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### The Assumption and Eschatology: Excerpts/Summary from Transcript of Presentation

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## THE ASSUMPTION AND ESCHATOLOGY

*Excerpts / summary from transcript of presentation*

This paper on the Assumption and Eschatology is part of a convention that has been held both to review the great Marian dogmas and study how the understanding of them may have been affected by theological developments in recent years, and also to explain what relevance they have to the current theological scene and to Christian living in our day. We are living through a period when all of the doctrines of our faith are being sifted and tested to some extent; in this setting, it is not surprising that some of the Marian teaching of the past seems to some people to be peripheral now. Its validity, as well as its relevance, is regarded as something that attaches to certain periods of history and to certain cultures. This may be especially true of the dogma of the Assumption, which was defined more recently than any of the others—on the Feast of All Saints, November 1, 1950.

This attitude was brought home to me very vividly a quarter of a century ago. In 1955, the General Senate of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America issued a document sharply criticizing Catholic Mariology, maintaining that Mary had been put in the place of the Holy Spirit; that supposed appearances at Lourdes and Fatima had become more important than the Scriptures, the sources of Revelation; and that the definition of the Assumption by Pope Pius XII was an invention of doctrine, with no sound basis in the revealed sources. Very shortly after that I was asked to give a talk on Catholic doctrine on Mary at a Newman Club at Columbia University. With the expectation, which proved to be true, that a good portion of the audience would be made up of divinity students from Union Theological Seminary, I gave a survey of our teaching and the

basis for it. Contrary to my expectations, however, I did not meet with any great opposition on the internal coherence of what I was saying. I thought there would be many pointed questions on Tradition or on our notion of grace. But, while they did not agree with these positions, they did not have any great difficulty in following what was being said. Their one objection that I did have difficulty with came as a real surprise to me: Why did Pius XII define the Assumption when there was no urgency to do so—no heresy, no threat of a break within the Church, and, especially, since this definition would be divisive at a time when Christians were hoping that the churches could draw closer together? I could not answer that question to their satisfaction or to my own. The reasons that Pope Pius XII had given for the definition—to bring joy to the Catholic world in a period of great turmoil, for the honor of the Blessed Trinity, the greater glory of Our Lady—these did not seem to answer their objection directly, or at least not very pointedly. There did not seem to me then any obvious relevance in the definition of the dogma, but the intervening years have shown me much more relevance in that definition than I could ever have imagined in 1955.

You are very familiar with the history of our Mariology during these years since: the peaking of Mariology in the fifties, when many of our major dogmatic theologians wrote books on Mary; in the sixties, Vatican II, with its disputes over whether emphasis on Mary was distraction from Christ, in doctrine and in practice, and with its culmination in chapter 8 of *Lumen Gentium*, a repetition of all of our earlier teaching on Mary, treated in the context of the teaching on the Church and the Communion of Saints. In 1965, with the use of the title "Mother of the Church," Pope Paul VI offered a solution to the difficulties in terminology and concept that had been raised over the titles "Coredemptrix" and "Mediatrix." Then, following the Council, came the concern raised by some theologians in ecumenical circles, over the two most-recently defined Marian dogmas—the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption—both with regard to themselves and in their relationship to infallibility: Was it really required that all who joined the Roman Catholic

Church accept them as "necessary for salvation"? Or, did their relative position in the hierarchy of truths make this unnecessary? And, finally, we have continued to experience a questioning of doctrines, even those which had been regarded as dogmas for a much longer time—like the perpetual virginity of Our Lady and the virginal conception of Jesus.

What is becoming apparent to many of us in these intervening years is that Marian doctrines are at the focal points of many questions dealing with the substance of Revelation, as well as at the focal points of critical questions on methodology. Both areas are of critical importance for deciding the method that is to be used, in order to come to an understanding of what Revelation says and what it means.

In a certain sense, Marian teachings can seem peripheral and not linked with the substance of Revelation, because they are not as essential in themselves to Christianity as the doctrines of the Trinity, the Creation and nature of man, the Incarnation, or the Redemption by the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus. The problem seems to be similar to the discussions we have had in the past about the relationship of our work and the work of Jesus in Redemption. Only his work is necessary. What everyone else does adds to the beauty but does not change the substance of what was done. I believe, though, that there is a half-truth here, because doctrine dealing with our salvation would become unreal if torn from its historical context. But, what is even more important, any questioning of doctrines on Our Lady seems to have profound consequences on our grasp of other truths that are rated much higher in the hierarchy of truths and also on practices that are vital to Christian life.

Let me give some simple examples from the past and the present. One of the factors that brought Cardinal Newman into the Roman Catholic Church was the realization that the title "Mother of God," bestowed on Mary at Ephesus, put a seal on the belief in the reality of the Incarnation. She would not have been Mother of God unless Jesus were truly God and unless he had truly become man in her womb. Newman found that the church which had been most zealous in its devotion to Mary was also, in

his own time, the church that was the strongest in defending the divinity of Jesus. Since Newman's time, we have moved into a period where some of our own Catholic scholars have questioned the pre-existence of Jesus as a distinct divine person and others have backed away from the use of the title "Mother of God." The connection between Mary's title and the divinity of Jesus is a real one, even when it is not perceived. On the other hand, the questioning of the perpetual virginity of Our Lady takes its origin at times from the lack of specific testimony to it in the Scriptures. But almost inevitably, such objections tie in quickly with the denial of any special value in celibacy and, thus, with far-reaching consequences for the life of the Church.

Questioning of the virginal conception often begins as a mere consequence of a decline in Christological interpretation of the Scriptures; it flows from the idea that Jesus would somehow be less human if he had no human father and were miraculously conceived. But this leads very quickly to a progressive downgrading of almost all the transcendent aspects of Revelation and of the Plan of Salvation. Concretely—and this may be even more significant—it has led to interpretations of what inspiration is that may leave us with very little understanding of what God is saying to us at all. The Immaculate Conception loses much of its meaning if original sin becomes more of an environmental condition than a personal affliction in an individual human soul. The need for redemption, the need for the Church, the need for baptism soon become endangered as well. And the role that human beings can play in their own redemption and that of the rest of the world, once they have been graced, is also weakened.

It is not an accident that Mary and the Church are both called "Mother," because of the similarities in their roles of bringing the life of Jesus to human beings. Thus, the title "Mother of the Church" may seem to some to be a pious addendum, but it points up the uniqueness of the role of one woman in the Plan of Salvation, a uniqueness that was rooted in the maternal gifts that God had given her by nature and by grace. It gives us, too, some profound insights into the role of woman and the role of

human sexuality in the plan of salvation, in a period when Catholic teaching on both of these matters is seriously challenged. To put it simply: In God's Providence, doctrines on Mary are vitally connected with issues critical for knowing what Catholic faith is, how to express it and how to live it. To set them aside will often have a disastrous effect on teachings that seem at first glance to have little or no relationship to them.

What has become equally apparent, in the years since 1955, is that Marian doctrines are at the focal point of critical issues on methodology as well, affecting how we come to grasp what Revelation is. This is especially apparent in the definition of the dogma of the Assumption. I will just list some of the principles involved, without taking the time to develop them fully. 1) Revelation reaches us through Tradition along with Scripture. The main role of Tradition is to interpret the data of Scripture, but the context of that interpretation goes far beyond a literal exegesis. Concretely, the Assumption is not clearly in Scripture, either explicitly or implicitly; the result is, therefore, that the role of Tradition assumes enormous importance. 2) The Church, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, is needed for discernment of what constitutes Revelation and for its interpretation. Maybe not in some cases where things are rather obvious, but many of the doctrines that are most significant are not so obvious. The main reason for defining the Assumption was its universal acceptance in the Church as a matter of faith over a long period of time. 3) The *sensus fidelium* is an important source of our knowledge of Revelation, especially regarding matters that relate to the devotional life of our people. In this area, the *sensus fidelium* has often proved more reliable than the speculations of theologians. Some theologians had problems with the Assumption up to the eve of its definition and perhaps beyond that. 4) The hierarchy of truths does not mean that truths of a lesser centrality, but organically united with the core of Revelation, are less needed to bring us salvation. Truths that are better described as devotional may be of more practical importance to many people than some elements in the Creed, and hence may be more salvific in terms of their direct and immedi-

ate effects. The Assumption is an example of this. 5) Doctrines that are defined are guaranteed as correct formulations of Revelation and are salvific for all times and places. Therefore, by accepting the doctrine of the Assumption, one affirms the value of all these dogmatic truths.

There was no way to predict, in 1950 or 1955, that each of these points would become an issue in the decades that followed. Various debates have arisen; for example, in an ecumenical context it is asked, What role does the Church have to accord to Tradition? How necessary and how legitimate is discernment by the Church—as in the case of *Humanae Vitae*—where no claim was made that completely new evidence had been introduced? Instead, we had a discernment of what Tradition considered essential and vital and what might not be. How important is the teaching of theologians in the Church, if it conflicts with official teaching or if it conflicts with popular opinion? Are there defined truths that are not very significant? And, finally, can defined truths outlive their usefulness and be no longer relevant or even no longer true? These questions either did not exist or were insignificant when the Assumption was defined in 1950. That definition, however, implicitly elaborates a fairly clear answer to each of these questions. I would find it much easier to defend the relevance of the definition of the Assumption now than I did in 1955.

What is the impact of the doctrine of the Assumption in the area of eschatology? I will forego apologetics, any attempt at a defense of the validity of the defined doctrines. I accept all of the Marian dogmas, and specifically the Assumption, as being permanently valid and true and relevant in the obvious sense. I do not mean to imply that an apologetic discussion of these issues is not important, but it is not the role of this paper!

On May 17, 1979, the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith issues a letter on certain questions concerning eschatology,\* to respond to confusion it felt had arisen among the faithful because of controversies within the Church and because of the use

\*See AAS 71 (1979): 939-943; *PSp* 25 (1979): 125-129.

of language that ordinary people did not really understand. The declaration proposed what the Church teaches on what happens between death and resurrection.

1) There will be a resurrection from the dead, like Christ's, that will affect the whole person. 2) A spiritual element with consciousness and volition, a human ego, continues to subsist after death, without its bodily component. We call this element "soul," even though Scripture uses that word in various ways, because we need a term for it. What the document is saying is that the concept is more important than the word *soul*. And what it is affirming is not that every passage in Scripture would fit what we are now talking about as *soul*, but that this reality is something that is vital and significant in our understanding of Revelation, and the word *soul* is as good as any, or the most convenient that we have to apply to it, even though there may be problems in that. The soul can exist and does exist without the body. 3) The soul is referred to as a human ego without its bodily component. Is that the equivalent of saying as an "incomplete person"? I believe that those in heaven are persons in the ordinary sense of the term. I do not want to become engaged in a specific philosophical difficulty. The denial that those in heaven are persons, because of the fact that they have no bodies, not only leads to confusion sometimes in our preaching but also has led to the allegation that there is an immediate resurrection because there has to be one. But this is faulty interpretation; those who follow "the letter" have used "human ego" in this context. 4) The Church rejects any concepts and language that make her practice of prayer, funeral rites, and veneration of the deceased meaningless. This is a rejection of the notion of an immediate reward for all at the moment of death, one that would obviate Purgatory. It is a rejection of the notion that the body in a coffin at a funeral has already been replaced by another body, that is already there and risen at this time. 5) The glorious manifestation of the Lord, referring to the Second Coming, is a distinct event that lies in the future. It is not achieved by human beings right after death. By saying this, the declaration excluded the notion of an atemporal existence which includes full reward and



occurs at the moment of death. The argumentation used by some is that persons who have died have moved out of the dimension of time, so we cannot apply the notion of "future" to them in the way we do to ourselves. It is this point that is the most significant for our own present discussion. The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary is held to be unique, in that her bodily glorification anticipates the glorification that awaits all of the rest of the elect. This means that the glorification, the resurrection of the body for the rest of mankind, will come only at the end of the world. 6) The just who are with Christ are blessed, which is another way of saying that they are in heaven now. Sinners will suffer an eternal punishment in their whole being; this means that Hell exists. There can be a purification prior to the vision of God, with sufferings totally different from the punishments of Hell; this means Purgatory exists. 7) We do not have enough data to give a proper description of the next life, but we must accept: *First*, its continuity with this life; *second*, the fact that the manner of life there differs a great deal from the life here—or, the manner of life here differs greatly from that hereafter.

Obviously, this declaration has a bearing on our understanding of the Assumption and its relationship to the rest of eschatology. It is a clear reassertion of our traditional understanding of eschatology with an added emphasis on: the uniqueness of Mary's Assumption, the distinction between soul and body, the delay of the resurrection of the rest of mankind until the Second Coming, and the reality of hell and purgatory, in the face of some questioning of all these doctrines. In this light, what relevance can we see in the doctrine of Mary's Assumption? I would like to offer eight points and eight questions—some of which I cannot answer—which might be subjects for some concern.

1) The Church is teaching us that Mary's Assumption is unique. It seems then that this makes untenable the position, proposed by Karl Rahner and others, that Mary's Assumption is simply a prime example of what happens to all of the faithful *as soon as* they die: that they receive a new body, distinct from the cadaver that is buried. It seems to me such a position was ex-

cluded already at the time of the definition in 1950, since the bull, *Munificentissimus*, made it clear that this privilege of Our Lady was an exception to the general rule that the bodies of even the just are corrupted and will be joined to their souls only on the Last Day. Now it is true that those words are not contained in the definition itself, but they are in the bull and they certainly seem to be an explanation of what was intended in the words of the definition. This uniqueness of Mary's Assumption has been questioned on various grounds since then: either, that the body is needed to make someone who is in heaven now a person; or, that time does not exist in the next life, so Jesus' coming could have happened already in a different dimension for those there; or, that bodies are totally different in the next life. Certainly, the assertion that Mary's Assumption is unique enriches her role in God's plan. Traditional explanations of the reasons for it (These would include the bull of definition.) have described it as: a privilege that is due either to her Divine Motherhood (It was not suitable that the body of the Mother of God should be corrupted.), or to her Immaculate Conception (She did not have the kind of subjection to sin that would have called for the punishment of corruption or even of death.), or to her Role in Redemption along with Jesus (Since she had a unique role in the work of Redemption, she should have a unique sharing in the anticipation of the resurrection.). I think we might raise the question whether there might not be a more dynamic reason why Mary alone had an anticipated resurrection along with Jesus—a different reason, one related to her Spiritual Motherhood.

2) The Assumption is clearly a strong reassertion of our belief in the reality of physical resurrection, which means our belief in the worth and value of the human body and the significance of our ties with the material world. We believe that the whole material world is in the course of being redeemed by Jesus, some would say of being transformed into the Whole Christ. Mary's glorified body is the first proof of that transformation among those who need redemption. On the same point, the physical assumption of Mary's body is also an assertion of the importance

of our identification with our own history. I say that because it seems to me that, in the minds of many of our people, heaven is another world, another universe—almost totally divorced from this one except in the fact that this world is the door through which one gets into heaven. The glorified body of Jesus bore the wounds of his crucifixion as an expression of how he had been affected and transformed, for all eternity, by what he had done and by what had happened to him on earth. Mary is the clear proof that all of the redeemed will carry their whole history with them for all eternity. I do not mean that simply as a memory. What happened in Jesus has a sense, a value, by which we are all united with the mysteries he fulfilled once and for all in his life on earth. It is through the glorified Jesus, who himself as a human being was changed, transformed, and affected by all that was a part of his own history, that we find a kind of change and transformation that reminds us that, when we move on into eternity, we do not become totally different persons. We do not forget what we have left behind, or the people that we have left behind. We do not divorce ourselves from our history. The physical assumption of Mary's body is an assertion, then, that what happened for Jesus happened for all of us.

3) The Assumption is a reminder of the importance of the future life in an age that is often inclined to downplay it as "Pie in the sky, by and by." This terminology seems to take us back to the early days of Marxism, but, in fact, Jesus came to save us from sins, to give us eternal life, and to promote justice and charity in this life—as a consequence of that future life and as a means to a fuller sharing in it. This is not intended to downgrade the intrinsic worth or value of events that happen here, but, in terms of priority, to acknowledge that all that is ordained to a future life ultimately derives its fullest and richest meaning from that tie. We accept that; as Christians, we do not judge the success of a person's life on the extent to which he was able to achieve all of his earthly objectives, even the good ones. We realize that the efforts made can be more important, as a part of God's Providence and Plan, than direct and immediate success. Recent disputes over the relative importance of evangel-

ization and human development or over the nature of evangelization and liberation theologies (What did Jesus really come to preach?) have sometimes obscured the notion of the next life that we will live for all eternity. The Assumption is a reassertion of this priority.

4) We have lived in a period of de-emphasis on the intercessory role of the saints. By her Assumption, Mary is in heaven body and soul; as our mother and the Mother of the Church, her prayers for us have greater effectiveness than the prayers of anyone else, in heaven or on earth. She helps us to focus on the continuity of this life and the next. Those who loved us here, still love us there. Those who were zealous to help the poor here, are still so there. The Assumption reminds us of the closeness of those who have died in Christ and who are aware of all our hopes, our needs and our fears.

5) The Assumption is *Realized Redemption*: Mary is totally redeemed. She is the only one of us—a mere human being—who has reached heaven, body and soul. She is the proof that resurrection is for all of us and not just for Jesus, the One Mediator. It is easier for some people, without any bad intentions, to write off Jesus as God so that what happened to him is not seen as readily transferable to us. We are also familiar with the objection that Catholic theology tends to identify too much with Mary, and, in that sense, almost to push off the Incarnation. I do not think our theology does that or ever can. Mary's life and her being would have no meaning unless the Incarnation were real, unless Jesus had really and truly become a human being and remained one. It is very easy, however, even in the light of all our doctrine, to regard Jesus as so distinct from us, so far off, that what happened to him is not necessarily a criteria of what we see or envision as happening readily to us. In Mary, we have proof that Jesus is the Way. Concretely, she is the only example we have of *realized redemption* on the part of someone who is not God and who needed to be redeemed.

6) The Assumption is a reminder that eschatology is one of the areas where our doctrines differ most from those of other Christian churches. This is so partly because the Scriptures are

not very explicit about what happens in the time between death and the end of the world, and the Protestant churches classically, historically, have relied very much on the direct evidence that would come from the Scriptures. In many cases the differences between us do not rest in explicit contradictions, but in the fact that our beliefs and practices are much more specific than those of Protestants. Father Heft mentioned the vehemence of the reactions of some Protestant theologians to the Assumption. I think it should not surprise us that Protestant theologians reacted with some vehemence to the definition of the Assumption, because the whole belief in a vital and active Communion of Saints, into which it was set, is not a part of their heritage. Our differences here touch on an area of great practical importance: our attitude toward what happens at death to those that we love or to ourselves, our prayers for the dead, our prayers to those in heaven and our reliance on their prayers for us, our concept of the continuity of this life with the next, and our closeness to those who have died. The roots of our Catholic doctrine on eschatology are in the doctrine and practice of the Communion of Saints, in our belief that those in heaven help us and that we can help those in purgatory. Concretely, no one is more important in this doctrine than Mary, our Mother, whom we are constantly imploring to "pray for us now and at the hour of our death." In this prayer, most Catholics—in our century or in our generation surely—have learned to associate Mary directly, immediately, with the hour of death and the hour of judgment. As Father Heft also mentioned yesterday, in view of the distinction some would make between devotional truths and doctrinal ones, with the devotional being much lower on the hierarchy of truths, it might be worth recalling that devotional truths are inevitably practical ones and, hence, truths that are close to the whole working out of salvation. From this vantage point, they may be more important in the hierarchy of truths than more speculative ones, and they might be less able than other truths to be set aside in our attempts at reunion. Devotional truths may be pastoral ones in the most profound sense of the term, and this applies especially to the Communion of Saints.

7) Catholics believe in the uniqueness of Mary's intercession. Priests have long had the experience of seeing more people return to the sacraments on her feasts and have taken that as a visible evidence that she is the Refuge of Sinners. Writers of the past attributed a special role to her in the deliverance of souls from purgatory. This uniqueness is rooted in her Assumption, which in turn is rooted, looking backwards, in her unique role in Redemption along with Jesus, and, looking forward, in her role as Mother of the Church, a role that Christ intended for her.

8) Among some final considerations, one of particular significance would be on the Assumption and Mary's universal role in our salvation. Currently, we are celebrating the 450th anniversary of the appearance of Our Lady at Guadalupe. She appeared — as we can see clearly in the image that is still preserved today — looking like an Indian girl. She is even referred to as "*la Virgen Morena*." Now, we know that the glorified body will be transformed; usually this is described in terms of moving through walls, becoming invisible, moving very swiftly, but there may be more important features to it. Mary has appeared — in the appearances for which we have historical evidence — clearly recognizable as the Mother of the Lord. Nobody thinks that Our Lady of Guadalupe, despite her brown features, is anybody else than Mary, the Mother of the Lord. Yet, she appeared with features that made her identifiable as the mother of the Indian peoples. Rahner spoke in his theology of death of a new openness to the material world that comes with death, whereby the person who has died is then open to the whole of the material world. He was not applying that idea to a risen body and, in any case, it is an idea that has to be used cautiously, lest we tend to detach Mary from the historical situation that made her life and the Incarnation a reality. Her genes are Jewish for all eternity, and she remains the Virgin of Nazareth. Yet, maybe the presence of her body in heaven now, when those of all of the other saints are not, has a special meaning all its own. Jesus' bodily presence in heaven makes possible the unique presence that brings him into our tabernacles and onto our altars. That is a matter of faith for us. Perhaps, and this is a matter of pure

speculation, the presence of Mary's body in heaven is tied in with the unique role that God has given her as Mother of the Church. The body which bore the redeemer and insured his humanity, so that he could save us, is our assurance of the human love of a mother who cares for us and of the reality of the divine life that God placed in her womb. It is a body that in a sense belongs to each of us, because she is our mother in a way that none of the saints ever will be.

And now, some of the questions that I think this whole topic opens up; maybe they are unanswerable and maybe they are not significant, but I would offer them just as matters of thought for the future with regard to the Assumption and eschatology. Again, there are eight of them.

1) What is the relation of Mary's contribution to salvation up to the time of Pentecost with her dynamic role in the salvation of others now? Our older theology very often describes Redemption in two stages: *First*, Jesus acquiring merits by his life, his good works, and, especially, by his passion and death; *second*, then Jesus distributing his merits to all of the rest of us. The newer theology of the last thirty or forty years has tended to bridge the gap between those two stages, to lay more emphasis on the fact that the mysteries of the life of Jesus are in some real sense lived out in the life of each one of us: his suffering, his death, his resurrection, his ascension are in some sense reproduced in our own lives as well. How that takes place has not always been clearly described. We could say, for example, that the events, the mysteries of Jesus' life, which happened once and for all nineteen-hundred years ago and were accomplished then, touch us now because a kind of finalization of his whole life took place at the moment of death, as he stepped over into eternity. All that had made him what he was at that moment remains as a part of him and as a part of his offering to the Father. And we may contact, from our point in time, this Jesus who has been changed and modified by all these mysteries.

A related question I ask is this: Is it conceivable that there is something similar in Mary's case? I admit it might be idle even to bring up the question at all, except for the fact that we do

have to understand why she was uniquely assumed. Is it simply an act of benignity on God's part? Or, does it have something to do with the role she had in Redemption and with what she does now? Is there any specific relationship between her earthly acts, nineteen-hundred years ago, and her heavenly acts now, for what happens to us in the process of salvation? In short, the reason for asking that question at all is Mary's unique role in our redemption, which we still firmly assert—the uniqueness of her Assumption and her role as the Mother of the Church. To put it in a more pointed form: Is there a presence of Mary as mystery in all salvific acts? I know many people might find that a little bit repelling, too strong. Yet, we have lived with centuries of writers, many of them saints, who maintained that all grace comes through Mary. Does that mean anything beyond intercession, in terms of her direct and immediate contact with us? I will leave it just as a question.

2) What is the relation of Mary's acts before the Passion and Resurrection to her acts after them? I do not believe anyone has studied this much. It seems that, rather obviously, they were different in kind from those of the apostles at the same time, that is before the Passion. Both Mary and the apostles were helping Jesus; they were responsive to him; they loved him. But she alone was full of grace, and she alone was a conscious partner in the salvific plan. I do not mean that the apostles had no part at all in this mystery. They hoped that Jesus was the Messiah, but, certainly, Mary's conscious participation, right from the moment of the conception of Jesus, was much greater. What is the relationship between her acts before the Passion and her acts afterwards?

3) Along the same line, we can ask, Was Mary's role as Mother of the Church a different role in these three periods: from the Immaculate Conception to Pentecost, from Pentecost to the Assumption, and after the Assumption? I could rephrase that into two sub-questions: *First*, What did events mean to her consciously *before* Pentecost? That is, in what sense, if any, was she the Mother of Mankind or the Mother of the Church, or was she simply the Mother of Jesus, in the state of preparation for what



he would confer upon her at a later time? *Second*, How was her motherhood exercised from Pentecost to the Assumption? As she lived with earthbound limitations, she could not know all of the members of the Church and their needs. She was not the object of their prayers at that time. We have paid almost no attention to this period. Perhaps, if God has revealed nothing, he wants us to know nothing about it and to stop speculating on it, but at least it is a question that arises. Is it conceivable that her role in that period was like that of the Church and of the sacraments? Was it a role in a formative stage, played while God was still completing his revelation through the Holy Spirit to the apostles, a revelation that would be full and totally formed and completed by the end of the Apostolic Age?

4) After death, what are the acts of Jesus, of Mary, and of the saints? Are they new acts? Are they extensions of old acts? Are they subject to interaction? What happens when we pray? When they respond? What kind of acts are these? If we pose the real possibility of the relevance of the Assumption to what Mary is and is doing now, these questions seem to have some significance.

5) Does Mary's Queenship over the angels and the saints have any substantive meaning, beyond the fact that she is holier than all of them and closer to Christ? Does she direct or influence their acts in any way at all? Does she have some kind of impact on these?

6) Is there any direct effect of Mary's Assumption on the prayer life of the Church? Is it different in any way because her body is in heaven? Our prayer life in the Church is profoundly affected by the presence of Jesus' glorified body in the next life. Is it affected in any way at all by the fact that Mary was assumed? I think that our theology in the past, at least in practice, presumed that the answer is "no." Not that it denied the possibility, but nothing was ever proposed that would seem to incorporate her into this mystery of eternal glory shared with Christ. I simply pose the question.

7) Does the emphasis on prayer and penance in contemporary appearances of Our Lady (Lourdes and Fatima) have any

special theological meaning in relation to Mary? Is this some special contribution of hers, or is it simply a reflection of what is basic to salvation? Should we attribute anything special, with regard to our own knowledge of Mary, from the instances that seem to be acts of communication or contact between her and our world at the present time?

8) Last of all, a philosophical question: What is the relation of eternity to time? Such a study might help us to deal with some of the objections that have been raised in this whole question, because it sometimes reminds one of the old Molinist-Bañezian dispute. One can do very well by just continuing to object to the holes in the other position, but there are real difficulties if one attempts to defend one's own.

Eschatology is far more important to Christian living than one would guess from the degree of attention given to it by our theology. We do not generally preach the continuity of this life and the next concretely enough. Our own saints, those who have been part of our lives and have gone home to God, still care about us and are still involved with and for us. It seems to me that our preaching ordinarily is in terms of their getting a reward, but that leaves us deprived. I do not think that is what our eschatology says. We know much more about the next life than what we usually preach. We accept the notion of prayer to the saints and we are encouraged to pray, not just to the saints that are canonized but to any of our own beloved deceased as well. We believe that they know what is going on in our lives. If, in the vision of God, they do know us and they are aware of us, this necessarily and obviously means that they are concerned. It means that they are capable of having a direct and real and profound effect on our lives, or else those prayers become totally useless and meaningless. These ideas are not new; they are obvious, and yet I do not find that they enter in practice into the consciousness of our people. Furthermore, I believe that the intercession of the saints and of the Blessed Virgin Mary is practically the surest guarantee we have of accepting transcendence, the reality of the invisible in our lives. In a very real and a concrete sense, we believe in things that we do not see.

Finally, it is hard to convey the significance of the Assumption where there is no developed practical eschatology. For those who do not believe that those who have died are concerned about us and have a close and continual relationship with us, the Assumption is an oddity, sitting off by itself. The Assumption becomes, in a sense, a triviality; it is an extra point that might be likened to one more gem in a crown, but, in the crown, it just is not that significant. Surely, it must be obvious that I have more questions than answers. But, in Mary's Assumption, what God has given us is a light shining from the next life to bring new meaning to this one, a Mother watching over us when we cannot do it for ourselves, and an assurance of a Home and a great New Life that awaits us—with her and her Son and all of his family, the Church—for all eternity.

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