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## DID OUR LADY DIE?

### SOME REFLECTIONS ON 'MUNIFICENTISSIMUS DEUS'<sup>1</sup>

BY THE MOST REV. GABRIEL M. ROSCHINI, O.S.M.,  
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 TRANSLATED BY REV. G. M. CORR, O.S.M.

THE President of the first international Mariological Congress, Cardinal Pizzardo, Secretary of the Congregation of the Holy Office, spoke, on the occasion of the Congress, of the 'still very obscure problem' of the end of Our Lady's earthly life, as a matter which calls for greater clarification on the part of Mariologists, adding that such clarification may enable us to 'admire in her the complete splendour of God's munificence.'<sup>2</sup>

It is in response to this invitation that I have thought it useful to consider this problem in the light of the dogmatic Constitution 'Munificentissimus Deus.'

To appreciate the situation created by the publication of this document we must begin with an historical conspectus.

#### I—THE FIRST THREE CENTURIES

In the first three centuries there is no textual reference at all—at least none of which we can be certain—in the writings of the Fathers and ecclesiastical writers, to the death of Mary. The texts quoted from Leucius (second century) and from Origen are considered very doubtful. We know of the existence of the apocryphal 'Assumption' of Leucius (who calls himself a disciple of St. John the Evangelist) only from pseudo-Meliton who himself wrote a similar work in the fourth or fifth century. Meliton refers to Leucius as 'a disciple of the devil.' Of the content of Leucius's work

<sup>1</sup> By kind permission of *Marianum* in which the original article appeared.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Alma Socia Christi. Acta Congressus Mariologici—Mariani Romae anno sancto MCMML celebrati*. Vol. I. Congressus Ordo et Summarium. Romae: Academia Mariana—Officium Libri Catholici, 1951, p. 104.



we know nothing. There is merely a reference to the 'disappearance' of the body of Our Lady, as also of that of St. John. It is therefore of no use as an argument in favour of the death of Our Lady.

The text for which Origen's name is claimed is from the *catena* on St. John's gospel (*Origen's Works*, ed. Preuschen, t. IV, Leipzig 1903, p. 506, fragm. 31). We read there that Mary 'remained a virgin till death.' The authenticity of this text is held by Devreese to be very doubtful.<sup>1</sup> It should be noted, moreover, that Origen's usual phrase for the perpetual virginity of Our Lady is not 'till death' but 'to the end.'<sup>2</sup>

It is generally admitted that in the first three centuries there is no mention of a sepulchre of Mary, either in Jerusalem or at Ephesus. Father Abel, O.P., the most outstanding archaeologist of Palestine, maintains in his monumental work on Jerusalem that the sepulchre of the Mother of God was known and venerated at Jerusalem from the middle of the fifth century onwards.<sup>3</sup> It was only when the Council of Ephesus (431) officially inaugurated, so to speak, the cultus of Our Lady that the subject of the sepulchre began to be discussed. The barrenness, from the point of view of evidence, of the preceding centuries did not facilitate the search.<sup>4</sup> Traditions were conflicting. In Jerusalem itself—to limit ourselves to one place—the so-called 'ancient tradition' pointed to the Garden of Olives (an analogy with the Ascension of Our Lord), while the Patriarch of Jerusalem claimed that it was in the valley of Josaphat.

## II—THE FOURTH CENTURY TO THE NINETEENTH (1854)

The earliest references to the manner in which Our Lady ended her life on earth are found in the writings

<sup>1</sup> *Chainses exégétiques grecques*, in the Supplement to the *Dict. de la Bible*, t. I, coll. 1198-1199.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. C. Vagaggini, O.S.B., *Maria nelle opere di Origene*, Rome, 1942, pp. 129-33.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. H. Vincent, O.P., and F. M. Abel, O.P., *Jérusalem. Recherches de topographie, d'archéologie et d'histoire*, t. II, 4. Paris, 1926, pp. 305-31.

<sup>4</sup> There is not the slightest reference to a sepulchre of Our Lady in the description of the Holy Places given by Etheria, or St. Jerome, or the letter to Paula and Eustochium.

of St. Epiphanius, bishop of Salamina, and Timotheus, a priest of Jerusalem.

St. Epiphanius has two passages in the *Panarion* (A.D. 374-377) in which he speaks of the end of Our Lady's life on earth.<sup>1</sup>

To understand his words fully we must remember that he was conscious, when writing, of two heresies which were then living and dangerous: that of the Antidicomarianites, and that of the Collyridians. The former denied the perpetual virginity of Mary, the latter, erring in the opposite direction, maintained that divine worship should be given to her. To assert that Our Lady died was to give a handle to the one

<sup>1</sup> The texts are as follows:

(1) Vereor ne hoc damno sit aliquibus, ut ad contubernales ac dilectas, quas vocant, feminas retinendas, quod genus pessimo sibi animi errore machinati sunt, fucum inde aliquem et colorem accessisse videantur. Verum illic certa quaedam providentiae ratione administrata sunt omnia, ita ut haec facta se juncta sunt ab aliorum omnium quae ex Dei mandato praestanda sunt disciplina. Nam postquam illud ita gestum est, et ad sese illam (Johannes) accepit, non amplius apud illum permansit.

Quodsi falli nos quispiam existimet, scripturae sectetur vestigia, in quibus neque mortem Mariae inveniat, neque utrum mortua sit, an non mortua sit, neque utrum sepulta, an non sit sepulta. Ac cum Johannes in Asiam profectus sit, nunquam tamen beatam virginem itineris comitem secum habuisse significat. Sed de ea re simpliciter conticescit scriptura propter excessum miraculi, ne in desperationem concipiat animos hominum.

Ego enim pronuntiare illud non audeo, sed mecum reputans mihi silentium indicere. Nam haud scio an vestigia invenimus Sanctae illius ac Beatae mortem ac posse quidem inveniri. Nam hinc Simeon ait de ea: 'Et tuam ipsius animam pervadet gladius, ut detegantur ex multorum cordibus cogitationes,' illinc cum Apocalypsis Johannes pronuntiat: 'Properavit draco adversus mulierem quae nuncem pepererat, et datae sunt ei pennae aquilae et translata est in desertum, ne eam draco comprehenderet,' hoc in illa forte potest impleri.

Neque omnino tamen hoc affirmo, neque aut immortalem eam perseverasse deficio, aut utrum mortua sit confirmare possum. Quippe scriptura mentis humanae captum praetergressa rem in incerto reliquit propter vas illud eximium ac praestans, ut quis suspicari de ea possit quicquam carnalium rerum.

Sive igitur mortua sit, nescimus, sive sepulta sit. Non tamen ullam est conjunctionem corporis experta: absit ut illud aestimemus.—Haeres. 78, 11, PG 42, 715-16 A. C.

(2) Aut enim mortua est sancta Virgo ac sepulta: in gloria dormitio illius est et in castitate exitus ejus et in corona; Aut interfecta est, ut scriptum est: 'Et ipsius animam penetrabit gladius'; Inter martyres est gloria ejus et in tentationibus sacrum illius corpus, per quam lumen mundo inluxit.

Aut denique in vita permansit: potest enim Deus quicquid libuerit, efficere; nec illius exitum nemo novit. Certe ultra quam par est sanctos venerari nefas est, sed illorum honorandus est Dominus.—Haeres. 78, 23, PG 42, 737.



heresy (for it was to suggest that the body of Mary was subject to the corruption of the tomb, and thus minimize her prerogatives); to assert that she did not die was to encourage the other. St. Epiphanius, who considers it probable that she did not die, and sees a reference to the idea in Apocalypse xii, prefers to avoid both dangers by a non-committal statement: 'I do not say that she died, nor yet that she did not die'; and he justifies this apparently neutral position by an appeal to the complete silence of the Scriptures on the subject. And indeed the silence of the Scriptures is complete.

Yet St. Epiphanius is certain, from tradition, that the end of Our Lady's exile on earth was marked by 'a great marvel, and such as to fill men's minds with astonishment.' What was this great marvel? Was it resurrection after death, or immediate translation out of this world to the glory of heaven? He does not tell us. But he grants that the latter supposition is plausible, and he makes it sufficiently clear by his choice of words that he is restraining his pen for fear of the Collyridian heretics.

What greater marvel, in fact, could there be, in this context, than the hitherto unheard-of miracle of immediate translation in body and soul to the glory of heaven, and what more likely to lend countenance to those who wished to give divine honours to Mary?

The contemporary Timotheus of Jerusalem is less inhibited.<sup>1</sup> Considering the prophecy of Simeon, 'Thy own soul a sword shall pierce,' he asserts, as against the false interpretation of some writers, that Mary did not die a martyr's death, and that 'she remains even till now immortal, because

<sup>1</sup> Timotheus's text: 'Et tuam ipsius animam penetrabit gladius, ut detegatur ex multis cordibus cogitationes.' Hinc accidit ut nonnulli putarent Matrem gladio interfectam, qualem martyres, vitae exitum habuisse, quia scilicet dixerat Simeon: 'Et tuam ipsius animam penetrabit gladius.'

Sed non ita se res habet. Ensis enim aere confectus corpus dividit, non eam in loca assumptionis traduzerit.

Translator's note: Father Roschini has, for the last clause of this text, 'la trasportò nei luoghi dell'Ascensione.' I suppose 'assumptio' could hardly have its modern sense in such a context, and the words 'assumptus est' used of the Ascension (Acts i, 2) give the clue to the meaning.

He who dwelt in her took her from this earth to the regions of the Ascension,' that is, to heaven. It has not been possible for those who maintain that Our Lady died to twist this assertion from its obvious sense: it remains, a testimony of the highest order, along with words of St. Epiphanius, to support our thesis. Such, then, is primitive tradition concerning the termination of Mary's exile on earth. These two witnesses against the idea of the death of Our Lady are worth more than hundreds of positive witnesses on the other side who simply never thought of doubting it.

The first documentary reference to the death of Mary is found in the apocryphal 'Transitus' writings of the fifth to the seventh centuries. There is, however, one very early writer, pseudo-Procorus (450-500), who seems, by way of exception, not to wish to speak of 'death' when referring to the 'transitus.' In his Catholic recension of the *Acta Johannis* (according to the reading of Codex Vaticanus Graecus 654, fol. 95)<sup>1</sup> he says that the Holy Mother of God 'passed from life to life, from temporal life to eternal life and the kingdom of heaven which will never end.' Here we have a clear reference not to death but to an immediate passing from life to life. It is, of course, open to anyone to suppose that the passing was made through the gate of death, but that is supposition pure and simple. Nothing need prevent us from taking these words as an echo of Timotheus of Jerusalem.

It was under the influence of the apocryphal writings that the Fathers and later writers admitted, or asserted, that Mary died. The question did not present itself to their minds: indeed it is hardly possible, historically, to imagine them raising it. They simply referred to her death as a thing which was to be supposed. Death is universal: even Christ died: therefore the question of Mary's death does not come up for consideration. Such, we may imagine, was the attitude of these Fathers and later ecclesiastical writers.

In the sixth century a codex of the anonymous writer

<sup>1</sup> Cod. Barb. graec. 516, f. 79A.



of Piacenza<sup>1</sup>—A.D. 570—has the simple statement: 'In this same valley of Josaphat is the house of Holy Mary from which it is said that the Virgin was taken up to heaven.' Here again, it is an immediate passing to heaven.

In the seventh century St. Isidore of Seville seems inclined to doubt or to deny that Our Lady died. He says that 'there is no written testimony concerning the death of Mary, though her sepulchre, as some say, is in the valley of Josaphat.'<sup>2</sup> If the death of Mary had been a certainty in St. Isidore's mind, would he thus have brought in the idea of 'written testimonies' for it?

The same attitude is seen in Spain in the eighth century, in the written answer given by Tusaredo, a bishop in the Asturias, to Ascario, a brother bishop in the same province. The latter had said that it was being affirmed in those parts that Our Lady suffered death in common with the rest of mankind and that her body still remained in the tomb awaiting a glorious resurrection. Scandalized by such statements Ascario turned to Tusaredo for help in confuting them. Tusaredo, without hesitation or argument, replies: 'Nowhere in history do we learn that she suffered martyrdom or any other kind of death'—'*Nulla historia eam doceat passione aut qualibet morte mulctari.*'<sup>3</sup> This goes further than St. Isidore, who had simply pointed out that there were no written records of Mary's death; it is a denial that she suffered any kind of death. It may be paraphrased: 'How can you speak of the death of Our Lady and of her remaining in the tomb, when there is *no* historical record of her having been martyred or dying in any other way?' If Mary's death had been accepted as a certainty at that time how can we explain this appeal to a complete absence of historical evidence for it? The least we can say is that this bishop found some difficulty in admitting it.

St. Andrew of Crete (d. 740) and St. John Damascene

<sup>1</sup> P. Geyer, *Itinera hierosolymitana s. IIII-VIII*, p. 203.

<sup>2</sup> 'Nec obitus ejus nusquam legitur; dum tamen reperitur ejus sepulchrum, ut aliqui dicunt, in valle Josaphat.' (De ortu et obitu Patrum, c. 67, PL 83, 148 a.) He is evidently ignoring the apocrypha as not being history.

<sup>3</sup> PL 99, 1235 C.

(674-749) in homilies on the *Dormitio* admit indeed that she died, but are full of wonder at the thought, and the former goes so far as to call it 'incredible.'<sup>1</sup> St. John Damascene asks: 'How then shall this blessed one be a prey to death?'<sup>2</sup> They both recognize that she ought not to have died. And the reasons they adduce for her death are by no means cogent. They are reducible, practically, to this: Our Blessed Lord Himself died: therefore His holy Mother died.

It is worth mentioning here, too, that about this time Theodore Abou-Kurra (d. c. 820) compares the 'death' of Mary to the ecstatic sleep of Adam in the Garden, during which the rib was taken from his body.<sup>3</sup> This is equivalent to asserting that Mary did not suffer death as we know it, separation of soul and body.

As is well known, an attitude of doubt and uncertainty is not uncommon in the ninth-twelfth centuries.

In the thirteenth century it must be admitted that all the great Doctors considered Our Lady's death as certain. But this was evidently a logical conclusion from the denial of the Immaculate Conception—a denial which St. Bonaventure himself calls 'the more common, the more reasonable and the safer view.'<sup>4</sup> His reasoning on the subject is clear enough, and it was the reasoning of many of his time:

If the Blessed Virgin was free from original sin, she was also exempt from the necessity of dying: therefore, either her death was an injustice or she died for the salvation of the human race. But the former supposition is blasphemous, implying that God is not just: and the latter, too, is a blasphemy against Christ for it implies that His Redemption is insufficient. Both are therefore erroneous and impossible. Therefore—Our Blessed Lady was subject to original sin.<sup>5</sup>

Surely one is allowed to question the dogmatic value of a conclusion such as this, based as it is upon a false assumption. It does not surprise us to find the natural reaction—doubt concerning Our Lady's death, and open denials of it: even more, the question of her immunity from the penalty of

<sup>1</sup> PG 120, 1089 C.

<sup>2</sup> PG 96, 709 C.

<sup>3</sup> PG 97, 1593 B. C.

<sup>4</sup> In *III Sent.*, D. 3, p. 1, a. 1, q. 2.

<sup>5</sup> In *III Sent.*, D. 15, 9, 3, ad 3, Op. III, 78 C.



death, precisely because of her immaculate conception, was thus discussed.

It is sufficiently clear from what has been said so far that Father Balić is mistaken in stating roundly that 'from the Patristic age to our own times not a single writer is found to deny the death of the Blessed Virgin.'<sup>1</sup>

In the seventeenth century, after the Council of Trent Father Bartholomew Beverini, of the Clerks Regular of the Mother of God, wrote a controversial tract (1667) against one 'Athanasius' (a pen-name) who asserted that the opinion of those who believed that Our Lady died was 'frivolous and apocryphal.'<sup>2</sup>

In 1683 we find the Spanish Inquisition condemning a sermon preached against the opinion that Our Lady died.<sup>3</sup>

At the beginning of the eighteenth century a celebrated Jesuit theologian, Father Ignatius de Camargo (d. 1772), wrote a whole treatise on the immortality of Mary.

Father Gallus, S.J., has noted, rightly, that towards the close of the Middle Ages there are some writers who prove the Immaculate Conception with an argument which logically implies that Our Lady did not die. They are: Giacomo Perez of Valencia (d. 1490), Pietro Bardo Celestino of Paris, Ambrogio Catarino of Siena (d. 1553), Vincenzo Bandelli (d. 1506). The argument is as follows: The sting of the infernal serpent is fourfold, guilt in the soul, concupiscence in the flesh, travail in child-bearing, suffering and return of the body to dust through death. But God, before pronouncing the universal doom to our first parents, exempted Mary from this fourfold sting, saying: 'I will put enmities between thee and the woman.' Mary, therefore, is free from all these four evils.

No doubt, as Father Gallus observes, these writers did not intend expressly to deduce that Our Lady did not die, but it does follow logically from their premisses.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Estudios Marianos*, vol. IX, 1950, p. 102.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Estudios Marianos*, vol. IX, 1950, pp. 103-9.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. C. Balić, O.F.M., *Tractatus de Immortalitate B.M.V.*, Rome, 1948, p. xxxi.

<sup>4</sup> *Ad argumentum quoddam Conceptionis quo exente Medio Aevo etiam Assumptio demonstratur*, in *Divus Thomas* (Plac. 1948), pp. 325 seq.

### III—FROM THE DEFINITION OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION TO THE DEFINITION OF THE ASSUMPTION

After the definition of the Immaculate Conception a controversy was aroused, chiefly through Dominic Arnaldi of Genoa (d. 1895) on the question of Our Lady's death. Arnaldi maintained that immunity from original sin logically implied immunity from the penalty of death. His thesis received more than one *imprimatur* and he was congratulated by several cardinals and by reviewers in periodicals.<sup>1</sup>

Professor Joseph Pennacchi defended it enthusiastically in his lectures at Propaganda. Monsignor Viridia (O.F.M. Conv.), Bishop of Cariati, petitioning the Holy See for a definition of the Assumption, stated plainly his belief that Our Lady did not die. Gaetano Guastalla y Schiuvellier was of the same opinion. Father J. Angelucci, O.S.M., definitely rejects the notion of Mary's death in several articles written for *Regina Martyrum* (Caserta) and in a separate study which is to be published shortly.<sup>2</sup> Father J. M. Dourehe, O.S.M., in *La Vierge toute Sainte* also rejects it, though indirectly.<sup>3</sup> Father Friethoff, O.P., has: 'The death of Mary is not certain, either historically or from revelation.'<sup>4</sup> Father Veermersch, S.J., has: 'Sur la mort de Marie plane un certain doute qu'il ne nous appartient pas de dissiper.'<sup>5</sup> In recent times the most ardent defender of the thesis that Mary's death is not proved has been Father Martin Jugie, A.A., in his monumental work, *La Mort et l'Assomption de la Sainte Vierge*, published in 1945 and dedicated to Pope Pius XII.

At Louvain, Professors Van Combrugge,<sup>6</sup> G. Coppens,<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cf. G. Ameri, O.F.M., *Domenico Arnaldi, appunti bio-bibliografici in Atti del Congr. Naz. Mar.*, O.F.M. d'Italia, Rome, 1948, pp. 381-401. Also *La dottrina di Domenico Arnaldi sull'Assunzione della B. V. Maria in Marianum* 32 (1950), pp. 56-67 and 33, pp. 141-69.

<sup>2</sup> In *Marianum*.

<sup>3</sup> P. 207 seq.

<sup>4</sup> *De Doctrina Assumptionis corporalis B.M.V. rationibus theologicis demonstrata*, in *Angelicum* 16 (1938), p. 12.

<sup>5</sup> *Meditations sur la Sainte Vierge*, Bruges, 1921, t. II, p. 204.

<sup>6</sup> *Tractatus de B. Virgine*.

<sup>7</sup> In *Eph. Theol. Lov.*, 1947.



B. Altaner<sup>1</sup> and K. Jüssen<sup>2</sup> hold that in the present state of historical knowledge it is impossible to prove that Our Blessed Lady died. Professor Philips, also of Louvain, after pointing out the necessary connection between immunity from original sin and immunity from death which is its penalty, asserts that 'everything points to the suggestion that she entered directly into the fullness of life.' She has, then, quitted this vale of tears, this 'abode unfitted for glorified bodies.' He asserts, moreover, that neither history nor theology can bring a proof of Mary's death such as to produce moral certainty.

It is by no means admissible [he writes] that in consequence of immunity from sin the Mother of the Saviour entered into a state of 'pure nature,' which never existed. The purpose of the Author of divinizing grace works without restriction, quite apart from considerations of sin; it is not bound within the confines of corporeal nature. It comprehends, therefore, the idea of blessed immortality, transformation of the body in glory. For us, organic corruptibility is concrete witness of the penalty of the great transgression. The preservation of a dead body, incorrupt, which has appealed to the imagination of some, is not a glorification, but on the contrary a reprieve, a delay, and therefore an absence of glorification. It symbolizes, always, a result of our enslavement to death and our subjection to the power of the devil.<sup>3</sup>

Cardinal Piazza has written: 'Concerning her death and subsequent resurrection there does not appear to be a complete consensus of the Fathers and Doctors. In our own day there are writers—Jugie, for instance, and Monsignor Landucci—who maintain the same thesis' (that of St. Epiphanius and Timotheus of Jerusalem) 'with arguments which, though not absolutely final, are not without force.' And he concludes, logically enough:

In whatever way it took place—by anticipated resurrection or by direct translation and glorification—the Assumption of Mary necessarily implies her *immediate glorification in body and soul at the end of her earthly pilgrimage.*<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Zur Frage der Definibilität der Assumptio B.M.V. in Theologische Revue*, 44 (1948), p. 140.

<sup>2</sup> *Tatsache und Definierbarkeit der lieblichen Himmelfahrt Mariens*, Karlsruh, 1948, pp. 6, 9.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. *Marianum*, X (1948), pp. 105-9.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. 'Il Simbolo,' vol. V, . . . *E s'incarnò da Maria Vergine: Assisi*, 1948, p. 200.

Father Tiburtius Gallus, S.J., has recently published a booklet of which the professed theme is that Mary did not die.<sup>1</sup>

I may add that several bishops of my own acquaintance have become convinced and ardent defenders of the thesis which I here maintain. Even Father Filograssi, who is definitely opposed to it, admits that

as a result of the public controversies aroused on this subject, the number of those who will have nothing to do with the idea that Our Lady died increases steadily, not only among priests but also among the educated laity.<sup>2</sup>

In spite of all this, there were some writers, before the definition, who held firmly and at all costs to the view that the death of Our Lady was part of the Assumption itself—at least in its actual, concrete reality. Thus Father Balić, following Father Renaudin, holds that

The *terminus a quo* of the Assumption is the death of Our Lady, the *terminus ad quem* is the glorification of her body in heaven. The object of the Assumption 'in recto' is the glorification of the living body, and 'obliquo' her death and resurrection.<sup>3</sup>

Father Di Fonzo maintained that

Death and resurrection are considered to be the manner and the closely connected circumstance of Our Lady's Assumption.

He was also in favour of the inclusion of this 'manner and circumstance' in the definition of the dogma.<sup>4</sup>

According to Father Bonnefoy, O.F.M.:

The death of the Most Holy Virgin may be considered as historically proved and explicitly revealed: as such (explicitly revealed) it may be the subject of a dogmatic definition: there is no reason why it should not be.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Le Vergine immortale*, Rome, Belardetti, 1949.

<sup>2</sup> *L'Assunzione corporea al cielo di Maria SS. nel momento attuale—in Tabor*, (1949), p. 116.

<sup>3</sup> Assumptionis itaque terminus a quo est mors; terminus vero ad quem caelestis glorificatio corporis Deiparae. Item, objectum Assumptionis "in recto" est glorificatio corporis viventis, et "ex obliquo" mors et resurrectio.—*De Definibilità Assumptionis B. V. Mariae*, Rome, 1945, pp. 46 seqq.

<sup>4</sup> *De Immaculatae Deiparae assumptione*. Misc. Fran. 1946, pp. 46-57.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Congrès Marial du Puy-en-Velay. *L'Assomption de la très Sainte Vierge*, Paris, 1950, p. 241.



Father Bover, Father De Aldama and Father de Sola :

The fact of Our Lady's death is not a matter of opinion in theology. It is not even a 'pious opinion.' Modern theologians consider it at least a *sententia certa*. The denial of it cannot escape the note of rashness.<sup>1</sup>

Father Constantine Koser, O.F.M., goes so far as to say that the fact of Our Lady's death is 'de fide divina et catholica credendum.'<sup>2</sup>

The Congress of the Franciscans of Italy, at which the general theme was the Assumption, arrived at the following conclusion :

Although the majority of lecturers in the Congress have maintained that the correct theological concept of Assumption is composed of three essential elements—death, resurrection, bodily glorification—and that all three are included in the idea of Assumption as a revealed doctrine, the First National Congress of the Friars Minor of Italy unanimously agrees that in the formulation of the definition itself it would not be necessary to make mention of the two elements which are presupposed, death and resurrection, though they would necessarily be mentioned in the Bull of the definition.<sup>3</sup>

The 'Mariological Week' of Salamanca in 1949, which was entirely taken up with the problem of the death of Our Lady, notwithstanding some division in its ranks, sent to the Holy See a 'Votum . . . de corporea Assumptione B. M. Virginis, in caelum, post mortem definienda.'<sup>4</sup>

#### IV—AFTER THE DEFINITION

The definition, together with the dogmatic Constitution, has thrown considerable light on the problem. It has made clear the precise theological concept of the Assumption; it has drawn a distinction between death and Assumption; it has left the question of Our Lady's death completely open.

##### (1) Clarification of the concept of Assumption

The Assumption is exactly defined in these terms : 'The

<sup>1</sup> *La Anunciación de María*. Madrid, 1947, p. 43.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Itinerarium*, 6 (1949), p. 494.

<sup>3</sup> *Atti del Congr. Mar. Naz. dei Frati Minori, d'Italia*. Rome, 1948, p. 10.

<sup>4</sup> *Estudios Marianos*, vol. IX, 1950, p. 11-17.

Immaculate Mother of God, Mary ever Virgin, having reached the end of her earthly life, was taken up body and soul to the glory of heaven.'

Thus a clear line of distinction is drawn between the two things, Assumption and death. Neither the definition nor the Bull considers the question of death at all. Henceforward we must exclude 'death and resurrection' absolutely from the theological notion of Assumption. 'Assumption' taken also in its actual concrete reality, does not include anything beyond glorification of the body and soul of Our Blessed Lady.

##### (2) Distinction between Assumption and Death

This most valuable demarcation of the subject evidently presupposes that the death and the Assumption are two clearly distinct things, and, even more to our purpose, that the arguments which are valid for the Assumption are not in the same class as those which are used to prove Our Lady's death : in fact there is no comparison : the question of her death remains, as before, uncertain and obscure, left to free discussion among theologians.

The Bull prescind absolutely from both alternatives—that she died and rose again, and that she did not die. The whole of the long exposition it contains merely illustrates the process of clarification through which the precise, definitive concept of Assumption, as now proclaimed for our belief, was reached. The documents quoted in the sketch of the process do indeed contain mention of Mary's death; but it is abundantly clear that they are not used in the Bull to prove it—it is, as we have said, simply not contemplated—but rather for the sole purpose of bringing out the concept of Assumption, as it has actually been defined, as a concept or 'belief which progressively became clearer.'

To take an example, the Bull begins by taking note of the fact that the faithful, arguing from Our Lady's subjection to suffering—which normally ends in death—easily accepted the notion that she, like her Divine Son, actually departed this life : 'Haud difficile iisdem (fidelibus) fuit



assentiri Magnam etiam Dei Matrem, quemadmodum jam Unigenam Suam, ex hac vita decessisse.'

Three things must be noted here: (1) In place of the stark expression 'died' the Bull uses the softer expression 'ex hac vita decedere,' which is 'relinquished this life,' literally.<sup>1</sup> (2) The Bull does not attribute even this expression, attenuated as it is, to the teaching of the Church, i.e. the Pastors, but to the faithful. (3) There are two very good reasons to explain what must have seemed, after all, an obvious deduction on the part of the faithful—the fact that Our Lady was subject to suffering (proved by Scripture and the teaching of the Pastors of the Church) and the notion of her likeness to Christ. These two reasons, considered carefully, are by no means conclusive. There is, then, here, no appeal to an apostolic tradition, to a tradition properly so called, to the *magisterium ecclesiasticum*, for the purpose of proving that Mary died, but only to two reasons which do not by any means prove it—at least with certainty.

Therefore, although the death of Mary is here mentioned (in attenuated terms, as we have seen) as a thing accepted by the faithful, appearing obvious, not calling for proof, the drift of the whole passage is simply this: The faithful did indeed admit, as being a matter of course, the death of Our Lady, yet this admission did not prevent them ('hoc tamen minime prohibuit') from 'openly believing and professing that her holy body was not subject to the corruption of the sepulchre'; but on the contrary, 'enlightened by divine grace, and impelled by the love of her who is "Mother of God and our most sweet Mother," they contemplated in ever-growing light the marvellous harmony' of her privileges. Thus the presumption of her death and resurrection played its part, and by no means a negligible one (for which reason

<sup>1</sup> I have translated (above) 'departed this life': Canon Smith (*Clergy Review*, Dec., 1950, pp. 367, 368) seems to lend definite support to this translation. I note, since writing the above, that the *Irish Messenger* translation has 'departed this life.' But Monsignor Knox (*Tablet*, Dec. 23rd, 1950, p. 553) makes no bones about it and puts 'died.' True, the statement is in a sort of *oratio obliqua*, but the word itself—*salva reverentia tanto viro debita*—seems tendentious. I should say that 'ex hac vita decedere,' even more than 'depart this life,' is in this context purposefully neutral. *Translator's note.*

it is referred to in the Bull) in the development of the doctrine of the Assumption.

Another reference to the death of Mary can be seen in the quotation of the Secret Prayer from the Gregorian Sacramentary, 'Veneranda . . .'; but it is clear from the context that this document is quoted not to prove that Our Lady died (though there is mention of her death in that Secret) but solely to prove that 'in the liturgical books . . . there are phrases which seem to conspire in asserting that, when the Virgin Mother of God *passed from this exile*, such things occurred, in regard of her holy body, by disposition of Divine Providence, as were in accord with her dignity as Mother of the Incarnate Word, and in keeping with the other privileges granted to her.' The Bull continues, a few words further down, 'This is affirmed, for instance, in the Sacramentary. . . .' Thus the quotation of the Sacramentary prayer is intended as a proof of the thesis immediately preceding (which prescind entirely from the question of Mary's death)—and of nothing else. The same must be said of the other quotations, from the Fathers and Doctors.<sup>1</sup>

### (3) *The question of Mary's death is a matter for free discussion*

From what has been said above it is quite clear that the Church has certainly made no pronouncement on the question of Our Lady's death. So much is clear from the whole tenor of the Bull. One natural consequence of this fact is that in the new Mass of the feast the Secret Prayer in which there was a suggestion of her death ('pro conditione carnis

<sup>1</sup> In *Acies Ordinata* (the organ of the Marian Congregations), Dec., 1950, there is a photograph copy of a prayer 'To Mary Assumed into heaven' with the autograph corrections made by Pope Pius XII. The Pope has cancelled the words which refer to the death of Our Lady. I may add that the Holy Father has indicated his own thought on this subject in other ways too, and in doing so has enabled us to see how the Constitution '*Munificentissimus Deus*' is to be interpreted (cf. also *Ragguaglio Mariano*, 1950, p. 65). It is to be taken—according to Pius XII—as *prescinding absolutely* from the question of the death of Our Lady. The highly personal interpretations put upon it in a number of periodicals lose all their value in the light of this fact. The best interpreter of a document is, surely, the one who wrote it.



migrasse cognoscimus') has been expunged: and this prayer, as is well known, was a main plank in the argument.

But we can go further. In the Bull—as in the new Mass—we have not only the complete exclusion of the question of Mary's death but also the positive inclusion of a principle which definitely tells in favour of the opinion that she did not die: I mean the reference to the close link between the Assumption and the Immaculate Conception—'Arctissime enim haec duo privilegia inter se conectuntur.' Our Blessed Lady, preserved, not, like the rest of us, freed, from original sin, was the companion of Christ in his complete victory over both sin and death. In the Bull Our Lady's victory over death is referred to as a consequence of her victory over sin.<sup>1</sup> She was not subject, therefore, like the rest of men, to the law of bodily corruption, and for this reason she needed not to await, as others must, 'the redemption of her body' (note the word *redemption*, not *resurrection*) 'until the end of time.' We have here, surely, an acknowledgement, that Mary had the right to triumph over death, and the reason of it is her complete victory over sin.

For my part I am convinced that the definition of the Assumption is the starting-point for a steady increase in number of those who hold that Our Blessed Lady did not die.

Mary's victory over death means that in her, and in her alone—or, to put it other words, in one member of the human race, despite death's general triumph—through the merits of her Son our Redeemer, and for the greater glory and exaltation of them both, God's plan of completely reversing the victory of Satan, author of sin and death, is realized through the happy deathless passing of Mary from earth to heaven, a transition such as would have terminated the earthly life of our first parents, and of all their descendants, but for that original sin from which Mary, God's Mother and ours, was preserved. The Immaculate Heart of Mary, because it is immaculate, never ceased to beat with love of all her sons, the Creator and all His creatures.

GABRIEL M. ROSCHINI, O.S.M.

<sup>1</sup> *A.A.S.*, 42 (1950), p. 734.

## LITERATURE AND PSYCHOLOGY

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THE title of this essay is somewhat vague and needs to be made more precise. In recent years there has been quite a lot of writing about the influence of Psychology, particularly Psycho-analysis, on novelists' treatment of their characters. The last chapter of C. E. M. Joad's *Guide to Modern Thought*, for example, is entitled 'The Invasion of Literature by Psychology' and describes some current literary tendencies illustrative of an attitude to human personality for which the influence of present-day psychological theories is largely responsible. The modern writer's chief concern, observes Joad, is not to create memorable characters, which was the object of the Victorian novelist, but 'to find out exactly what people are like and to record his discoveries. His purpose is psychological research.' It is not this relation of psychology to literature which I propose to treat of. My object here may be said to be concerned with the unconscious rather than with the conscious relation of psychology to literature—with the elusive influences which play on both writer and reader and which go far towards being decisive factors in determining, on the one hand, what a writer will produce and, on the other, what the reader will enjoy. It might, in fact, be well described as 'The Psychology of the Best Seller.'

### I

A writer is capable of factual inaccuracies, of failures in logic and even of downright deceit, and we keep a sharp look-out for such pitfalls. But we can often be quite gullible in failing to realize the influence of unconscious motives on an author's point of view and by accepting as valid for all what is really a highly personal approach to a particular problem. This is particularly true in the case