

2-11-1957

The Testimony of the Sacred Liturgy Relative to Mary's Death

John P. O'Connell

Follow this and additional works at: https://ecommons.udayton.edu/marian_studies



Part of the [Catholic Studies Commons](#), [Christianity Commons](#), and the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

O'Connell, John P. (1957) "The Testimony of the Sacred Liturgy Relative to Mary's Death," *Marian Studies*: Vol. 8, Article 10, Pages 125-142.

Available at: https://ecommons.udayton.edu/marian_studies/vol8/iss1/10

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Marian Library Publications at eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Marian Studies by an authorized editor of eCommons. For more information, please contact mschlangen1@udayton.edu, ecommons@udayton.edu.

THE TESTIMONY OF THE SACRED LITURGY RELATIVE TO MARY'S DEATH

WHATEVER the liturgy may have to tell us about the death of Mary will be found in connection with the celebration of the feast of August 15, today known as the Assumption. Although the dogmatic truth defined by Pope Pius XII on November 1, 1950, does not include the death or the resurrection of Mary, but only her bodily assumption and glorification in heaven, it cannot be concluded that these latter constitute the complete and only object of the feast of the Assumption. And it certainly cannot be assumed that the heavenly glorification of the Mother of God was even the principal object of the feast when it first entered the Church's official cult. In the following pages the history of that feast will be sketched with special emphasis on the attitude of the Church—as expressed in her liturgy—toward the death of Mary.

In examining liturgical evidence from early periods it is necessary to deal with each locality separately, since one can seldom assume that a liturgical practice of which one finds some documentary remains has had a greater extension than the given evidence will support. This review, then, will discuss individually some of the principal Christian churches and their liturgical recognition or denial of the death of Mary.

CONSTANTINOPLE

The Byzantine Emperor Maurice (582-602), a contemporary (and, in more than one matter, an antagonist) of Gregory the Great (590-604), is credited with fixing the date of the feast of the *koimesis* or dormition of the Virgin. The only direct evidence for this fact is the word of the not-too-trustworthy Nicephorus Callistus (died about 1335), a Byzantine

historian separated by more than seven centuries from the event he reports. Nicephorus says:

Mauricius sacrosancte Dei Genitricis dormitionem
quindecimo Augusti mensis die celebrari praecepit.¹

The source of his information has been neither revealed by him nor discovered by subsequent historians. Nevertheless, certain corroborative hints in earlier documents are warrant enough for accepting the word of this fourteenth century writer.²

It may be noted that Maurice is not credited with establishing the feast, but merely with fixing its date. The feast, therefore, had existed earlier.

A critical reader can be forgiven for wondering how universal the application of this decree really was. Although it must have been observed outside the city of Constantinople, it would hardly be safe to say—on the basis of Nicephorus alone—how much of the Empire was affected.

When its date was fixed by Maurice, the feast was of recent origin, although no date can be given for its institution. The only earlier Marian celebration about which we are well informed is a general feast commemorating the divine maternity and the virginity of Mary. Two homilists, Atticus, Bishop of Constantinople (405-446),³ and St. Proclus (434-446),⁴ have left us evidence of both the existence and object of this *memoria Mariae*, held on Christmas or the day after.

The title *koimesis* or dormition given to the feast fixed by Maurice on August 15 would make us suspect that the death

¹ PG 147, 292

² "La subite introduction de la fête, à Thessalonique entre 610 et 630, et à Rome peu après le milieu du VII^e siècle, la mention du typicon géorgien (VIII^e s.) qui situe à Jérusalem la fête de la Théotokos à Gethsemani 'dans la fondation de Maurice,' sont des indices concordants qui donnent créance à la notice de Nicéphore." B. Capelle, O.S.B., *La témoignage de la liturgie*, in BSFEM 7 (1949) 42

³ Cf. his homily edited by J. Lebon, in *Msn* 46 (1933) 167-202

⁴ PG 65, 679-691

of Mary was at least partially in view. Fortunately we are not left with mere suspicions. Early in the seventh century, John of Thessalonika (610-630) wrote a pastoral letter⁵ to his flock in which he established the same feast in his diocese, he called it the *anapausis*. In this letter he explains the object of the feast: it is the death of Mary and the marvels that surrounded it, the account of these marvels being rather uncritically adopted from the current apocrypha. While it is true that Thessalonika is over 300 miles from Constantinople, John says explicitly that he is introducing a feast that is celebrated almost everywhere else. We are justified, then, in accepting as the object of the feast of dormition in Constantinople the explanation John gives to the people of Thessalonika: the death of Mary.

From a century after John of Thessalonika, we have the homilies on the dormition by Germanus, metropolitan of Constantinople (715-728), to give us another insight into the object of the feast.⁶ Of the nine homilies which he has left us, seven deal with the Blessed Virgin, three (or two) with the dormition. In these latter, the death of Mary is not merely assumed, it is asserted. This author even explains that, since Mary had a body like other women, she could not escape the death which is the common lot of mankind. He deals with the assumption also, but his acceptance of the death as an important part of the object of the feast is unmistakable, even though his account of the death is presented against a background of legendary details.

The Byzantine liturgy of today, in its complete acceptance, not merely of the death of Mary, but of the apocryphal accounts

⁵ This document, which was published by M. Jugie, A.A., in *PO* 19, 344-438, has been studied by Carli in *La morte e l'assunzione di Maria Santissima nelle omele greche dei secoli VII-VIII* (Rome, 1941) 15-29, and by Jugie in *La mort et l'assomption de la Sainte Vierge* (Vatican City, 1944) 139-159.

⁶ These homilies, published in *PG* 98, 340-372, have also been studied by Carli, *op. cit.*, 43-58, and by Jugie, *op. cit.*, 226-233.

of her death, still reflects the atmosphere and spirit of John of Thessalonika and of Germanus of Constantinople. Even a cursory reading of the Meneon for the feast of the *koimesis* now celebrated in the Byzantine Rite (whether in or out of communion with the Holy See) reveals that the apocryphal data completely permeate the formulae of the office. So complete is this permeation that in the useful Mercenier-Paris translation of the office, the editors have felt obliged to preface their translation of the office of the *koimesis* with the apocryphal story so that the readers of the office itself will understand the numerous references.⁷ Though embedded in the fanciful data of the *transitus Mariae*, the liturgical commemoration of the death of Mary has been maintained in the Byzantine Rite.

To sum up: the feast of the *koimesis*, sometime in the sixth century, entered the liturgy of Byzantium; it celebrated the *death* of Mary. And the character of that celebration has not changed up to our own day. Millions of Byzantine Rite Christians (both orthodox and those in union with the Holy See) annually celebrate the death of Mary.

JERUSALEM

The earliest hortological information we have of the holy city is found in a fifth-century list of Jerusalem feast days, which has reached us with an indication of the scriptural passages read and the psalms sung on each day.⁸ This list shows there was only one Marian celebration in the year—a fact confirmed also by a remark of Theodore of Petra.⁹ It is called

⁷ "Littérairement, tout l'office dépend de récits plus ou moins légendaires dont on peut lire une rédaction dans la seconde homélie de saint Jean Damascène sur la Dormition de Notre Dame, contenant le récit de l'événement tel qu'il circulait dans les Églises chrétiennes depuis une très haute antiquité" Mercenier-Paris, *La prière des églises de rite byzantin*, II *Les fêtes*, 1 (Amay-sur-Meuse, 1939) 286-287.

⁸ Cf. Capelle, *La fête de la Vierge à Jérusalem au V^e siècle* in *Msn* 56 (1943) 1-33.

⁹ Cf. Capelle, *Le témoignage de la liturgie*, in *BSFEM* 7 (1949) 38.

the "day of Mary the Theotokos"; it was kept on August 15 in the sanctuary at Kathisma. An examination of the readings and psalms¹⁰ is not very informative, since they contain only most generic references to the Blessed Virgin. However, since we know that the scriptural passages used in a Mass do not always refer explicitly to the object of the feast, it is our good fortune to possess a fifth-century sermon preached on this feast day by Chrysippus (died 479), in which he comments on the biblical texts of the liturgy.¹¹ His commentary concerns the divine maternity of Mary. We can hardly escape the conclusion of Dom Botte that both the sanctuary at Kathisma, founded in 450, and the feast referred to began after the definition of the divine maternity at Ephesus in 431, and that the feast concerned only the defined mystery.¹²

From the sixth century there is no direct evidence of a Jerusalem liturgical celebration of the death or assumption of Mary. But there is evidence that during that century pilgrims to Jerusalem were shown the tomb wherein Mary had been laid. Two pilgrims speak of a basilica built over the tomb.¹³

From the seventh century there is a report of a French pilgrim who visited the tomb of Mary in the Valley of Josaphat, the tomb in which she had been laid after she died on Mount Sion. He speaks of:

sanctae Mariae . . . saxum cavum sepulchrum in quo aliquando

¹⁰ The passages used are *Ps* 131 8, *Is.* 7 10-15, *Gal* 3 29-4 7, *Ps* 109 1, *Luke* 2:1-7

¹¹ Jugie has published this homily in *PO* 19, 336-343

¹² B. Botte, OSB, *Le lectionnaire arménien et la fête de la Theotokos à Jérusalem au V^e siècle*, in *SE* 2 (1949) 111-122

¹³ Paul Geyer, *Itinera hierosolymitana saeculis IV-VIII*, in *CSEL* 39. The former is the *Breviarius de Hierosolyma* (p. 155), in which we read "Et ibi est basilica sanctae Mariae, et ibi est sepulchrum ejus." The other is from *Atonini Placentini itinerarium* (p. 170) in which we read "In ipsa valle est basilica sanctae Mariae, quam dicunt domum ejus fuisse, in qua et de corpore sublatam fuisse." The attribution to Atoninus is false, the author is unknown. The latter of these two texts is found also in *PL* 72, 899

sepulta pausavit . Sed de eodem sepulcro, quo modo vel quo tempore, aut a quibus personis sanctum corpusculum ejus sit sublatum, vel quo loco resurrectionem expectat, nullus (ut fertur) pro certo scire potest ¹⁴

From the eighth century we have the homilies of Andrew, Bishop of Crete.¹⁵ Although Crete is almost 600 miles from Jerusalem, Andrew can be quoted here. For, though born in Damascus, he was a monk of the monastery of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem and is sometimes known as Andrew of Jerusalem. Even though he had spent many years in Constantinople before being named bishop of Crete, in the homilies now under discussion he explicitly appeals to his personal experience in Jerusalem to support what he says. From the three homilies he preached on the feast of the *koimesis* the following passages are an index to his thought:

illicque (in Sion) naturae obsecuta legibus finem vitae accepit ¹⁶

Ut enim minime corruptus est parientis uterus, ita nec interiit defunctae caro. O mirandas res! Partus omnino corruptionem effugit, nec sepulcrum illam a morte extremam corruptionem admisit ¹⁷

It seems that the feast had not been fittingly celebrated in Crete, and Andrew is trying in his sermons to restore it. Although, as Epiphanius said,¹⁸ Andrew is more interested in giving a panegyric than a narrative, he does insist that Mary died. He even tries to explain why she died, since it appears

¹⁴ Geyer, *op cit*, 240. Also *PL* 88, 788.

¹⁵ These homilies are studied by Carl, *op cit*, 59-76, and by Jugie, *op cit*, 234-245.

¹⁶ *PG* 97, 1073.

¹⁷ *PG* 97, 1081.

¹⁸ *PG* 120, 188.

incredible that the Mother of Life should submit to death. His explanation of this anomaly and his subsequent explanation of her assumption need not detain us. What is significant for us is that Andrew considers the death of Mary part of the object of the feast of the *koimesis*.

The evidence from Jerusalem, then, is rather incomplete. We know there was no feast of the *koimesis* during the fifth century. During the sixth and seventh centuries the death of Mary was accepted in Jerusalem as a known historical fact, its location known and her empty tomb shown to pilgrims. By the eighth century, when Andrew was trying to restore the feast in Crete, he referred his hearers to the Jerusalem events at the end of Mary's life, which, he said, were well known in the Holy City. We can fill in the lacunae in the evidence: During the sixth century the feast of the *koimesis* began to be kept in Jerusalem, as in Constantinople. There was a mutual influence of the liturgical celebration and the apocryphal accounts circulating at the time. And the development of the apocrypha was influenced also by the creative imagination of guides who, then as now, tried to make the holy places as interesting as possible to pilgrims. What evidence we have points to the marvelous death of Mary as the original object of the feast of the *koimesis*. The marvels soon included also the transfer of her body to heaven, but they always included her death.

OTHER EASTERN CENTERS

From two important Christian centers of Syria, Antioch and Edessa, there is only meager evidence. An early fifth-century lectionary from Antioch¹⁹ has no mention of a Marian feast; sixth century documents²⁰ show a general feast of Mary,

¹⁹ Cf. Burkitt, *The Early Syriac Lectionary System*, in *The Proceedings of the British Academy* 10 (1921-1923) 301-338.

²⁰ The documents referred to are two homilies of Severus of Antioch (see Capelle, *art. cit.*, 45) and a Vatican manuscript (Burkitt, *op. cit.*, 319).

not the *koimesis*. From Edessa a calendar from the end of the seventh century²¹ lists four Marian feasts, but none of the *koimesis*. Nevertheless a ninth century calendar²² lists eight Marian commemorations, including the *koimesis*. Antioch and Edessa, then, were slower than Constantinople and Jerusalem in giving liturgical recognition to the marvelous death of Mary that was described in the apocrypha.

In Egypt, where the apocryphal accounts of the passing of Mary certainly enjoyed a great vogue, we do not find much direct evidence of the *koimesis*. However, by supplying a few words missing from a sixth-century calendar, Capelle has tentatively at least indicated that the death of Mary was commemorated liturgically in Egypt²³.

The apocrypha circulating in Syria and in Egypt are the only indication we have of the object of the feasts named in the various lectionaries and calendars. The death of Mary is never absent from the apocrypha. Almost every other detail in the accounts is variable; but the death always appears.

ROME

When did the Feast of the Assumption begin in Rome? The clearest and most important piece of evidence is the following passage from the *Liber Pontificalis*, concerning the actions of Pope Sergius I (687-701):

Constituit autem ut diebus Adnuntiationis Domini, Dormitionis et Nativitatis sanctae Dei genetricis semperque virginis Mariae ac sancti Symeonis, quod Ypapanti Greci appellant, letania exeat a sancto Hadriano et ad sanctam Mariam populus occurrat.²⁴

²¹ Cf. Capelle, *art. cit.*, 46

²² *Ibid*

²³ *Ibid* 47. For further pertinent references cf. J. B. Carol, O.F.M., *Fundamentals of Mariology* (New York, 1956) 170.

²⁴ Ed. L. Duchesne, I (Paris, 1886) 376.

From this statement we gather that at the end of the seventh century the four Marian feasts named above were already being celebrated in Rome. For Sergius is credited with establishing a procession, which would give added solemnity to these four festivals, the procession would begin at the Church of Sant' Adriano nel Foro and go a little over a mile to Santa Maria Maggiore, where Mass would be celebrated. The four feasts, Annunciation, Dormition, Nativity of Mary, and the Purification existed, therefore, before the year 700.

How much before? Great and prolific preachers like Augustine (died 430) and Leo the Great (440-461) never mention a Marian feast. The *Leomne Sacramentary*,²⁵ which was completed probably about 540 and is Roman in origin, contains no feast of Mary (although one might argue that such a feast could be found therein if the only extant copy were not missing the section from Christmas to the middle of April). Even Gregory the Great (590-604) never refers to a particular feast of Our Lady. It was, then, sometime between Gregory and Sergius that the four liturgical commemorations entered the Roman liturgy. Baumstark suggests that it may have been Pope Theodore I (642-649) who is responsible for their introduction, since he was originally a Palestinian.²⁶ Antonelli thinks that the Eastern monks who came to Rome in the second and third decades of the seventh century are more likely candidates.²⁷

Whatever its origin, we are concerned with the object of the feast of the dormition. The Gregorian Sacramentary has

²⁵ Feltoe's edition (Cambridge, 1896), long out of print, is now succeeded by one edited by Mohlberg-Eizenhoefer-Siffrin, *Sacramentarium Veronense* (Rome, 1956). Here this famous manuscript is given the name it had when originally published in 1735 by Joseph Bianchini, who had discovered it in the Chapter library in Verona, where the manuscript still remains.

²⁶ Mohlberg-Baumstark, *Die älteste erreichbare Gestalt des Liber sacramentorum anni circuli der römischen Kirche* (Münster i. W., 1927) 156.

²⁷ F. Antonelli, O.F.M., *La festa dell'Assunzione nella liturgia romana*, in *SM* 1, 232-233.

preserved for us the initial prayer, the one said at Sant'Adriano before the procession to Santa Maria Maggiore began. Although this formula is called a prayer, it is rather an announcement of the nature of the feast. The text:

Veneranda nobis, Domine, hujus est diei festivitas, in qua sancta Dei Genetrix mortem subito temporalem, nec tamen mortis nexibus deprimi potuit, quae Filium tuum Dominum nostrum de se genuit incarnatum: per ²⁸

Since this is not a prayer but a proclamation of the reason for the festivity, it takes on additional significance. Its author set out precisely to explain the object of the solemnity. Note that he does not make any request of God. That this formula is not really a prayer is brought out by the fact that in the Carmelite, Dominican, and Premonstratensian missals, in which it is used as the Collect of the Mass for August 15, the wording had to be slightly changed

Veneranda nobis, Domine, hujus diei festivitas opem conferat salutarem, in qua sancta Dei Genetrix mortem subito temporalem, nec tamen mortis nexibus deprimi potuit, quae Filium tuum Dominum nostrum (Jesum Christum) de se genuit incarnatum Qui tecum

In this amended form the main point is a request for *opem salutarem*, "saving grace" as translated in both the Dominican and Carmelite English missals. But in its original form the main point was to state what was being celebrated.

Much has been written about the meaning of the phrase "nec tamen mortis nexibus deprimi potuit," ²⁹ and these words do seem to refer to the assumption. But there can be no doubt

²⁸ Cf. Capelle, *L'oraison "Veneranda" à la messe de l'assomption*, in *ETL* 26 (1950) 354-364.

²⁹ Cf. Capelle, *Mort et assomption de la Vierge dans l'oraison "Veneranda"* in *EL* 66 (1952) 241-251.

about the previous phrase. It says explicitly that the temporal death of Mary is being commemorated. It would be difficult to find a clearer statement of the object of a feast.

The *Veneranda* was annexed to the Mass which remained in the Roman Missal until 1951. But in the fourteenth or fifteenth century the *Veneranda* was dropped. Roschini hints darkly that its removal was based on some theological criticism of its content.³⁰ However, the simple historical fact is that it was dropped from the Roman Missal because the procession was dropped, and there was no place for a fourth oration. The Carmelites, Dominicans, and Premonstratensians would hardly have retained the theologically unacceptable of the two formulae, when they could not keep both the *Famulorum* and the *Veneranda*.

Another well known reference to death was found in the Secret of the *Gaudeamus* Mass:

Subveniat, Domine, plebi tuae Dei Genitricis oratio. quam etsi pro conditione carnis migrasse cognoscimus, in caelesti gloria apud te pro nobis intercedere sentiamus. Per eundem. . .

This prayer, which goes back to the seventh century, was dropped in 1951 when the Mass *Signum magnum* replaced the Mass *Gaudeamus*. The obvious reason for the change was to express clearly in Collect, Secret, and Postcommunion the defined truth of the Assumption; a new theological precision now appears in the liturgical formulae. While the positive purpose was achieved by the change, something negative was accomplished also: the reference to Mary's death left the Mass of August 15. Here again Roschini sees a liturgical reflection of the Church's growing awareness of Mary's immortality.³¹ That

³⁰ G. M. Roschini, OSM, *La Madonna secondo la fede e la teologia*, 3 (Rome, 1953) 289-290. The author uses almost the identical words in *Il problema della morte di Maria SS*, in *EphM* 3 (1953) 42.

³¹ *Ibid*

may be seeing a little more than is really there, but certainly the Church did set out to make the three prayers of the new Mass express the defined dogma and no more.

Yet in the Breviary, where some changes were made after the 1950 definition, references to Mary's death were not eliminated. The second nocturn of the feast, taken from a sermon of Saint John Damascene,³² raises the theological difficulty of Mary's death in the terms not uncommon among the fathers:

Ex qua enim vera vita manavit, quomodo illa mortem gustaret?

The answer allows no doubt that Mary died

Sed cedit legi latae ab eo quem genuit, et ut filia veteris Adam, veterem sententiam subit (et ejus Filius, qui est vita ipsa, eam non recusavit)

To complete the story, John Damascene adds, however, that the assumption followed the death:

Ut autem Dei viventis Mater, ad illum ipsum digne assumitur.

In the liturgical revisions after the 1950 definition, no scruples were felt about the presence in the Office of such explicit teaching that Mary had died.

The three lessons for the second nocturn of the fourth day of the Octave were, before 1951, from the same sermon of Saint John Damascene. The excerpt used gives the apocryphal account of the death, which, as the Saint says naively, "ex antiqua accepimus traditione." Then follows the detailed narration: the miraculous gathering of the apostles in Jerusalem; the angels appearing; Mary's death and reverent burial in Gethsemane; the three-day angelic concert; the disappearance of the body on the third day.

In the new Office this has been replaced with the less color-

³² PG 96, 726 This passage remained unchanged when the new formulae for the feast were introduced after the 1950 definition.

ful, but far more theological excerpt from Pius XII's apostolic constitution *Munificentissimus Deus*, which makes no reference to Our Lady's death. Was the change dictated by a desire to rid the office of "moralist" sentiments? If so, the revisors were strangely inconsistent. Is it not more likely that the legendary events said to surround the death in this account were the reason for removing it?

In reviewing the relevant material in the Roman liturgy we have said nothing about the famous pseudo-hieronymian document *Cogitis me*, now believed to be the work of the ninth-century Paschasius Radbertus.³³ This work, which furnished the six lessons for the feast of the Assumption and for five of the days within its octave, was removed in the reform of Pius V in 1568. But during the six centuries that it was read annually in the Church's liturgy, its reservations about the Assumption constituted one of the most influential negative impacts on belief in the dogma. For our purposes, however, it is sufficient to point out that the author of *Cogitis me*, when he warned his readers not to accept as certain the legendary *Transitus Mariae*, gave this as his reason:

. . . cum ex his nihil aliud experiri possit pro certo nisi quod hodierna die gloriosa migravit a corpore.³⁴

In this sweeping criticism he accepts only one fact as certain from the apocrypha: that Mary died.

To sum up the evidence of the Roman liturgy, we would say that, except possibly at the beginning, i.e., in the seventh and eighth centuries, the death of Mary has not been the principal object of the feast of August 15, as that feast is judged from the liturgical texts employed; it has been rather the

³³ *PL* 30, 122-147. For a short account of this document and its place in the history of the assumption, see Jugie, *op. cit.*, 276 ff. About its authorship see further references *ibid.*, 278, footnote 2.

³⁴ *PL* 30, 123.

heavenly glorification of Mary, in body and soul. In this the emphasis of the Roman liturgy differs somewhat from that of the Eastern liturgies. For in the East there seems to have been an almost equal emphasis, or perhaps even a predominant emphasis, on the death. Nevertheless, from the beginning in Rome, especially as evidenced by the *Veneranda*, the idea of Mary's death has always been present. As Western piety turned its thoughts more and more to the Assumption, the liturgy reflected this tendency. But no hint of an "immortalist" sentiment has found its way into the Roman liturgy.

GALLICAN LITURGY

Before closing this short survey we must look at the liturgy used during the early Middle Ages in northern Europe. By the time of Charlemagne, the Gallican forms had been replaced by the imported Roman forms, which were destined to have a new development in the north and then to be reintroduced to Rome which accepted and retains to this day many of the practices developed north of the Alps. But before the Roman liturgy had gained the ascendancy, there had been a Gallican liturgy, the origin of which is still puzzling scholars

In the Gallican Rite there was a single *Festivitas sanctae Mariae* as early as the sixth century; it was celebrated in mid-January. In the seventh century it had become *Adsumptio Sanctae Mariae* and was observed on January 18.³⁵ The *Missale Gothicum*³⁶ from about 700 and probably from Alsace,

³⁵ Cf. Capelle, *La messe gallicane de l'assomption son rayonnement, ses sources*, in *Miscellanea Liturgica in honorem L. Cuniberti Mohlberg* 2 (Rome, 1949) 34

³⁶ *Missale Gothicum* is probably the best witness to the Gallican liturgy. The Vatican manuscript (*Vatic Regm* 317) has been reproduced in facsimile by Mohlberg at Augsburg in 1929, who published also a separate volume of notes on the Missal. The Henry Bradshaw Society published an edition in two volumes: the text with introduction in 1917 (lv) and a volume of notes in 1919 (liv) both edited by H. M. Bannister. Muratori had published it in the 18th century; Migne has it in *PL* 72, 225.

and the Bobbio Missal³⁷ from the eighth century of disputed provenance, both contain substantially the same Mass of the Assumption, *Generosae diei*³⁸ Although this Mass has more than one reference to the apocryphal accounts of the *Transitus Mariae*, it is rather reserved and general in its references to the Blessed Virgin. The nature of the feast—the Assumption—seems to be ignored by some of the formulae that would be expected to mention it. Nevertheless, in the few references to the Assumption, Mary's death is also in view. Thus in the *Collectio post nomina* Mary's Assumption is said to be "from death":

Nec per assumptionem de morte sensit illuvium quae vitae portavit auctorem

And in the same prayer Mary's translation "from the tomb" is spoken of:

. beatae virginis translatum corpus est de sepulchro .³⁹

The emphasis is on the entry into heaven; but the *terminus a quo* is none other than the grave.

Since the Mozarabic Rite is related to the Gallican, we can say a word here about the ancient Spanish Liturgy. The Gallican Mass *Generosae diei* just spoken of and quoted is also found in use—with some rather considerable changes—in medieval Spain.⁴⁰ At least where it was used, the death of Mary

³⁷ The Bobbio Missal, Paris ms lat 13 246, appeared in *PL* 72 451. The Henry Bradshaw Society has devoted three volumes to it: a facsimile edition (lvi, 1917), the printed text (lviii, 1920), edited by E. A. Lowe, and a volume of notes and studies (lvi, 1923) by Lowe, Wilmart, and Wilson.

³⁸ Capelle, *art. cit.*, 37-45 compares the texts.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁴⁰ Capelle, as pointed out in note 38 above, compared the Assumption Masses of the *Missale Gothicum* and of the Bobbio Missal. But in the same article he more carefully compares the *Generosae diei* of the *Missale Gothicum* with an Assumption Mass from Spain (*Excellentissimo huic diei*) and finds a close connection. The passages I have quoted from the *Missale Gothicum* concerning the death of Mary are also found in the Spanish Mass.

was mentioned in the liturgy of Spain. But there is also a more distinctly Mozarabic Mass for the Assumption, *Omni studio*. This tenth-century Mass, like those of the Gallican Rite, celebrates an assumption of Mary that is "post soporem quietum, post etiam sepulcri descensum pernicemque illinc Marie et ineffabiliter exitum" ⁴¹

Having reviewed briefly the evidence of the liturgy relative to Mary's death, we must now try to evaluate it. For that evaluation a few principles must first be stated

(1) The liturgy is a *locus theologicus*.⁴² The repeated uses of the liturgy in papal pronouncements and in the works of theologians allows no room for doubt on the point.

(2) However, the liturgy is only one part of tradition; or rather, the liturgy is only one indication of the living magisterium which has always been effective in the Church. It is an exceptionally important bit of evidence, but it is not the whole of it. Hence, its full significance can be seen only when it is considered in connection with the other witnesses of tradition, for example, in connection with the writings of the Fathers

(3) In dealing with the liturgy, as in dealing with the Fathers, one must remember that not every assertion or presumption in a liturgical document is *eo ipso* infallibly true just because of its presence in a liturgical document. The example frequently adduced to clinch that position is the statement in the Collect for the Feast of Saint Catherine of Alexandria, November 25, that angels carried her body to the top of Mount

⁴¹ In the *Post Prædicatione*. Cf. M. Férotin, *Le "Liber Mozarabicus sacramentorum"*, in *MEL* 6 (Paris, 1912) 406

⁴² Theologians rarely omit a mention of this fact. But seldom do they explain it in any great detail. Perhaps the best, certainly the fullest, treatment of the subject in recent times is found in P. Oppenheim, *Principia theologiae liturgicae* (Turin, 1947). Pages xiii to xix contain a useful review of those who have written on the subject.

Sinai The untrustworthy character of many second nocturns has occasioned more than one clerical joke. Certainly, then, historical errors can be found in the liturgy. And even doctrinal errors have been found in liturgical books used in certain places and for a certain time.

(4) The only ultimate judge of the value of a liturgical argument, as of any argument from tradition, is the voice of the living magisterium, speaking clearly in the person of the Roman Pontiff under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

(5) Theologians, however, can and should deal with tradition, i e., with the evidence found in history of the voice of the magisterium over the centuries. Until the Roman Pontiff makes an authoritative and clear statement, the less clear or less authoritative witnesses of tradition should be examined and evaluated by theologians.

(6) In general, the norms for a liturgical argument are the same as those for a patristic argument. A truth that is universally held as a matter of faith in the liturgy of the Catholic Church is thereby known to be a truth of faith.

When one examines the history of the liturgy's attitude toward Mary's death, one cannot find an apodictic argument that her death has been universally held *as a truth of faith* in the liturgy of the Catholic Church. It has been held, and it has been widely, almost universally held. But has it been held as a truth of faith? Only the supreme teacher can give the final answer to that question. It seems to me, however, that the liturgy has viewed the death as a part of Christian faith, even though the truth was frequently enmeshed in legends of no historical value.

The present flurry of interest in the immortalist position seems to me to have a parallel in the history of other doctrines. As is well known, the faith of the Church in the Assumption existed, then became a subject of theological discussion. The truth created its own opposition, as it were, by faulty presen-

tations or by extraneous teaching that seemed to be connected with it or by the apparent difficulty of reconciling the doctrine with other indisputable truths. But holding firmly to the truth, theologians have faced the difficulties raised. The result has been not merely a defense of the doctrine in question, but a theological clarification and a more adequate understanding. The liturgy has reflected this process. For example, when the famous *Cogitis me* entered the liturgy as though it were the work of Jerome, its providential role was not to deny that the Assumption had occurred but to reflect the contemporary theological thought: the doctrine of the Assumption would have to be re-examined and purified of its legendary accretions, Bede would have to be dealt with. The faith of the Church in the Assumption was not suspended for the period; the feast continued to be celebrated. But the theological dialogue went on until finally the dogma was proclaimed. Similarly, I suggest with hesitation, the death of Mary is a truth that for centuries was accepted, with only a lonely voice being raised now and then to cast some doubt on it. The liturgy continued to celebrate it. In recent times some influential voices have been raised against it, their objections must be dealt with. The conservative liturgy in the East and West does not immediately reach to this new situation. But, when in 1950 a new Mass was being prepared, there was a cautious abstention from settling the matter by incorporating it in the Collect of the new Mass, although there was no frantic effort to rout out any traces of the death of Mary. The truth of the death of Mary is in possession in the liturgy and in the beliefs of the people. The theologians who see the difficulties it involves will now continue their dialogue. To me it seems that there will be only one outcome: their difficulties will be answered; the belief enshrined in the liturgy will receive a new luster.

REV. JOHN P. O'CONNELL
Chicago, Illinois