

NOTE

THE IMMORTALITY OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

As was to be expected, a flood of theological literature followed in the wake of the Bull, *Munificentissimus Deus*. Most of the commentators had little difficulty in seeing the psychosomatic glorification of the Mother of God as the formal cause (object) of the definition. The Blessed Virgin's bodily assumption into heaven embraces three elements: (a) supernatural beatitude of soul, (b) preternatural transformation of body, and (c) supernatural eternal life *in termino*.¹ The object of the definition surpasses the empirical perception of the senses² and pertains to the supernatural, not to the historical or sensible order.³ As such it is a truth that has been revealed by God and one "which surely no faculty of the human mind could know by its own natural power."⁴

There was more unanimity in regard to the *terminus ad quem* of the Assumption than in regard to the *terminus a quo*. The bone of contention was supplied by the words, "expleto terrestri vitae cursu." Some commentators held that the Bull clearly teaches, constantly supposes, and equivalently defines the death of Mary. This seems to be the opinion of J. F. Bonnefoy, O.F.M.,⁵ L. M. Simon, O.M.I.,⁶ B. G. Rodriguez, C.M.F.,⁷ and Charles De Koninck, Professor of Philosophy and Auxiliary Professor of Theology at the University of Laval.⁸

¹ Cf. G. Filograssi, S.J., "Constitutio apostolica 'Munificentissimus Deus' de Assumptione beatae Mariae virginis," *Gregorianum* 31 (1950) 490.

² Cf. *ibid.*

³ Cf. P. G. Balic, O.F.M., "De proclamato Assumptionis dogmate prae theologorum doctrinis et ecclesiae vita," *Antonianum* 36 (1951) 5.

⁴ *Munificentissimus Deus*; *AAS* 32 (1950) 757.

⁵ As quoted by L. M. Simon, O.M.I., *Marianum* 14 (1952) 329.

⁶ Cf. "La Bulle 'Munificentissimus' et la mort de la très sainte Vierge," *Marianum* 14 (1952) 339.

⁷ Cf. "La razón teológica en la constitución Munificentissimus Deus," *Ephemerides mariologicae* 1 (1953) 49.

⁸ Cf. "La mort et l'Assomption de la sainte Vierge," *Laval théologique et philosophique* 7 (1952) 9-86. In this article the author proposes an hypothesis which he hopes might serve as a possible means of reconciling the two divergent opinions concerning the final lot of the Mother of God. The first part (pp. 9-42) is an eloquent presentation of a definitely minority opinion that the Bull clearly and explicitly teaches the death of the B.V.M. The second part (pp. 42-86) is devoted to the task of developing an analogical concept of death and predicating it of Mary. Applying the Aristotelian doctrine of substantial change to a suggestion he finds in St. Augustine's observation that at the time of the Parousia the just will pass "ad immortalitatem per mortem mira celeritate" (*De civitate Dei* 20, 20), De Koninck contends that an interval of time between death and resurrection is necessary

Others, although personally believing that Mary died, were more cautious in stating the relation of their opinion to the dogmatic definition of the Assumption. J. D. DeAldama, S.J.,⁹ and M. Gordillo, S.J.,¹⁰ held that the definition, properly so called, neither affirmed nor denied the death of Mary. M. Labourdette, O.P., and M. J. Nicolas, O.P., called attention to the silence of the definition in regard to the fact of Mary's death.¹¹ G. Philips felt that the dogma only indirectly touched on the death of the Blessed Virgin.¹² J. Daniélou, S.J., admitted that the definition did not settle the question.¹³ P. G. Balic, O.F.M., asserted that the Pope neither affirms nor denies the death of Mary in his own words¹⁴ and that the terms of the definition prescind from the manner in which her earthly life was terminated.¹⁵ G. Filograssi, S.J., maintained that the definition did not decide

only for death as it is commonly understood, i.e., a state in which the soul is separated from the body for a period of time, no matter how long or short that interval may be. The Mother of God was never subject to death in this sense, i.e., there never was a *time* during which she was dead. But death may be predicated of her properly, although analogically, in the sense that the final instant of her earthly existence, in which her soul informed her mortal body, is already the first instant of her glorious existence, in which her soul informs her immortal body. In his own words: "Dans ce cas la mort, entendue au sens le plus propre de ce nom et qui ne se vérifie que d'un unique instant—*mori et simul mortuum esse*—référerait non pas à une altération corruptive dont elle aurait été le terme, mais à la cause efficiente de la résurrection et à la cause formelle du corps spirituel. . . . Bref, le trépas ne voudrait dire ici autre chose que le *primum non esse* de la condition mortelle à l'instant même où de prime abord l'âme serait pleinement glorifiée, établissant ainsi le *primum esse* du corps spirituel" (pp. 70-71). See also De Koninck, "La personne humaine et la résurrection," *Laval théologique et philosophique* 10 (1955) 199-221.

Whatever might be the intrinsic merits of his philosophical concept of death, De Koninck's position is theologically unacceptable precisely because his premise, that the Bull clearly and explicitly teaches the death of the B.V.M., is hardly recognized as tenable even by many theologians who hold that Mary died. He does not seem to be particularly impressed by the fact that Augustine's commentary on 1 Cor 15:51 is currently considered an exegetical anachronism. Moreover, his observation that the Church seems to prefer this reading is a purely gratuitous statement. De Koninck's position appears to be merely an argument of convenience for a purely hypothetical situation which he readily admits finds no support in revelation. Read in the light of the actual state of the question, De Koninck's position can be shown to contain in principle a strong argument for the immortality of the Blessed Virgin.

⁹ Cf. "Los primeros comentarios de la Bula Munificentissimus Deus," *Estudios eclesiásticos* 25 (1951) 378.

¹⁰ Cf. "La Bula de la Asunción," *Estudios eclesiásticos* 25 (1951) 327.

¹¹ Cf. "La définition de l'Assomption," *Revue thomiste* 50 (1950) 250.

¹² Cf. "Sommes-nous entrés dans une phase mariologique?" *Marianum* 14 (1952) 37.

¹³ Cf. "Le dogme de l'Assomption," *Etudes* 267 (1950) 290, note 1.

¹⁴ Cf. Balic, *art. cit.*, 6.

¹⁵ Cf. *ibid.*, 14.

whether the Assumption was preceded by death and resurrection or took place without the intervention of death.¹⁶

Still others, personally believing in Mary's immortality *de jure* if not *de facto*, felt that the definition gave special actuality to the question of her death. This seems to be the opinion of G. Roschini, O.S.M.,¹⁷ T. Gallus, S.J.,¹⁸ M. A. Rossi, O. de M.,¹⁹ J. Loncke,²⁰ M. Jugie, A.A.,²¹ and T. Maré, O.M.I.²²

It is generally recognized that the Bull, *Munificentissimus Deus*, has left the question, whether Mary died or not, to the free discussion of theologians. It is likewise generally recognized that the opinion of those who hold that Mary did not die is gaining adherents. For that reason a discussion of their opinion would seem timely. It is the purpose of this article to give an exposi-

¹⁶ Cf. Filograssi, *art. cit.*, 517.

¹⁷ Before the definition of the Assumption Roschini held the opinion that the Blessed Virgin died; cf. *Mariologia* 2 (2nd ed.; Rome, 1948) 234-36. After the definition he espoused the cause of her immortality; cf. "Il problema della morte di Maria dopo la Costituzione Dogmatica Munificentissimus Deus," *Marianum* 13 (1952) 148-63. An English translation of this article appeared in the *Irish Ecclesiastical Record* 80 (1953) 73-88. A condensation of the same appeared in *Theology Digest* 2 (1954) 73-76.

¹⁸ Cf. "Ad immortalitatem B. M. Virginis," *Marianum* 12 (1950) 26-54; "Notae quaedam ad interpretationem Bullae Munificentissimus Deus," *Marianum* 13 (1951) 180-83; "Quaestio mortis B. V. Mariae post Bullam Munificentissimus Deus," *Divus Thomas* (Piacenza) 54 (1952) 3-15; "Ad quaestionem mortis post Bullam Munificentissimus Deus," *Marianum* 15 (1953) 123-34.

¹⁹ Cf. "Assumptio B. V. M. corpore et anima in coelum quae implicite continetur in privilegio Immaculatae suae Conceptionis," *Alma socia Christi* 7 (Acta Congressus Mariologici-Mariani; Romae, 1950) 291-305. The purpose of this article is to show that the argument *Assumptio ex Immaculata* is theologically conclusive only on the supposition that Mary is *de jure* immortal. The author expresses his opinion in regard to the death of Mary in these words: "Cogitamus omnes hucusque theologos, mortis Mariae defensores, nullum argumentum plene demonstrativum pro sua sententia adducere potuisse. . ." (p. 303, note 17).

²⁰ Cf. "De dogmatica definitione Assumptionis Mariae corporeae," *Collationes Brugenses* 47 (1951) 437.

²¹ Cf. *La mort et l'Assomption de la sainte Vierge* (Rome, 1944) 1-738. See also Jugie, "La définition du dogme de l'Assomption," *L'Année théologique*, 37 (1951) 102, in which he adverts to the fact that the definition makes no allusion to the death or resurrection of Mary.

²² Fr. Maré considers "a little temerarious" any attempt to see in the words of the Holy Father a confirmation of the opinion that Mary died, and affirms that such a translation "... dépasse les prémisses, induit en erreur (de bonne foi) sur la pensée pontificale et tent d'éliminer toute discussion future en promulguant une opinion personnelle comme 'vérité' indubitable, au détriment d'une doctrine qui rallie des suffrages chaque jour plus nombreux," as quoted by Charles De Koninck, "La mort et l'Assomption de la sainte Vierge," *Laval théologique et philosophique* 7 (1952) 11.

tion of their opinion in the light of the recently defined dogma of the Assumption. The article will be divided into three sections: (a) a criticism of the opinion that Mary died; (b) an exposition of the arguments for her immortality; and (c) the relation of this opinion to the Encyclical.

ARGUMENTS FOR THE DEATH OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

Unlike the *terminus ad quem*, the *terminus a quo* of the Assumption pertains to the historical order. Any attempt to establish the fact of Mary's death on this ground seems doomed to fail. In the first six centuries there exists no constant and unanimous tradition on the way in which Mary left this world. Not only is there silence in regard to the time, manner, and circumstances, but even the very fact of her death does not seem to be universally felt. After a rather thorough examination of the patristic evidence B. Altaner concludes that there is no historical certitude in regard to the death of the Blessed Virgin.²³ After a careful sifting of the same evidence M. Jugie asserts that the argument from the Fathers has only a very relative value.²⁴ T. Gallus considers the silence of the first three centuries historically inexplicable on the hypothesis that Mary died.²⁵ J. Loncke feels that the silence of antiquity becomes intelligible only on the hypothesis that she did not die.²⁶

It is precisely from this point of view that the testimony of St. Epiphanius is significant. The Bishop of Salamis was born early in the fourth century and died in the first years of the fifth (315–402). His lifetime overlapped that of St. Athanasius and St. John Chrysostom. He was held in high esteem by his younger contemporary, St. Jerome.²⁷ His *Panarion*, a monumental work enumerating and refuting eighty varieties of error from the beginning of human history to his own time, was written within the years 372–377. In

²³ Altaner's analysis of the Assumption monuments of the patristic era may be found in three articles bearing the same title, "Zur Frage der Definibilität der Assumptio B.M.V.," *Theologische Revue* 44 (1948) 128–40; 45 (1949) 129–42; 46 (1950) 2–20. In concluding that the definability of the Assumption cannot be maintained from the standpoint of scientific theology, Altaner apparently erred by identifying the historical method with the theological method. But his conclusion from the standpoint of the historical method cannot, at present, be challenged; i.e., in the first eight centuries there is no trustworthy historical tradition for the death and Assumption of Mary.

²⁴ Cf. *La mort et l'Assomption de la sainte Vierge*, 507.

²⁵ Cf. "Ad immortalitatem B. M. Virginis," *Marianum* 12 (1950) 42.

²⁶ Cf. "De dogmatica definitione Assumptionis Mariae corporeae," *Collationes Brugenses* 47 (1951) 438.

²⁷ Cf. *Liber contra Joannem Hierosolymitanum* 12 (PL 22, 365).

discussing the errors of the Antidicomarianites²⁸ and the Collyridians²⁹ he reveals that there was no explicit positive tradition, genuine or spurious, known to him of the circumstances of Mary's departure from this life.³⁰ He allows for three hypotheses: she may have died a natural death; she may have suffered martyrdom; she may not have died at all. The significance of Epiphanius' contribution to the present question is not which of the three hypotheses he personally held, but the fact that he knew of no apostolic tradition affirming that the Blessed Virgin died.³¹ It is not without significance that the Holy Father in defining the doctrine of the Assumption made no reference to any historical tradition antedating the sixth century.

However, towards the end of the fifth century the *Transitus Mariae* literature appears on the scene to fill in the gaps left by the canonical books of the New Testament regarding the life, death, and final lot of Mary.³² The popularity of these pseudoepigraphs is clearly seen in the fact that they have come down to us in Coptic, Greek, Latin, Syriac, Arabic, Ethiopic, and Armenian versions.³³ These accounts, often fantastic, inconsistent, and contradictory, are not reliable witnesses to the death of Mary in the same way that the Gospels are reliable records of the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ. They cannot be used to establish the existence of a positive tradition of apostolic origin regarding the fact of Mary's death. They may be alleged as witness to the existence of a current opinion professing belief in the fact of her death. But since the connection of this opinion with an apostolic tradition is purely legendary, the reason for the existence of the belief must be sought elsewhere. One of the more plausible explanations seems to be the simple fact that the authors merely presumed that the universal law of death was applicable to the Blessed Virgin and then proceeded to fill in the blanks left by Scripture.³⁴ Again it is significant that the Holy Father made no reference to this literature, which not only clearly taught that Mary died but explicitly professed belief in her Assumption.

²⁸ Antidicomarianites, the Adversaries of Mary, were heretics who denied her perpetual virginity, making her the bearer of children to Joseph, and even a consort to St. John, who "took her unto his own."

²⁹ Collyridians were heretics who offered sacrifice to Mary as to a divinity.

³⁰ For an excellent appraisal of Epiphanius' position, cf. E. Smothers, S.J., "Saint Epiphanius and the Assumption," *American Ecclesiastical Review* 125 (1951) 255-372.

³¹ Cf. B. Capelle, O.S.B., "Théologie de l'Assomption d'après la Bulle Munificentissimus Deus," *Nouvelle revue théologique* 72 (1950) 1010.

³² Cf. Jugie, *op. cit.*, 103-71.

³³ Cf. A. C. Rush, C.S.S.R., "The Assumption in the Apocrypha," *American Ecclesiastical Review* 116 (1947) 5.

³⁴ Cf. Jugie, *op. cit.*, 508.

Can the light of theology pierce the veil of historical uncertainty surrounding the final lot of Mary? In the field of theological speculation the opinion that Mary died enjoys the advantage of numbers. But there is a striking lack of unanimity in regard to the degree of certitude attached to this position. As a thesis it runs a sort of theological gamut from the probable to the definable. It is possible that its impressive array of authors clothes the opinion with a semblance of authority which conceals the intrinsic weakness of the arguments advanced as proofs.

The feast of the Assumption has been cited frequently as a theological proof for the death of the Blessed Virgin. It cannot be denied that in the liturgy of both the Eastern and Western Churches the object of the feast originally was the death of Mary. But the history of the development of the Roman rite shows a gradual shift of emphasis from the notion of death to the idea of the Assumption.³⁵ Up to a few years ago the only clear references to the death of Mary in the Roman liturgy were found in the second nocturne lessons of the fourth day within the octave of the feast (*De sermone Sancti Joannis Damasceni*) and in the secret of the Mass. Inasmuch as the words of prayer "... etsi pro conditione carnis migrasse cognoscimus ... " seem to bear the weight of the argument, they are worthy of some consideration.

A priori it is not impossible to give them an interpretation favorable to the opinion of those who claim that Mary did not die.³⁶ However, admitting that they do refer explicitly to the death of Mary their demonstrative value is not ipso facto established. Unless the liturgical reference to Mary's death is equivalent to a dogmatic fact, then it does not even pertain to the indirect object of infallibility. Such a necessary connection between the death of Mary and her Assumption does not seem apparent from the liturgical text itself. Even if it were, can a passing reference in an incidental phrase be considered the equivalent of a dogmatic definition?

If the reference is to a simple historical fact, then it is presented on human, not divine authority. In this case the infallibility of the Church is not engaged and belief in Mary's death would not be endowed with the immutability of a dogma. In any event, the formula, "Lex supplicandi statuit legem credendi," hardly seems applicable here. The word "supplicandi" in the formula should be taken in its strict sense and not extended to everything contained in the liturgical offices. The fact of Mary's death never appeared in the liturgy as a direct object of prayer and supplication. And for that reason the axiom hardly seems *ad rem*. Moreover the force of the argument from the liturgy has been weakened by the fact that the clear reference to

³⁵ Cf. Jugie, *op. cit.*, 518-25.

³⁶ Cf. Jugie, *op. cit.*, 520.

the death of Mary in the old Mass has been expunged in the new Mass of the Feast.

Various attempts have been made to show that Mary's death is a truth which is at least theologically certain. The force of one such argument rests on the application to Mary of the universal law of death, a doctrine usually attributed to St. Paul. The universality of death is not a Pauline doctrine but a theological opinion which found its way into Latin theology as a result of a false reading of 1 Corinthians 15:51: "... omnes quidem resurgemus sed non omnes immutabimur."³⁷ The true reading is "... πάντες μὲν οὐ κοιμηθήσόμεθα, πάντες δὲ ἀλλαγθήσόμεθα."³⁸ The operative word *κοιμάομαι* is a euphemism for dying.³⁹

Therefore on whatever hypothesis death is explained (as a punishment for sin, merely a penalty, or a simple condition of nature), it cannot be universal because of the explicit teaching of St. Paul that the privilege of immortality *de facto* will be given to the just who are living at the time of the parousia: "We shall not all sleep (die) but we shall all be changed." Consequently if "Mary's death must be formally classified under a law which is absolutely universal and knows no exception it should be so formulated that after the fall the final perfection of mankind must be reached only by the cessation of bodily life."⁴⁰

Another argument for Mary's death rests on the opinion that in her case death is not a punishment for sin but simply the result of the natural constitution of human nature since the fall. The force of this argument rests on the assumption that there is no necessary connection in the present order of divine providence between sin and death. As a matter of fact the only reason assigned in revelation for death is sin.⁴¹ St. Paul explicitly affirms the causal connection between death and sin in the Epistle to the Romans, 5:12: "Wherefore by one man sin entered into the world and by sin death, and so death passed upon all men because all have sinned." The causal connection between sin and death is confirmed by the teaching of the Second Council of

³⁷ For Latin text, cf. A. Merk, S.J., *Novum Testamentum graece et latine* (7th ed.; Rome, 1951) 588. For a criticism of the opinion based on a false reading of the text, cf. F. Prat, S.J., *La théologie de saint Paul* 1 (38th ed.; Paris, 1949) 91-92, 166 and note 2; also vol. 2, 449 and note 1.

³⁸ For Greek text, cf. Merk, *loc. cit.*

³⁹ Cf. F. Zorell, S.J., *Lexicon graecum Novi Testamenti* (Paris, 1931) 718.

⁴⁰ M. J. Scheeben, *Mariology* 2 (tr. J. Geukers; St. Louis: Herder, 1948) 152.

⁴¹ Gn 2:17: "But of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat. For in what day soever thou shalt eat of it, thou shalt die the death." Wis 1:13: "For God made not death. . . ." Wis 2:23: "God created man incorruptible . . . by the envy of the devil, death came into the world." Sir 25:23: "From the woman came the beginning of sin, and by her we all die."

Orange. The second canon of this Council clearly asserts that it would be an injustice on the part of God if bodily death (*reatus poenae*) were transmitted to Adam's descendants without original sin (*reatus culpae*) also being transmitted.⁴² The fact that Adam sinned (*peccatum originale originans*) is not sufficient to account for the death of his descendants. But the personal contraction of original sin (*peccatum originale originatum*) is required to avoid the dilemma of attributing an injustice to God.⁴³

The distinction between death as a punishment of sin and death as a condition of nature seems to ignore rather arbitrarily the necessary connection between sin and death in the present order of divine providence. No fault can be found with it from a philosophical point of view. But the relation between sin and death is not a purely philosophical question. From an historical point of view this distinction seems to make a rather illicit transition from one order to another: "A posse ad esse non valet illatio." In the actual order in which man lives death is revealed as a condition of nature which is a penalty of sin.⁴⁴ If then a descendant of Adam were not personally to contract original sin he would not fall under the natural necessity of dying. Now this is precisely the case in the situation of the Blessed Virgin. In virtue of her Immaculate Conception she was de jure immortal. All theologians would agree with M. J. Scheeben's observation that in virtue of her Immaculate Conception Mary was not subject to death as a penal debt. But not all would agree with him when he asserts: "Neither can it be said that she was subject to death because of her mortal nature, for nature makes death inevitable only insofar as the person to whom it belongs has no supernatural claim to the eternal continuation of that nature."⁴⁵

Many theologians recognizing in Mary some right or claim to immortality in virtue of her Immaculate Conception attempt to explain her death in terms of her role as Co-Redemptrix.⁴⁶ Again it is not immediately apparent

⁴² DB 175.

⁴³ This argument has been developed at some length by C. Koser, O.F.M., "A defibilidade da Assunção de Nossa Senhora," *Revista eclesiástica Brasileira* 7 (1947) 256-77; "O Argumento de Assunção fundado sobre o II Canon do II Sinodo de Orange," *ibid.* 10 (1950) 203-40. Also by B. Kloppenburg, O.F.M., who gives a comprehensive treatment of the question in a book entitled, *De relatione inter peccatum et mortem* (Rome: Libreria Orbis Catholicus, 1951).

⁴⁴ Cf. M. A. Rossi, "Assumptio B.V.M. corpore et anima in caelum quae implicite continetur in privilegio Immaculatae suae Conceptionis," *Alma socia Christi* 7 (Rome, 1950) 302, note 16.

⁴⁵ M. J. Scheeben, *op. cit.* 2, 152.

⁴⁶ The argument for Mary's death based on her role of Co-Redemptrix requires some qualification. All theologians agree that the Blessed Virgin Mary cooperated in our subjective redemption. All likewise agree that Mary remotely cooperated in the work of

that the "noble associate of the divine Redeemer"⁴⁷ should be subject to death in order to say "that she with Christ redeemed the human race."⁴⁸ If Mary's death were required to fulfill her role as Co-Redemptrix it would seem that she should have died at the same time as the Redeemer. Otherwise it is difficult to avoid the implication that the work of objective Redemption consummated on Calvary was not complete with the expiatory death of Christ on the cross. Or, if it be asserted that her future death was anticipatively imputed to the death of Christ on Calvary, then where in revelation is there any support for such a gratuitous hypothesis?

Actually, Mary's role as Co-Redemptrix is adequately explained by her compassion with Christ on the cross. The sword of sorrow which pierced her soul on Calvary reveals the full extent of her cooperation in the work of objective redemption. During the Redeemer's agony on the cross His immaculate mother "suffered and all but died (*pene commortua*) along with her Son suffering and dying."⁴⁹ If she almost died on Calvary while fulfilling her role as Co-Redemptrix, then what possible relation can her subsequent death have to a work which was consummated years before?

Since the two theological reasons alleged for Mary's death are not absolutely conclusive, what can be said about the arguments of fittingness for her death? It is alleged that the death of the Blessed Virgin Mary would show the reality of the Incarnation. If the human nature of Christ is not sufficiently demonstrated by the historical record of His suffering, death, and burial in a sealed and guarded tomb, it is difficult to see how the conflicting and contradictory accounts of her death could possibly be an effective refutation of any species of Docetism.⁵⁰

Another argument is drawn from the privilege of the divine maternity. Jesus passed through the portals of death and it is fitting that His mother do likewise. There would be in her maternal heart a desire to imitate her divine

objective redemption. But modern theologians are now vigorously disputing Mary's proximate cooperation in the work of objective redemption. Some (traditionalists) maintain that Christ, and Christ alone, performed the act of objective redemption; Mary had no part in it, not even a secondary and subordinate part. For those who hold this opinion some reason other than her role as Co-Redemptrix would be necessary to account for her death. Others (Co-Redemptionists) maintain that Mary on Calvary, with Christ and under Christ, paid the price which redeemed the world. According to this view we are redeemed by Christ and Mary. As has been shown in the body of the article, such a role does not necessarily require the death of the Blessed Virgin. In any event, the argument for Mary's death based on her role of Co-Redemptrix hardly seems to be conclusive.

⁴⁷ Pius XII, *Munificentissimus Deus*, AAS 42 (1950) 768.

⁴⁸ Benedict XV, *Inter sodalicia*, AAS 10 (1918) 182.

⁴⁹ Benedict XV, *loc. cit.*

⁵⁰ Cf. Roschini, *Mariologia* 2/2, 235.

Son in all things. Actually, Christ died in the midst of the most bitter physical, mental, and moral sufferings, while Mary's death is usually depicted as some sort of sleep and loving slumber. Rather than being similar to the death of Christ such a death presents a striking contrast and fails to verify the very *ratio* for which it is alleged, i.e., assimilation to her Son's death.⁵¹

But might it not be said that Mary's death was fitting in order to furnish an example to all those souls over whom she exercises a spiritual maternity? It is hard to find an example of virtue in a species of death so obscure, ambiguous, and totally different from the suffering and agony usually associated with the ordinary notion of death. While, on the other hand, the most perfect example of virtue in the midst of suffering is revealed in the spiritual martyrdom of Mary at the foot of the cross.⁵²

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The opinion that Mary *de facto* did not die rests on the argument that she has a right to immortality. This right flows from the fact that in the present order of divine providence sin is the unique cause of death. But Mary in virtue of her Immaculate Conception was preserved free from the stain of original sin. Therefore she had a right to immortality. The only uncontested point in this syllogism is the minor, which happens to be *de fide definita*. The proponents of Mary's immortality believe that the major rests on the constant and unanimous teaching of Scripture and tradition. But it is the conclusion which has been subject to most criticism.

One criticism starts with the undeniable fact that immortality is a preternatural gift to which no creature has a strict right. This objection has been briefly expressed by B. Lonergan, S.J.: "The summary answer is that privileges are freely bestowed."⁵³ No one intends to deny the gratuity of the privilege in predicating a right of Mary. But a creature may be said quite properly to have *coram Deo* a right which is founded on the order, providence, and grace of God. It is in this sense that Saint Augustine speaks of God being a debtor: "[God] became a debtor, not by receiving anything from us, but by promising what it pleased Him to promise."⁵⁴ And in this sense a right to immortality may be properly predicated of Mary because in the present order and providence of God sin is the unique cause of death.

⁵¹ Cf. T. Gallus, "Ad quaestionem mortis post Bullam Munificentissimus Deus," *Marianum* 15 (1953) 138.

⁵² Cf. Roschini, *op. cit.*, p. 235.

⁵³ B. Lonergan, S.J., "The Assumption and Theology," *Vers le dogme de l'Assomption* (Montreal: Fides, 1948) 422.

⁵⁴ *PL* 38, 863.

This right to immortality is rejected on still another score. It is the equivalent of claiming for Mary a right to the non-existent state of innocent nature. It is true that some proponents of Mary's right to immortality do seem to present their argument in some such framework. From this point of view M. Jugie, A.A., has come in for his share of criticism. He has evolved a somewhat eclectic concept of original sin to establish his point.⁵⁵ Jugie himself expressed his apprehension on this score.⁵⁶ Moreover J. M. Parent, O.P., pointed out the difficulties in Jugie's distinction between original sin objectively considered and subjectively considered.⁵⁷ Whatever be the merits or demerits of Jugie's concept of original sin, the claim of immortality for Mary in no wise depends on such theological subtleties. Moreover, if, as K. Healy, O.Carm., asserts, the learned Augustinian makes the right to immortality the equivalent of a right to the state of innocent nature,⁵⁸ it does not follow that everyone else does.⁵⁹ The claim to immortality is not incompatible with the present order of redemption.⁶⁰ But it is verified precisely in the present economy of salvation, where Scripture clearly shows that death is a consequence of original sin.

The validity of the conclusion has been challenged on the ground that it proves too much. Why should not Mary have been impassible as well as immortal, since both are the consequence of original sin in the present order of Divine Providence? The answer to this objection is found in the providential role assigned to passibility in the redemption of the human race: "Since Christ was not subject to sin, He was not fated to die or to become ashes; nevertheless He freely underwent death for the sake of [our] salvation."⁶¹ De jure immortal, Christ de facto suffered and died, but uniquely *propter peccatum*. His eternal Father "laid on Him the iniquity of us all,"⁶² in order that He might "take away the sin of the world."⁶³ And this He did in virtue of a divine command: "No one takes it [*vitam in carne passibili*] from me, but I lay it down of myself, and I have the power to take it up again. This commandment I have received from my Father."⁶⁴ The body of the Blessed Virgin was passible in order that she might fulfill her role as Co-

⁵⁵ Cf. Jugie, *La mort et l'Assomption de la sainte Vierge*, 527-39.

⁵⁶ Cf. Jugie, *op. cit.*, 527.

⁵⁷ Cf. J. M. Parent, O.P., "La sainte Vierge est-elle morte?" *Vers le dogme de l'Assomption*, 280-83.

⁵⁸ Cf. "The Assumption among Mary's Privileges," *Thomist* 14 (1951) 80.

⁵⁹ Cf. M. A. Rossi, *art. cit.*, 296, note 9.

⁶⁰ Cf. J. Loncke, "De dogmatica definitione Assumptionis Mariae corporeae," *Collationes Brugenses* 47 (1951) 437.

⁶¹ *Sum. theol.* 3, q. 51, a. 3, ad 1.

⁶² Is 53:6.

⁶³ Jn 1:29.

⁶⁴ Jn 10:18.

Redemptrix. As has been pointed out, death was not essential to this role, nor is there any evidence of a divine command that Mary should die. Moreover, the coexistence of passibility with the privilege of immortality is a divinely revealed situation verified of the just living at the end of the world, who in no sense can be said to have as good a claim to this privilege as the immaculate Mother of God.

Now what about the fact corresponding to the right? It seems indisputable that there is neither historical nor theological certitude that Mary did not die. But neither is there any historical or theological certitude that she did die. The question of the actual fact is a sort of theological trysting-ground on which both opinions meet. All that either position has to offer are arguments of convenience more or less persuasive. But positing Mary's right to immortality in the present order of divine providence, the arguments of convenience for immortality *de facto* seem more persuasive and impressive than the arguments for Mary's death.

Immortality *de facto* seems to fit better into the context of her other privileges than the opinion that she died. Preordained from all eternity to be the Mother of God, she was preserved free from the stain of original sin. Unlike all other descendants of Adam, Mary was never subject to ignorance, concupiscence, pains of childbirth, or the loss of virginity through maternity. Yet the principal malediction visited upon Adam and his descendants was death: "For in what day soever thou shalt eat of it thou shalt die the death."⁶⁵ Why then should Mary be preserved free from the lesser maledictions and subject to the greater?

The distinction between corruption in the tomb and death does not seem to be of much help. God threatened Adam and Eve not with the loss of sepulchral incorruption but with the loss of the gift of immortality which is the essential corruption of human nature: "Poena originalis peccati magis est mori, quam morte detineri."⁶⁶ To deny Mary a right to immortality, and then argue that in virtue of her Immaculate Conception she had a right to be free from such consequences of original sin as to remain dead and to see corruption, seems to be not only an evident inconsequence but also a certain contradiction. No such inconsequence is verified of the claim to immortality founded on the Immaculate Conception.

Moreover, immortality would add even greater glory to Mary's role as Co-Redemptrix. Eternally at enmity with the enemy of the human race the Blessed Virgin was never subject to the dominion of Satan. From the first moment of its existence her soul was immaculate. At no moment of her life

⁶⁵ Gn 2:17.

⁶⁶ *Sum. theol.* 3, q. 75, a. 2, ad 4.

could Satan ever claim as his own the slightest malice in her will, the least ignorance in her intellect, the faintest indication of moral weakness, or any sign of concupiscence. On Calvary she became the co-conqueror with Christ over sin and Satan. Why then at the last moment of her earthly existence should her body "be subject to his power who henceforth had the empire of death, that is to say the devil"?⁶⁷ Incorruption in the tomb hardly seems to verify as well as immortality the manner in which Mary "most completely triumphed over Satan, and thus crushed his head with her immaculate foot."⁶⁸

THE IMMORTALITY OF MARY AND THE ENCYCLICAL

The opinion that Mary did not die seems to have been strengthened rather than weakened by the Bull *Munificentissimus Deus*. It is true, as many commentators pointed out, that the definition in no wise crowns either opinion with the aureole of infallibility. However it seems equally true that both opinions must be evaluated in the light of the very terms of the definition.

If Mary died, her Assumption followed either immediately or after some interval. To allege that her soul was separated from her body for an instant and then immediately reunited might very well verify the metaphysical notion of death but would hardly correspond to the common notion of death. It surely would not be the object of empirical knowledge and could be known only by revelation. Moreover, in such an hypothesis, what happens to those elements so dear to the traditional opinion, i.e., incorruption in the tomb and anticipated resurrection. Can any persuasive reason be alleged for such an extraordinary and seemingly superfluous display of divine omnipotence?

The other alternative bristles with even greater difficulties. With the death of Mary the course of her earthly life would be completed. But the very terms of the definition do not seem to allow of any interval between the end of her earthly life and her Assumption, body and soul, into heaven. Taking the least fantastic of the *Transitus* legends, suppose her body was in the tomb for three days, where was her soul? According to Benedict XII: "The souls of all the saints. . . in whom when they died there was nothing requiring purification immediately after death were, are, and shall be in heaven."⁶⁹ In view of this article of faith the traditional opinion that Mary died quite properly answers that her soul was in heaven and presumes that

⁶⁷ Council of Trent, *Decretum super peccato originali* (DB 788).

⁶⁸ Pius IX, *Ineffabilis Deus* (*Acta Pii IX* 1, 607).

⁶⁹ Benedict XII, *Benedictus Deus* (DB 530).

her body was in the tomb. But is such a situation contemplated by the dogma of the Assumption? The very word order of the definition, "body and soul," not "soul and body," seems to exclude any interval between the glorification of the Blessed Virgin's soul and body.⁷⁰ If this be true, where was her soul during the *triduum mortis*? Surely not in her dead body, emphatically not in purgatory, apparently not yet in heaven because the Assumption was the simultaneous glorification of body and soul. Any interval between death and Assumption demands a miracle to preserve her body incorrupt and posits a mystery as to where the soul of the Blessed Virgin was while her body was in the tomb. The assertion of the traditional opinion that her soul was assumed into heaven and her body left in the tomb seems to insert an unwarranted dichotomy into the very terms of the definition.

Not only do the very words of the definition abstract from the death of the Blessed Virgin but the Holy Father himself never once mentions her death in his own words. In those passages of the Bull where he institutes a comparison between the victory of Christ and the victory of His Blessed Mother the Holy Father seems to do violence to the rhetorical exigencies of the parallelism rather than draw the obvious conclusion of the traditional opinion: "... just as the glorious resurrection of Christ was an essential part and the final sign of this victory, so that struggle which was common to the Blessed Virgin and her divine Son should be brought to a close by the glorification of her virginal body,"⁷⁰ not "resurrection" as the parallel seems to demand. Moreover this section concludes with a text from St. Paul in the context of which the Apostle of the Gentiles explicitly speaks of immortality *de facto*: "when this mortal thing hath put on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: death is swallowed up in victory."⁷¹

In the very next paragraph⁷² when the Holy Father describes the supreme culmination of Mary's privileges he does not speak of her resurrection and glorification, as the parallelism has always been interpreted by the traditional opinion, but uses the words: "ut a sepulcri corruptione servaretur immunis,"⁷³ which prescind from the fact of death. Obviously, in virtue of

⁷⁰ The word-order of the definition can hardly be called arbitrary. Moreover, the fact that it changes the more commonly accepted order is not without significance. In his *Homily on the Assumption* Pope Pius speaks of his intention of defining that the Mother of God was raised "anima et corpore ad caelestem gloriam" (AAS 42 [1950] 774). In his formal petition for the definition Cardinal Tisserant used the same word-order: "anima corporeque" (*op. cit.*, 778). In his allocution after the definition and in his prayer following the allocution His Holiness used the words "in anima e in corpo al cielo" (*op. cit.*, 779, 781).

⁷¹ *Munificentissimus Deus* (*op. cit.*, 768).

⁷² *Loc. cit.*

⁷³ *Loc. cit.*

the privilege of immortality, the Blessed Virgin would surely be preserved from sepulchral corruption.

Finally, the silence of the Holy Father in regard to the death and resurrection of the Blessed Virgin is not without significance. Tibertius Gallus, S.J., assigns as the proximate reason for this silence the premeditated intention of abstracting from these questions;⁷⁴ he is of the opinion that the remote reason can be found in the weakness of the arguments alleged for the death of Mary.⁷⁵ Moreover, he feels that the Holy Father revealed his own mind on the question by personally deleting the words referring to the death of Mary from a prayer he was asked to approve for public recitation.⁷⁶

CONCLUSION

By way of conclusion it should be stated that the purpose of this article was simply to present the case for the immortality of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Throughout the author has not been unaware of the actual state of the question. This has been clearly, accurately, and succinctly stated by Cyril Vollert, S.J., in a review of a recently published book on the Litany of Loreto: "Whether Mary died or not is currently a topic of lively debate; we can hardly at present talk about her death as a fact, and certainly it is not a matter of belief."⁷⁷

No theologian need be reminded that the debate should be carried on according to the exigencies of his science which is *fides quaerens intellectum*, not *opinio quaerens confirmationem*. Before either opinion can claim historical or theological certitude it would seem that a more profound investigation of the whole question is in order. The norm to be followed in such an investigation was given in the radio message of Pope Pius XII delivered to the opening session of the Second International Mariological Congress held in Rome on October 24, 1954: "Such studies are not always easy and obvious, since in pursuing them and in perfecting them both what are called positive and speculative disciplines are required. Both of these are governed by their own standards and laws. And the work of research in matters of Mariology is safer and more rewarding to the extent that everyone adverts to the truth that 'in matters of faith and morals the immediate and universal standard of truth for every theologian' is, as We have said, the

⁷⁴ Cf. T. Gallus, "Ad quaestionem mortis post Bullam Munificentissimus Deus," *Marianum* 15 (1953) 124.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 125.

⁷⁶ Cf. T. Gallus, S.J., "Quaestio mortis B. V. Mariae post Bullam Munificentissimus," *Divus Thomas* (Piacenza) 54 (1952) 15.

⁷⁷ Cyril Vollert, S.J., *Homiletic and Pastoral Review* 55 (1954) 174.

Church's sacred teaching authority."⁷⁸ With this norm in mind the proponents of the opinion that Mary did not die may still discuss "with erudition, learning, expertness and piety"⁷⁹ their desire to see the jewel of immortality placed on the crown of the Queen of Heaven and Earth whose entrance into this world was shrouded in mystery and whose exit was resplendent with glory.

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⁷⁸ Pius XII, *Inter complures* (AAS 46 [1954] 678).

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 679.