the conclusion that the Apostles must have proclaimed the Assumption as a distinct truth.

However, we should not minimize or ignore the evidence for an early explicit belief in the Assumption. The statement is often made that the first five or six centuries are silent about this privilege of our Lady, and this is regarded as the greatest obstacle to an eventual definition. Here there is another misconception of the problem. It is not at all necessary to forge an unbroken chain of historical testimonies reaching back to the apostolic age—just as little as one must prove that the Assumption is explicitly revealed.⁸ Still, the present state of research shows that the silence of the early centuries has been exaggerated. There is evidence of an explicit belief in the Assumption almost three centuries before St. Gregory of Tours (544-593), who is often cited as the first authentic witness.

First, there is the feast of the *koimesis* or the *dormitio*, the object of which was not only the death and burial of Mary, but also her resurrection and Assumption.⁹ The observance of this feast was a concrete expression of the teaching of the Church in the vivid and practical form of liturgical cult. Its institution implies that faith in the Assumption had already come to maturity.

The feast was well established throughout the East when the Emperor Maurice (582-602) decreed that it be celebrated in the Byzantine Empire on August 15th.¹⁰ The Emperor did not institute the feast, as is so often stated. He merely fixed the date.

We know from St. Gregory of Tours that the feast was celebrated in Jerusalem in the latter part of the sixth century,¹¹ but we have an earlier witness. Theodore Petrensis, in his biography of his contemporary, the Palestinian Abbot St. Theodosius (ca. 423-529),

Pius IX, in V. Sardi, *La solenne definizione del dogma dell' Immacolato Concepimento di Maria Santissima* (Roma: Tipografia Vaticana, 1904), vol. I, pp. 791-94.

⁸ See V. Sardi, *loc. cit.*, p. 792.

⁹ L. Carli, *op. cit.*, p. 21, 29, 34, 62, 96, 101; F. Cabrol, "Assomption (Fête de l')" *Dictionnaire d'Archéologie Chrétienne et de Liturgie*, I, 2996.

¹⁰ Nicephorus Callistus, *Hist. Eccles.*, XVIII, 18. PG 147, 292. See F. Cabrol, *op. cit.*, col. 2997; L. Carli, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

¹¹ *De Gloria Martyrum*, lib. I, cap. iv, ix. PL 71, 708, 713.

mentions the observance of the feast in Jerusalem about the year 500.¹² What is still more significant is the fact that he refers to it as an annual feast in the liturgical calendar of the Holy City.¹³ In Jerusalem, therefore, at the beginning of the sixth century, the feast was not of recent origin.

There is still earlier evidence for the celebration of the feast in Syria—the testimony of Jacob of Sarug (ca. 490), who clearly expresses the notion of Mary's glorious Assumption in a liturgical hymn composed for the feast. He sings of Mary's virginal body going forth to paradise replete with divine beatitude.¹⁴

About the middle of the fifth century the Syriac apocryphal *The Obsequies of the Holy Virgin* attests the existence of the feast by claiming that it was instituted by the Apostles after they had witnessed the resurrection and the Assumption of Mary.¹⁵

That the tradition embodied in the feast was current at a still earlier date, is evident from a sermon preached before the people of Jerusalem by the priest Timothy, probably about the beginning of the fifth century. Timothy states that He who had dwelt within the Blessed Virgin took her bodily to the heavenly abode of the blessed.¹⁶ It is an obiter dictum which implies that the idea of our Lady's bodily Assumption was familiar to the people of Jerusalem.

In treatises on the Assumption it is customary to dismiss St. Epiphanius (367-403) with the remark that he alone among the

¹² H. Usener, *Der Heilige Theodosius* (Leipzig, 1890), p. 38, 144; *Acta Sanctorum*, 11 Januarii, p. 690, n. 31; O. Faller, *op. cit.*, pp. 24 ff.

¹³ H. Usener, *op. cit.*, p. 144; O. Faller, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

¹⁴ A. Zingerle, "Proben syrische Poesie aus Jacobus von Sarug," *Zeitschrift fuer Deutsche Morgenland Gesellschaft*, XII (1859), 44; A. Baumstark, "Zwei syrische Koimesis-Dichtungen," *Oriens Christianus*, V (1905), 82; O. Faller, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

¹⁵ W. Wright, *Contributions to the apocryphal literature of the New Testament* (London, 1865), pp. 42 ff; A. S. Lewis, *Apocrypha Syriaca* (Studia Sinaitica XI, London, 1902), pp. 12 ff; M. R. James, *The Apocryphal New Testament* (Oxford, 1945), p. 219.

¹⁶ *Oratio in Symeonem*, PG 86, 245. See L. Carli, *op. cit.*, pp. 7-8; M. Jugie, in *Echos d'Orient*, XXV (1926), 286-90; *La mort et l'Assomption de la sainte Vierge: Etude historico-doctrinale*, pp. 70-81. O. Faller (*op. cit.*, pp. 27-33) rectifies P. Jugie's reading and interpretation of the text.

Fathers denied the fact of Mary's death. It seems rather that this ardent champion of the Faith hesitated only about the manner of her passing from this world, and it may be that he wrote as he did only as an *argumentum ad hominem* against the Antidicomarianites of Arabia, who denied the perfect and perpetual virginity of Mary, and against the Collyridians, who worshiped her as a goddess. These heretics appealed to Scripture, and this seems to have led Epiphanius to overstress the silence of Scripture about Mary's death.¹⁷

Be that as it may, the Saint clearly avows his belief in the Assumption. Native of Palestine, Bishop of Salamis on the island of Cyprus, militant Father of the Church, he is the earliest authentic witness whose voice has reached the present age. This is not surprising, seeing that he grew up in the full stream of the tradition of Jerusalem, attested by his near contemporary Timothy and by the early celebration of the feast of the *koimesis* in the mother church. Thus he writes: ¹⁸

Scripture, does not tell us whether Mary died or whether she did not die. Scripture is silent about this because of the surpassing miracle of her departure, lest the minds of men be overcome by the marvel. Therefore, neither do I dare to speak of the manner of her passing. I remain silent and commune with my own thoughts. Some indeed understand the prophecy of Simeon as meaning that she was to be slain with the sword. On the other hand, she may have been exempt from death, for that which John tells us in the Apocalypse may have been fulfilled in her: "The dragon hastened to the woman who had brought forth the man child, and there were given to her the wings of an eagle, and she was borne into the desert lest the dragon seize her" (Apoc. xii. 14). For my part, I will not say whether she remained immortal or whether she died. I refrain because Scripture, which transcends the grasp of the human mind, has left the matter in the dark for the honor of her body—that noble and precious vessel!—lest anyone think of her as subject to the conditions of

¹⁷ See O. Faller, *op. cit.*, pp. 33-43; L. Carli, *op. cit.*, pp. 5-7; T. Livius, C.S.S.R., *The Blessed Virgin in the Fathers of the first six centuries* (London: Burns and Oates, 1893), pp. 342 ff; L. Heidet and L. Pirot, "Assomption," *Supplément au Dictionnaire de la Bible*, I, 657-59; F. Cavallera, "A propos d'une enquête patristique sur l'Assomption," *Bulletin de littérature ecclésiastique de l'Institut Catholique de Toulouse*, XXVII (1926), 110-13.

¹⁸ *Adversus Haereses*, 78:11. PG 42, 715-16.

the flesh. Therefore, whether or not she died, she was not affected by anything carnal.¹⁹

In his refutation of the Collyridians,²⁰ St. Epiphanius insists that Mary is not to receive divine honors any more than other saints, although she is glorified above all others both in soul and body. He proposes three hypotheses as to the manner of her passing from this world, and while leaving this undecided, he implies clearly enough that she was assumed bodily into heaven.

Say she died a natural death. In that case she fell asleep in glory, and departed in purity, and received the crown of her virginity. Or say she was slain with the sword according to Simeon's prophecy. Then her glory is with the martyrs, and she through whom the divine light shone upon the world is in the place of bliss with her sacred body. Or say she left this world without dying, for God can do what He will. Then she was simply transferred to eternal glory.²¹

Such is the testimony of St. Epiphanius in the third quarter of the fourth century (374-377). Let it be granted that he was hesitant and reserved about the fact of Mary's death, still he is a prime witness to her bodily Assumption. And this was not merely his personal opinion. He was attesting a current tradition, for we know from other sources that this was the common belief in his time and even earlier.

From the beginning of the fourth century we have what seems to be a valuable piece of evidence, discovered in Spain and preserved

¹⁹ O. Faller (*op. cit.*, p. 41) thus concludes his searching study of this passage: "Ergo eius dubium de morte Mariae contra traditionis consensum nullius est ponderis, certe nihil importat contra definibilitatem Assumptionis Mariae cum corpore et anima. Nam de glorificatione corporea Mariae a traditione non dissentit, sed satis eam indicat adeo, ut huius traditionis testis anno 377 invocari possit."

²⁰ *Adversus Haereses*, 78:23. PG 42, 737.

²¹ From this passage O. Faller (*loc. cit.*) concludes: ". . . dubium suum repetit circa modum quo Maria ad alteram vitam transiit, et simul certitudinem circa gloriam eius corpoream indicat." L. Heidet and L. Pirot (*op. cit.*, col. 659) are equally emphatic: "Ce Père affirme sa croyance formelle à la glorification béatifique corporelle et immortelle de Marie, en d'autres termes à son Assomption. . . ." They add that St. Epiphanius is "l'écho d'une tradition historique indubitable."

in the crypt dedicated to Santa Engrazia in Saragossa. It is a sculptured group on a sarcophagus representing the Assumption,²² according to the interpretation of Huebner,²³ De Rossi,²⁴ and Leclercq,²⁵ who claims that the meaning of the sculpture is beyond question. A particularly significant detail is a hand reaching out from heaven and grasping Mary's extended arm by the wrist. The same detail is described in certain manuscripts of the *Transitus Mariae*.²⁶ The sculpture antedates the apocryphon by perhaps a century, but this unique and striking detail brings them both into contact with the same tradition.

We are concerned at the moment with the earliest evidence of an explicit belief in the Assumption. In this respect, the apocrypha have a positive value. Belief in the Assumption was certainly not based upon them, as is asserted by so many non-Catholic critics, notably Renan,²⁷ Tischendorf,²⁸ Zoeckler,²⁹ Jameson,³⁰ and the author of the article "Assumption" in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.³¹

²² Reproduced by R. Garrucci, *Storia della arte cristiana nei primi otto secoli della Chiesa* (Prato, 1879), vol. V, pl. 381, no. 4, description pp. 121 ff; H. Leclercq, "Assomption (dans l'art)," *DACL*, I, no. 1026, description col. 2991.

²³ E. Huebner, *Antike Bilderwerke in Madrid* (Berlin, 1862), p. 340; *Inscriptiones Hispaniae Christianae* (Berolinae, 1871), p. 48, no. 152.

²⁴ See A. Fernandez Guerra y Orbe, *Monumento Zaragozano del año 312 que representa la Asuncion de la Virgen* (Madrid, 1870), p. 16.

²⁵ *Loc. cit.*, col. 2993.

²⁶ A. Le Hir, *op. cit.*, pp. 514 ff. See also *Dictionnaire des Apocryphes* (Paris, 1858), vol. II, col. 526.

²⁷ E. Renan, *L'Eglise Chrétienne* (Histoire des origines du christianisme VI, Paris, 1879), p. 513.

²⁸ C. Tischendorf, *Apocalypses Apocryphae* (Leipzig, 1866), p. 34.

²⁹ H. Zoeckler, "Maria," *Realencyklopaedie fuer protestantische Theologie und Kirche*, XII, 300.

³⁰ A. Jameson, *Legends of the Madonna as represented in the fine arts* (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1902), p. 307.

³¹ 14th ed., 1939, vol. II, p. 567. It is refreshing to note the more objective opinion of the Anglican Mozley regarding the relationship of the apocrypha to the early belief in the Assumption: "The belief was never founded on that story. The story was founded on the belief. The belief, which was universal, required a definite shape, and that shape at length it found" (*Reminiscences of Oriel College and the Oxford Movement*, vol. II, p. 368. Quoted by T. Livius, *op. cit.*, p. 365).

On the contrary, the more thoughtful among the ancients regarded them with suspicion or rejected them as worthless, and in some localities they actually were a hindrance to a confident acceptance of belief in the Assumption.³² The fact is that the apocrypha are a spurious outgrowth of the existing belief, and for that very reason they bear witness to the current tradition. The objection to them is that they elaborate that tradition with an extravagant fantasy, or distort it with historical and doctrinal errors, but this does not cancel their value as witnesses to the fact that the Assumption was a matter of popular belief. This was noted by the Bishops of the Subalpine Province of Piedmont in their petition for the definition of the Assumption.³³ These Bishops note also that the authentic tradition must have served as a criterion for winnowing fact from fancy in the apocrypha.³⁴ Hence, the date of the oldest of the Assumptionist apocrypha is rather important. For our present purpose we need consider only two.³⁵

The Syriac *Obsequies of the Holy Virgin* dates from the middle of the fifth century, shortly after the Council of Ephesus. Besides attesting the celebration of the feast of the *koimesis*, it describes the death of our Lady in the presence of the Apostles and the reunion of her body with her blessed soul under the tree of life in paradise.³⁶

The most important of all these apocrypha is the *Transitus Mariae*, falsely ascribed to St. Melito, Bishop of Sardis in the second century. It was the most popular, the most widely circulated, and the most influential. It exists in several Greek and Latin recensions, but scholars are not agreed as to whether the Greek or the Latin has the priority. In his recent work Father Otto Faller, S.J.,

³² See L. Carli, *op. cit.*, p. 102 ff, and below p. 13.

³³ *Petitiones de Assumptione corporea B. V. Mariae in coelum definienda ad Sanctam Sedem delata*, edd. Guilhelmo Hentrich et Rudolfo G. De Moos (Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1942), vol. I, p. 241.

³⁴ *loc. cit.* See also H. Juergens, *op. cit.*, p. 603, 610.

³⁵ I purposely refrain from treating the famous *Historia Euthymiaca*, quoted, ostensibly from an ancient source, in St. John Damascene's second homily on the Assumption (PG 96, 747-52). The present state of research seems to leave little room for doubt that the passage is a late interpolation. See M. J. Scheeben, *Handbuch der Katholischen Dogmatik* (Freiburg i. Br., 1882), vol. III, p. 572; L. Carli, *op. cit.*, pp. 78-81; O. Faller, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

³⁶ W. Wright, *op. cit.*, pp. 42-51.

of the Gregorian University, analyzes the data now available and concludes with Tischendorf in dating the Latin text probably about the end of the fourth century and perhaps even earlier.³⁷ Its doctrinal content is perfectly orthodox and it is more sober than most apocrypha in describing Mary's death and bodily Assumption.

According to the leading Latin manuscripts,³⁸ Mary dies placidly after a vision of her Divine Son. Her soul, whiter than snow or silver, is taken up to heaven by the archangels Michael and Gabriel. Her body is laid in a new sepulchre in the valley of Josaphat. There the Apostles keep vigil till Michael brings her soul back to the tomb and the Lord commands: "Arise, my love and my kinswoman. Thou that didst not suffer corruption by union of the flesh, shalt not suffer dissolution of the body in the sepulchre." And immediately Mary rose up and was borne to heaven by the angels.

If the end of the fourth century is even approximately correct as the date of the *Transitus Mariae*, we must advance to a relatively earlier date a similar work from another pen. In his prologue Pseudo-Melito declares that he is writing the true account of Mary's passing as he heard it from the Apostle John in order to counteract the baneful influence of Leucius, who "corrupted with so evil a pen the departure of the Blessed Mary ever virgin, the Mother of God, that it is unlawful not only to read but even to hear it in the Church of God."³⁹

Leucius, or Leucius Charinus, is a pseudonym assumed by a heretical writer frequently mentioned in patristic literature.⁴⁰ A number of apocryphal Acts of Apostles is ascribed to him, but the only work of this kind that can be traced to his pen with certainty is the Acts of John,⁴¹ dated at the end of the second century or not much

³⁷ C. Tischendorf, *op. cit.*, p. xxxiv; O. Faller, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

³⁸ C. Tischendorf, *op. cit.*, pp. 124-136. See M. R. James, *op. cit.*, pp. 209-216.

³⁹ For a discussion of the authenticity of the prologue, see R. A. Lipsius, *Die apokryphen Apostelgeschichten und Apostellegenden* (Braunschweig, 1883-90), vol. I, p. 108, 111; O. Faller, *op. cit.*, pp. 43-59.

⁴⁰ See early literary references in R. A. Lipsius, *op. cit.*, vol. I, pp. 47 ff; H. Leclercq, "Leucius Charinus," *DACL*, VIII, 2983-85.

⁴¹ A. S. Lewis, *The Mythological Acts of the Apostles* (*Horae Semiticae* III, London, 1904), p. xlii.

later.⁴² However, it is not at all certain that he is the author of the Marian apocryphon attributed to him by Pseudo-Melito. This may have been written later and falsely ascribed to Leucius, as were apparently the apocryphal Acts of Peter, Andrew, Thomas, and Paul. There is reason to believe that these works were only modeled upon the Acts of John, with which they came to form one collection under the name of Leucius.⁴³ It may be, then, that the book on Mary's Departure was likewise written by a later hand, and not by the second century author of the Acts of John. The important point is that there was such a book antedating the *Transitus Mariae* of Pseudo-Melito.

On the basis of late manuscripts, Dom Wilmart attempted to reconstruct the basic Latin text ascribed to Leucius.⁴⁴ With one exception, the manuscripts speak of the reunion of Mary's body with her glorified soul soon after her death. It seems doubtful, however, whether the manuscripts collated by Dom Wilmart really represent the original text.⁴⁵ The most that can be gleaned from the meager data is that this oldest apocryphon was circulating rather early in the fourth century, and that the tradition of Mary's bodily Assumption was current at that time,⁴⁶ as is indicated also by the sculptured sarcophagus of Saragossa.

⁴² R. A. Lipsius, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 83; R. A. Lipsius and M. Bonnet, *Acta Apostolorum Apocrypha* (Lipsiae, 1891-1903), pars II, vol. I, p. xxvi; M. R. James, *Apocrypha Anecdota*, second series (Texts and Studies V, no. 1), pp. ix ff.

⁴³ A. S. Lewis, *op. cit.*, p. xlii.

⁴⁴ A. Wilmart, O.S.B., *L'ancien récit latin de l'Assomption* (Studi e Testi 59), pp. 325-57.

⁴⁵ See L. Carli, *op. cit.*, p. 13, 26, 29; M. Jugie, *La mort et l'Assomption de la sainte Vierge* (Studi e Testi 114), p. 151.

⁴⁶ The non-Catholic scholar M. R. James would consider this a moderate opinion. He thus expresses his own view: "I cannot regard any of the texts as older than the fourth century, but the nucleus of the story may be—I think must be—at least as old as the third" (*The Apocryphal New Testament*, p. xix). Such also is the opinion of R. A. Lipsius in the *Dictionary of Christian Biography*, II, 707. Many no doubt would hesitate to grant with Zahn (*Neue kirchliche Zeitschrift*, X, fasc. 5) that the apocryphal tradition dates from the second century, or with Lagrange (*Révue Biblique*, VIII, 589 ff) that it goes back "à la première antiquité." See Heidet-Pirot, *op. cit.*, col. 659.

II

On the whole, then, the positive evidence for an explicit belief in the Assumption at a comparatively early date is now somewhat more precise and more abundant, and it throws some light upon the first phase in the development of the doctrine. It would be rash, however, to conclude that this belief derived from the explicit testimony of the Apostles. The state of belief prior to the fourth century is still too obscure to warrant any definite conclusion. One might indeed say that an explicit apostolic tradition could have been handed on from the beginning without leaving any trace in literature or in the liturgy. One might also say that there may have been earlier documents which are now lost or have not yet come to light. But this is only conjecture. It is precisely ill-advised efforts like this to establish an explicit apostolic tradition that have given rise to much of the difficulty and confusion about the definability of the Assumption. As the case actually stands the attempt is futile. At best, it is bound to fall far short of the certitude required for a solemn definition. Moreover, this line of argument treats the Assumption too much as a mere fact which is to be verified according to the principles of historical evidence. Not only is it inconclusive, it also leaves that sublime privilege of the Mother of God exposed to the attack of the Modernists, with their false concept of tradition and their false historical method.⁴⁷

We are on firm ground only if we treat the Assumption, not

⁴⁷ In the discussions preliminary to the definition of the Immaculate Conception, one of the principles stressed by C. Passaglia, S.J., was that the facts of divine revelation cannot be rightly evaluated by the same norms as are applied to the facts of human history (V. Sardi, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 893). Scheeben pointed out how vital it is to realize this with regard to the Assumption (*op. cit.*, vol. III, p. 574). It was from a superficial historical point of view that Jansenists like Baillet and Launoy attempted to justify their animus against the assumption, as well as other Marian doctrines (C. Dillenschneider, C.S.S.R., *La Mariologie de S. Alphonse de Ligouri* (Fribourg-Paris, 1931), pp. 61-62, 64-65). The same minimizing viewpoint was a dominant factor in the more recent attack on the Assumption by Johann Ernst (*Die leibliche Himmelfahrt Mariae historischdogmatisch nach ihrer Definierbarkeit beleuchtet*, Regensburg, 1921. See also the same author in *Theologisch-praktische Quartal schrift*, LXXIV (1921), 226-37, 381-89).

merely as a historical fact, but above all as a supernatural mystery intimately connected with the cycle of Marian dogmas which express our Lady's place in the divine plan of Redemption. In other words, we must consider it from a strictly theological point of view in the light of the continuous living tradition of the Church. Thus we can show that the Assumption is implicit in the apostolic deposit, and that it was realized and clarified in the mind of the Church by a true organic development.

In this respect, the Assumption is no different from the Immaculate Conception. The two mysteries are implicit in the same revealed truths and the same passages of Scripture, and they were jointly developed by the same process, so that the definition of the Immaculate Conception has confirmed and deepened the conviction that the Assumption is likewise definable. In the expository part of the Encyclical *Ineffabilis Deus* we could substitute the notion of the Assumption for that of the Immaculate Conception and have a perfectly correct statement of the case for its definability. For example, the passage in which Pius IX summarizes the testimony of tradition is literally true of the Assumption, to which it may be applied in the following terms.

The Catholic Church, pillar and mainstay of the truth, ever enlightened by the Holy Spirit, has constantly explained, proposed and fostered the doctrine of the bodily Assumption of the Blessed Virgin, which is so closely linked with the marvelous holiness and the sublime dignity of the Mother of God. The Church has taught it as a revealed truth contained in the deposit received from heaven. It flourished in the most ancient times and was deeply rooted in the minds of the faithful. By the zealous labors of the Bishops it was diffused throughout the Catholic world. And the Church herself set it forth in the most luminous manner when she did not hesitate to make it an object of public cult to be venerated by the faithful.⁴⁸

Again I adapt the language of Pius IX as follows. The doctrine of the bodily Assumption of the Blessed Virgin was ever more clearly unfolded, proclaimed and confirmed by the authority of the

⁴⁸ *Pii IX Acta*, pars I, vol. I, p. 598; V. Sardi, *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 302.

Church, by means of her teaching, her zeal and her wisdom. It was propagated in a wonderful manner among all peoples and nations within the Catholic fold. And there are notable witnesses of the ancient tradition of the Church in the East and the West which provide convincing proof that it was handed on as a doctrine inherited from earlier generations and endowed with the character of a revealed truth.⁴⁹

Then Pius IX states the principle of doctrinal development which has brought out the Assumption in its proper proportions and relations as a revealed truth. The Church, he says, is the faithful custodian and defender of the sacred truths entrusted to her. She never changes them, never detracts from them, never adds to them. On the contrary, she teaches them today with all care and wisdom as they were taught in ancient times and were made fruitful by the faith of the Fathers. At the same time she is ever striving for greater precision in understanding and declaring the truths revealed in the beginning, so that they may become more clear, more certain, more distinct, while retaining their full integrity and their proper characteristics. She cultivates them that they may unfold more fully without any change of meaning.⁵⁰

On the basis of an organic development in the tradition of the Church, the case for the definability of the Assumption is even clearer than it was for the Immaculate Conception. The Assumption appeared earlier as a distinct truth. It was the first Marian mystery to be honored with its own proper feast. It matured more quickly in the mind of the Church, and it had a more tranquil course through the ages.

We saw that the tradition of the Assumption was already current at the beginning of the fourth century, and that the feast was being celebrated in Palestine and Syria in the fifth. In the sixth century, or at latest in the seventh, the feast was observed by the universal Church and it gradually acquired extraordinary solemnity. In the seventh and the eighth centuries the doctrine was developed with a sure touch in the festal homilies of St. Modestus of Jeru-

⁴⁹ *Pii IX Acta, loc. cit.*, p. 606; V. Sardi, *loc. cit.*, p. 306.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

salem,⁵¹ St. Germanus of Constantinople,⁵² St. Andrew of Crete,⁵³ St. Theodore the Studite,⁵⁴ and above all St. John Damascene,⁵⁵ who may properly be called the Doctor of the Assumption. After him there was no further development of the doctrine in the East. It simply remained the hereditary faith of the Orientals, schismatic as well as Catholic.

In the West the doctrinal development of the Assumption was retarded by several factors. The infrequent and difficult contacts with the East and a general ignorance of Greek caused the writings of the Eastern Fathers to remain a closed book to the Latins till rather late in the scholastic age, when Jacobus de Voragine (ca. 1230-1298) had access to the works of the Greek witnesses, especially the homilies of St. Germanus and St. John Damascene.⁵⁶ Besides isolation from the East and ignorance of its literature, there was also a strong animus against the apocrypha in scholarly circles. These were about the only early literature on the subject known in the West, and their legendary character engendered doubts about the truth of the Assumption. The development of the doctrine in the West, therefore, was more or less independent of the East, so that the two trends of thought confirm each other.

The hostile attitude towards the apocrypha is reflected in the criticism of the *Transitus Mariae* by St. Bede the Venerable, and in the condemnation of this book by the so-called Gelasian Decree,

⁵¹ *Encomium in Dormitionem Sanctissimae Dominae Nostrae*, PG 86, 3277-3312; Carli, pp. 30-42.

⁵² *In Dormitionem B. Mariae*, PG 98, 339-372; Carli, pp. 43-58.

⁵³ *In Dormitionem Sanctissimae Deiparae Dominae Nostrae*, PG 97, 1045-1110; Carli, pp. 59-76.

⁵⁴ *Oratio in Dormitionem Deiparae*, PG 99, 720-729; *Catechesis Chronica*, *ibid.*, col. 1701; Carli, pp. 94-99.

⁵⁵ *In Dormitionem B. V. Mariae*, PG 96, 700-761; *Canon in Dormitionem Dei Genetricis*, *ibid.*, col. 1364-68; Carli, pp. 77-93; Valentine A. Mitchel, *The Mariology of Saint John Damascene* (Kirkwood, Mo., Maryhurst Normal Press, 1931), pp. 138-69.

⁵⁶ C. Piana, O.F.M., *Assumptio Beatae Virginis Mariae apud Scriptores saec. XIII* (Bibliotheca Mariana Medii Aevii, fasc. 4, Romae, 1942), p. 5, 25-26, 39-40.

a private document of the late fifth or the early sixth century.⁵⁷ The famous letter *Cogitis me* of Pseudo-Jerome (Paschasius Radbertus) also warns against the *Transitus Mariae* and indicates that it disposed many at that time (8th century) to doubt the Assumption.⁵⁸ It certainly had much to do with the extreme reserve of the author himself. This letter was generally accepted as genuine, and the great name of St. Jerome lent it an utterly unmerited prestige. It was even included in that vademecum of the medieval clergy, the *Homiliarius* which the Deacon Paulus Winfridus compiled by order of Charlemagne.⁵⁹ An excerpt adverse to the Assumption was inserted into the martyrology of St. Ado,⁶⁰ Archbishop of Vienne, whence it was adopted by Usuard.⁶¹ The influence of Pseudo-Jerome and his derivatives was reinforced by a homily of Pseudo-Augustine (Ambrosius Autpertus),⁶² which betrays the same skeptical attitude as a result of the legendary character of the apocrypha.

A definite reaction against these spurious writings is manifest in the work of another impersonator of St. Augustine, who strove to base the question on sound theological principles.⁶³ In the schools of the Middle Ages this treatise had a pronounced influence in favor of the Assumption.⁶⁴

The official position of the Church and the common belief of the people were little affected by this literary war. The Church expressed her real mind through the annual celebration of the feast, making its object perfectly clear in the striking oration *Veneranda*.⁶⁵

⁵⁷ G. Bardy, "Gélase (Décret de)," *Suppl. DB*, III, 588-89; H. Leclercq, "Gélasien (Décret)," *DACL*, VI, 726, 735, 738; P. Godet, "Gélase 1er," *Dict. de Théol. Cath.*, VI, 303; Carli, pp. 11-13.

⁵⁸ *Epistola IX. Ad Paulam et Eustochium*, PL 30, 122-42.

⁵⁹ *Homiliae de Sanctis*, XLIV. PL 95, 1490.

⁶⁰ *Martyrologium*, VI Idus Septembris. PL 123, 202.

⁶¹ *Usuardi Monachi Martyrologium*. PL 124, 365-66.

⁶² *Sermo 208. In Festo Assumptionis Beatae Mariae*. PL 39, 2129-34.

⁶³ *De Assumptione Beatae Virginis Liber unus*. PL 40, 1141-48.

⁶⁴ See C. Piana, *op. cit.*, p. 15, 33, 40, 68, 122, 125, 135.

⁶⁵ "Veneranda nobis Domine, hujus est diei Festivitas, in qua sancta Dei Genitrix mortem subiit temporalem, nec tamen mortis nexibus deprimi potuit, quae Filium tuum Dominum nostrum de se genuit incarnatum. Qui tecum . . ." (*Sancti Gregorii Magni Liber Sacramentorum*, XVIII Kal. Sept. PL 78, 133). See L. Duchesne, *Origines du Culte Chrétien*² (Paris, 1898), pp. 114-19.

For the people the feast was a recurrent stimulus to faith and piety toward Mary in her glory, and for theologians it was an incentive to devote their thought to its doctrinal import.⁶⁶

During the scholastic age there was this strange situation, as it appears to us now. On the one hand, the Immaculate Conception was the subject of heated controversy, which was mainly a struggle to clarify the state of the question as the necessary preliminary to the still distant triumph of the doctrine. Even after Scotus it was still so much disputed and denied that the Holy See had to intervene with censures. On the other hand, the scholastics were unanimous in maintaining the truth of the Assumption and sought its sources in the deposit of revelation.⁶⁷ Thereafter the doctrine remained in peaceful possession, its progress being disturbed only locally and temporarily by the subtle, venomous attack of the Jansenists,⁶⁸ and the dispute occasioned in Paris by the excerpt from Pseudo-Jerome in the martyrology of Usuard.⁶⁹

Our own age has witnessed the rise and progress of the Assumptionist movement, which has united the Catholic world in an appeal to the Holy See to define the Assumption as a dogma of faith—an appeal which is surely the voice of the *anima christiana naturaliter mariana*. The two bulky volumes printed at the Vatican Press contain only the petitions filed at the Holy Office and a few others which the editors were able to verify from other sources. It is known that many were lost. But even at that, the published petitions are an imposing expression of the teaching of the ordinary magisterium and of its faithful echo, the *sensus communis fidelium*.

The total number of petitions submitted from 1869 to 1941 is 3,018, representing all ranks and conditions in the Church. Of these 2,917, or 97 per cent, formally petition the Holy See to define the Assumption as a truth divinely revealed.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ See C. Piana, *op. cit.*, pp. 57-62.

⁶⁷ A wealth of references to scholastic exponents of the doctrine is given by A. Noyon, S.J., "Marie," *Dictionnaire Apologétique de la Foi Catholique*, III, 277-80; C. Piana, *op. cit.*, pp. xxvii-xxxii.

⁶⁸ C. Dillenschneider, *op. cit.*, pp. 61-65.

⁶⁹ J. Bellamy, "Assomption de la Sainte Vierge," *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique*, II, 2131; M. J. Scheeben, III, 587.

⁷⁰ *Petitiones*, II, 822-31.

The largest and most significant group is the 1,789 petitions submitted by Resident Bishops, ruling 820 Sees, 73 per cent of all the Sees in the world.⁷¹ These Bishops speak with apostolic authority and as authentic witnesses of the tradition of the Church. Their judgment in this matter constitutes a moral unanimity of the Catholic Episcopate. Here is how the editors state their conclusion: *Ergo constat (ex testibus revelationis atque doctrinae magisterii, sive immediatis sive mediatis) adesse verum et proprium consensum universalem totius Ecclesiae Docentis: doctrinam Assumptionis corporeae B. V. Mariae tamquam dogma fidei definiri posse et hanc definitionem opportunam esse.*⁷²

To the petitions of the Resident Bishops must be added the 656 petitions submitted by Titular Bishops, and the petitions of 261 Vicars Apostolic, 26 Abbots and Prelates *nullius*, 61 General Superiors of clerical orders, 336 minor prelates, 32,291 priests and male religious, 50,975 female religious, and 8,086,396 of the laity.⁷³

On the basis of all the petitions taken together the editors conclude: *Ergo universa Ecclesia et Docens et Discens hodie una voce, uno animo definitionem Assumptionis a Sancta Sede efflagitat.*⁷⁴

Here, then, we have the manifest consensus of the apostolic teaching body of the Church, re-echoed by the voice of the faithful throughout the world, in a matter that pertains to the primary object of the magisterium. It is the result of the progressive active tradition of the Church through the ages, guided and assisted by the indwelling Spirit of Truth. As the case stands today, therefore, the authority of the Church gives all Catholics an unquestionable assurance that the Assumption is a revealed truth, even though they may not know any direct theological proof of its revelation. It is the task of the theologians to formulate the proofs. How and where, then, is the Assumption contained in the original apostolic deposit?

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 832-42. For the text of the petitiones presented by nearly 200 Bishops attending the Vatican Council, see *Collectio Lacensis*, VII, 868-72; C. Martin, *Omnium Concilii Vaticani . . . documentorum collectio* (Paderbornae, 1873), pp. 106-115; Mansi-Petit, *Sacrorum Conciliorum Collectio* (Arnhem-Leipzig, 1927), vol. LIII, 482-517.

⁷² *Petitiones*, I, p. xxiii.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, II, 842-54.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, I, p. xxiii.

III

The expositions of the Fathers and theologians and the language of the Liturgy vary in viewpoint and emphasis, but they all involve this fundamental principle: the Assumption is implicit in the revealed traditional notion of the Divine Maternity, taken in its concrete, historical reality.⁷⁵ This includes immeasurably more than the bare relationship of motherhood to the Person of the Word. It is the living notion with which the Church was born, which she has been contemplating, expounding, defending, sounding ever more deeply, for nineteen centuries. It is the notion of Mary as Mother of the Divine Redeemer precisely as Redeemer, with whom she was predestined from all eternity, and through whom she was to receive the blessings of the Redemption first and in fullest measure. It is the notion of Mary as Queen of the created universe, Queen of the Kingdom ransomed with the Blood of the immaculate Lamb. It is the notion of Mary, therefore, as possessing a dignity that exalts her above the Cherubim and the Seraphim, endowed with a personal holiness that is unique and supreme among creatures, immune to the slightest shadow of sin, exempt from all penalty for sin. It is the notion of Mary as a virgin in the highest and most perfect sense, because her virginity was confirmed and consecrated by her espousals with the Holy Spirit and her miraculous motherhood of the God-Man. Her very body became inconceivably sacred as the *caro deifera*, the living tabernacle of the Word, who took flesh of her flesh and made her womb the paradise of the Second Adam.

In this revealed notion of Mary's immaculate, virginal motherhood the Church sees her glorious bodily Assumption as her crowning privilege. The Church sees it there, not as the result of a logical deduction, still less as a mere *convenientia*, but as one element of that miracle of miracles which God willed His Mother to be. The Church sees it with a supernatural insight imparted by the Divine Spirit who dwells within her. The Bishops of the Austrian Empire call it a simple intuition.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ See M. J. Scheeben, III, 583 ff; C. Piana, *op. cit.*, pp. 44-57; L. Carli, *op. cit.*, p. 36 ff, 40, 56, 70 ff, 83, 88 ff, 98; *Estudios Marianos* (Madrid, 1944), vol. III, pp. 35-53, 163-217, O. Faller, *op. cit.*, pp. 79 ff, 210 ff.

⁷⁶ *Petitiones*, I, 194.

The development of the inexhaustible notion of the Divine Maternity in the tradition of the Church has brought into clear view the more proximate reason for Mary's Assumption. As the Mother of the Divine Redeemer, Mary is the Second Eve, associated with Christ in a unique manner in His triumph over Satan.^{76b} That triumph consists in a threefold victory—victory over sin, which is the formal cause of man's ruin; victory over concupiscence, which is the material element of sin; and victory over death and the corruption of the tomb, which is the supreme temporal penalty for sin. Christ's triumph over Satan was not complete till He rose in glory from the tomb. Only then did He become fully the Redeemer, the "life-giving spirit" (1 Cor. xv. 45) fully empowered to impart life to the souls of men through grace and glory, and life to their bodies by raising them up in the likeness of His own glorified body (Phil. iii. 21).

All the elect share with Christ in this threefold victory, but they do so by a restorative redemption which will not be complete till the last day. They are cleansed from original sin actually contracted, and to some extent they remain sinners in their personal lives. By the grace of Christ they are enabled to conquer concupiscence, but they are still subject to its impulses. And they are entitled to a complete victory over death through the glorification of their bodies, but this will take place only at the general resurrection.

Mary, on the other hand, shared in the threefold victory of Christ by a preservative redemption, whereby God granted her a sublime pre-eminence over the whole race of Adam. As the Second Eve, she triumphed over sin by her Immaculate Conception and her supreme personal sanctity. She triumphed over concupiscence by her perfect and perpetual virginity in mind and body. So, too, did she have her complete triumph over death by her anticipated resurrection and bodily Assumption. This is implicit in the fact that the Redemption is not complete so long as the body remains subject to the corruption of the tomb, and in the further fact that Mary's redemption was in all respects preservative.

^{76b} L. Carli, *op. cit.*, p. 38, 55, 90, 97; Sardi, I, 810-13; T. Livius, *op. cit.*, pp. 353-54; O. Faller, *op. cit.*, p. 87, 93-209; R. Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P., "De Definibilitate Assumptionis B. Mariae Virginis," *Angelicum*, XXII (1945), 70-72.

IV

So far I have stated how the Assumption, implicit in the revealed notion of Mary as the Mother of the Redeemer and the Second Eve, came to be clearly and explicitly realized in the tradition of the Church. This alone is sufficient as a theological proof that the Assumption, too, is a revealed doctrine, definable as a dogma of faith. Our certitude would not be impaired in the least if there were not the slightest trace of the Assumption in Scripture. But how does the case really stand? Are those authors right who say there is nothing in Holy Writ that can be adduced as a proof of the Assumption? More specifically, are they right in rejecting the two texts which are most frequently cited as proofs—the Protoevangelium and the Angelic Salutation?

With regard to the Protoevangelium, there was a lively controversy in recent years. The Benedictine Leander Drewniak⁷⁷ maintained that there is no patristic authority for a Marian interpretation of Gen. iii. 15, and he suggested a serious examination of conscience for the many theologians who confidently appeal to the Fathers in support of such an interpretation. The Abbe Rivière⁷⁸ and Prof. W. Goossens⁷⁹ endorsed his main position, while Fathers Mitzka,⁸⁰ Przybylski,⁸¹ Teetaert,⁸² and Roschini⁸³ took issue with him and called for a more precise study of the pertinent patristic sources.

As the result of an independent study of the Bull *Ineffabilis Deus*, H. Lennerz, S.J.,⁸⁴ of the Gregorian University, concluded that the Bull does not teach that there is a consensus of the Fathers in re-

⁷⁷ *Die Mariologische Deutung von Genesis, III, 15 in der Vaeterzeit* (Breslau, 1934).

⁷⁸ In *Révue des Sciences Religieuses*, XV (1935), 485.

⁷⁹ *De cooperatione immediata Matris Redemptoris ad Redemptionem objectivam* (Parisiis, 1939), p. 100; the same in *Collationes Gandavenses*, XXV (1938), pp. 11 ff.

⁸⁰ In *Zeitschrift fuer Katholische Theologie*, LIX (1935), 513.

⁸¹ *De Mariologia Sancti Irenaei* (Romae, 1937), pp. 111 ff.

⁸² In *Collectanea Franciscana*, VI (1936), 21.

⁸³ *De Coredeptrice* (Romae, 1930), p. 42.

⁸⁴ "Duae Quaestiones de Bulla 'Ineffabilis Deus,'" *Gregorianum*, XXIV (1943), 347-56.

ferring Gen. iii. 15 to the Blessed Virgin. This was contested by Roschini,⁸⁵ against whom Father Lennerz made a sharp rejoinder, reaffirming his original position and maintaining that, apart from the import of the Bull in this respect, there actually is no consensus of the Fathers in favor of a Marian interpretation.⁸⁶

This whole controversy leaves one with the impression that those who deny a consensus of the Fathers overlook the significance of the *traditio allusiva* which runs through much of the patristic writings. By this is meant the many passages in which the Fathers refer Gen. iii. 15 to the Blessed Virgin, not by explicitly citing the text and giving an *ex professo* interpretation, but by expounding their thought in such terms as to show clearly enough that for them this text was a source of Marian doctrine. This occurs especially when they point the contrast between Mary and Eve, or when they draw a parallel between the Annunciation and the scene of God's judgment in paradise. According to the special commission appointed by Pius IX to formulate the arguments for the definability of the Immaculate Conception, this *traditio allusiva* provides a solid foundation for that doctrine in Gen. iii. 15. The commission also cited a few specimen passages to illustrate how this is to be understood.⁸⁷ Passaglia, who was a member of this commission, collected a veritable armory of similar texts in his monumental work,⁸⁸ which Pius IX ordered to be distributed among the members of the Cardinalitial commission charged with drawing up the text of the Bull of definition.⁸⁹ Whether or not all such passages together suffice to establish

⁸⁵ "Sull'interpretazione patristica del Protoevangelio," *Marianum* VI (1944), 79-94.

⁸⁶ "Consensus Patrum in interpretatione mariologica Gen. 3, 15?" *Gregorianum*, XXVII (1946), 300-318.

⁸⁷ Sardi, I, 796-99.

⁸⁸ *De Immaculato Deiparae semper Virginis Conceptu Commentarius* (Romae, Typis S. Congr. de Prop. Fide, 1854-55), pars II, pp. 812 ff. See also T. Livius, *op. cit.*, pp. 67-74; O. Faller, *op. cit.*, pp. 93-209; A. D'Ales, S.J., "Marie, Mere de Dieu," *DAFC*, III, 119; X. M. Bachelet, S.J., "Marie—Immaculée Conception," *ibid.*, col. 271; P. Bonnetain, "Immaculée Conception," *Suppl. DB*, fasc. XIX (1943), 249-50; L. G. Da Fonseca, S.J., "L'Asunzione di Maria nella Sacra Scrittura," *Biblica*, XXVIII (1947), 339-47.

⁸⁹ Sardi, II, 102.

a consensus of the Fathers for a Marian interpretation of the Proto-evangelium, they show at least that there is much stronger patristic authority for such an interpretation than the authors in question are prepared to admit.

It seems, too, that the recent controversy tends to obscure the distinction between the testimony of the ancient Fathers, preserved in their extant writings, and the living tradition of the Church, which continues without interruption and is still active today.⁹⁰ After all, the primary authentic organ of the tradition of the Church is her living magisterium. It is only in dependence on the magisterium that the Fathers have their authority as qualified witnesses of the faith.⁹¹ Moreover, the Fathers were succeeded, though on a lower level, by the theologians as a secondary organ of the tradition of the Church. Hence the high value of a consensus of theologians as a *locus theologicus*.^{91b}

⁹⁰ Of Father Drewniak's treatment of the question P. Friethoff, O.P., writes: "Confundit auctor traditionem quae vi sui oretenus traditur cum testimoniis scriptis antiquorum" (*De alma socia Christi Mediatoris*, Romae, 1936, p. 49).

⁹¹ "Maximam auctoritatem habet Ecclesiae consuetudo, quae semper est in omnibus aemulanda; quia et ipsa doctrina catholicorum doctorum ab Ecclesia auctoritatem habet. Unde magis standum est auctoritati Ecclesiae quam auctoritati vel Augustini, vel Hieronymi, vel cuiuscumque doctoris" (*Summa Theol.* 2a 2ae, qu. 10, art. 12, corp).

^{91b} Dom Thomas Rigby ("The Definition of the Assumption of Our Lady," *Eastern Churches Quarterly*, VII (1947), 117-32) has no high regard for theologians. For them, he says, the common teaching and belief of the Church is too simple a proof of the Assumption. They resort to arguments of mere congruence and far-fetched interpretations of Scripture which they use with the poetic license of the "Great Pyramid" cranks. He himself uses something more than poetic license when he ascribes the literary hoax of Pseudo-Jerome to Pope Gelasius and calls it an official cold douche, a warning by a Roman Pontiff so strongly worded that the most enlightened theologians would have scrapped the doctrine of the Assumption, had not the people tenaciously held on to their belief. The simple faith of those whose minds had not been addled by excessive theologizing—this it was that overcame the skepticism, not to say the rationalism, of the "most approved authors," who were trying to soft-pedal the Assumption. The victory of Faith over Theology!

A solemn definition of the Assumption Dom Rigby regards as highly inexpedient. He does not see how there could be any gain for Catholic devotion to the Blessed Mother, which owes little to theological definition anyhow. The pious Catholic, he says, knew better than the theologian in the past, and

Now the fact is that there has been a definite advance since the patristic age in the interpretation of Gen. iii. 15. This is to be expected, since a clearer insight into the meaning of Scripture is one factor in the more general development of doctrine. Today there is a real consensus of Catholic scholars in referring the Protoevangelium to the Blessed Virgin as the woman who was to be the victorious antagonist of Satan, and this in an objective sense intended by the Holy Spirit, whether the exclusive literal sense, or the eminent literal, or the typical-prophetical, which is just as much an objective sense of Scripture as the literal.

With that unanimity of Catholic scholars, there is the fact that Pius IX, apart from his appeal to the Fathers, used the Protoevangelium on his own authority as a source of Marian doctrine, as did also the Pope's special commission and most of the Bishops who petitioned for the definition of the Immaculate Conception. We have ample assurance, therefore, that this text may be used in our present inquiry—all the more so since its real meaning is now much clearer, and it is actually cited and expounded by a notable portion of the Bishops and theologians as the primary scriptural proof of the Assumption.

Whatever "sense" of Scripture may be adopted, the commonly received Catholic interpretation of Gen. iii. 15 is as follows. Mary is the woman whom God will place in absolute enmity with Satan. It will be the identical enmity that will exist between Christ and all the hosts of hell—an active, unrelenting enmity that will gain a complete victory, symbolized by the crushing of the serpent's head. Between Mary and Satan, therefore, there can be nothing in common, least of all can there be even the slightest partial victory of Satan over her. This necessarily implies her anticipated resurrection. "Dust thou art, and into dust thou shalt return" (Gen. iii. 19)—such is the curse inflicted upon Adam and his offspring as the

can dispense with his professional assistance in the future. And he warns us not to pass over too lightly the double danger of repelling Western agnostics from their first approaches to the Faith, and of giving Orthodox dissidents occasion for abandoning their present devotion to Mary's Assumption. It all seems strangely like the misgivings expressed before the definition of the Immaculate Conception and Papal Infallibility.

penalty for the sin through which Satan brought about the ruin of the human race. From that curse Mary must be immune, otherwise her triumph would not be complete. On the contrary, Satan would have a real victory over her, since he would be holding her body captive in "the bonds of death." Mary's bodily Assumption is unquestionably implicit in the Protoevangelium.⁹²

That this is the meaning of that first intimation of the mystery of the Redemption, becomes still more evident if we view it in the full light of the New Testament teaching about the relationship of Satan, sin, death and resurrection.

Here, for example, is what St. Paul writes under divine inspiration. Death came into the world and reigns over mankind through that sin by which Satan conquered the head of the human race (Rom. v. 12). Satan, therefore, is lord of the empire of death (Hebr. ii. 14). He rules even over the just, inasmuch as they bear a body doomed to death and corruption because of the sin of Adam (Rom. viii. 10). So long as their bodies remain dust returned to the dust of the earth, they are under the dominion of death, and they sigh for the ultimate redemption of their bodies (Rom. viii. 23). This will take place only at the end of the world, when this mortal body will put on immortality, and death will be swallowed up in victory (1 Cor. xv. 52-55). Meanwhile death wields its fatal power, impelled by the sin of which it was begotten (v. 56). It is the last enemy, the last element of the victory of Satan, which will be destroyed last of all (1 Cor. xv. 25-26; Hebr. ii. 14).

Since, then, the Protoevangelium is so emphatic in predicting Mary's absolute enmity with Satan and her complete triumph over him, her triumph must certainly include her victory over death, that is, she must be immune to the corruption of the tomb and the postponement of her resurrection. If anything, the sacred text implies the Assumption even more clearly than the Immaculate Conception.

This is a strictly scriptural proof, an exposition of the objective meaning of the Word of God as interpreted in the tradition of the Church. The Fathers of the Vatican Council proposed it as their chief reason for petitioning that the Assumption be defined.⁹³ It is

⁹² See L. G. Da Fonseca, *op. cit.*, pp. 352-54.

⁹³ See references above, no. 71.

proposed in many other petitions of the Hierarchy, notably in that of the Plenary Council of Smyrna (1869), representing the Bishops of Greece and Asia Minor,⁹⁴ and in the petitions of the united Episcopate of the Austrian Empire, of Brazil, Chile, and China.⁹⁵ It is proposed also in many petitions which represent the considered conviction of eminent exegetes and theologians, such as the faculties of the Biblical Institute, the Oriental Institute, and the Gregorian University.⁹⁶

V

There remains only the problem of explaining why Mary actually died,^{96b} and how this is to be reconciled with her complete victory over Satan. In the end, the only satisfactory solution is that given by many of the Fathers.⁹⁷

⁹⁴ *Petitiones*, vol. I, pp. 164-65; Mansi-Petit, LIII, 517-19.

⁹⁵ *Petitiones*, vol. I, p. 194, 206, 211, 276.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, vol. II, pp. 349-53.

^{96b} Besides the one doubtful exception of St. Epiphanius among the ancients, a few modern authors have denied the reality of Mary's death. (See E. Campana, *Maria nel dogma cattolico* ⁴, Roma-Torino, 1936, p. 803). The most notable exponent of this thesis was D. Arnaldi (*Super Transitu B. Mariae Virginis Deiparae*, Genuae, 1879), who drew a devastating review from M. J. Scheeben in *Der Katholik*, LXII (1882), 330-33. Arnaldi did not profit by this and other criticisms, as appears from his *De Definibilitate Assumptionis B. V. M. Deiparae* (Augustae Taurinorum, 1884). Much more recently M. Jugie maintained that the primitive Christian tradition represents Mary as rapt immediately to her bodily glory without dying, and he himself espouses this as the true concept of the Assumption. His whole position has been attacked by C. Balic, O. Faller, and P. Charles. (See above, no. 2.) Historically, it seems beyond question that his theory is not only baseless, but definitely contrary to the earliest extant sources. Doctrinally, it is untenable. It is the constant tradition of the Church that Mary's Assumption was an anticipated *resurrection*, necessarily preceded by a real death.

⁹⁷ Sardi, vol. I, pp. 813-16; Carli, *op. cit.*, pp. 107-109. C. Koser, O.F.M. ("A Definibilidade da Assunção de Nossa Senhora," *Revista Ecclesiastica Brasileira*, VII (1947), 246-77) proposes this thesis: Mary had a right to exemption from death, based upon the divine will exempting her from original sin and its penalties, for this left her with a right to the preternatural gifts of the state of original justice. She could be and actually was justly subjected to death only insofar as her death was meritorious and vicariously satisfactory for sinners. Many theologians hesitate to ascribe to Mary the right that

Mary, it is true, was not subject to death as a penalty, but God willed that she die for higher reasons pertaining to her relationship with Christ and the part she was to play in the work of Redemption. God sent His Son into the world vested with a human nature in the condition which the race of Adam had incurred through sin. The Divine Savior came *in similitudinem carnis peccati* (Rom. viii. 3), passible and mortal, that He might share the earthly lot of His brethren and redeem them through His death on the cross. As the Mother of the passible and mortal Christ, Mary must likewise be passible and mortal, His fellow victim in suffering till she would follow Him through the portals of death. She did not, like Christ, voluntarily assume death as something from which she was exempt. It was God's will for her, a creature, and in the end she paid her tribute to death *pro conditione carnis*, as the Church puts it in the Secret of the Mass of the Assumption. It was her last sublime act of love and obedience before her soul sped to the eternal glory of heaven. In view of her passible and mortal state, it was also the necessary prelude to her triumph over death, manifest in her anticipated resurrection and Assumption, as Christ's triumph over death is manifest in His Resurrection and Ascension.

Such a death could not be derogatory to the Mother of God. Least of all was it the death brought into the world through the malice and guile of Satan. In the traditional language of the Church it is appropriately called Mary's *koimesis*, *dormitio*, *pausatio*, *transitus*. Still more appropriately some of the Fathers call it a life-giving sleep, the brief repose of her lifeless body till its glorious awakening and flight to the abode of the blessed.

In the Angelic Salutation (Lk. i. 28), completed by Elizabeth's benediction (Lk. i. 42), the Holy Spirit intimates that Mary and her Child are the woman and her seed foretold in the Proto-evangelium. The Son of God is about to take flesh of her flesh and through her join Himself to the fallen race of Adam that He may conquer its deadly foe. It is then that Heaven salutes Mary

Father Koster postulates. Moreover, the sole reason that he assigns for her death raises the question of the manner and the extent of Mary's co-operation in the objective Redemption of the human race, which is still a much-disputed problem.

as the one lone member of the race who is supremely favored by God and replete with His gifts. And when Mary comes to Elizabeth with the Savior of the world enshrined within her, she is greeted as the woman who is blessed above all women together with the fruit of her womb.⁹⁸

Pius IX is the authentic spokesman of the tradition of the Church when he says: This salutation, never spoken to anyone else, knows Mary to be the seat of all God's graces, an unfathomed abyss and an almost infinite treasury of all the charismata of the Holy Spirit. Never subject to the curse which strikes all others, she is hailed as sharing forever with her Son in the same divine benediction.⁹⁹

Those charismata and that joint benediction certainly include Mary's anticipated resurrection and bodily Assumption. The resurrection of the body to eternal glory is an element intrinsic to the order of grace, for glory is nothing else than grace in full flower. "Life eternal in Christ Jesus" (Rom. vi, 23)—this is the final and supreme grace. For man, perfect glory demands the reunion of the body with the soul in bliss. Only when this takes place will the elect be completely divinized, completely assimilated to God in that supernatural life of which grace is the vital principle. That is why the elect will become the children of God in a perfect way only when they will rise from the tomb on the last day, with their bodies transfigured by the divine glory of the soul (Rom. viii, 23). Hence, if Mary is replete with grace, she is necessarily replete with glory; that is, she is now in full possession of her beatitude with her glorified body. Her Assumption was the speedy and perfect flowering of her transcendent life of grace which began with her Immaculate Conception.

Such is the traditional interpretation of the Angelic Salutation in reference to the Assumption. The erudite Pope Alexander III (1159-81) put it in striking form when he wrote to the Sultan of Iconium, who had asked for an exposition of the principle teachings of the Church: *Maria concepit sine pudore, peperit sine dolore, et hinc*

⁹⁸ For the critical exposition of the text and its interpretation in the light of the exegetical tradition of the Church, see V. Sardi, *op. cit.*, vol. I, pp. 799-804; C. Passaglia, *op. cit.*, pars I, pp. 151-337; pars II, pp. 1022 ff; P. Bonnetain, *op. cit.*, col. 254-63; L. G. Da Fonseca, *op. cit.*, pp. 355-61.

⁹⁹ *Pii IX Acta*, pars I, vol. I, p. 609; Sardi, II, 308.

*migravit sine corruptione, juxta verbum angeli, imo Dei per angelum, ut plena, non semiplena gratiae probaretur.*¹⁰⁰ In our own time the text of Luke has been sounded more deeply, and many Bishops and theologians expound its implications in their petitions for the definition of the Assumption.¹⁰¹

VI.

I shall now sum up briefly.

There is no authentic, circumstantial history of the Assumption. Neither is there any way of proving an explicit apostolic tradition of the simple fact of the Assumption, either from historical sources or from indirect theological argument. The first witnesses to an explicit belief in the Assumption appear in the fourth century, leaving the origin of the belief in the dark. Hence, the attempt to prove that the Assumption is explicitly revealed should be abandoned as inconclusive and hazardous.

From a theological point of view, it is now demonstrated that the Assumption is implicitly revealed, and that it was brought to a clear realization in the course of the centuries by a true organic development in the living tradition of the Church.

In the East, the Assumption was an object of public liturgical cult rather early in the fifth century, and it was brought to its full doctrinal development by the Eastern Fathers of the seventh and the eighth centuries.

In the West, the feast was instituted in the sixth century, but the development of the doctrine was retarded till the scholastic age, when it became the common teaching. From that time onwards the connection of the Assumption with the mystery of the Redemption and the cycle of Marian dogmas became steadily more manifest.

Today we have a real consensus of the magisterium, of the theologians, and of the faithful, both of the East and the West, that the Assumption is definable as a truth divinely revealed.

This consensus is manifestly the result of the fact that the doctrine of the Assumption is implicit in the concrete, historical notion of the

¹⁰⁰ *Epistola XXXII. Ad Soldanum Iconii. PL 207, 1077; Mansi, XXI, 898.*

¹⁰¹ *Petitiones, I, 210, 276; II, 732.*

Divine Maternity, more proximately in the notion of Mary as the Second Eve, indissolubly associated with Christ in His victory over sin, concupiscence, and death. This development has also brought a clearer insight into the meaning of the Protoevangelium and the Angelic Salutation, in both of which the Assumption is as certainly implicit as the twin mystery of the Immaculate Conception.

We may not anticipate the action of the Holy See, but we may hope and pray that the providential moment may soon come when the Vicar of Christ will set a new jewel in Mary's diadem by a solemn definition of her Assumption. When that moment comes, all Catholics will rejoice at having infallible assurance that the doctrine which they already believe is revealed by God: that Mary is in possession of that bodily glory which the elect will receive only on the last day. Believing this as a dogma of faith, they will salute Mary all the more joyfully as Queen of Heaven, they will love her all the more ardently as the Refuge of sinners and the Mother of her children on earth, and they will invoke her intercession all the more confidently that she may bring them to that heavenly bliss of which she, after Christ, is the pledge and the first-fruits.

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