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THE PROTOEVANGELIUM IN THE LIGHT OF THE MAGISTERIUM

In pronouncing sentence on the seducer of our first parents, God said, according to one of the several probable translations of *Genesis* 3, 15:

"I will put enmity between you and the woman,
between your seed and her seed;
He shall crush your head,
and you shall lie in wait for his heel."¹

The passage has come to be known as the "Protoevangelium" or "Protogospel" because, as not a few Church Fathers recognized, and as a number of Popes have confirmed, in this malediction pronounced upon Satan God announced to fallen mankind the First Glad Tidings of a future Redeemer²

The overwhelming majority of Catholic scholars (exegetes as well as dogmatic theologians) today agree that the Protoevangelium refers, in some truly Scriptural sense, not only to

¹ *The Holy Bible*, translated . . . by Members of the Catholic Biblical Association of America, sponsored by the Episcopal Committee of the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, 1 (2nd ed, Paterson, 1953) The above rendering is offered without prejudice to other plausible versions of the difficult Hebrew original, whose ambiguities are such as to make any translation in part interpretation

² For example, Leo XIII, Enc. *Tametsi*, Nov 1, 1900 "In the first dawn of the world's history, God Himself had promised Him (Christ the Redeemer) to us, as the victor and conqueror of 'the serpent'", *The Great Encyclical Letters of Pope Leo XIII* (New York, 1903) 464 Pius XII, in the Apost. Constit. *Munificentissimus Deus*, speaks of "the Protoevangelium" as foretelling Christ's "complete victory over sin and death", *AAS* 32 (1950) 768 For Church Fathers who interpret *Gen* 3, 15 Christologically, cf R Laurentin, *L'interprétation de la Genèse 3, 15 dans la tradition jusqu'au début du XIII^e siècle*, in *La Nouvelle Ève*, 1 (*BSFEM*, 12, 1954) 77-156 On the history of the term "Protoevangelium" see G Roschini, OSM, *Come e quando è sorto il titolo di 'Protevangelo'*, in *Mm* 18 (1956) 344-347.

Christ but also to His Blessed Mother, and may therefore be used, when relevant, as a theological place for constructing a Scriptural argument for Mariological theses³

Indeed, as Laurentin noted with some disapproval,⁴ many consider the Protoevangelium to contain "all Mariology in a nutshell."⁵ "Our concern is not whether all of these manifold applications of the passage to Mariology are valid, but whether any of them can be valid." In other words, this paper confines itself to the fundamental question of the very existence of a Marian meaning in *Gen. 3, 15*—does the inspired Protoevangelium really refer to the Blessed Virgin in some truly Scriptural sense, as opposed to the so-called accommodated sense? How sure can we be of the Marian interpretation of the famous text, and on what grounds?

At one stage of its deliberations, the special commission appointed by Pope Pius IX to study the definability of the Immaculate Conception concluded that the latter privilege of Our Lady could be proved from the very words of *Gen. 3, 15*—

³ For modern partisans of the Marian interpretation of the Protoevangelium, as well as for the relatively few dissenters, see V. Bertelli, *L'interpretazione mariologica del Protoevangelo (Gen. 3, 15) negli esegeti e teologi dopo la Bolla 'Ineffabilis Deus' di Pio IX (1854-1948)*, in *Mm* 13 (1951) 257-291, *idem*, *Il senso mariologico pieno e il senso letterale del Protoevangelo (Gen. 3, 15) dalla 'Ineffabilis Deus' al 1948*, in *Mm* 13 (1951) 369-395; B. Mariani, O.F.M., *L'Immacolata nel Protoevangelo Gen. 3, 15*, in *Vgl* 3 (Rome, 1955) 29-99, J. Carol, O.F.M., *The Apostolic Constitution 'Munificentissimus Deus' and Our Blessed Lady's Coredemption*, in *AER* 25 (1951/II) 255-273, especially 258-263.

⁴ Cf. Laurentin, *art. cit.*, 79

⁵ Thus D. Unger, O.F.M. Cap., *The Use of Sacred Scripture in Mariology*, in *MS* 1 (1950) 75. Similarly, Bertelli, *art. cit.*, *Mm* 13 (1951) 394, C. Hauret, *Beginnings Genesis and Modern Science* (transl. from the 4th French edition, Dubuque, 1955) 226. For varying estimates of the Protoevangelium's doctrinal content regarding the Blessed Mother, see D. Unger, *The First-Gospel-Genesis 3, 15* (St. Bonaventure, 1954) 294-322, J. Carol, O.F.M., *De Coredemptione Beatae Virginis Mariae* (Vatican City, 1950) 118, with note 79, A. Bea, S.J., *Maria SS. nel Protoevangelo (Gen. 3, 15)*, in *Mm* 15 (1953) 21.

"dalle parole stesse" ⁶ Few today would agree with this. For, few today would seriously insist that, in the present state of our Biblical knowledge, a Marian meaning of the Protoevangelium can be established with certainty merely from a scientific exegesis of the text in its context, using only the resources proper to such exegesis, namely, philology and literary criticism

In fact, there are Catholic scholars who doubt that the purely rational criteria of scientific exegesis can ascertain even the Christological sense, that is, the soteriological-Messianic import, of the Protoevangelium ⁷ Be that as it may, it is generally accepted that, although rational criteria may succeed in rendering the Marian interpretation of our text probable, only theological criteria can render it certain. ⁸

Theological criteria, when available, are valid and legitimate aids in discerning the genuine meaning of the inspired Word. For, the sense which the Holy Spirit, the principal author of Sacred Scripture, intended to impart and did impart

⁶ Cf. A. Lennerz, S.J., *Duae quaestiones de Bulla 'Ineffabilis Deus'*, in *Gr* 24 (1943) 349

⁷ Cf., e.g., J. Coppens, *Le protévangile. Un nouvel essai d'exégèse*, in *ETL* 26 (1950) 12-13; J. McKenzie, S.J., *The Two-Edged Sword* (Milwaukee, 1956) 96-104, 190-191, *idem*, *The Literary Characteristics of Genesis 2-3*, in *TS* 15 (1954) 541-572; E. Sutcliffe, S.J., in *A Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture* (ed. by B. Orchard, London, 1953) n. 145, d; T. Maertens, *La mort a régné depuis Adam. Genèse II, 4b-III, 24* (Bruges, 1951) 80; Laurentin, *art. cit.*, 83, 110, note 159; Surely B. Rigaux, O.F.M., *La femme et son lignage dans Genèse III, 14-15*, in *RB* 61 (1954) 321-348, goes too far when he contends, pp. 324-328, that the Christological sense of *Gen* 3, 15 cannot be established even from theological criteria

⁸ Cf., e.g., A.-M. Dubarle, O.P., *Les fondements bibliques du titre marial de Nouvelle Ève*, in *Mélanges Jules Lebreton*, 1 (RSR 39, 1951) 60, with note 17; Sutcliffe, in *A Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture*, n. 145, d-e; A. Bea, S.J., *Bulla 'Ineffabilis Deus' et hermeneutica biblica*, in *Vgl* 3 (1955) 15. For some recent attempts to show the probability of a Marian interpretation of *Gen* 3, 15 by rational criteria alone, see Bea, *art. cit.*, *Mm* 15 (1953) 4-9; Coppens, *art. cit.*, 5-36; Mariani, *art. cit.*, 76-94; Rigaux, *art. cit.*, 321-349; Unger, *op. cit.*, 235-264

in a given Biblical passage is not necessarily limited to what can be determined merely from an exegetical consideration of the text, seen in its more or less proximate context. Often that sense, even if it be a matter of the literal sense, must be ascertained by theological criteria, must be gathered from elsewhere—from authoritative interpretations by the Magisterium, from parallel passages of the Bible, from the consent of the Church's Fathers and Doctors, from the tradition of the Church, from the analogy of faith.⁹ While urging the Church's scholars to make all legitimate use of rational criteria, the Sovereign Pontiffs, for example, Leo XIII and Pius XII, have repeatedly warned of their insufficiency when dealing with a divine book, and of the need of recourse to theological criteria.¹⁰

Chief among the latter criteria is the Magisterium or teaching authority of the Church, a Magisterium divinely instituted, and divinely assisted by that same Holy Spirit who is the principal author of Sacred Scripture. As Pope Pius XII pointed out in his Encyclical on Biblical Studies, echoing his predecessors and the Tridentine and Vatican Councils:

⁹ Cf. Bea, *art. cit.*, in *Vgl* 3 (1955) 11-17; Unger, *art. cit.*, in *MS* 1 (1950) 102-112, G. Filograssi, S.J., *De Sanctissima Eucharistia* (5th ed., Rome, 1953) 51-64, C. Boyer, S.J., *Les leçons de l'Encyclique 'Humani generis'*, in *Gr* 31 (1950) 529-531; F. Asensio, S.J., *La Enciclica 'Humani generis' y la Escritura*, in *Gr* 31 (1950) 554-561, M. Pernador, C.M.F., *La Sagrada Escritura en la Mariología durante los últimos veinticinco años*, in *ASC* 4 (Rome 1951) 24-25; *idem*, *De argumento Scripturistico in Mariología*, in *EphM* 1 (1951) 313-322.

¹⁰ Cf. Leo XIII, Enc. *Providentissimus Deus*, Nov. 18, 1893, Pius XII, Enc. *Divino afflante Spiritu*, Sept. 30, 1943, *Letter of the Biblical Commission to the Archbishops and Bishops of Italy*, Aug. 20, 1941, *Instruction of the Biblical Commission on Teaching Sacred Scripture*, May 13, 1950. The relevant passages may be seen in *EB* (2nd ed., revised and augmented, Rome, 1954), nn. 108-113, 531, 550-554, 597-598, English transl. in *Rome and the Study of Scripture* (6th ed., newly revised and enlarged, St. Meinrad, 1958), 14-17, 92-95, 143, 158-159. See also Pius XII, Enc. *Humani generis*, Aug. 12, 1950; in *EB*, nn. 611-613, *N.C.W.C.* English transl., nn. 21-24.

"The commentators of the Sacred Letters, mindful of the fact that here there is question of a divinely inspired text, the care and interpretation of which have been confided to the Church by God Himself, should no less diligently take into account the explanations and declarations of the teaching authority of the Church" ¹¹

Repeating this admonition in the Encyclical *Humani generis*, the same Holy Father said:

"What is called positive theology cannot be equated with mere historical science. For, together with these sources of revelation (Scripture and Tradition) God has given to His Church a living Magisterium to elucidate and explain what is contained in the deposit of faith only obscurely and, as it were, implicitly. . . . Holy Scripture is to be explained according to the mind of the Church which Christ our Lord has appointed guardian and interpreter of the whole deposit of divinely revealed truth" ¹²

A few years later, Pius XII specifically and emphatically applied the foregoing norms to the study of Mariology.¹³

These and other declarations of Pope Pius XII make it clear that the Magisterium should be, not a last resort, but the first resort for all Catholic theologians, Biblical scholars included.¹⁴ Sound theological method requires that one should

¹¹ *Divino afflante Spiritu*, in *EB* n. 551; *Rome and the Study of Scripture*, 93. Cf. *Concilium Tridentinum, sessio iv*, in *DB* n. 786; *Concilium Vaticanum, sessio vi, cap. 2*, in *DB* n. 1788.

¹² *EB* nn. 611, 612, *N.C.W.C.* English transl. (slightly altered above) nn. 21, 22.

¹³ Radio Message *Inter complures*, Oct. 24, 1954, to the Second International Mariological Congress in Rome, *AAS* 46 (1954) 677-680, English transl. in *The Pope Speaks* 1 (1954) 343-346.

¹⁴ Cf. G. Shea, *Theology and the Magisterium*, in *PCTSA* 12 (1957) 217-231, C. Balić, O.F.M., preface to *Vgl* 3 (1955) vi-viii; C. Colombo, *La metodologia e la sistemazione teologica*, in *Problemi e Orientamenti di Teologia Dogmatica*, edited by the Pontifical Theological Faculty of Milan, 1 (Milan,

begin with what the Magisterium has had to say. For, in the resounding words of the *Humani generis*, the Magisterium "in matters of faith and morals must be the proximate and universal criterion of truth for all theologians, since to it has been entrusted by Christ Our Lord the whole deposit of faith—Sacred Scripture and Tradition—to be preserved, guarded and interpreted."¹⁵

Therefore it is mistaken to suppose, as is sometimes done,¹⁶ that philology and literary criticism should be the Catholic exegete's normal point of departure in his elucidation of a Biblical passage. It is unwarranted to criticize Father Unger's book, *The First-Gospel*, on the grounds that it views the Protoevangelium in the light of the Magisterium and other theological criteria before turning to rational criteria.¹⁷ And it is a misleading oversimplification to declare that "the role (and the honor) of exegesis is to prepare, not to justify, theological conclusions."¹⁸ According to the *Humani generis*, the noblest office of theology is to show how the teachings of the Magisterium are founded in Scripture or Tradition.¹⁹ Pope Leo XIII inculcated the very same lesson when, in his Encyclical *Providentissimus Deus*, he declared that "the first and dearest object of the Catholic commentator should be . . . to prove by all the resources of science, that sound hermeneutical laws admit of no other interpretation" of a Biblical passage than the one already authentically given by the Magisterium.²⁰ Where this cannot be done, we may add, the Catholic exegete

1957) 15-20, and, in the same volume, L. Vagaggini, C.M., *Ispirazione biblica e questioni connesse*, 218-220, 229, see also the authors cited *supra*, footnote 9

¹⁵ AAS 42 (1950) 567, *NCWC* English transl n 18

¹⁶ See, e.g., Coppens, *art. cit.*, 6

¹⁷ So ran a criticism by R. de Vaux, O.P., in *RB* 62 (1955) 277.

¹⁸ See again R. de Vaux, *loc. cit.*

¹⁹ Cf. *EB* n 611, *NCWC*, English transl n 21. See Boyer, *art. cit.*, 529-530

²⁰ *EB* n 109; *Rome and the Study of Scripture*, 15

should strive to show that the Church's interpretation of a text is a probable or at least possible one, compatible with sound hermeneutics. So, then, that which the above-mentioned oversimplification described as "*the role*" of exegesis is only one of the latter's functions. It is the role of which Leo XIII said in the same Encyclical on Biblical Studies: "In those passages of Holy Scripture which have not as yet received a certain and definite interpretation [the exegete's] labors may, in the benignant providence of God, prepare for and bring to maturity the judgment of the Church."²¹

The foregoing general reflections on the pre-eminence of the Magisterium as a norm for determining the true meaning of Holy Writ have especial importance for and application to the question of the Marian interpretation of the Protoevangelium. For, as we have already insisted, the rational criteria presently at our disposal do not suffice to settle that question.²² But further, neither, it seems, do the theological criteria, other than and independently of the Magisterium, suffice, if the following brief evaluation be correct.

Seeking light on *Gen.* 3, 15 from elsewhere in the Bible, numerous modern studies, for example, those of Braun,²³ have

²¹ *Loc cit*

²² We do not wish to exclude the possibility that further progress in Biblical studies may one day enable scientific exegesis to establish the Marian interpretation of the Protoevangelium with certainty. Modern researchers have already contributed notably toward that end, cf. F-M Brauo, OP, *Ève et Marie dans les deux Testaments*, in *La Nouvelle Ève*, 1 (BSFEM, 12, 1954) 14.

²³ Cf. F-M Braun, OP, *La Mère des fidèles* (2nd ed, revised and augmented, Paris, 1954), *idem*, *Ève et Marie dans les deux Testaments*, in *La Nouvelle Ève*, 1 (BSFEM, 12, 1954) 9-34, on the latter essay, see, in the same volume, Laurentin, *art cit*, 114, coll 83. Among others we may mention A-M Dubarle, *art. cit*, 49-64, J Brunkirne, *Das Protoevangelium (Gen 3, 15) und die Unbefleckte Empfängnis Mariens*, in *Vgl 3* (1955) 18-28, Peinador, *art cit*, in *ASC 4* (1951) 38-58, R Rábanos, CM, *La maternidad espiritual de María en el Protoevangelio y San Juan*, in *EM 7* (1948) 15-50.

detected, especially in the New Testament,²⁴ above all in *Apoc.* 12,²⁵ possible confirmation of the Marian interpretation of the Protoevangelium, in putative parallels so striking that one may legitimately ask, with Dubarle, "is this merely fortuitous coincidence?"²⁶ But as yet these findings are far from certain,²⁷ and in some instances must lean heavily on the Magisterium.²⁸

Turning from "Biblical analogy" to patristic consensus, one finds that this, too, is a theological criterion of doubtful efficacy in the present question. To be sure, the morally concordant interpretation by the Fathers of a Scripture text bearing on faith or morals commands the assent of faith.²⁹ But in our opinion, such a consensus, which Pius XII acknowl-

²⁴ E.g., *Luke* 1, 26-28; 2, 34-35, *John* 19, 26-27

²⁵ Cf., e.g., F-M Braun, *La Femme vêtue de soleil (Apoc XII)*, in *RT* 55 (1955) 639-669, L. Ceriaux, *La vision de la Femme et du Dragon de l'Apocalypse en relation avec le Protévangile*, in *Vgl* 3 (1955) 116-131; A. Romeo, *La Donna ravvolta dal sole, Madre di Cristo e dei cristiani, nel cielo (Apoc 12)*, in *Vgl* 3, 216-258, B. Le Frois, SVD, *The Woman Clothed with the Sun (Ap. 12)* (Rome, 1954) 220-222

²⁶ Cf. Dubarle, *art. cit.*, 57.

²⁷ J. Michl, *Der Weibessame (Gen 3, 15) in spätjüdischer und frühchristlicher Auffassung*, in *Bibl* 33 (1952) 390-401, contends that *Gen.* 3, 15 exercised no recognizable influence in any book of the Old or New Testaments; Rigaut, *art. cit.*, 325-326, agrees. Similarly, as to the Old Testament, J. Coppens, *La Mère du Sauveur dans l'Ancien Testament*, in *Vgl* 3, 100-115. Many remain unconvinced that *Apoc.* 12 refers to Mary in any truly Biblical sense; Dubarle, *art. cit.*, while disposed to acknowledge the import of *John* 19, 26-27 for Our Lady's spiritual maternity, pp. 61-63, doubts the text alludes to *Gen.* 3, 15 (p. 64, Postscript); cf. Braun, *art. cit.*, *La Nouvelle Ève* 1 (1954) 32, note 107.

²⁸ On the need of invoking the Magisterium to support *John* 19, 26-27 as witnessing to the spiritual maternity, cf. Penador, *art. cit.*, in *ASC* 4, 57-58; Le Frois, *op. cit.*, 227-229, appeals to the Magisterium for the Marian import of *Apoc.* 12. Quoting an article of Braun, *G. Filograssi, Gr* 41 (1960) 92-93, emphasizes the Magisterium's role in discovering the connections between various passages of Holy Writ

²⁹ Cf. *DB* nn. 995, 1788, 1942, 1944

edged to be quite rare,³⁰ has not been demonstrated for the Marian interpretation of *Gen.* 3, 15. The arguments presented by Lennerz and others render it at least doubtful that Pius IX affirmed this consensus in the Bull *Ineffabilis Deus*.³¹ Further, again in view of arguments advanced by Lennerz, and later by Styś and Laurentin in their criticisms of Gallus, it remains uncertain that the Marian interpretation was in fact that of a relative majority of the Fathers.³²

One must, therefore, reject the appeal to a patristic consensus. But what of another theological criterion, the tradition of the Church in patristic times? The writings of the Fathers are organs, and indeed secondary organs, of tradition, rather than tradition itself.³³ Many things that were part of universal oral tradition came to be consigned to writing only by a minority of Fathers, if at all.³⁴ Is the Marian interpretation of our

³⁰ *Divino afflante Spiritu*; EB n 565, *Rome and the Study of Scripture*, 102.

³¹ Cf H Lennerz, SJ, *Duae quaestiones de Bulla 'Ineffabilis Deus'*, in *Gr* 24 (1943) 347-356, concludes that the Bull did not affirm a consent of the Fathers and Ecclesiastical Writers on the Marian interpretation of *Gen* 3, 15, or even that a majority of them upheld it; the Bull probably wished to say only that some Fathers and Ecclesiastical Writers espoused that interpretation. Cf *idem*, *Consensus Patrum in interpretatione mariologica Gen 3, 15?*, in *Gr* 27 (1946) 300-318, J. Carol, *De Corredemptione Beatae Virginis Mariae*, 102-103, A. Bea, SJ, *art cit*, *Mm* 15 (1953) 3. Opposed is, e.g., Unger, *op cit*, 46-57.

³² Cf Lennerz, *art cit*, *Gr* 27 (1946) 300-318. Refuting the contentions of T. Gallus, SJ, *Interpretatio mariologica protoevangelii tempore post-patristico usque al Concilium Tridentinum* (Rome, 1949), R. Laurentin, *art cit*, in *La Nouvelle Eve* 1, 79-156, reports and confirms the findings of a Polish Jesuit, S. Styś, see especially 87-89. The mere fact that a majority of the Fathers did not perceive a Marian meaning in *Gen* 3, 15 does not, of course, rule out such a meaning, cf Laurentin, *art cit*, 91.

³³ Cf Filograssi, *De Sanctissima Eucharistia*, 22-23; L. Lercher, SJ, *Institutiones Theologiae Dogmaticae*, 1 (3rd ed, Innsbruck, 1939) nn 529-544, Carol, *op cit*, 104-105.

³⁴ Cf J. C. Fenton, *The Requisites for an Infallible Pontifical Definition According to the Commission of Pope Pius IX*, in *AER* 115 (1946/II) 378-

text a case in point? This has been alleged, but never established. In the absence of other means of determining the belief of the ancient Church in this matter, we have only the Fathers to go on.³⁵ Now the Fathers who espoused the Marian interpretation give no hint that it was part of the universal oral tradition of their day. And were it in fact part, would so many Fathers have construed the text quite differently,³⁶ some of them even in such a way as to exclude the Marian sense? Among the latter, Styś names St. Justin, St. Ambrose, St. Augustine, and St. Cyril of Alexandria.³⁷ Laurentin adds as to St. Cyril that this important witness to Marian doctrine did not touch on *Gen.* 3, 15 at all in his great works on the Pentateuch.³⁸

So much for tradition, and its organs, of the patristic era. But what of later times? ³⁹ "Catholic tradition," it has been said, now "holds with moral unanimity that the 'woman' of the Protoevangelium is Mary in a true and proper Biblical sense, intended and willed by God."⁴⁰ Cited in support of this are the studies by Bertelli and Gallus, which tend to show that the Marian interpretation of our text has been that of morally all Catholic scholars (exegetes and dogmatic theologians) for the last 100 years, indeed, for the last several centuries.⁴¹

379, G. Thils *La définition de l'Immaculée Conception et la révélation*, in *ETL* 31 (1955) 38-39.

³⁵ Theoretically, the writings of the Fathers are not the only media for ascertaining the oral tradition of their times, cf. Lercher, *op. cit.*, 1, n. 529, Filograssi, *op. cit.*, 22. But in the present instance we are reduced to the Fathers.

³⁶ Cf. Laurentin, *art. cit.*, *passim*.

³⁷ Cf. *ibid.*, 89, note 45.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 143.

³⁹ Tradition, of course, embraces all ages of the Church, it is not confined to the patristic era, cf. Filograssi, *op. cit.*, 23-24, Bea, *art. cit.*, in *Vgl* 3, 17.

⁴⁰ Thus Bea, *art. cit.*, in *Mm* 15 (1953) 19-20.

⁴¹ See the articles of Bertelli, cited *supra*, note 3; T. Gallus, *Interpretatio mariologica Protoevangelii posttridentina* 1 (Rome, 1953), 2 (Rome, 1954).

Do we really have, in this "consent" of modern Catholic biblical and dogmatic theologians, a sufficient criterion for the Marian meaning of the Protoevangelium? Our answer must begin by recalling, once again, the necessity of distinguishing between tradition and its organs, and between the organs of tradition. The primary organ is the Magisterium; like the writings of the Fathers, those of theologians pertain to the secondary organs.⁴² But since theologians write as "*doctores privati*," not as "*magistri authenticici*," their consent does not enjoy the same authority as that of the Fathers.⁴³ Nevertheless, under due conditions, their consent can be a certain criterion of divine revelation.⁴⁴ Do we have such a consensus in regard to *Gen. 3, 15*? It is questionable.

Above all, there is the doubt raised a few years ago by J. O'Rourke, and even before him by Laurentin.⁴⁵ Calling attention to the many different and mutually exclusive ways by which commentators arrive at a Marian interpretation of the Protoevangelium, O'Rourke argues, in effect, that one may not speak of moral unanimity when the exponents of the seemingly general interpretation reach conclusions that are really distinct and mutually exclusive, by arguments that are distinct and mutually exclusive—"Mutual discord does not effect mutual agreement."⁴⁶

Cf. Bea, *art. cit.*, in *Mm* 15 (1953) 15-16, *idem*, *art. cit.*, in *Vgl* 3, 8-9, Peinador, *art. cit.*, in *EphM* 1 (1951) 345.

⁴² Cf. Lercher, *op. cit.*, 1, n. 529, Filograssi, *op. cit.*, 22-24.

⁴³ Cf. Lercher, *op. cit.*, 1, n. 543, *coll. nn.* 531-533. Indeed, the Fathers, even when speaking as *doctores privati*, excel the later commentators on Holy Writ; cf. *Providentissimus Deus*, and *Divino afflante Spiritu*, in *EB* nn. 111, 113, 554; English transl. in *Rome and the Study of Scripture*, 16, 17, 95.

⁴⁴ Cf. Lercher, *op. cit.*, 1, nn. 543-545, Filograssi, *op. cit.*, 24.

⁴⁵ J. O'Rourke, *An Aside to the Mariological Interpretation of Genesis 3.14* (*sic!*—so runs the title, and the article's every reference to the Protoevangelium), in *AER* 135 (1956/II) 227-230, Laurentin, *art. cit.*, 79, note 3a.

⁴⁶ O'Rourke, *art. cit.*, 229. Laurentin, *loc. cit.* "It is a paradox that under the almost general accord of Catholic authors on the 'Marian sense'

Hence the commentators are at one, not in the basic exegesis of our text, but in their common goal of showing that *Gen.* 3, 15 somehow refers to Mary. Does this common striving spring, as Laurentin fears, from an *a priori* postulate, or is it, as I believe, a response to the teachings of the modern Magisterium on the Protoevangelium?⁴⁷ The very fact that this question can and must be asked shows that the argument from "moral unanimity" of Catholic commentators is not a sure criterion for the Marian interpretation of the Protoevangelium.

It remains for us to appraise the "analogy of faith" as a possible criterion for establishing the Marian interpretation of *Gen.* 3, 15. This criterion, expressly mentioned by the Encyclicals *Providentissimus Deus* and *Divino afflante Spiritu* as a genuine norm of exegesis,⁴⁸ is defined as the conformity of an interpretation with the sum-total of doctrine which the Catholic Church teaches and professes.⁴⁹ Chiefly a negative norm, it is also a positive one, but, as such, one which can only corroborate, not convince.⁵⁰ Hence we confine ourselves to the analogy of faith as a negative norm, condemning as false any interpretation of Holy Writ which either makes the sacred

of *Gen.* 3, 15 (an accord from which one draws too massive an argument) there is hidden an extreme diversity of 'Marian senses'. It does not suffice, in effect, to distinguish Marian literal, fuller, and typical sense, for in each category there is room for many divergent and even opposed ways of evaluating the manner in which the Virgin is contained in the verse. Among the numerous new theories which are proposed every year, many are established on the ruins of others."

⁴⁷ Cf. Laurentin, *loc. cit.*, from his notes 20 and 165a in the same article, one gathers that the distinguished author does not sufficiently appreciate the role of the Magisterium regarding the meaning of *Gen.* 3, 15.

⁴⁸ Cf. *EB* nn. 109, 551, *Rome and the Study of Scripture*, 15, 93.

⁴⁹ Cf. Le Frois, *op. cit.*, 229, Unger, *art. cit.*, in *MS* 1 (1950) 106-109.

⁵⁰ Cf. Le Frois, *op. cit.*, 229. For application of the analogy of faith, as a positive norm, to the interpretation of the Protoevangelium, see Pernador, *art. cit.*, *EphM* 1 (1951) 320-321, 342, *idem*, *art. cit.*, in *EM* 7 (1948) 354-361.

writers disagree one with another (or with themselves), or is opposed to the doctrine of the Church.

Since, as was noted earlier, it has not yet been clearly demonstrated that any other passage of Sacred Scripture supposes the Marian sense of *Gen.* 3, 15, rejection of the latter would not offend against the analogy of faith on this score. Neither would such rejection conflict with any doctrine of the Church, except perhaps that of the Magisterium's authority to interpret Holy Writ—if the Magisterium has in fact authoritatively taught the Marian interpretation of our text.⁵¹

One must conclude, then, that if there is a theological criterion able to guarantee the Marian interpretation of *Gen.* 3, 15, it can only be the Magisterium. And so we come to the question: What light does the latter shed on the Protoevangelium?

All agree that the Magisterium has never rendered solemn infallible judgment on the Marian sense of our text, either in an *ex cathedra* pronouncement by a Pope, or in a definition by an Ecumenical Council.⁵²

What of the infallible ordinary universal Magisterium

⁵¹ For example, rejection of the Marian sense would not entail a denial of the Immaculate Conception, or the Assumption, or any other Marian dogma or doctrine, cf. Laurentin, *art. cit.*, 91. Again, such rejection would not necessarily imply rejection of the Christological sense of *Gen.* 3, 15; cf. Laurentin, *art. cit.*, 89, note 45, also 78, for the distinction found among the Fathers between the Christological and the Christo-Marian interpretations of *Gen.* 3, 15.

⁵² To be sure, Pius IX, in the Bull *Ineffabilis Deus*, which contained the dogmatic definition of the Immaculate Conception, and Pius XII, in his Apostolic Constitution *Munificentissimus Deus*, which contained the definition of the Assumption, both appealed to the Protoevangelium. But these appeals belong to the "doctrinal considerations" advanced by the Sovereign Pontiffs in support of their definitions, not to the infallible definitions themselves. On the doctrinal considerations in *Ineffabilis Deus*, see R. Laurentin, *The Role of the Papal Magisterium in the Development of the Dogma of the Immaculate Conception*, in E. O'Connor, CSC, editor, *The Dogma of the Immaculate Conception* (Notre Dame, 1958) 313.

exercised by Catholic bishops in their day-by-day teaching throughout the world? Certainly, within the last century a great number of bishops have asserted the Marian sense of the Protoevangelium—for example, the 113 bishops who at the Vatican Council signed a petition for the definition of the Assumption,⁵³ and the many others who later, down to 1950 A.D., signed like petitions.⁵⁴ Very likely, by now, at least, morally all Catholic bishops teach, with recent Popes, the Marian sense of *Gen.* 3, 15. But even if that be the case, it is perhaps premature to declare that this sense has been infallibly guaranteed by the universal ordinary Magisterium of the Episcopate, since, for such a guarantee, theologians require that the episcopal consensus have demonstrably existed for a considerable length of time.⁵⁵

Be that as it may, there is still the ordinary papal Magisterium to be considered. After all, the authoritative pronouncements of the Magisterium on Sacred Scripture are not limited to those interpretations which have been taught infallibly by the Church's solemn judgment or by the ordinary and universal Magisterium of her episcopate. For we are also bound by those interpretations which have been authoritatively expounded for the universal Church by a Sovereign Pontiff exercising his ordinary Magisterium.⁵⁶

To be sure, a pronouncement of the latter category is not of itself infallible, and hence does not demand that firm and irrevocable assent of divine and Catholic faith (or of ecclesiastical faith) which is due to the Church's infallible teachings.

⁵³ Cf. *ADSC* 7 (Freiburg in Breisgau, 1892) 869-871

⁵⁴ Cf. W. Hentrich, S.J., R. De Moos, S.J., *Petitiones de Assumptione Corporea B. V. Mariae in caelum definienda ad Sanctam Sedem delatae*, 2 (Vatican City, 1942) 731-734. For some other bishops who have espoused the Marian sense of our text, see J. B. Carol, O.F.M., *De Corredemptione Beatae Virginitatis Mariae*, 593-598, Unger, *The First-Gospel*, 85-89.

⁵⁵ Cf. Lercher, *op. cit.*, 1, n. 480.

⁵⁶ Cf. Unger, *art. cit.*, in *MS* 1 (1950) 105-106.

Nevertheless, as Pius XII reminded us in the Encyclical *Humani generis*, it must not be thought that the doctrine authoritatively enunciated in such a pronouncement does not demand any assent at all.⁵⁷ On the contrary, such teachings demand what theologians call "religious assent." Though this is not an absolute assent, nevertheless it is a firm one, since all prudent fear of error is excluded. For, in view of the abiding assistance of Christ and of the Holy Spirit to the Church in the discharge of her teaching office, it is most unlikely (although not absolutely excluded) that the Pope would be mistaken when, without using his supreme and infallible authority, he imposes a doctrine on all the faithful.⁵⁸

Last, but not least, of the ordinary Magisterium of the Popes one should note carefully that, under due conditions, it can even be infallible. Namely, if over a prolonged period of time the same doctrine is repeated by several Roman Pontiffs, this becomes in effect an infallible teaching, to which absolute assent is due.⁵⁹ What is more, for this to come to pass it is not necessary, we venture to suggest, that the Popes have been exercising on those occasions their universal Magisterium, have been addressing the entire Church—it is enough if the Pontiffs were speaking as the local Bishop of Rome to the faithful of the diocese of Rome.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Cf. *Humani generis*, in *AAS* 42 (1950) 568; *N.C.W.C.* English transl., n. 20.

⁵⁸ Cf. Filograssi, *De Sanctissima Eucharistia*, 64-67, A. Cotter, S.J., *The Encyclical 'Humani generis' with a Commentary* (2nd ed., Weston, 1952) 74-75, 79-82; Lercher, *op. cit.*, 1, nn. 498-501.

⁵⁹ Cf. P. Nau, O.S.B., *Le Magistère pontifical ordinaire, lieu théologique*, in *RT* 56 (1956) 389-412, J. De Guibert, S.J., *De Christi Ecclesia* (2nd ed., Rome, 1928) 308, Filograssi, *op. cit.*, 66, M. Scheeben, *Handbuch der katholischen Dogmatik*, 1 (2nd ed., edited by M. Grabmann, Freiburg in Breisgau, 1948) n. 433: "Als Kriterien des eigentlichen Glaubensdogmas gelten . . . speziell die notorische, konstante Glaubenstradition der römischen Kirche."

⁶⁰ Nau, *art. cit.* 405-406, requires that the Popes be exercising, in effect,

After these preliminaries we may now consult the ordinary papal Magisterium as to the Marian interpretation of *Gen.* 3, 15. One may begin with a response of the Biblical Commission, whose decrees participate in the authority of the Pope's ordinary Magisterium.⁶¹ Replying to a query about the historical character of the first three chapters of Genesis, the Commission in 1909 gave us to understand, and the same Commission's letter of 1948 to Cardinal Suhard as well as the Encyclical *Humani generis* later confirmed, that these chapters contain a number of fundamental teachings of the Christian religion, truths presupposed for the economy of salvation, among which, the 1909 decree expressly states, is "the promise of a future Redeemer."⁶² Now the only passage in the first three chapters of Genesis which could constitute such a promise is our *Gen.* 3, 15. We gather, then, that this verse belongs to the "*inspirata per se*," and is therefore a "*locus theologicus*."⁶³ This is confirmed by the manner in which the Popes use the Protoevangelium; as we shall see, they treat it as a "dogmatic" text.

A text, however, can be a "dogmatic" text, a "*locus theologicus*," even when the truth it is meant to convey was not

their universal Magisterium, but this does not seem to square with the thought of Irenaeus, which Nau had earlier reported (391-392) with approval

⁶¹ Cf. *DB* n 2113, Cotter, *op cit*, 80, Unger, *art cit*, in *MS* 1 (1950) 106, Lercher, *op cit*, 1, n 502, *CBQ* 17 (1955) 450-451

⁶² See the Response of the Biblical Commission, June 30, 1909, *ad dubium III*, in *EB* n 338 and *DB* 2123, *Rome and the Study of Scripture*, 121 Also, the Biblical Commission's Letter to Cardinal Suhard, Jan 16, 1948, in *EB* n. 581 and *DB* n 2302, *Rome and the Study of Scripture*, 150 Also, Pius XII, *Enc Humani generis*, in *AAS* 42 (1950) 576-577, *N C W C*. English transl n 39 Cf Cotter, *op cit*, 88-89, 106-107

⁶³ Cf. K Prumm, S J, in *Bibl* 31 (1950) 517, Cotter, *op cit*, 89, *idem*, *Theologia Fundamentalis* (2nd ed, Weston, 1947) 596-598 Hence, among other things, *Gen.* 3, 15 has the purpose of teaching, it is not one of those passages which Benoit says propose, e.g, merely to touch the heart, appease, console . . . , Cf. P Benoit, O.P., *L'Inspiration*, in A Robert, A. Tricot, editors, *Initation Biblique* (3rd ed, Paris, 1954) 20-21

revealed in the strict sense of the word. If, namely, God inspired a hagiographer to write and assert something which he, the human author, had come to know naturally or had even only surmised, this is called revelation in a wider sense.⁶⁴ A truth asserted in Holy Writ derives from revelation strictly so called only if it had been previously manifested by God, through a "*locutio proprie dicta*," either to the hagiographer or to someone before him

It is worth asking, which is the case with the promise of the Redeemer made in the Protoevangelium—revelation strictly so called, or widely so called? According to the Magisterium, it is a case of the former, revelation strictly so called; *Gen* 3, 15 is not a mere expression of humanly acquired knowledge or human surmise, whose truth God guaranteed by inspiring the hagiographer to assert it. For the context of the 1909 response of the Biblical Commission requires one to understand that the promise of the Redeemer was manifested to our first parents.⁶⁵ Such, too, is the mind of the Popes when, for example, they speak of this promise having been given at the dawn of the world's history.⁶⁶

According to the Magisterium, therefore, our text reports,

⁶⁴ Cf. Lercher, *op cit*, 1, n. 568, *coll* n. 549

⁶⁵ Cf. K. Prumm, *Bibl* 31 (1950) 515, note 1. Peinador, *art cit*, in *ASC* 4 (1951) 30, in discussing problems as to the historicity of the account of the Fall in Genesis, remarks that, even if one supposed that the entire narrative of the Fall of our first parents was a pure symbol adopted by the inspired author to teach us in some fashion the truths he wished to convey, and even in the supposition that all transpired in the intellectual region between the Tempter and our first parents, the divine words remain intact, just as do those we frequently meet in the prophets and which they received in a vision or through the infusion of intellectual species

⁶⁶ Cf., e.g., Leo XIII, quoted *supra*, note 2, or, again, Pius IX, *Ineffabilis Deus*, which describes *Gen* 3, 15 as "the words by which at the beginning of the world God announced His merciful remedies prepared for the regeneration of mankind", quoted from W. Doherty, C.S.C., J. Kelly, editors, *Papal Documents on Mary* (Milwaukee, 1954) 17, Latin text in A. Tondini, editor, *Le Encicliche Mariane* (2nd ed., Rome, 1954) 42.

with at least substantial fidelity to God's words, a divine revelation strictly so called, wherein God promised to our first parents one who would redeem the human race.⁶⁷ Thus *Gen.* 3, 15, indeed a Protoevangelium, has an eschatological or prophetic character; also a soteriological character, since it is a promise of religious salvation for mankind; and a Christological character, since this religious salvation is to be wrought by an individual, the Redeemer.⁶⁸

Our next question is, does the Protoevangelium have, according to the Magisterium, also a Mariological character, does it refer not only to our divine Savior but also to His Blessed Mother?

Such was the belief and teaching of the first Pope known to us as referring to *Gen.* 3, 15, St. Leo the Great (d. 461). In a sermon on Christ's Nativity, he stated:

God. . . , as soon as the diabolical wickedness killed us by the poison of its envy, at the very beginnings of the world signified beforehand (*praesignavit*) the remedies prepared by His mercy for renewing us mortals; announcing to the serpent the future seed of the woman, which would crush (*conteret*) by its power the haughtiness of the guilty head, namely, signifying Christ who was to come in the flesh, God and man, who, born of the Virgin, would by His incorrupt birth condemn the violator of the human race.⁶⁹

Laurentin acknowledges this to be a Christo-Marian interpretation of *Gen.* 3, 15.⁷⁰ Besides understanding Christ as the future seed of the woman which, by its own power, would crush the devil's haughty head, St. Leo identifies the woman

⁶⁷ Cf. K. Prumm, *Bibl.* 31 (1950) 515-516.

⁶⁸ In the above terminology we follow J. Coppens, *art. cit.*, *ETL* 26 (1950) 12.

⁶⁹ *Sermo 22 de nativitate Domini*; *PL* 54, 194A.

⁷⁰ Cf. Laurentin, *art. cit.*, 121, *coll.* 98.

of *Gen* 3, 15 as the Virgin Mother of Christ, and notes that this virginity was foretold in the prophecy. "What is more," says Father Unger, "the very fact that the Savior was born in a virginal manner was a condemnation of the Devil who violated the human race, namely by vitiating the seed of Adam and infecting all men with original sin."⁷¹ Some of Leo's ideas and wording were later echoed in the Bull on the Immaculate Conception, *Ineffabilis Deus*.⁷²

If one accepts Laurentin's rigorous re-evaluation of the patristic interpretation of *Gen*. 3, 15, St. Leo, besides being the first Pope to espay a Marian sense in the Protoevangelium, would even seem to be the first Western Father to do so, with, moreover, only four predecessors, at most, among the Greek Fathers.⁷³

The next Pope to comment on *Gen*. 3, 15 was, so far as we know, St. Gregory the Great (d. 604). But his is merely a moral-allegorical interpretation, oriented toward practical applications.⁷⁴ While not testifying to the Christo-Marian sense of the text, neither does Gregory exclude it.⁷⁵

As the next papal exponent of the Marian interpretation we may cite, perhaps, Paul V, in his Bull of Oct 28, 1615, *Immensae bonitatis* (on the erection of a chapel in the Basilica of St Mary Major):

She [the Mother of God], having been pointed out beforehand (*antea praemonstrata*) by so many figures, visions and prophecies of the prophets. . . , by her salutary fecundity freed us from captivity and, the head of the serpent having been crushed, she, clothed with the sun, having the moon for her

⁷¹ Unger, *The First-Gospel*, 202

⁷² Cf *ibid*, 201.

⁷³ Namely, Serapion of Thmuis, Epiphanius, Isidore of Pelusium, Pseudo-Chrysostom, cf Laurentin, *art cit*, 106

⁷⁴ Cf. Laurentin, *art. cit*, 122

⁷⁵ Cf Unger, *op cit*, 208

footstool, victorious and triumphant, deserved to be crowned with a crown of twelve stars and, having been exalted above the choirs of angels, to be called the Queen of heaven and earth.⁷⁶

Paul links up *Gen.* 3, 15 with *Apoc.* 12, and seems to understand both passages as having a truly Marian sense.

Pope Leo XII, in his Brief *Etsi Dei Filius*, Sept. 1, 1826, quoted approvingly the following passage from St. Bernard's sermon *On the Twelve Stars*: "She is the woman promised of old by God as the one who would crush the head of the ancient serpent with her virtuous foot. The serpent, in many deceits, lay in wait for her heel, but in vain, for she alone crushed all heresy."⁷⁷

In his Encyclical *Ubi primum*, Feb. 2, 1849, which directed the bishops of the universal Church to inform him what was the belief of their clergy and faithful and what their own belief concerning the Immaculate Conception, Pope Pius IX stated that Mary "crushed the head of the ancient serpent with her virtuous foot."⁷⁸

This assertion, and two similar ones in the same Pontiff's Bull on the Immaculate Conception, *Ineffabilis Deus*,⁷⁹ do not

⁷⁶ *Bullarium Romanum*, 12 (Turin, 1867) 346. Two sermons by Honorius III (d. 1227) exhibit a Marian interpretation of *Gen.* 3, 15, but they seem to have been written before Honorius became Pope, cf. Laurentin, *art. cit.*, 134.

⁷⁷ *Bullarii Romani Continuatio*, 8 (Prato, 1854) 464, the brief confirmed the rule and constitutions of the Congregation of Oblates of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The passage taken from St. Bernard's *Sermo infra octavam Assumptionis* (PL 183, 431CD) is evaluated by Laurentin, *art. cit.*, 127, as "a Marian application in the line of the Christological interpretation. The divine maternity has triumphed over all heresies."

⁷⁸ For the Latin text, cf. Tondini, *op. cit.*, 4.

⁷⁹ "Decebat omnino, ut vel ab ipsa originalis culpae labe plane immunus amplissimum de antiquo serpente triumphum referret tam venerabilis Mater. . . Professi sunt (Patres), gloriosissimam Virginem fuisse. . . a Deo, quando ad serpentem ait, inimicitias ponam inter te et mulierem, praedictam, quae procul dubio venenatum ejusdem serpentis caput contrivit", *ADSC* 6 (Freiburg in Br., 1882) 836b, 840d, Tondini, *op. cit.*, 30, 46.

derive from the Vulgate's reading of *Gen.* 3, 15, "*ipsa (conteret . . .)*." Neither Pius IX nor any of the later Popes who invoke our text argue from *ipsa*; indeed, they do not quote the last member of the verse at all, even with *ipse* or *ipsum*.⁸⁰ Still less are the above-mentioned statements merely accommodating the Protoevangelium to Mary.⁸¹ They are to be understood in the light of the following passage of the Bull *Ineffabilis Deus*, which is the chief one for our subject:

Now, Fathers and writers of the Church, taught by the heavenly words, had nothing more at heart than, vying with one another, to preach and exalt—through books written to explain the Scriptures, to vindicate the dogmas, and to instruct the faithful—in many wonderful ways the Virgin's utter sanctity, dignity, and immunity from all stain of sin, and her glorious victory over the foulest enemy of the human race.

For this reason, in explaining the words by which God, announcing beforehand at the very beginnings of the world the remedies prepared by His mercy for renewing us mortals, both beat down the audacity of the deceitful serpent and marvelously raised up the hope of our race, saying: 'I will put enmities between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed,' they taught that this divine prophecy had clearly and patently pointed out beforehand (*praemonstratum fuisse*) the merciful Redeemer of the human race, the only-begotten Son

⁸⁰ The members of the special commission appointed by Pius IX to study the definability of the Immaculate Conception carefully distinguished the first part of *Gen.* 3, 15 from the last, in which they read *ipsa*, judging the latter inefficacious, they retained as demonstrative only the first part of the verse; cf. P. Bonnetain, *Immaculée Conception*, in *SDBI*, fasc. 19 (1943) 252, J. B. Carol, *op. cit.*, 117-118, T. Gallus, *Interpretatio Mariologica Protoevangelii Posttridentina*, 2 (Rome, 1954) 299-300, 316.

⁸¹ Speaking of the passage quoted *supra*, note 79, "Professi sunt . . .," A. De Guglielmo, O.F.M., *Mary in the Protoevangelium*, in *CBQ* 14 (1952) 112, mistakenly asserts that Pius IX "is resorting to accommodation, since he speaks of Mary as crushing the head of the serpent, an action the sacred text explicitly ascribes to the seed of the woman."

of God, Jesus Christ, and designated (*designatam*) His most blessed Mother, the Virgin Mary, and at the same time projected in sharp relief the selfsame enmity of both against the devil (*ipsissimas utriusque contra diabolum inimicitias insigniter expressas*). Hence, just as Christ, the mediator between God and man, having assumed human nature, cancelling the decree against us, nailed it triumphantly to the cross, so the most holy Virgin, united with Him by a most intimate and indissoluble bond, together with Him and through Him everlastingly at war with and most completely triumphing over the poisonous serpent, crushed his head with her immaculate foot.⁸²

According to this celebrated passage, then, a number of Fathers and ecclesiastical writers taught that the prophecy, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, between your seed and her seed," refers to the Blessed Mother in some truly Scriptural sense, not by mere accommodation.⁸³ The Protoevangelium joins Mary with Christ in the struggle against Satan, and since Christ was completely victorious in that struggle, so too was Mary, whence she may rightly be said to have crushed, together with Christ and through Him, the serpent's head.⁸⁴

⁸² This intentionally quite literal translation is our own. The original Latin may be seen in *ADSC* 6, 839cd, Tondini, *op cit*, 42. De Guglielmo, *art cit*, 111, in giving "the pertinent passages" of the Bull, overlooks the latter half of the above quotation ("Hence, just as Christ . . . her immaculate foot") This author, it should be remarked, does not deny that the Bull *Ineffabilis Deus* upholds a Marian interpretation of *Gen* 3, 15, he merely denies that the Bull sustains the view that the Protoevangelium deals with Mary in "the direct literal sense."

⁸³ Cf Bea, *art cit*, *Mm* 15 (1953) 18

⁸⁴ Cf Bonnetain, *art. cit*, 251. Hence, even if the Vulgate's reading *ipsa* be philologically incorrect, it is faithful to the sense and spirit of the Protoevangelium; cf Gallus, *Interpretatio Mariologica Protoevangelii Posttridentina*, 2 (Rome, 1954) 318-319, Carol, *op cit*, 116-117, Bonnetain, *art cit*, 241, 250, 252. Incidentally, it is not yet settled that the translation *ipsa* is grammatically inadmissible, cf Brunktrne, *art cit*, in *Vgl* 3 (1955) 19-22, and Coppens' comment thereon, in the same volume, p 104, note 16.

Pius IX did not simply adduce, without approving, this Marian interpretation of *Gen.* 3, 15 on the part of some Fathers and ecclesiastical writers. He agreed with and endorsed it.⁸⁵ He relied on it to argue the Immaculate Conception from Holy Writ.⁸⁶ Exercising his ordinary magisterium, the Sovereign Pontiff made it his own, clothed it with his own authority, in such wise as to give us an authentic and binding, though not of itself infallible, Marian, as well as Christological, interpretation of the Protoevangelium.⁸⁷ This has been established by careful studies of the text of the Bull and of its historical genesis.⁸⁸ Particularly significant is the fact that when later the Bull twice sums up the doctrinal considerations which warranted the solemn definition of the Immaculate Conception, it mentions Sacred Scripture in the first place and as distinct from Tradition,⁸⁹ as Pope Pius XII noted and confirmed in the Encyclical *Fulgens Corona*.⁹⁰ From the structure of the Bull and from the history of its formation, it is clear that in the

⁸⁵ As De Guglielmo, *art. cit.*, 112, acknowledges.

⁸⁶ As Rigaux, *art. cit.*, 323-324, and Coppens, *art. cit.*, *ETL* 26 (1950) 6, concede, without, however, recognizing the binding force of this papal teaching on *Gen.* 3, 15. The request which Coppens there makes for norms in interpreting pontifical documents has since been met by M. Peinador, *La Bula 'Munificentissimus Deus'*, in *EM* 12 (1952) 22-25, cf. *idem*, *EphM* 1 (1951) 40, note 19.

⁸⁷ Cf., e.g., M. Peinador, *De Bullis 'Ineffabilis Deus' et 'Munificentissimus Deus' ad invicem comparatus*, in *EphM* 4 (1954) 186-197. The moral unanimity which has come about in the course of the last century on the thesis that *Gen.* 3, 15 refers to Mary in some genuinely Biblical sense is largely due to the influence of the *Ineffabilis Deus* and attests to a general recognition that Pius IX was speaking authoritatively.

⁸⁸ Cf. Bea, *art. cit.*, in *Vgl* 3 (1955) 4-9, 17, *idem*, *art. cit.*, *Mm* 15 (1953) 2-3, 17-19, Carol, *op. cit.*, 105-121, G. Flograssi, *Il dogma dell'Immacolata nell'Enciclica 'Fulgens Corona'*, in *Gr* 36 (1955) 11-13.

⁸⁹ Cf. *ADSC* 6, 841c, 842b, Tondini, *op. cit.*, 50, 52.

⁹⁰ Encyclical commemorating the 100th anniversary of the definition of the Immaculate Conception by proclaiming a Marian Year, *Fulgens corona*, Sept. 8, 1953; *ASS* 45 (1953) 582, Tondini, *op. cit.*, 738.

eyes of Pius IX the Protoevangelium ranked as the chief Biblical basis for the dogma of the Immaculate Conception.⁹¹

Although Pius IX authoritatively taught that "the woman" of *Gen.* 3, 15 refers in some truly Scriptural sense to Mary, he did not determine the precise nature of that sense, and so left scholars free to debate whether it is the direct literal sense, the plenary sense, or the typical sense.⁹²

In his allocution of July 1, 1867, to bishops assembled in Rome, Pius IX announced his intention of placing the impending Vatican Council under the patronage of Mary, "beneath whose foot the head of the serpent was put from the beginnings of time."⁹³

A Marian interpretation of *Gen.* 3, 15 underlies the following passage of Leo XIII's Rosary Encyclical *Augustissimae Virginis*, Sept. 12, 1897: "When, in the beginning of the human race, the parents of mankind fell into sin, involving their descendants in the same ruin, she [Mary] was set up as the pledge of the restoration of peace and salvation."⁹⁴ Under the same Pontiff, the Sacred Congregation of Indulgences approved, Feb. 1, 1896, a prayer invoking the Blessed Virgin as "victorious over the infernal serpent from the beginning of your existence."⁹⁵ Leo's epistle *Da molte parti*, May 26, 1903, which appointed a commission of Cardinals to prepare for celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the definition of the Immaculate Conception, concluded with a prayer containing

⁹¹ Cf. Bea, Carol, Filograssi, *ubi supra*.

⁹² Cf. Bea, *art. cit.*, in *Vgl* 3 (1955) 9-16; *idem*, *art. cit.*, *Mm* 15 (1953) 19-20. M. Pennador, *art. cit.*, in *ASC* 4 (1951) 22. "The Bull *Ineffabilis Deus*, above all, leaves no doubt that, if one is to see Mary in this prophecy, it has to be precisely in the word 'woman,' who is opposed by God to the serpent-tempter. . . . there is no accord among Catholics on the manner in which Mary is designated, whether in the literal or typical or full sense."

⁹³ *ADSC* 7, 1043b.

⁹⁴ Doherty-Kelly, *op. cit.*, 122-123, Latin text in Tondini, *op. cit.*, 258.

⁹⁵ Cf. H. Marin, S.J., ed., *Documentos marianos* (Madrid, 1954) n. 439.

these words: "The wicked serpent, against whom the primal curse was hurled, continues none the less to wage war and to lay snares for the unhappy children of Eve. Ah, do thou, our blessed Mother, our Queen and Advocate, who from the first instant of thy conception didst crush the head of our enemy, receive the prayers . . ." ⁹⁶

Among other references to *Gen.* 3, 15 in a Marian sense, St. Pius X's Encyclical on the jubilee of the definition of the Immaculate Conception, *Ad diem illum*, Feb. 2, 1904, has the following:

Adam looked to Mary crushing the serpent's head, and he restrained the tears which the malediction brought to his eyes. . . . We shrink with horror from saying, as Denis the Carthusian so well expresses it, that 'this woman who was to crush the head of the serpent should have been crushed by him and that the Mother of God should have ever been a daughter of the Evil One.' ⁹⁷

A prayer in the same Pontiff's Apostolic Letter *Quae ad fidei*, Mar. 4, 1910, speaks of Mary as "Our Mother, who didst crush the head of the serpent with thy virginal foot." ⁹⁸

In a homily delivered at St. Peter's, May 13, 1920, Benedict XV declared:

These two things are intimately and necessarily bound together. to have compassion with the torments of Jesus and to have compassion with the sufferings of Mary. For, as the first Adam bad a woman as his associate in the Fall, so the second

⁹⁶ Cf. *ibid.*, n. 479. This prayer was later enriched with an indulgence (S. C. Ind., Jan. 11, 1905, S. P. Ap., Feb. 2, 1934), and appears in the *Enchiridion Indulgentiarum* (2nd ed., Vatican City, 1952), n. 368, cf. also n. 345.

⁹⁷ Doheny-Kelly, *op. cit.*, 137, 143, Latin in Tondini, *op. cit.*, 308, 316. Cf. Unger, *The First-Gospel*, 71-72.

⁹⁸ *AAS* 2 (1910) 226

Adam willed that there participate in the reparation of our salvation she whom, by styling her 'Woman' from the Cross, He declared to be the second Eve, that is, the ineffably sorrowing Mother of all men, for whom He was dying, to win life for them.⁹⁹

Here, as Baumann remarks, "the Pope gives *John* 19, 26-27 a Messianic significance, in that he exhibits the testament of the dying Savior as the fulfillment of the prophecy in Paradise. . . Benedict XV, by reference to the *principium consortii* ('*participem*'), outlines the connections between *Gen.* 3, 15 and *John* 19, 26-27. . . ." ¹⁰⁰

The Encyclical of Pius XI on Atheistic Communism, *Divini Redemptoris*, Mar. 19, 1937, which begins with a Christological interpretation of the Protoevangelium, later adds a Marian interpretation of the same passage:

The promise of a Redeemer brightens the first page of the history of mankind . . . Nevertheless, the struggle between good and evil remained in the world as a sad legacy of the original fall. Nor has the ancient tempter ever ceased to deceive mankind with false promises. . . . The evil which today torments humanity can be conquered only by a world-wide crusade of prayer and penance. . . . Implore also the powerful intercession of the Immaculate Virgin who, having crushed the head of the serpent of old, remains the sure protectress and invincible 'Help of Christians' ¹⁰¹

As an early indication of the mind of Pius XII on our sub-

⁹⁹ *AAS* 12 (1920) 224

¹⁰⁰ A. Baumann, *Maria Mater nostra spiritualis Eine theologische Untersuchung über die geistige Mutterschaft Mariens in den Äusserungen der Päpste vom Tridentinum bis heute* (Brixen, 1948) 56-57.

¹⁰¹ *AAS* 29 (1937) 65-66, 96, *NCWC* English translation, nn 1-2, 59. For relevant prayers enriched with indulgences under Pius XI, see *supra*, note 96.

ject, we may quote from a prayer indulgenced by the Sacred Penitentiary Apostolic on May 20, 1941:

Oh most holy Virgin who, predestined to become the Mother of God, were preserved from original sin . . . Contemplating you . . . in the magnificent act of crushing the proud head of the infernal serpent, Heaven exults, earth rejoices .¹⁰²

According to the Apost. Constit. *Munificentissimus Deus*, Nov. 1, 1950, in its summation of the doctrinal considerations warranting the definition of the Assumption, the latter truth "is based on the Sacred Scriptures"¹⁰³ This Biblical basis had been set forth by Pius XII in the immediately preceding paragraphs:

All these arguments and considerations of the Holy Fathers and the theologians are based on the Sacred Scriptures as on their ultimate foundation. Indeed, the Scriptures place before our eyes, as it were, the gracious Mother of God as most closely united with her divine Son, and as always sharing His lot. Therefore it seems well nigh impossible to think of her, who conceived Christ, brought Him forth, nursed Him with her own milk, held Him in her arms and clasped Him to her bosom, as being, after her life upon earth, separated from Him, if not in soul, yet in body. . .

But most especially to be recalled is this, that from the second century on, the Virgin Mary is proposed by the Holy Fathers as the New Eve most intimately associated with, while subject to, the New Adam in that struggle with the infernal foe which, as is foretold in the Protoevangelium, was to result in fullest victory over sin and death, which are always coupled one with the other in the writings of the Apostle to the Gentiles (cf. *Rom* 5-6, *1 Cor* 15, 21-26, 54-57). Therefore, just as the glorious resurrection of Christ was an essential part and the

¹⁰² *Enchiridion Indulgentiarum* (2nd ed, Vatican City, 1952) n. 373

¹⁰³ *AAS* 42 (1950) 769 "quae veritas Sacris Litteris innuitur"

crowning memorial of this victory, so too the struggle which the Blessed Virgin had in common with her Son had to culminate in the 'glorification' of her virginal body; for, as the same Apostle says, 'when this mortal body puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the word that is written, "Death is swallowed up in victory"' (1 Cor. 15, 54)

Hence the venerable Mother of God, from all eternity joined in a mysterious way with Jesus Christ 'by one and the same decree' (*Ineffabilis Deus*) of predestination, immaculate in her conception, a most perfect virgin in her divine motherhood, the selfless associate of the divine Redeemer, He who triumphed completely over sin and its consequences, did obtain at last, as the supreme crown of her privileges, that she should be preserved free from the corruption of the tomb and that, like her Son before her, having overcome death, she might be taken up body and soul to the supernal glory of heaven, where as Queen she sits in splendor at the right hand of her Son, the immortal King of the ages (cf. 1 Tim 1, 17) ¹⁰⁴

The great majority of commentators on this profound passage—among them, some who had been members of the special commission appointed by Pius XII to prepare the dogmatic definition of the Assumption ¹⁰⁵—have rightly recognized it as another papal avowal of the Marian interpretation of the Protoevangelium,¹⁰⁶ wherein, however, the Sovereign Pontiff

¹⁰⁴ The translation is our own, for the Latin text cf AAS 42 (1950) 767-769

¹⁰⁵ Eg, A Bea, SJ, C Balč, OFM, P Parente The names of the fourteen members of the commission are given in OR Dec 9-10, 1950, cf Marie 4 (1951) 39, note 5

¹⁰⁶ Cf, eg, A Bea, *La S Scrittura 'ultimo fondamento' del dogma dell'Assunzione*, in CC 101 (1950) 547-561; *idem art cit.*, in Mm 15 (1953) 1-2, 17-19, C Balč, *De Constitutione Apostolica 'Munificentissimus Deus'*, in Ant 26 (1951) 27, P Parente, *La giustificazione teologica della definizione dogmatica dell'Assunzione*, in SM 8 (1954) 20-21; G Filograssi, *Constitutio Apostolica 'Munificentissimus Deus' de Assumptione Beatae Mariae Virginis*,

does not determine whether the prophecy bears on Mary in the literal, or full, or typical sense.¹⁰⁷ "The Pope here asserts that in Sacred Scripture there is revealed the concept of the strict union of Mary with her Son, that is, the single decree which associates both in the same lot. This decree is adumbrated precisely in the Protoevangelium: in *Gen.* 3, 15 the Pope sees therefore a Christological sense and a Mariological sense."¹⁰⁸

A few have denied that the above passage of *Munificentissimus Deus* espouses the Marian interpretation of our text, but it seems needless to delay on this controversy, because Pius XII made his mind on the Protoevangelium indisputably clear in the Encyclical *Fulgens Corona*, Sept. 8, 1953:

In the first place, the foundation of this doctrine [the Immaculate Conception] is to be found in Sacred Scripture, in which God, Creator of all things, after the sad fall of Adam speaks to the serpent, the tempter and corrupter, in these words, which not a few Fathers, Doctors of the Church and very many approved interpreters refer to the Virgin Mother of God: 'I will put enmities between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed . . .' (*Gen.* 3, 15) Now, if at any time the Blessed Virgin Mary had been, because contaminated in her conception by the hereditary stain of sin, destitute of divine grace, for that moment at least, however brief, there would not have come between her and the serpent that perpetual enmity spoken of from earliest 'tradition' down to the time of the solemn

in *Gr.* 31 (1950) 511-514, M. Peñador, *De argumento scripturistico in bulla dogmatica de Assumptione*, in *EphM* 1 (1951) 27-44, *idem*, *Más sobre el argumento escriturístico en la Bula 'Munificentissimus Deus'*, in *EphM* 1 (1951) 395-404, J. B. Carol, O.F.M., *The Apostolic Constitution 'Munificentissimus Deus' and Our Blessed Lady's Coredeposition*, in *AER* 125 (1951/II) 255-273; D. Unger, *The First-Gospel*, 72-82, 305-314

¹⁰⁷ Cf. e.g., Peñador, *art. cit.*, *EphM* 1 (1951) 36, note 13, c

¹⁰⁸ P. Parente, in *ED* 7 (1954) 18

definition of the Virgin's Immaculate Conception, but rather a certain subjection.¹⁰⁹

Thus Pius XII, recalling and making his own the Marian interpretation of *Gen* 3, 15 found in not a few Fathers, etc., uses it to vindicate his assertion that there is a Biblical basis for the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception; he does not, however, commit himself on the question whether the text deals with the Blessed Mother in the literal, the typical, or the full sense.¹¹⁰ The same Pope reiterated his position in a radio message to members of the Italian Catholic Action, Dec. 8, 1953:

Already after the fall of Adam, the first announcement of Mary, according to the interpretation of not a few Holy Fathers and Doctors, tells us of enmities between her and the serpent, the adversary of God and man. . . . Mary immaculate has crushed the head of the serpent, the tempter and the corrupter.¹¹¹

So far as the present writer knows, Pope John XXIII has not yet found occasion to unfold the meaning of *Gen*. 3, 15. But, in our judgment, his predecessors have already settled the matter. The thesis that the Protoevangelium refers in some genuine Scriptural sense to Mary is authoritatively taught by the universal ordinary Magisterium of the Popes (in the documents *Ineffabilis Deus*, *Ad diem illum*, *Munificentissimus Deus*, *Fulgens Corona*) in such a way as to render the Marian interpretation at least morally certain and binding us to at least religious assent.¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ The translation is our own, Latin text in *AAS* 45 (1953) 579; cf *ibid*, 582, on the Bull *Ineffabilis Deus*.

¹¹⁰ Cf G Filograssi, *Il dogma dell'Immacolata nell'Enciclica 'Fulgens Corona'*, in *Gr* 36 (1955) 7-11; M Peñador, *Adnotationes in encyclicam 'Fulgens Corona'*, in *EphM* 4 (1954) 21-22

¹¹¹ *AAS* 45 (1954) 852.

¹¹² Similarly, e.g., Peñador, Bea, repeatedly in their articles cited throughout this study; cf, also G Filograssi, in *Gr* 41 (1960) 88-91.

Indeed, since the Marian interpretation can claim the support of every Pope for nearly a century, from Pius IX to Pius XII, it would seem to be infallibly guaranteed by this constant teaching of a long series of Bishops of Rome, who, moreover, were but echoing their forerunners, St. Leo I, Paul V, and Leo XIII.

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