

1-1-2005

Eschatology and the Church in the Light of the Assumption

Paul E. Duggan

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

Recommended Citation

Duggan, Paul E. (2005) "Eschatology and the Church in the Light of the Assumption," *Marian Studies*: Vol. 56, Article 10.
Available at: https://ecommons.udayton.edu/marian_studies/vol56/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 frice1@udayton.edu, mschlange1@udayton.edu.

Marian Studies

Volume 56 *Mary, Eschatological Icon of the Church*

Article 10

1-1-2005

Eschatology and the Church in the Light of the Assumption

Paul E. Duggan

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

Recommended Citation

Duggan, Paul E. (2005) "Eschatology and the Church in the Light of the Assumption," *Marian Studies*: Vol. 56, Article 10.
Available at: http://ecommons.udayton.edu/marian_studies/vol56/iss56/10

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Marian Studies by an authorized administrator of eCommons. For more information, please contact frice1@udayton.edu.

ESCHATOLOGY AND THE CHURCH IN THE LIGHT OF THE ASSUMPTION

*Paul E. Duggan**

The Mystery of the Assumption teaches us that in Mary, the transfiguration of the Cosmos, the principle of which lies in the Resurrection of Christ, has already begun to produce its effect. The Assumption is the dawn of the New Creation whose first rays filter through into the darkness of the world.

(Jean Danielou, "Le dogme de l'Assomption," *Études* 267 [1950]:301)

The Assumption is part of God's wondrous plan for humankind: The Assumption reminds us that God's plan to give us life and being has not been undone by sin or the obscurity of life and death. The gift of life and being, given originally in creation and regiven in the Resurrection of Christ, is being enjoyed by at least one human being, Mary. Since Mary is the mother of all believers, the Assumption teaches us that we, like her, are not destined for the deep pit of death and despair, but rather for the glory of heaven's everlasting life. In Mary we are able to see what God intends and is doing for all of us.¹

Heavenly Glory

Mary's death is not to be looked upon merely as a passive happening. Rather, it is the model of our confidence in God's loving benevolence that we, like Mary, can reject sin as well as death, and also freely choose God and future life. The Assumption implies the transformation of a body-person into an

*At the time of this presentation, Father Paul E. Duggan was a retired priest and Air Force Chaplain in the Archdiocese of San Francisco. After his retirement from pastoral ministry in 1984, he continued to serve as an auxiliary chaplain and, in 1989, successfully defended his dissertation for an STD specializing in Marian studies from the International Marian Research Institute (University of Dayton). Father Duggan (82 years) died on March 30, 2007.

¹ Robert Kress, "Mary's Assumption, God's Promise Fulfilled," *America* 137 (1977): 73.

156 *Eschatology and Church in Light of the Assumption*

entirely new dimension of existence.² Human flesh has been taken up and glorified with Christ. Eternal glory is now a possibility. This humanity and flesh is already a possibility in the flesh of Christ, which is a part of the world; it is already a reality.³

The Assumption is the completion of Mary's redemption,⁴ God's glorification of her whole person. We are God's children in this life. It is more certain that we shall be God's children in the next life, although we do not realize the precise manner through which this will happen (see Jn 3:2).⁵

Mircea Eliade believed that Mary's going to heaven did not imply an automatic, immediate divinization. A good person could be brought to heaven without becoming a participant in divinity. Such a person could take on a new existential dimension and still remain completely human. There are two distinguishing characteristics of this new heavenly existence: the person transcends human imperfection and fulfills a previously limited potential in total freedom. Eliade denied that the Assumption implied a freedom in the Gnostic sense. Rather Mary, in the unity of her body and soul, existed freely in the fullness of her Son's redemption without any possibility of human decay. Since she joined Christ in heaven, there was evidenced a growth in the intensity of her humanness.⁶

² There are no direct scriptural references to the Assumption. Further, there are presently no references from early patristic Church literature. Refer to A. C. Rush, "Assumption Theology in the *Transitus Mariae*," *American Ecclesiastical Review* 123 (1950): 93-110. It is possible that such literature could be discovered. It is also possible that the *Transitus* literature could be traced back to the second century.

³ Karl Rahner, *Mary, Mother of the Lord: Theological Meditations* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1970), 89.

⁴ "Karl Rahner, "Interpretation of the Dogma of the Assumption," in *Theological Investigations*, trans. C. Ernst (23 vols.; Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1961-1992), 1:223.

⁵ Since Mary was the perfectly redeemed person in this life, there was no obstacle to her enjoying immediately the glory of the next life at the moment that she left this one. Because she cooperated perfectly with her own Son in the Redemption, she is seen as being already in heavenly glory in the totality of her personhood, body and soul.

⁶ Mircea Eliade, *Myths, Dreams and Mysteries: The Encounter between Contemporary Faiths and Archaic Realities*, trans. P. Mairet (New York: Harper, 1961, c1960), 99-100.

Eschatology and Church in Light of the Assumption 157

Mary's Assumption points to the transformation we will experience in heaven. The faithful will retain their personal identity in body and soul. St. Paul tells us: "Not that we should be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so what is mortal may be swallowed up in life" (2 Cor 5:4). A continuity exists between Mary's earthly and heavenly life, since our Lady retains her own body-soul identity.

Part of the fear associated with death is the fact that there is an unfounded loss of body that can never be regained. Our own reality is transformed and not simply replaced by another.⁷ Humankind's heavenly destiny is a complete transformation of the life we have known in this world, not simply a replacement of what we have known with another world. The taking up of the Virgin's physical body verifies an indissoluble union between what is and what is to come. The Communion of Saints is, consequently, a reality and not just a symbol.

A Transformative Theological Event

Our Lady's Assumption, the expression of her being changed over in body and soul to a new order of existence, has a relevance like Christ's Resurrection for Christian anthropology. She realized the fulfillment of her personhood in body and soul, already living and enjoying this transformation in the fullness of her humanity. Mary was always open to union with God, always open to the self-gift of her humanity to the divinity in a nuptial giving. While the Virgin conceived the Lord in her fleshly womb and bore him without sin, she ultimately came to know him through a bodily assumption into glorified life. Even after Christ's Ascension, Mary remained open to the new work of the Holy Spirit, and through prayer served as the nucleus around whom the apostles gathered at Pentecost.

Her Assumption establishes her as the one who participated most completely and intimately in the redemptive work of her Son. Hence the Church bestows on Mary the titles of Advocate, Helper, Benefactress, and *Mediatrix*. Our Lady's

⁷ Rahner, "Interpretation," 1:223-224.

158 *Eschatology and Church in Light of the Assumption*

earthly present and heavenly future are perfectly accomplished in her body-soul entity. The Assumption would be a meaningless, even frustrating, source of humiliation if it held no meaning as a universal transformation from our tragic, sinful, human condition.

The Person in Relation to *Thanatos*

Death is usually considered as an unknown, definitive separation of matter and spirit from the earth, which is the consequence of sin. What this transformation would be like without human sinfulness is an unknown. In I Corinthians 15:56, Paul says that the sting of death is sin, but he does not go on to tell us what death would be without the sting of sin.⁸ Yet the human person yearns for transcendence, a translation into heavenly glory without the negative concept of death. As he approached death, Jesus transformed, rather than destroyed, bread. He changed it into his own body, which is given to us as a gift of self. In consonance with this mystery of the Eucharist, our Lady's Assumption is seen as a transformation of continuity, rather than as a destruction, by a new reality and identity. The life of every human being is called to be "Eucharistic," that is, a life given in the example of Mary who, by her whole life, is a "Eucharistic woman."⁹

Mother of the Lord

It was Cyril of Alexandria who insisted upon the hypostatic identity of Jesus with the pre-existent Logos. The Word became humankind's Savior. This served as the Christological foundation for Marian devotion after the fifth century. Since Jesus' humanization came about through Mary, she became inseparable from her Son's person and mission. Since in Jesus there is no human hypostasis and since a mother can only be a mother of "someone" not of something, Mary is indeed the Mother of the Incarnate Logos; she is the *Theotokos*, the "Mother of God." And since the deification of humankind takes

⁸ Agnostic and atheistic existentialists point from the loss of identity and of continuity in this life to annihilation in death.

⁹ John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* (2003), no. 53.

Eschatology and Church in Light of the Assumption 159

place “in Christ,” she is also—in a sense just as real as humankind’s participation in Christ—the mother of the whole body of the Church.¹⁰ Mary’s bodily Assumption then becomes an eschatological sign, consequent to Christ’s resurrection and as an anticipation of the general resurrection.

Image of the Church

The Second Vatican Council essentially repeated the words of this Marian dogma: “Having completed the course of her earthly life [Mary] was assumed body and soul into heavenly glory.” The Council joined this dogma with the typology of Mary-Church: “In the most holy Virgin the Church has already reached that perfection whereby she exists without spot or wrinkle.”

The 1950 definition was the result of the Assumptionist movement’s insistence to honor Mary, a movement which may have placed too much emphasis on her and not enough on her Son. Still, in God’s providence, this very insistence later developed into a new theology of Mary. Vatican II did emphasize the Christological aspect, but it also added the ecclesial and eschatological implications. Marian theology made the turn from focus on her privileges to her faith and discipleship.¹¹ As early as 1951, the French Mariological Society was turning its attention to the theme of Mary and Church. German theologians followed with anthropological and ecclesiological studies.¹²

Vatican II spoke further and definitively concerning the eschatological function of the whole Mary in glory. In the bodily and spiritual glory which she possesses in heaven, the Virgin appears to be the image and first flowering of the Church as it is to be perfected in the world to come. “Mary shines forth until the day the Lord shall come as a sign of sure hope and comfort for the pilgrim People of God.”¹³

¹⁰ John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1974), 165.

¹¹ Donal Flanagan, *The Theology of Mary* (Hales Corner, WI: Clergy Book Service, 1976), 62.

¹² See also Eamon R. Carroll, *Understanding the Mother of Jesus* (Wilmington DE: Michael Glazier).

¹³ *Lumen Gentium*, nos. 59 and 65.

Most Fully Redeemed

The Assumption is important for two reasons. First, one must understand what it is that one believes. Second, the epistemological and psychological difficulties that seemingly preclude the inclusion of this dogma in revelation are illusory. It is necessary that God's Son be a son of Adam. This eschatological event of salvation took place through Mary's flesh and through her faith. Jesus the Christ was born of a woman and through her voluntary acceptance of God's will. Therefore, the human physical body is deemed worthy of God's merciful redemption, and more astonishingly, is deemed worthy to participate in God's glory. In her Assumption Mary did not become something other than human; she became most fully human, the perfect image of God. Body and soul perfectly dwelling in God's glory is the true context for human happiness and the achievement of the full realization of our human potential.

Her faith is called blessed because it admits the Word into the region of the flesh. Her motherhood is not only a biological occurrence, it is also a supreme action of faith through which she became blessed.¹⁴ Mary's Assumption confirms for Christian men and women today the importance of faith, prayer, and living chastely as we, like Mary, strive to fulfill our vocation in the world. Mary's Assumption opens the way to our participation in the glory of the risen Christ who shares in his Father's glory.

Mary enables the Word to enter the physical world through the power of his grace, because he desires to be with sinful humankind. Mary's instrumentality is the work of the grace of his coming. Our Lady accomplishes this, though she is unable to accomplish anything except through his grace. His gracing action upon her body and her faith prompted the beginning of the world's salvation.

In Mary, God finalizes his dialogue with creation and commences the final phase of humankind's salvation. The phrase "born of the Virgin Mary" means something more than the biological occurrence of the Incarnation, or that God "used" the womb of the Virgin to accomplish the hypostatic union. It

¹⁴ *Lumen Gentium*, no. 65.

Eschatology and Church in Light of the Assumption 161

means that “in her and through her” Christ’s salvation is bestowed upon the world. This does not mean that there was a synergistic sharing in the redemption. She received the salvation of the world in her flesh from the Holy Spirit through the consent of her faith. She has received, for all humankind in the most corporeal way, the whole Christ.¹⁵

General Resurrection

The Church has perennially believed that in Mary “the redemption, which took place in her and through her in the world, has reached its fullest and most radical perfection.” When the Church realized that our Lady had been preserved from all actual and original sin, it realized that the original grace that humankind had and lost in Adam has not been lost in the Virgin. The Church further indicated that Mary was the radically redeemed in whom Christ’s special grace overcame human sinfulness. That is how she is the second Eve, the Mother of all the living, the type of perfect redemption and the representation of what redeemed humanity can be. God’s grace achieved its incomprehensible work where it laid hold of the world most closely and in the most “fleshly” way—in Mary.

According to Ronald Knox, human nature was intended in God’s original plan to be unified. After the Fall, Mary in her Assumption became the type of humankind’s future self. “In our blessed Lady, not born under the star of that defeat, human nature was perfectly integrated; body and soul belonged to one another, as one day, please God, yours and mine will.”¹⁶

Jesus Christ, born of the Virgin, descended into hell and then rose from the dead. There is a resurrection of the body, only because Christ died and rose. His acceptance of death ensured the resurrection and was the cause of humankind’s salvation. The heart of the earth accepted and received the Son of God. From a womb so consecrated, this womb of the hellish depths of human existence, the saved creature rises up.

¹⁵ Rahner, “Interpretation of Dogma,” 218. Rahner compares his teaching to Lutheran theologian H. Asmussen’s literal biblical reflections concerning Mary in his *Maria, die Mutter Gottes* (Stuttgart: Evangelisches Verlagswerk, 1951), 51.

¹⁶ Ronald A. Knox, *Pastoral Sermons of Ronald A. Knox*, ed. Philip Caraman (New York: Sheed and Ward), 252.

162 *Eschatology and Church in Light of the Assumption*

A definitive salvation came to humankind through Christ's victory over death. He is not the firstborn of the dead in the sense that he is the only one to have attained human fulfillment. The Church's belief in Christ's descent and in the resurrection of the dead presumes a multiple sharing in the complete victory over sin and death. Christ's victory is shared in by others. This is implied by his descent and resurrection. It is impossible for the Lord to have risen alone by himself. It is impossible for the Resurrection to be an individual event, because our "bodily condition," glorified or not, is simply the outward aspect of the spirit. The spirit forms this for itself in matter so as to be open to the rest of the world. It includes a community of a bodily kind with a bodily Thou (and not just with God's Spirit).¹⁷

Transforming Glorification

It is illogical to assume that Jesus the Christ's glorified body could exist in solitude until the end of the world. There is support found in Matthew 27:52. "If definitive salvation has already been unshakably founded, death was conquered; a man, for whom it is never good to be alone, has entered upon the fulfillment of his whole being."¹⁸

It is impossible for an imperfect being to perceive a bodily condition, perfected and glorified. The Lord appeared to his followers in his bodily resurrection, not in the reality of his glorified bodily condition, but only in a mode in which the glorified may appear to the unglorified in "flesh and bone." "For the

¹⁷ Karl Rahner, "God, Christ, Mary and Grace," in *Theological Investigations*, 1:218 and 219.

¹⁸ Rahner, "God, Christ, Mary and Grace," 220. Rahner records that the majority of the Fathers and theologians whom the pope adduced in support of the Assumption agree with an eschatological interpretation of Matthew. The apostolic constitution does not state that our Lady's "anticipated resurrection," beyond its source and title, is a unique occurrence. See H. Zeller, "*Corpora Sanctorum*: Eine Studie zu Mt 27.52-53," *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie* 71 (1949): 385-465, for the exegesis of the Matthean text. See also J. Danielou, "Le dogme de l'Assomption," *Études* 267 (1950): 291. Rahner disagreed with this opinion that, since the encyclical's definition, it is impossible to interpret the text "in terms of a definitive eschatological resurrection of these saints."

Eschatology and Church in Light of the Assumption 163

inner nature of his glorified bodily condition could only be made evident for 'what it is in itself' to those who themselves live in this new mode of existence."¹⁹

Paul reminded the faithful that very little is known about the new condition which is required for entry into glory. It is a fact that humankind possesses an incorruptible, glorious spiritual body (see I Cor 15:42). It reflects upon visions of a new heaven and a new earth (see Apoc 21). Prior to the nineteenth century, prescinding from matters of faith, theologians generally pictured heaven in space, which existed prior to the Resurrection and was an abode for the glorified body, as a goal of the Resurrection. "Time ran its course . . . in space; in virtue of being glorified the body came to its new place, as space conatural to it, existing prior to it and possessing 'properties of glorification.'"²⁰

Heaven instead must be seen as a condition. If a concept of spatiality must be retained in order to localize humankind's bodily condition, that place cannot be named. Spatiality is conceived as a function of saving history, of the time which shapes this space. Heaven is not a goal to attain; it is rather the result of Christ's Resurrection.

Space, a Function of Time

Time, which is an historical event, had previously been considered as a function of space in which it moved. Space should be considered, on the contrary, to be a function of time. They both arise from the positioning of an historical happening. Transforming glorification, no longer commensurable with space, cannot be represented. It must be postulated, since the true bodily condition of someone who has risen in glory must not be dissipated by a false spiritualization.

The world has been given a new heavenly dimension, a new order through the Resurrection. The world obtained a new mode of being, beginning with the glorified body of Christ, by means of its history in Christ, which is at once material and

¹⁹ Rahner, "God, Christ, Mary and Grace," 221.

²⁰ Rahner, "God, Christ, Mary and Grace," 221-222.

164 *Eschatology and Church in Light of the Assumption*

spiritual, of flesh and person in the one Spirit of God who renews all things. Heaven is not necessarily deprived as a space concept because time and history shape space, and do not intrinsically presuppose it.²¹

Eschaton

Christ and the saints, in their new life, possess a cosmic body with a present glorified body. This is an objective one, which is capable of describing future glory. The eternity of God and humankind in glory are not comparable. God's eternity is equally immediate to every point in time and cannot have an application of time made to it. The eternity of the earthly in glory is a result of God's saving action in time and history, which projects the temporal into eternity through a discrete process.²²

The phrase "born of the Virgin Mary" implies more than the fact that Mary is the Mother of the Lord. It gives the Son of God his earthly, and fleshly, existence. Our Lady became mother. It was in her flesh and through her faith that the eschatological event of salvation took place. Mary then appeared as the perfectly redeemed. This concept of perfect redemption is dynamic rather than static. It is open to a continued growth in understanding.

In her earthly life and in her life now in glory, Mary serves as the eschatological bridge, linking the "already" of God's saving action with the "not yet fully" of our earthly lives. Her life can be seen as the mingling of the water of her humanity and the wine of Christ's divinity, so that we might participate in that divine life in the fullness of our redeemed humanity.

²¹ Rahner, "God, Christ, Mary and Grace," 222–226.

²² Rahner, "God, Christ, Mary and Grace," 226. This difference is more attributable, however, to Christ's Resurrection than to the involved personages. It is impossible for anyone to rise from the dead before Christ opened up the possibility of glorification. Christ's descent to the lower regions was a saving event on behalf of the dead. His entry into glory initiated a community in the body of the redeemed. Salvation history, since the Resurrection, has witnessed a community of faithful who have overcome the pangs of sin and death.

A Parousia

The end of time in Christ has already commenced, although there may be thousands of years ahead of us in which to live. The Virgin is the ideal representation of full redemption through her exemplary place in salvation history. She is in perfect communion with God “in the glorified totality of her real being, body and soul, which certainly exists till now.”²³

The Assumption is explained by two articles in the Creed: “Born of the Virgin Mary” and the “resurrection of the flesh.” Mary received the fullness of salvation in faith; she received it in body for herself and the faithful. In her entire being, she “is already where perfect redemption exists, entirely in that region of being which came to be Jesus the Christ’s Resurrection.”²⁴ Rahner taught that through faith Mary is seen as the perfect achievement and work of redemption, “consequently as the perfect type or representative of redemption in its very essence.”²⁵

There are two privileges to be considered in relation to the Virgin’s Assumption. First, she had a unique right to it because of her divine maternity and her special place in salvation history. Second, the interval of time between her death and bodily glorification is briefer than that of the saints who have seen corruption (see Mt 27:2).²⁶

The future of the Church rests in the glorified Jesus the Christ. It has already been actualized in Mary as the Church’s most perfect representation. The Church has been totally redeemed, actually in one of her members, but not in all. Bodily salvation has already commenced in its final form. “The world is already in transition to God’s eternity, not only in the ‘spirit’ of those who have gone to their everlasting home, and not only in the body of the Son who came from ‘above,’ but also in the bodies of those who are simply ‘from below.’”²⁷

²³ Rahner, “God, Christ, Mary and Grace,” 226.

²⁴ Rahner, “God, Christ, Mary and Grace,” 226. See also Eph 5:26ff.

²⁵ Rahner, *Mary, Mother of the Lord*, 89.

²⁶ Rahner, “God, Christ, Mary and Grace,” 225.

²⁷ Rahner, “God, Christ, Mary and Grace,” 226.

166 *Eschatology and Church in Light of the Assumption*

The Assumption is a clarification of existence and salvation already achieved and constituted by God—the reign of God already manifested through its hold on this world. It is no idle dream of the future. For many Protestants, the theology of the cross does not fully point beyond itself to a theology of glory. “For Protestantism this is ultimately only a promise, and not something which exists ‘even now,’ although it has not embraced everything yet and for us here below has not become apparent.”²⁸

Mary and Church: Single Mystery

Mary and the Church form a single mystery. Each is, after Christ, the dwelling place of wisdom. Both are a new world and a prodigious creation for both rest in the shadow of Christ.²⁹ While her horizon once extended to the edges of her small town of Nazareth, her horizon now “is what our horizon is to be also—the very dynamic, effective, transforming presence of the Glory of God.”³⁰

The Church will join Mary in her perfection as the Bride of Christ at the end of the world. Mary’s heavenly journey indicates that not only she, but also an entire community, will be assumed as the completion of God’s redemptive action. A forceful argument for the Assumption definition is that intimate association of the Virgin with the Lord in his redemptive efforts.³¹

Why should Mary be assumed? Is it not sufficient that Christ alone, in his divinity and humanity, attained the fulfillment of supernatural destiny? The Eternal Word is divine, while Mary is human. Therefore, there is revealed an entirely different eschatological concept: the principle of an eventual glorification of all those who had been redeemed.

The dual relationship of sins in Adam and Eve and in the subsequent reconciliation with the second Adam and Eve was

²⁸ Rahner, “God, Christ, Mary and Grace,” 226.

²⁹ Rahner, “God, Christ, Mary and Grace,” 226–227.

³⁰ Matthew F. Morry, O.P., “Mary, Type of the Church: Eschatology Realized,” *Marian Studies* 45 (1994): 280.

³¹ G. W. Shea, “Assumption,” in *The Mystery of the Woman*, ed. E. D. O’Connor (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1956), 82.

Eschatology and Church in Light of the Assumption 167

shown in the redemption and also in the Lord's association with his mother. A community dimension was affirmed. This is an eschatological fulfillment of the human person as witness to all generations.³² Humankind has already been saved, not only in Jesus Christ, but also in Mary. The human body has been created by the Father, redeemed by the Son, made holy by the Spirit, and is already saved forever.

St. Cyprian (d. 256) insisted that those saved will in glory be able to know and to love their own. "What man, stationed in a foreign land, would not want to return to his own country? . . . Well, we look upon paradise as our country, and a great crowd of our loved ones awaits us there, a countless throng of parents, brothers and children long for us to join them."³³ Cyprian continued that it would be such a joy to see and embrace one another. There is no fear of death, simply an endless bliss of everlasting life.

The relationship between the glorified Virgin and the saints can be appreciated by the title Bride of Christ, since it can be applied to both Mary and to the Church. This title had been given to the Church from the earliest Christian times. The Old Testament had offered evidence of the covenant relationship between God and Israel.³⁴ The Church Fathers went beyond Pauline teaching to interpret the Old Testament in this manner. The New Testament emphasized this truth through its descriptions of the Church as the New Israel and the Bride of Christ.³⁵

St. Hippolytus (d. 235), in his commentary on the Canticle of Canticles, referred to the Church as the Bride of Christ. By the middle of the third century, Origen, in his Song of Origen, spoke not only of the Church, but also of each soul, as the Bride of Christ. This phraseology continued down until the

³² J. Galot, "Le mystère de l'Assomption," in *Marie: Études sur la sainte Vierge*, ed. H. du Manoir (8 vols.; Paris: Beauchesne et ses Fils, 1964), 7:224.

³³ St. Cyprian, "De Mortalitate," *Corpus Christianorum*, Series latina, IIIA, section 26.

³⁴ See the following scriptural texts for evidence of this relationship: Cant. 4:1; Isa. 62:5; Ezech. 16:8; Ps. 45.

³⁵ See the following scriptural texts: Eph. 5:25; Rev. 21:9-10.

168 *Eschatology and Church in Light of the Assumption*

twelfth century when it became common. St. Bernard, a follower of Origen, applies the Canticle imagery to both Christ and the Church, to single souls and finally to Mary.³⁶

Since this title applied to both the Church and her individual members, the title easily came to refer to Mary, the first member of the Church. Christ had died for his mother. He redeemed her. He had sanctified her in an anticipatory fashion at the instant of her *fiat*. Mary was predestined to be the virginal and immaculate *Theotokos*. She was to be her Son's most obedient servant, a preeminent woman of faith, the most faithful disciple. She is then the type for the Church.

Bridal Motherhood

In addition to a bond of love between mother and Son, there existed a union of a mystical nature which symbolized the union of bridegroom and bride. To describe this, Scheeben uses the term "Mary's Bridal Motherhood." Our Lady is the bride of the Word Incarnate: She is such a bride in a unique manner. As Eve was given to the first Adam, so Mary is raised up to Christ. Mary is seen in her Assumption as the personification of the Church. The Church will join her in her perfection as the Bride of Christ at the end of the world.³⁷

An entirely different eschatological concept is revealed here: The eternal Word is divine; Mary is human. Yet the principle of the eventual glorification of all the redeemed was realized. The dual relationship of sin in the first Adam and Eve was overcome by the reconciliation of the second Adam and Eve. This resulted in both the Redemption and the association of the Son with his mother.³⁸ Mary should be associated with her Son in her victory over death, just as she had been in the victory over sin and concupiscence.³⁹ Kilian Healy asserts that "the parallelism between Christ and Mary would cease on Cal-

³⁶ Kilian J. Healy, "The Assumption among Mary's Privileges," *Thomist* 14 (1951): 143-144.

³⁷ Carl Feckes, *The Mystery of Divine Motherhood: A Theological Portrait of Mary* (New York: Spiritual Books Associates, 1949), 49-73.

³⁸ Galot, "Le mystere de l'Assomption," 224.

³⁹ Kilian J. Healy, *The Assumption of Mary* (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1982), 90-91.

Eschatology and Church in Light of the Assumption 169

vary. Christ would conquer the devil by his Resurrection. Mary, if still held by the bonds of death, would be conquered by the devil.”⁴⁰

New Adam

Vincent Vasey drew attention to the parallel between Eve being taken from the sleeping Adam and the new spouse of Christ, the Church, born as the new Adam was expiring on the Cross. Mary persevered in faith until the end of her time on earth. Her glorification can be construed not only as a personal victory, but as a victory for the Church and a promise of humankind’s heavenly inheritance. “Her corporal assumption, which was a personal triumph, is a victory for the entire Mystical Body and a pledge for the good things to come. From heaven she intercedes for the Church that fights below, and she crushes all heresies in God’s good time.”⁴¹

Vasey emphasized the likeness of Mary and the Church: They both overcame the forces of sin and death; they both give a new birth to humankind. “We cannot have God for our Father if we refuse to have Mary and Church for mother. The Church is the continuation of the Incarnation; hence it is the abiding place of Mary. All things have come to the Church and to each soul in the Church through Mary. The Church wants us to return to God by the same way He came to us, through Mary.”⁴²

Mary: Type of the Church

The Virgin presents a paradox: she is simply a creature; yet she has a singular relationship with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. While theologians debate Mary’s quasi-infinite dignity, the faithful believe that she is *Theotokos*, a human being marked by special closeness to the three divine persons.

For Mary and for us, bodiliness is integral to humanness. Body is made for soul, and soul for body; the soul is made to reside in the body. The body does not function only as an instrument of the soul, for the body is an enabler of the soul’s activities. Bodiliness is also an essential part of the Church’s

⁴⁰ Healy, *The Assumption of Mary*, 91.

⁴¹ Vincent Vasey, “Mary and the Church,” *The Marianist* 50/2 (1959): 3-4.

⁴² Vasey, “Mary and the Church,” 4.

170 *Eschatology and Church in Light of the Assumption*

divine-life principle. While the Church is visible in her mission to bring a divine gracing action through the senses, the Church is actually visible according to her very essence. Redemption takes place within the Church: *Extra ecclesiam nullus est salvus*. Redemption is accomplished through the Church: The redeemed must be drawn into the Church; they constitute her essence. That is why the Church must have a physical aspect and why the physical cosmos must be included: "The Church must be visible, tangible, sensory, material—not only spiritual. Once corporeality has been included in the Church it ceases to be 'the body of this death.' The somatic body becomes 'pneumatic,' a body enlivened by the Spirit of Christ. The physical nature of the world becomes the *sacramentum*, the covering with the Divine Life of grace."⁴³

The body participates in the redemption in relation to the extent that grace reigns corporately and individually in the Church. Christ dwells bodily in glory. The Church is physical when she enters into glory with the faithful. Redemption is completed only at that moment in heaven when a new heaven and a new earth have come into being. The Church joyfully celebrates the feast of the Assumption annually, since in it the Church sees the perfect image of that final destiny of glory towards which she is advancing. Mary began the glorification of the Church; that glorification will culminate on the last day. The Second Vatican Council set forth the implications of this mystery, stating that "the Immaculate Virgin of Nazareth not only constitutes the first and perfect member of the historical Church, but with her immediate glorification represents also the beginning and perfect image of the Church of the future age." The Assumption remains an eschatological sign of hope for the People of God on pilgrimage toward the *parousia*. By presenting Mary as the beginning and image of the Church in final glory, the Council Fathers taught that the Assumption was the beginning of the final manifestation of the Mystical Body of Christ on the last day in its fulfilled and perfect reality.

⁴³ Otto Semmelroth, *Mary: Archetype of the Church*, trans. Maria von Broes and John Devlin (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1963), 161-163, 165.

Archetype of the Church

As an archetype of the Church, Mary typifies the essence of the Church, a community of humankind and the faithful in whom the divine life dwells. God's grace is given to every member of the Church and the Church performs its receptive co-redemption in Mary, its representative. In Mary the Church sees the human body in a perfectly redeemed state. This does not mean Mary did not die. Every person realizes redemption and grace through a return of one's self to the Lord in a personal death. Mary fulfilled the receptive and co-redeeming role of the Church when, by dying, she made Christ's redemptive death her own and she subjectively co-enacted it.

With his death, Christ surrendered his human will to his Father in an act of perfect obedience. This was in recognition of Adam's disobedience to God's sovereignty. Nothing historical is known about the Virgin's death, but it seems to be a logical outgrowth of her position as type of the receptive, co-redeeming Church. Jesus' death enables humankind to approach the Creator once again.

Mary died as the archetype of the co-redeeming Church. Every day the Church reenacts the Redeemer's death and rises with him to eternal life. It is appropriate then that our Lady, as the perfect embodiment of the Church's function, should have undergone death, as did the Savior. Just as Mary suffered the bodily death of her Son in her own body, she reflected the fully redeemed body of the Church. Otto Semmelroth tells us: "At the same time the redeemed state of the physical cosmos, at the end of time, shines forth in her body." In her role as the archetype of the Church, Mary is revelatory of the redemption in both intensive and extensive capacities. In the intensive sense, she fully possesses the grace of Christ that makes her what she is. She fully participates in divine life because, as archetype, she depicts the Church's essence as redeemed. The faithful also possess the grace of Christ in this life; however, it is veiled as a pledge for them of what will occur in heaven.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Semmelroth, *Mary: Archetype of the Church*, 169.

172 *Eschatology and Church in Light of the Assumption*

The faithful's incomplete redemption on earth is explained by the fact that their bodies, because of struggling with their souls, have not been drawn into a complete redemption. The redeemed state of the body is perfected in eternity only after the resurrection of the flesh. Humankind struggles to control the body through a redeemed soul, which reveals the soul's adoptive status through the body. Yet the Church, in her essential structure, includes the body in its redemption.

French Catholic writer François Mauriac points to the mysterious article of the Creed, faith in the resurrection of human flesh—the basis of a radical, overwhelming hope:

But we Christians, do we really believe in eternal life? The dogma of the Assumption, so disconcerting for many minds—and I confess it, for myself—which the Holy Father is going to define on the Feast of All Saints, draws our attention to that article of the Creed, the most mysterious, the most incredible, which is so rarely discussed by the Church and which represents an insane, marvelous hope—the resurrection of the flesh.⁴⁵

The extensive sense, which embraces the bodily element of Mary as type, exemplifies the nature of the Church redeemed. Mary represents that hidden, fundamental reason of the Church as the redeemed Bride of Christ. She shows the faithful that they are essential parts of the Church, the abode of the Holy Spirit. Their bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit (see 1 Cor 1:16). Mary reflects the Church as the redeemed Bride of Christ. This is why the Church believes that her Archetype dwells in perfection. Mary brought her body and soul to the Bridegroom to be redeemed. “Now she must stand in eternity next to the God-man-Bridegroom, revealing to the faithful that this soul and body belong to the one whom Christ sanctified and healed in the water by means of the Word and made into a Church in all her glory, not having a spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but rather that she might be whole and without blemish.”⁴⁶

⁴⁵ François Mauriac, cited in “Gaudet Exercitus Angelorum” (unsigned article), *The Tablet* (4 Nov. 1950): 384.

⁴⁶ Semmelroth, *Mary: Archetype*, 169.

Eschatology and Church in Light of the Assumption 173

With the whole communion of saints we pray the words of the Preface for the Solemnity of the Assumption:

You would not allow decay to touch her body, for she had given birth to your Son, the Lord of all life, in the glory of the incarnation. Today the virgin Mother of God was taken up into heaven to be the beginning and the pattern of the Church in its perfection, and a sign of hope and comfort for your people on their pilgrim way.

Mary, preeminent disciple of Christ and first among the fully redeemed, is our model and source of hope and encouragement as we continue our pilgrimage, through Christ, to the very heart of God.

Conclusion

An important orientation for continued research is to view *Maria Assumpta* in the “New Creation,” since the plan of God is for a new creation. Today, the doctrine of the redemption is explained primarily as a work of love. This love is revealed in the hypostatic union at the incarnation and in Jesus’ self-oblation at Calvary, as the expression of the mutuality of love between the Father and the Son, who became our New Adam, the head of the mystical body. In this new creation we are more than ever the “image of God.” Christ is the New Adam, the head of the mystical body. His soul is united with the body of a male in the mystery of the Incarnation. The Gospel of John reveals the presence of Mary at Calvary and the words of Jesus to her and to the beloved disciple. Jesus and Mary are united by their mutual love for the will of the Father, for the divine plan of salvation.

Tradition discovered here the implicit revelation of the New Eve. She had been united as a mother with our Savior, the Son of God. She, the mother of God’s Son who was risen from the dead, was transferred to heavenly glory in body and soul after the completion of her time on earth. This is the perfect restoration of the creation of humankind, created male and female by the Father in his own image.

Jesus the Christ is the Son of God who became our redeemer. He became savior to give back to us dignity in our divine filiation. This was accomplished in a new way: in our

174 *Eschatology and Church in Light of the Assumption*

union with the Eternal Word who assumed his perfect humanity from his mother Mary. It was accomplished in a new way: in our union with the Son of God, our brother. In himself, Christ, as the risen Lord, ascended into heaven and restored our vocation to reign over material creation. As Son of God made man, he reigns even over the angelic choirs. Christ gave back to us our entire vocation. This was done first of all to his mother according to her union with him. Now, as mother of God, restored in her whole person, she reigns as queen of all creation.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Paul E. Duggan, *The Assumption Dogma: Some Reactions and Ecumenical Implications in the Thought of English-speaking Theologians* ([Cleveland, OH: Emerson Press], 1989), 165.