

The Virgin Mary in the Christian Faith: The Development of the Church's Teaching on the Virgin Mary in Modern Perspective

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FOR secular man approaching the Gospels and St. Paul with no real background in Christianity, and for Evangelicals in the tradition of Luther and Calvin who are close to Catholics in many fundamental ways, the prominence which Catholics give to the Virgin Mary often seems altogether puzzling. To them, it seems quite out of proportion to the amount and kind of attention given to her in the pages of Scripture.

Yet Roman Catholic doctrine in regard to the Assumption as expressed by Pius XII in 1950 in promulgating the dogma of the Assumption in *Munificentissimus Deus*, is that all Catholic belief about the Virgin Mary, including that concerning the Assumption,¹ is founded upon Scripture as upon its ultimate foundation, rather than resting on extra-Scriptural traditions surviving alongside Scripture in the Church. So dispute about the sufficiency of Scripture is irrelevant, and the question of reliance on tradition alone does not arise in this context. Rather the problem is one of proportion. Protestants from Luther onwards have found the prominence given to Mary by Catholics and by the Eastern Churches utterly disproportionate to what they see in the Scriptures.

One difficulty which has obstructed both Protestant and secular perceptions has been the appearance that Catholic confidence in the

¹ Pius XII promulgated the definition of the corporeal assumption of the Virgin Mary in the apostolic constitution *Munificentissimus Deus* and it is here that he makes this remark after previously having rehearsed various arguments from the agreement of the ordinary magisterium, from the liturgy over many centuries, and from the Fathers and Doctors of the Church.

controverted doctrines concerned has often seemed supported more by popular devotion and reliance upon arguments of the type “It is fitting; therefore it must be so” rather than upon arguments from scriptural revelation as such. It was for this reason that von Balthasar had good reason to say of Louis Bouyer’s *Le Trône de la Sagesse* (1957, translated as *Woman and Man with God*, Darton, Longmans, and Todd, 1960) that it was “le seul livre sur ce sujet que l’on peut avec bonne conscience conseiller à un lecteur protestant,” so rare are such books. Jaroslav Pelikan, *Mary Through the Centuries* (Yale, 1996) and Luigi Gambero, *Mary and the Fathers of the Church* (Ignatius, 1999) are perhaps others.

In the meantime the historical situation of dialogue and debate between Catholic and Protestant has radically changed. During the nineteenth and twentieth century a liberal “Christianity” which doubts Jesus’ virgin birth and even the divinity of Christ has gained large influence. This has been in the setting of a secular world in which the doctrine of the virgin birth is held in even more contempt than the idea of the uniqueness of God’s Incarnation in Jesus, and within which any belief in God is held to be a matter of subjective opinion and even merely private concern. In this essay, I concentrate on the earlier matters of debate between Catholic and Evangelical Protestant, but, in doing this, in showing the deep connection between the Incarnation and the Virgin Birth and in considering some of the questions of historicity which arise, I shall incidentally give some answer to some of the more radical modern questionings.

Section 1: Scriptural Background

The Relation of the Doctrines of the Incarnation and the Virgin Birth

Obviously, any reflection about Virgin Mary must begin with reflection upon the virgin conception and birth of Jesus of Nazareth, understood to be the Son of God. His conception, as being of a virgin, corresponds firstly to the Incarnation’s being a work outside the power of man.

I therefore begin by considering the close logical connection between the doctrines of the Incarnation and of Mary’s virginity.

If Mary and Joseph had had Jesus as their child by the natural process of their having intercourse and its bearing fruit in Jesus, then this Jesus would be first an embryo, then a child, and later an adult of whom one could say that he would have existed anyway as a human person, even if God had not willed him to be divine. His divinity would then be not key to his natural identity and existence but, as it were, an extra gift, one of his properties, or, in Aristotelian terms, “accidents”—a matter relating to the point of his human life, not to his origin.

A slightly different suggestion might be that, in this case, Mary and Joseph did not have fruitful intercourse except by special divine providence, and that it was by the same providence that God willed that this fruit should be divine and called Son of God. However, this suggestion will not stand scrutiny, since it would be by one act of God's free will that Jesus existed as a human person, and still be by a logically independent act of God's free will that this person would be divine. Accordingly, for Jesus to be one person, in the sense prevalent in theology and philosophy since A.D. 400, at once truly divine and truly human, the man Jesus of Nazareth has to be none other than the Son of God, through whom all things are made, giving them existence and sustaining them in existence, himself one in act of being with God the Father, existing eternally, at a certain time becoming man so as to have a human biography, but in such a way that, as St. Thomas says, there is only one act of being or *esse* in Christ, not two.

There is a discussion in Duns Scotus which makes vivid what is involved here. He asks what would happen if God, in his absolute power, decided to bring his being incarnate to an end. The divine Son as co-eternal with his Father, through whom all things were made and are sustained in being, would remain in his eternal existence—but what would be left behind of his manhood? The implication of St. Thomas's position is that there would be no man left behind, whereas Duns Scotus appears to consider it obscure whether there might be a man left behind, the same particular human nature as had existed before, as if nothing in this man's existing as a man depended upon God's constituting him as man by his becoming incarnate or enfleshed, at a certain time conceived of the Virgin Mary.² The idea of a humanity which would have existed anyway whether or not God chose to be incarnate and would remain if God decided to bring his being incarnate to an end constitutes the essence of the Nestorian heresy, the heresy whereby Mary conceived, bore in her womb and gave birth to the man Jesus so as to be indeed mother and bearer of Jesus, but not thereby mother and bearer of God the Son.

But, if God the Son was not conceived and born of Mary, then neither did God the Son live a human life of love and obedience and die on the

² This appears to be the opinion of Duns Scotus in *God and Creatures: The Quodlibetal Questions*, trans. Allan Wolter and Felix Alluntis (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975), in q. 19, a. 3, the second point investigated (19.73–19.93), which presents an argument which seems to show this, although the structure of the argumentation may leave this disputable. The point had been touched upon in 19.62, but 19.77 seems to show that “the Word could put off his human nature without anything absolute in it [presumably meaning, ‘in the human nature’] being destroyed,” and, in the subsequent argument 19.79–19.92, this does not seem to be disproved.

cross for our salvation. Accordingly, it is at the heart of Christian doctrine that God truly took on human nature, God becoming man in order that men should be divinized, the Son of God becoming man in order that mankind should become sons of God, God entering into solidarity with man in order that man should be able to enter into solidarity with God.

Or, to consider the matter from a different angle, it is simply not within the power of man and woman by the normal or natural processes of nature, upheld by and co-operated in by God in the customary way, to procreate a person who is the Divine Son of God. Therefore if Mary and Joseph had had intercourse, then, in order for the child issuing from this intercourse to be the Son of God, the natural upshot of their intercourse would have had to be superseded and set aside and the Son of God substituted for that natural issue. Therefore it would have been no less a miracle but rather more for the Son of God to have been conceived by the intercourse of Mary and Joseph than for him to be conceived virginally. The latter does not involve the suppression of the natural issue of intercourse and the substitution of something different.

In the history of Christian theology, we meet again and again ways of thinking which involve confusions in the logic of identity, that is, ways of thinking that involve the idea that it is sensible to speak of the man who would have existed anyway (as a result of what occurred in the Virgin Mary, whether virginally or otherwise) whether or not God had chosen or willed the becoming incarnate in this man of the Son of God. This way of thinking involves thinking that Jesus had an identity as a male human being, as a man, independent of whether or not he was the Son of his Divine Father; that is, it involves thinking of Jesus as containing or being a man in some particular relationship to the Son of God, that is, to the second Person of the Trinity, rather than understanding him to be the *same person* as the second Person of the Trinity, that is, *to be* the second person of the Trinity, to be himself that divine Person. It is essential to Christian theology that Jesus' humanity should have no existence which is independent of the existence of the Divine Son of God. (Whether or not his human nature has some existence in a secondary sense, and in no way independent of the eternal existence of the Divine Son, not as a *hypostasis*, as this word was understood by the Cappadocian Fathers and used by the first Council of Constantinople in A.D. 381 is a separate technical question—Aquinas uses *hypostasis*, taking *subsistentia* as a synonym, explaining it as meaning neither predicated of nor present in a subject [that is, what Aristotle describes as what is firstly and chiefly called *ousia* in the *Categories*].)

It is not that God willed that this man exist and at the same time willed the Incarnation, but that in one act of will with a single object he

willed the Incarnation, and in willing the Incarnation willed that the Son, eternal expression of the Father within the eternal life of God, should take on a human nature and human expression, willed that the Word be made flesh. We must reject the idea that, if God had suspended the Incarnation, Christ's manhood might have remained, now become mere man. We must also reject Karl Rahner's conception of a distinct "I-centre" in Jesus,³ a suggestion which in any case depends upon a Cartesian conception of an "I" which is the subject of different kinds of *pensées* or *cogitationes*, some of them judgements, some volitions, some sensations and so forth, the "I" or self whose existence in Cartesian and empiricist thought does not essentially involve having a body.

³ Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, vol. 1, trans. Cornelius Ernst (London: Darton, Longman, and Todd, 1961; translated from the German original of 1954), 159–63, understood in the context of the whole of 137 (bottom line). One needs to question the credentials of the whole distinction between the ontic and the onto-logical as made by Rahner, for example at 168–69, which Rahner uses in order to divide between an ontological conception of "person" in the traditional sense (159, n. 4) of something substantially one and singular (incommunicable), and a psychological conception of "person" developed in terms derived from Heidegger's conception of the existential (appearing in Cornelius Ernst's translation of Rahner's discussion as "ontological").

Historically, the modern use of the word "person" stemmed ultimately from Augustine and Boethius, that is, precisely from understanding the conception of *hypostasis* in a way compatible with the notion of *prosopon* (Latin *persona*), expressing relationality in the case of divine Persons, a relationality enshrined in their very act of being. When Boethius defines a person as an individual substance of a rational nature, he does this in a context in which the use of the word "person" as expressing relationality was already presupposed. And when Aquinas comes to define *hypostasis* he does so in terms of the Aristotelian definition of "what is firstly and chiefly called *ousia*," [Aristotle, *Categories*, chap. 5, 2a 11] namely as a subject which is neither predicated of nor present in any other subject, adopting the Latin word *subsistentia* in order to achieve this disambiguation of the word *substantia*. (One may note that Aquinas also uses the word *subsistentia* of the human soul, and so does not confine it to Trinitarian doctrine.) Accordingly, Boethius's definition is to be understood in a way which extends to created persons to having a fulfillment which consists in relations, an actuality only properly fulfilled in the degree that these relations have a personal character. The best exposition of this conception is to be found when Aquinas considers the threefold sense in which a human being may be said to be in the image of God, the weakest consisting in the possession of intellect and will carrying with them the aptitude for grace, the second arising through the gift of grace in friendship with God, and the third consisting in the unity with God in the beatific vision, made possible by the gift of glory (*Summa theologiae* I, q. 93, a. 4).

*The Incarnation Is in No Way Dependent on Human Agency,
But Only on Human Consent: The First Emphases of St. Luke*

Jesus' conception was not a work in which a woman was a sole creaturely agent unassisted by a man, but a work in which neither woman nor man exercised their normal agentive function in procreation—or indeed in which either exercised any agentive function at all. Mary exercises, not agency, but only consent in respect to the conception of the Word. What comes about comes about by the power of the Holy Spirit, with this consent.

There is no surrogate for biological masculine and feminine in God's relationship to Mary. In Jesus' conception, the New Creation is sown, and in his Resurrection the New Creation is begotten: the begetting which God does in respect of Jesus is either before all worlds (so far as the divine nature in Jesus is concerned) or at the Resurrection. I say this in order further to make clear that nothing analogous to the male-female relation is involved, nothing analogous to what we find in pagan myths about gods eloping with mortals. It is notable that it was the need to repudiate any idea of intercourse or physical relation between God and Mary that most particularly concerned Muhammad in his denying that Jesus had any divine sonship.⁴

In these initial remarks, I do not deal with the whole importance of Mary's virgin conception of Jesus for Christology, but only at this point those aspects of importance for understanding *her* immediate role.

It is the key importance of Mary's consent and the implied preparedness and virtue out of which it sprang, shown also in Mary's expression of sentiment in the Magnificat, which is particularly highlighted in St. Luke's Gospel. There, the angel Gabriel who "stands in the presence of God," is first sent to Zechariah to give him the good news that his wife Elisabeth would bear him a son (John the Baptist) and Zechariah's response is unbelief. He is next sent to Mary, a virgin betrothed to Joseph of the house of David, saying, "Greetings, highly favoured one; the Lord is with you"; continuing, "Do not be afraid Mary, for you have found favour with God. Behold you will conceive in your womb and bear a son and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of his kingdom there will be no end"; and responding to Mary's enquiry as to how this was possible since she had no intercourse with a man by

⁴ Cf. R. C. Zaehner, *At Sundry Times* (London: Faber & Faber, 1958), 203–8, and David B. Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993) 178–79.

saying, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore the child to be born will be called Holy, the Son of God"; and Mary's response is one of faith and consent: "Behold, I am the handmaiden of the Lord, let it be to me according to your word." The contrast with Zechariah highlights the significance of Mary's faith and consent.

It is this first feature of Mary's role which leads Justin and Irenaeus to set Mary in contrast with Eve. Justin contrasts the undefiled virgin Eve who conceived the word of a serpent and brought forth disobedience and death with the virgin Mary who received the word of the angel Gabriel with faith, joy, and consent, so that by her the Son of God might be born by whom God destroys both the serpent and those angels and men who are like him while delivering from death those who repent and believe.⁵ In his *Against Heresies*, Book III, chapter 22, 1–3, Irenaeus is most anxious to insist that, in being born of Mary, Jesus Son of God did not simply pass through Mary taking nothing from her, but took from her a full human nature, so that St. Paul's describing him as "born of a woman" implied with it liability to hunger, weariness, the pain of being wounded, distress and weeping over Lazarus's death, the agony of Gethsemane, and the blood and water that poured from his side after his death, besides having many human generations precede him after the first Adam. So Irenaeus thought it a heresy to deny the salvation of Adam, since if Adam had been utterly abandoned to death God would in that case have been conquered by the serpent and the wickedness of the serpent would have prevailed over the will of God. But God is invincible and long-suffering, showing himself long-suffering in correcting man and granting all probation, a mercy to which Irenaeus sees Adam as responding and Cain as not responding.⁶

Then, in *Against Heresies*, Book III, chapter 22, 4, he goes on to say that it is in accordance with this design that Mary should have been found obedient by contrast with the disobedient Eve, both virgins, seeing here a back-reference from Mary to Eve, the disobedient virgin having caused death to herself and the whole human race and the obedient virgin becoming the cause of salvation to the whole human race. The Lord Jesus through being the first to be resurrected from the dead, receiving into his bosom the ancient fathers (Irenaeus perhaps having in mind the patriarchs, the first in the lineage of Jesus back to Adam, representatively listed in Luke 3:23–38), regenerating them into the life of God, making himself the beginning of those that live, as Adam had been the beginning of those

⁵ Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 100.

⁶ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, Bk. III, ch. 23.

that died. And having explained this, Irenaeus develops this theme by going on to speak of how the knot created by Eve's disobedience was undone by the obedience of Mary, since what the virgin Eve had bound fast through unbelief, this the virgin Mary had set free by faith. In Book V, chapter 19, §1, in accord with his theme of recapitulation, he sets the way in which Jesus' obedience undid the disobedience of Eve, so that the whole human race fell into bondage to death, in contrast with the way in which Mary's obedience allowed her to become advocate for Eve, so that those chains binding the human race to death might be unloosed. It is striking to notice how immediately Irenaeus moves on from thinking of Mary as responding to God's invitation with obedience to thinking of her as an advocate of sinners, beginning with Eve, as if inviting us to think of her in a caring, intercessory, and motherly role to all sinners—a thought to be developed in the fourth century.

*The Role of Mary's Presence at the Wedding
at Cana and Then at the Crucifixion*

The third element in the background of Christian thought about Mary must naturally be the passages referring to her in St. John's Gospel. It is natural to the traditional Catholic and traditional Evangelical to take these as historical in basis, albeit recounted with the liberties customary in those days to those historical events recorded-to-some-purpose. (If a liberal supposes the accounts to have no basis in history, but to reflect the faith of the early Church, this would give them more, not less, theological weight, for the purposes of the discussion below, so long as the Scriptures still be conceived as revelatory word, determinative for the preaching and teaching of a Revelation given once and for all.)

In St. John's Gospel Mary is twice addressed as "woman."⁷ This mode of address is not in tradition conceived of as being disrespectful, but is most naturally interpreted as signifying to us her position as the successor of Eve. The fact that it is not used disrespectfully is evident from the

⁷ St. John's Gospel 2:3–5 and 19:25–27, as it were embracing the rest of the Gospel in a sandwich, should be read against the background of Genesis, chapter 3, where we find portrayed the proto-typical woman, Eve. The Gospel within which Mary is addressed as "Woman" is the one most permeated with ideas from the Torah, most Jewish in its pre-occupations and apologetic, and at the same time most cosmic and universal in its appeal. The first epistle, which seems to be more Greek in ideas, as seen in its using the terms "love" and "light" in a more abstract way, perpetuates the tradition of pre-occupation with the Torah and even contains a midrash on the temptation of Eve in Genesis in I John 2:16. References to Genesis are difficult to trace in the New Testament outside the Johannine writings.

second passage where, significantly, Jesus says to his mother, "Woman, behold thy son," while saying to the Beloved Disciple, "Son, behold thy mother."⁸ It seems evident from this form of address in the second case that Jesus' mother is being deliberately addressed, not as his own mother, but as now in a representative role to care for all Jesus' faithful disciples. No one has suggested that it is used disrespectfully or disowningly in the second passage, and therefore, since it is not accidental but intentional that the substance of the Gospel is sandwiched between these two references to Mary, it is evident that, since it was not to be understood disrespectfully in the second, it should not be understood disrespectfully in the first. In the first, Jesus says, "Woman, what is that to you and to me?" which has been interpreted as meaning, "Woman, what have I to do with thee?" "Woman, what have you to do with me?" or "Woman, how is *your* business any of *my* business?" but can instead carry the natural interpretation "Woman, how is that *our* concern?" which would not be disrespectful.

As we look at the second of the passages in St. John, the passage when she is present at the Crucifixion, we see the one described as the "Beloved Disciple,"⁹ who is according to tradition John, the junior twin of the sons of Zebedee,¹⁰ being told to take her to be his mother, and we

⁸ In his Tractate 8, on St. John's Gospel, in § 9, St. Augustine gives the explanation that the use of the designation "Woman" in both cases is deliberate, but designed to pick Mary out as representative of human womanhood in its weakness, firstly in making earthly requests, and secondly in being confronted with her son in the most extreme exhibition of his human weakness. However, this explanation fits very badly with the rest of the context, since Mary's instant reaction is to assume that Jesus will accede to her request, immediately telling the servants to "Do what he tells you," upon which Jesus commands them to take the jars of water, the water being transformed into wine.

⁹ Perhaps the *talmid muvhaq*, such as each rabbi chose from amongst his most devoted students as his brightest student. Cf. Jacqueline Genot-Bismuth, *Un Homme Nommé Salut* (Paris: de Guibert, 1986, 1995), 214.

¹⁰ It makes no difference to my argument here whether the Beloved Disciple be John brother of James, son of Zebedee, as tradition has held since sometime in the second century, or whether the two be different persons as some have argued.

Some consensus seems to be emerging that the author of the Fourth Gospel wrote from the situation and standpoint of one associated with the Jerusalem priestly aristocracy as opposed to that of the Pharisees—whether like Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI) in his *Jesus of Nazareth*, trans. Adrian Walker (New York: Doubleday, 2007), and those he cites on pp. 224–27, they keep to the tradition that the Beloved Disciple and John son of Zebedee are one and the same person, or whether like Claude Tresmontant in *The Hebrew Christ* (from the French *Le Christ Hebreu* of 1983; cf. *Evangile de Jean*, 1984), Martin Hengel in *The Johannine Question* (London: SCM, 1989), and Richard Bauckham in pages 412 to 478 of *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), they hold

see her commanded to take him as son. Now, if this were conceived of solely as a matter of Jesus making provision for the care of his mother after the end of earthly life, then it would be by itself somewhat remarkable in the context of custom, inasmuch as there were still alive of the household of Joseph and Mary those spoken of as “the brethren” of Jesus—James, Josès, and Jude amongst them. For her to be removed from the care of James and put into the care of the beloved disciple would be socially very peculiar and the more peculiar when taken in the full context: namely, the context wherein James the “brother of the Lord” after the Resurrection needed conversion (cf. John 7:3–5), being recipient of a special appearance of the risen Christ. He was then present in the upper room at Pentecost, and later was head of the Church in Jerusalem, singled out by Paul, as along with Peter and John, as one of the three pillars of the Church (James, son of Zebedee, brother of John, being dead by martyrdom earlier and James, son of Alphaeus, unmentioned as such) and remaining head of the Church in Jerusalem until his martyrdom in A.D. 62. Nor was James the “brother of the Lord” a future itinerant like most of the twelve to whom, within the Christian community, the care of the mother of Jesus would be inconvenient, unless as some later tradition suggests she died and was buried and assumed within twelve years of Jesus’ passion.

Now the first controverted or controversial construction on this passage in Catholic tradition is to suppose the presence of Mary at the foot of the cross to express her consent to Christ’s death on behalf of the human race, not the consent to his death in the manner of the priests, not the reluctant consent which one might have anticipated from Peter, who was reluctant that Christ die or that even Jesus wash his feet, but the willing consent of one in wholehearted obedient concord with the will of her son, whole-heartedly obedient, not merely in willing what he willed, but doing this out of love, not as to an authority. In this construction Catholics adopt a mode of exegesis which is of a piece with the Fathers’ exegesis of many other passages in Scripture. For instance, when St. Augustine comments on the passage where a woman cries, “Blessed is the womb that bore thee and the paps that gave thee suck!” and Jesus replies, “Yes, rather

them to be distinct persons. The Gospel’s historical, legal, and geographical knowledge is firmly rooted in a period earlier than A.D. 65.

The arguments presented by Henri Cazelles give strong support to the traditional view; cf. Henri Cazelles, “Johannes, Ein Sohn des Zebedaus. ‘Priester’ und Apostel,” *Internationale Katholische Zeitschrift Communio* 31 (2002): 479–84; cf. Peter Stuhlmacher, *Biblische Theologie des Neuen Testaments*, vol. 2: *Von der Paulusschule bis zur Johannesoffenbarung*, 206 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1992–99).

are those blessed who hear the word of God and keep it" (Luke 2:27–28), St. Augustine explains that this does not mean that Mary is not blessed, but that she was blessed rather because she did hear the word of God and keep it (here one can compare Luke 2:5—"his mother kept all these things in her heart"—referring to Jesus having said to her, "did you not know that I must be about my Father's business [or 'in my Father's house']?"), and not because of any merely or purely or solely physical relationship to the Son, attachment to which the Gospels show her as being weaned from (a process of weaning seen in Luke 2:48–51, John 2:4, Luke 11:27–28, Matthew 12:50, Mark 3:31–35, etc.).¹¹

Now, if we reflect upon the passage in St. John about Mary at the Crucifixion in the context of the prediction of the old man Simeon in the Temple in Luke—that her heart would be pierced also (Luke 2:35)—we can see it as in accord with Scripture to suppose that God willed her consent, not only to the Incarnation, but also, as she grew in understanding of the mission and work of her son, even to his death for her own and our redemption. And certainly both the modes of address to Mary by the angel and by Mary's cousin Elizabeth, combined with this saying of Simeon give edge to the importance which the Fourth Gospel gives to Mary's presence at the foot of the cross, and confirm that it is no accident that Jesus' ministry in the Fourth Gospel is sandwiched between the two episodes in which Mary figures.

Mary as Spiritual Mother to All the Faithful

But there is also a second controversial or controverted construction put by traditional Catholics on this passage, namely, that what it concerns is not primarily (if at all) the familial social provision by a son for the care of his mother after his death (unless this be symbolic embodiment or expression of a spiritual fact), but rather the committal of John as sole representative remaining of the faithful of Israel to Mary as spiritual mother. And it is noteworthy that Irenaeus represents Mary as advocate for the first Eve while Augustine describes Mary as "clearly the mother of his members."¹² And against the background of the conception in Genesis of the first Eve as the mother of all living, the early Fathers' conception of Mary as the new Eve would seem to connote that she should be considered as the mother of all those living the new Life found

¹¹ Ambrose, *Exposition of Luke*, 6, 36–38 (PL, vol. 15, 1764); Jerome, *Commentary on Matthew* (PL, vol. 26, 87); Augustine, *On Holy Virginité*, 3, 5 (PL, vol. 40, 397ff); see Paul F. Palmer's convenient collection, *Mary in the Documents of the Church* (London: Burns Oates, 1953), 42–48.

¹² Augustine, *De Sancta Virginitate*, 6 (PL, 40, 399).

in the Church after Pentecost. These themes, which begin to appear in the second century in Justin and Irenaeus, appear in their most eloquent form in the hymns of Ephraem the Syrian (c. A.D. 306–76).¹³

Of course, the significance of Mary's spiritual motherhood of the Church depends on its being seen in the context of the full doctrine of the fellowship or communion of the saints. We have no relation with the saints who have died except in virtue of our relationship with Christ. There is no analogy between our relation to saints and any supposed relation of man to the dead via mediums, etc. Rather, the saints have no knowledge of us and our doings pertinent to any prayer or care in detail for us, except such knowledge as is specifically given them by God, in response to their charity and our desire, so that any prayer of the saints for us is itself the work of God, work in which the cooperation of God and man is involved. What we have here is another example of God's unwillingness to act, even to act graciously, towards man except in accord with some desire and consent within the human community, a desire and consent itself raised up by him; and we have an expression of the view that just as it is licit, appropriate, and unfitting to be omitted that we ask the living to pray for us, so in virtue of the communion of saints it is possible and proper to ask the saints that are dead to pray for us, as well as to ask them to join with us in the same hymn of praise to the Father, or to express it in a better way, ask them to allow us to join with them in this hymn.

The significance of Mary's spiritual motherhood of the Church is, then, if we take the meaning of the passage in John's Gospel in the traditional way, that her prayer for us the living extends to all, and this is the background of the conspicuous place that she has in every liturgy of Eastern Christendom from long before any schism between East and West,

¹³ Several of the references in the Fathers illustrating all these themes appear in Palmer's collection *Mary in the Documents of the Church*, 12–23. Thus, besides works already mentioned in this paper earlier, he cites Tertullian, *On the Flesh of Christ* (17) written when he was already a Montanist, but not showing it, as well as a multiplicity of passages from the fourth-century Syriac father Ephraem Syrus, collected by Palmer (15–23): Ephraem, *Hymns on Blessed Mary*, 18 (Lamy, 2, 605–19, trans. based on Livius, pp 427ff), 19 (Lamy, 2, 621–25, trans. based on Livius, 430f); *On the Annunciation of the Mother of God*, Hymn 3 (Lamy, 3, 979–99, trans. based on Livius, 437ff); *The Nisibis Hymn*, 27, trans. G. Bickell (Leipzig: 1886), 122; Mary's virginity and the virgin birth, *Fragments of the Commentary of Ephrem Syrus upon the Diatessaron*, trans. J. Rendel Harris (London: 1895), 31–32. Ephraem wrote first at the Assyrian Nisibis close to the Tigris (now Nusaybin) and then at Edessa close to the Euphrates (now Sanhurfa), both now in South East Turkey close to the border with Syria.

and even between Constantinople and Alexandria—as well as the conspicuous place of her feasts in the East and West, as well as in other devotions public and private.

Although the full significance in life of the communion of saints and of Mary's motherhood of all the faithful depends on the possibility of asking them to pray with us for our needs, spiritual and temporal, one must not overstate this. The first element in communion is sharing in praise, and recognition, greeting, respect, or reverence, for those we share with (*dulia* not *latría*). At its origins, possibly in England, but anyway before A.D. 1200, the "Hail Mary" in the Rosary included no petition to Mary but only the Scriptural words "Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee, blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus," and close to the present form came into increasing use in the fifteenth century, being given exact form and universal authorization in the Catechism of the Council of Trent in 1566 and Roman Breviary of 1569. But the idea that she is the object of special veneration is strongly present in Luther and other Reformers, and her place in this communion of praises of God and of the Lamb, her son, never doubted.

The veneration of Mary is evidenced from the Roman catacombs from early centuries. Mary as mother of Jesus appears to be represented in catacomb paintings in Rome from the second to the fourth centuries, most of them from the third century, numerous seeming to include the Magi in barbarian dress, but the earliest from the early second century seeming to combine a striking naturalism with a naked child and a figure with a scroll (perhaps Matthew or Isaiah) pointing at an eight-pointed star above the mother's head; these themes also appear in fourth-century Roman glass vases, two vases with Mary named standing between Peter and Paul.¹⁴

I spoke earlier of Irenaeus describing Mary as advocate of Eve, and Greek invocations of Mary under the title of *theotokos* ("God-bearer," that is, mother of God), are found in an Egyptian papyrus appearing to date from the third century.¹⁵ The second, petitionary clause to the Rosary, "Holy Mary, mother of God, pray for us now and in the hour of our

¹⁴ M. Vloberg, "The Iconographic Types of the Virgin in Western Art" (trans. from the French, 1952), in *Mary: The Complete Resource*, ed. S. J. Boss (London: Continuum, 2007), 540–43, cf. Luigi Gambero, *Mary and the Fathers of the Church* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1999), 83–85.

¹⁵ Discussed by Richard Price and Stephen J. Shoemaker in *Mary: The Complete Resource*, on 56–57 and 130–31 respectively, revealing that it is only on the basis of an argument from silence as to other such devotion at such an early time that palaeographic evidence has been doubted.

death,” was added only in late medieval or later times, although this invocation was established in the church of Axum (attached to Alexandria) before the schism between Alexandria and Constantinople in 449.¹⁶

The Historicity of the Gospel Teaching About the Virgin Birth

Luke and Matthew are the most explicit witnesses to Jesus’ virgin conception and birth, and even liberal critics assign Luke a date around 85 and Matthew around 90, still times when there would be many who had heard the teaching of the Apostles still alive. In the second century Ignatius of Antioch, speaking both of the reality of Jesus’ bodiliness and of the folly of the cross, says, “For our God, Jesus the Christ, was conceived by Mary, in God’s plan being sprung both from the seed of David and from the Holy Spirit—he was born and baptized in order that by his Passion he might hallow water. . . . Mary’s virginity and her giving birth escaped the notice of the prince of this world, as did the Lord’s death—those secrets crying to be told, but wrought in God’s silence.”¹⁷ This leaves no room for doubt about the credal character of his belief in it, and Justin too makes it central along with the crucifixion and Resurrection.

However, in considering the historicity of the gospel teaching about the virgin birth, sceptical biblical critics have concentrated upon two points, the one the apparent absence of any trace of this teaching in St. Mark’s Gospel, and the second the absence of any reference to it in St. Paul’s epistles.

The fact that St. Mark, whom almost all scholars take to be the first to write a *bios*, or life, of Jesus, says nothing of the virgin birth has been what has given most force to theologians’ doubts as to the historicity of the virgin birth. However, one ought to take account of the probable context of the first writing and presentation of St. Mark’s Gospel, namely as delivering “the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God” to an audience of Gentiles in Rome, and not only to Jews, doing this by presenting an account of Jesus’ public life, which in some way recommended a belief in Jesus as Christ and Son of God. In such a context, one would not expect a *bios* to rely on any facts which of their nature would be known only privately, and one would not have expected the preaching of Peter to such Romans to draw upon any such facts (it is Peter’s preaching that St. Mark was supposed from very early times to be translating or interpreting), but rather on the mighty works of Jesus recapitulating and exceeding the miracles of the ancient prophets and Moses.

¹⁶ See Palmer, *Mary in the Documents of the Church*, 54.

¹⁷ Ignatius, *Epistle to the Ephesians*, 18; cf. his *Epistle to the Trallians*, 9, trans. C. C. Richardson, *Early Christian Fathers* (London: SCM Press, 1953).

Now, if the context of delivery had been more purely Jewish, the speculations of scholars that the expression "son of God" need not be understood to imply a claim to divinity (Jewish kings and the faithful of Israel sometimes being referred to as "sons of God" in the Old Testament), might conceivably have some relevance. But such speculations are quite irrelevant to the interpretation of Mark if we take into account that it was presented in a Roman context, as is confirmed by its many Latinisms, to an audience including, according to Clement of Alexandria, some of Caesar's *equites*. Therefore any affirmation of Jesus Christ as the Son of God, made in this way in the full face of the Roman and Greek world, would have had the implication of divine honours just such as Philippians 2:5–11 refers when it speaks of God having bestowed on Jesus a name above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth.

Therefore, Mark's proclamation presented a direct challenge to the Roman world view and in particular to the claims about the emperor as divine during his life made by Caligula, as well as to the aura which might make the Senate declare him divine at death. From at latest A.D. 40, Caligula increasingly presented himself as being a god even in his lifetime, and it was this direct clash between Jewish understanding and Roman claims which generated the simmering battles between the Roman authorities and the Jews in Alexandria from A.D. 39 onwards. The tensions with the Jews extended throughout the Levant, and the most plausible interpretation of Mark 13:14, "when you see the desolated sacrilege set where it ought not to be (let the reader understand), then those in Judea must flee," is to see it in the context of Caligula's decree from about A.D. 40 ordering the erection and worship of his statue in the Temple of God.¹⁸ In Graham Stanton's recent work *Jesus and Gospel* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), makes it very clear the title "Son of God" came to such early prominence in the presentation of the Gospel precisely in order to set Jesus as the true Son of God and his good news in contrast with the emperors and the good news they claimed to bring when they took the throne.

¹⁸ He appointed Petronius to the government of Syria, bidding him carry out that decree even at the cost of a war against the rebellious Jews. In response, the Jews in tens of thousands protested to the governor that they were willing to be slaughtered rather than to be condemned to witness that idolatrous profanation of their holy Temple. Soon afterwards Petronius asked Caligula to revoke his order, and Agrippa I, who then lived at Rome, prevailed upon the Emperor not to enforce his decree. It seems, however, that Caligula soon repented of the concession, and that but for his untimely death (A.D.) he would have had his statue set up in Jerusalem. Cf. Emil Schürer, *History of the Jewish People in the Time of Christ*, trans. John MacPherson, div. 1, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1890), 90–105.

Stanton's picture makes the earliest possible date the most plausible. It has often been supposed that Mark's apocalyptic chapter 13 was written with the situation in A.D. 64–66 or 67–69 in view, but in fact the re-application of the phrase "abomination of desolation," to be found in Daniel and Maccabees, suggested by the actions of Antiochus Epiphanes,¹⁹ fits far better with the aftermath of Caligula's attempt, foiled by his death, to install his image in the Temple. Such early dates²⁰ fit well with Mark's

¹⁹ Daniel 11:31, 12:11, cf. 9:27; 1 Maccabees 1:54 referring to Antiochus Epiphanes's erection of a statue of Zeus on the altar of burnt offering in the Temple in 167 B.C., and sacrificing swine before it.

²⁰ Standard commentaries add no other internal arguments for later dates which are not to be found in Vincent Taylor, *The Gospel according to St. Mark* (New York: Macmillan, 1953), 31–32; Martin Hengel, *Studies in the Gospel of Mark*, trans. John Bowden (London: SCM, 1985) 12–28; and Daniel Harrington, "The Gospel According to Mark" *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1989). All are weak and question-begging.

The first two authors take the view that the ideas of worldwide mission and of the freedom of the Gentiles from *kosher* laws could not come from Jesus himself, or from any period before the Pauline mission had had extensive influence, making the groundless assumption that they do not come from Jesus himself. These arguments also ignore the likelihood of an early general spread of the gospel to all the areas mentioned in Acts 2, augmented by the movement of the Hellenists from Jerusalem throughout Judea and Samaria, to Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, who were expelled after the killing of Stephen in 33 or 36, and assume that Acts 10 is unhistorical or chronologically misplaced. Such arguments are in any case compatible with any date after A.D. 45, when the Pauline mission had already begun to turn towards the Gentiles.

It is also argued that Christianity in its earliest stages was so dominated by eschatological expectation that a *bios* or life of Jesus would have been alien to it, whereas it seems that at the time the main reason why writing required some special motive was the tendency to share the Rabbinic idea that memory within an oral tradition was more reliable than writings; Peter's leaving Rome would have provided just such a special motive. The relationship of the few sayings to be found in Mark and Q and the dating of Q are entirely speculative, and therefore no firm argument can be drawn from them.

Harrington's conception that it was only in the 60s that Mark would have anticipated persecution is countervailed by the persecution in Judea spoken of in I Thessalonians in 50 or 51 and the troubles between Jew and Christian which it is said led Jews to be expelled from Rome in 49, besides the evidence from 2 Corinthians 11, Acts 6–9, 12, 14, 21, et al. There is no reason to think that there was any uniform practice in respect of penalties for blasphemy or synagogue-exclusion amongst the Jews across the Empire before A.D. 70, or that the norms prescribed in the Mishnah were already applied as assumed in Douglas Hare's *The Theme of Jewish Persecution of Christians in the Gospel According to St. Matthew* (Cambridge University Press, 1967), or that such criteria controlled lynching.

David Flusser echoes the general view that the council of Jamnia around A.D. 80 made little change to the application of the *Birkat ha-minim*, or curses on the *minim*,

taking his Gospel from Rome to Alexandria as attested in the Old Latin Anti-Marcionite Prologue, Recension 2,²¹ also fitting with the tradition passed on by Africanus and Eusebius associating Mark with Alexandria up until A.D. 61, and with Clement of Alexandria's seeming to have independent information about the origins of Mark's Gospel, and also placing it before the death of Peter.

This would make Mark's Gospel perhaps the earliest writing to witness to the divinity of Christ in a full-blooded sense, and give peculiar significance to Mark 12:35–37 where he portrays Jesus as challenging the scribes and elders to answer the question as to how, if the Messiah is to be son of David, David can call him Lord (*kurios*), David being taken to be the author of Psalm 110 which begins "YHWH (*Adonai* in public synogue reading) said to my Lord (Hebrew *Adonai*)."²² This challenge brings into direct question how the Messiah can be described as Lord if he is merely a descendant of David. It thereby implies that any description of Jesus as Messiah, or as Lord, or as Son of God, raises a question as to his family origins, taking one beyond his baptism by John the Baptist, back to the question of his origin and conception.

For, within the Jewish framework of thought which Mark shared with St. Paul, there could be no place for an apotheosis, whereby a mere man might become a God, like Hercules in Greek mythology, but only of one who was already divine coming to be recognized as such, and that is what St. Paul's epistle to the Philippians presents, namely that Jesus, being already in the form of God, did not treat equality with God as something to be snatched at (as it were by robbery) in the manner of Eve and Adam, but took on humanity in the form appropriate to a slave, not in the open glory appropriate to his closeness to his Father, but mostly hidden until his ascension. It is within this framework of thought that we should consider the significance of Mark.

introduced into the Eighteenth Benediction of the Amidah. He argues that they were introduced long before, in the late Maccabean period, at that time probably directed against the Essenes, the added curse on the *nosrim* being found only in two Palestinian MSS of about A.D. 150 surviving from Egypt, having quite limited application. Cf. David Flusser, "The Jewish Christian Schism Part II," in *Judaism and Origins of Christianity* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1988), 635–44.

²¹ The texts and discussion of the dating of the various Anti-Marcionite prologues, of which this and the Greek text of the Anti-Marcionite prologue to Luke appear the most probably historical, are conveniently presented in Bernard Orchard and Harold Riley, *The Order of the Synoptics: Why Three Synoptic Gospels?* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1987), 143–56. The prologues add the incidental information that Mark was nicknamed Stubfinger because of the shortness of his fingers, which suggests some historical grounding.

It is normally accepted that Mark drew much from the preaching of Peter in Rome. The strongest arguments for the commonly accepted date of Mark are based on the tradition that he published his Gospel after the *death* of Peter, so the Gospel would date between 65 and 69. But other traditions suggest that he published it after some earlier *departure* of Peter from Rome, which would be compatible with Mark's Gospel being written as early as A.D. 47 to 49 or 54 to 57 if Peter made visits to Rome in the 40s or 50s.

If Mark were written as early as A.D. 47–49 or 54–57, then the possibility of dates for the Gospels of Matthew and Luke (or a Proto-Luke) from the '50s onwards becomes possible, and for Acts, the second half of Luke's work, from A.D. 62 onwards, the time that the narrative of Acts comes to what seems an arbitrary end, without mention of Paul's later martyrdom.²² We are ignorant of what links he may have maintained with Antioch (his city of origin) or Jerusalem, how much Luke learnt at any time from Jesus' relatives or John, what documents may have passed to him whether in Rome, Philippi, or Achaia, or what travels he may have made when not with Paul.²³ Dates much earlier than critics usually suggest recommend themselves on many grounds,²⁴ but they also have

²² Early dates would explain the absence in Matthew, Luke, or Acts of any trace of knowledge of the apostolic martyrdoms, and even the fall of Jerusalem; cf. n. 24.

If Matthew had an early date, a plausible place of origin would be Alexandria, following the tradition that Mark brought his Gospel with him to Alexandria in the 50s. The tendency to dismiss the possibility of an Alexandrian origin has only arisen in the context of the presumption of a late post-Jamnia date. In any case, whatever the dates of Matthew and Luke, it is impossible that there should be much overlap between the lives of Matthew and Luke or that they should both be rooted in the traditions of the church in Antioch, since there is so little sign that either knew the text of the other, and what evidence we have associates Luke, not Matthew, with Antioch.

²³ Luke appears to have had closer knowledge both of the family traditions of Jesus (see Richard Bauckham's *Jude and the Relatives of Jesus in the Early Church* [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1990, 2004]). for his discussion of the Lukan genealogy in the context of the evidence of Julius Africanus), the court of Herod and the proceedings in Jerusalem from the time of Jesus' arrest to his appearance to the apostles than Matthew (perhaps through Joanna, cf. Luke 8:3 and 24:10, or Manaen at Antioch, Acts 13:1). Luke also shows a good knowledge of the general topography and distances in Palestine both north of Jerusalem and west to Azotus and Gaza.

Acts places him in Philippi in 50 and early 58, in Jerusalem and Caesarea in late 58 and 60, and travelling to Rome in 62, but he may have had only short times in Rome (cf. Colossians 4:14 Philemon 24 and 2 Timothy, 4:11, especially if Timothy responded quickly to Paul's plea in 4:9). The Greek text of the Anti-Marcionite prologue to Luke tells us that Luke wrote his Gospel in Achaia (dying much later in Thebes in Boeotia).

²⁴ The fall of Jerusalem is described in terms which seem derived from Old Testament models, rather than from any historical knowledge after the event (cf. C. H. Dodd,

the implication that the doctrine of the virgin birth may have become well-established in Christian catechesis at a much earlier date than is commonly supposed.

As to St. John's Gospel, it suggests more knowledge of the virgin birth than appears upon the surface. The predominant reading of John 1:12–13 in all the manuscripts which have come down to us is “but to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will from the flesh nor of the will of a male human being [in the genitive, *andros* from *aner*: “male human being”], but of God,” the “who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of a male human being, but of God” being taken to refer to those who become children of God. In this reading, the specification “not of the will of a male human being” seems oddly irrelevant, an irrelevancy disguised by the common translation “not of man” construed as meaning not of a human being (*anthropos*) as if the Greek had used the generic term for “man,” *anthropos*, whereas in fact it uses the specifically male term, *aner*. However, Tertullian had a reading of John 1:13 as saying “who was born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of a male human being, but of God,” making the whole relative clause refer to him who gave power to become children of God, rather than to the children themselves—a reading he shares with many other early Fathers from Irenaeus onwards, mostly relying upon Latin. This reading makes more sense of the male formation *andros*, although it is a reading found in no Greek manuscript. In this way the evidence is ambivalent.

Turning to 6:42, the verse after Jesus' assertion that he is the bread that came down from heaven, we read:

They were saying, “Is not this Jesus the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, ‘I have come down from heaven’?”

“The Fall of Jerusalem and the ‘Abomination of Desolation,’” *JRS* 37 (1947), 47–54; reprinted in his *More New Testament Studies* (Manchester: University Press, 1968), 69–83, and other references given in pp. 13–30, J. A. T. Robinson, *Redating the New Testament* (London: SCM, 1976), including those to Rengstorff and to S. Pedersen, in respect of Matthew 22:6f. which strangely refers to the burning of a city, but not of the temple, and Luke 21:20–24 which again mentions only the city, not the temple). And such dates explain the closeness of moral instruction in Matthew to that found in St. Paul (cf. C. H. Dodd, *New Testament Studies* [Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1953], essay 3, 53–66, no. 3, 53–66, “Matthew and Paul,” reprinted from 1947) as well as the apparent links between the ideas of Matthew 24 and II Thessalonians. Cf. n. 22.

Then in 7:25–27, we are told:

Some of the people of Jerusalem were saying, “Is not this the man whom they are trying to kill? Here he is, speaking openly, but they say nothing to him? Can it be that the authorities really know that this is the Messiah? Yet we know where this man is from; but when the Messiah comes no one will know where he is from.”

And in 7:41–42, we are told:

Others said “This is the Messiah.” But some asked, “Surely the Messiah does not come from Galilee, does he? Has not the scripture said that the Messiah is descended from David and comes from Bethlehem, the village where David lived?”

All these passages, along with the passage in 8:41 suggesting that Jesus was born of fornication, seem to be written in full consciousness of contemporary Jewish disagreements as to where the Messiah would come from and with an audience in view which is aware that Jesus was in fact born in Bethlehem, and in fact born of a virgin, written with the same irony as we find in John’s reference to Caiaphas as prophesying despite himself that “it was expedient that one man should die for the sake of the people, in order that the whole nation shall not perish” in John 11:49–52.

It is against this background that we should consider St. Paul. St. Paul speaks of Jesus as Son of David, implying kingship of Israel, something depending on David’s having ultimate legal paternity, and elsewhere of his having been “born of woman, conceived under the Law” (Galatians 4:4), which was vital to Jesus being born a Jew, both things of which Matthew and Luke are clearly conscious. For the rest, Paul’s preoccupation is always with Jesus’ crucifixion and Resurrection and their significance for our salvation. And, whether in the epistles or in his sermons in Acts, Paul never refers to Jesus’ baptism by John, but, when he thinks of Jesus as Son of God, this embraces his whole human existence as in Philippians, Colossians, and Ephesians, even though Acts 13:33 speaks of him as being begotten as Son of God at the Resurrection.

It should be recalled that, in the Church’s liturgy, the feasts associated with the birth and conception of Christ do not even begin to be established until, at earliest, late in the third century, and other feasts associated with the Virgin Mary only later, even though thinking of her as the second Eve was well established much earlier. Rather the whole of the Church’s year was centred around Good Friday and Easter with a period of preparation of up to seventy days before them, and the feasts of the Ascension and Pentecost after them. Yet at the very same time, it is undisputed that

belief in the virgin birth was established before A.D. 100, evident not only from the Gospels of Luke and Matthew but also from the epistles of Ignatius, and belief in the divinity of Christ in a sense implying his pre-existence before his conception is plain from Hebrews and all the Johannine works as well as all the second-century Fathers, although only Luke shows any interest in Jesus' early life.

John Henry Newman makes it particularly clear that any public and ecclesiastical recognition of the place of Mary in the economy of grace had to be reserved until after clarity was achieved as to the divinity of Jesus,²⁵ and therefore reserved for the fifth century when preserving the doctrine of Jesus' true divinity led the Council of Ephesus in 431 to insist on the appropriateness of describing Mary as *theotokos* ("God-bearer"), Mother of God, against Nestorius who refused to allow Mary to be referred to by this title in A.D. 428. At each stage in the development of Christian doctrine, the primary truths have to be better understood and made clear before public proclamation and clarification can be made in regard to the subordinate ones, and sometimes it is only the clarification of the primary truths which forces Christians to give full recognition to the secondary ones.

Epiphanius of Judea, Bishop of Salamis in Cyprus (c. 310–403), in his *Panarion* written between A.D. 374 and 377, felt himself obliged to warn against treating Mary as a goddess to be offered sacrifices or *latreia*, regarding the practices of some sects as having pagan roots²⁶ or as able to play a role in the administration of the sacraments as if women could be priests. The danger of excesses in devotion to the Virgin Mary has always been something the Church has had to resist since early times.²⁷ In the same period Jerome defended the honouring (*honorare*) of Mary and the saints against the accusation that it involved importing paganism into the

²⁵ John Henry Newman, *The Development of Christian Doctrine*, 1878 edition (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989; 6th edition), 142–48, cf. 436 in respect of 423–36. A particularly striking instance of this is provided by consideration of the Church's teaching on the Eucharist. If Jesus was a mere man, or if it had not been by his Resurrection and Ascension and the work of the Holy Spirit that Jesus' divine presence could be made universally accessible and formative of Christian life and community, or if the ritual of taking bread and wine and their transformation into the body and blood of Christ could not be understood with reference to the Old Testament prefigurings in Israel's sacrifices, being freed from slavery and constituted one people, the Eucharist would appear to be mere cannibalism.

²⁶ Cf. the appendix below.

²⁷ Palmer, *Mary in the Documents of the Church*, 49, gives references to the early need to reprove excesses in such devotion, given evidence in the writings of Epiphanius, who had a Jewish origin southwest of Jerusalem, became a Christian monk in Egypt, returning to Judea to found his own monastery, and then Bishop of Salamis

churches, and Ambrose advocated her veneration (*venerare*), while both rejected adoring her with the adoration due to God alone,²⁸ and Augustine saw the need for words to distinguish the kinds of worship so that since his time in the West the word *latria* (from the Greek *latreia*) has been reserved for the worship of God alone and the word *dulia* (from the Greek *doulia*) used for the reverence due to Mary and the saints.²⁹ It was only after the clear limits set by Trinitarian doctrine had been established in 381 that there could be any freedom in any rich expressions of veneration towards the Virgin Mary, saints, and prophets.

Section 2: Reaching Clarity in Regard to Mary's Virginity and Sinlessness

Mary's Virginity Before and After the Birth of Jesus: The Relationship Between Jesus and Those Referred to as His "Brothers and Sisters"

One element in Catholic and Eastern Orthodox teaching about the Virgin Mary which is in no way a modern development, and historically well evidenced as established from the third century or earlier, but often ignored or rejected in modern thinking outside Catholic and Orthodox circles, is the tradition of her perpetual virginity, that is, that she was not only virgin in the conception of Jesus, but also remained virgin ever after. Moreover, this tradition dovetailed with the ideas of Mary as the new Eve and as having the role of being mother of all the faithful, the beloved disciple John with her at the foot of the Cross onwards being the first and representative of all those to follow.

Yet, in addition to modern radical doubts as to the central doctrines of Jesus' virgin conception and birth and the Incarnation itself, Mary's perpetual virginity and long-term role in the life of the Church, along with the rest of Catholic doctrine about Mary, have come to seem foreign to the common way of reading the New Testament. For, in this common reading, it is assumed that Jesus had brothers and sisters such as are referred to in

in Cyprus because of his learning and orthodoxy. Later, the writings of St. Louis-Marie Grignon de Montfort and St. Alphonsus Liguori offer much that has seemed excessive at least since 1950, and much Italian devotion has seemed alien to the English since the nineteenth century. More substantially, the Church has had to condemn portrayals of Mary as if she shared in the ministerial priesthood, an idea Epiphanius was concerned to condemn and implied today when she is pictured wearing a stole.

²⁸ Cf. Stephen Shoemaker, "Epiphanius of Salamis, the Kollyridians, and the Early Dormition Narratives: The Cult of the Virgin in the Fourth Century," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 16 (2008): 378.

²⁹ Cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* II-II, q. 103, a. 3.

Mark, Matthew, and Luke, and appearing in St. John and Acts as Jesus' brethren, including above all James, whom St. Paul speaks of as the brother of the Lord. And it is taken for granted that these were all children of Joseph and, following the modern way of thinking spoken of earlier, also children of Mary.

In the attitude of both non-Christians and many Protestants today, therefore, all these elements of Catholic teaching about Mary appear not so much ill-supported as far-fetched.

Amongst many recent Protestants, we find an attitude whereby Mary's role in the Incarnation is simply as an obedient human biological instrument in the bearing, birth, nurturing, and upbringing of Jesus, and as having no further role in relation to man's salvation beyond being an instrument in fulfilling these tasks. Accordingly, after bearing Jesus, she could be allotted by God to other duties, for example, those of bearing, giving birth, nurturing a whole brood of other children, four sons and at least two daughters. And from her point of view, rather than having her whole vocation and life centred on the conception, birth, and care of Jesus, she could turn aside to a "normal" life as wife of Joseph, bearing him children, as it were half-brothers and half-sisters to Jesus. Yet Rahner rightly argues, it is quite wrong to treat Mary's role as mother of the Son of God as merely biological, rather than as something personal, and, as personal, embracing the motherhood of a divine person.³⁰

But today, it is thought that companionship and the use of sex to express love as well as to bear children is part of the norm of human life and especially of marriage, so surely it might seem natural that, after Mary had done her job in bearing and caring for Jesus, she should fulfil the role of a normal married woman in relation to Joseph and a whole large natural family.

Against this, there has always been a feeling amongst all Christians which gives some Evangelicals (followers of the Reformed tradition) cause to pause. To most Christians through the ages, for what some consider good and some consider some bad reasons, it has been felt incredible that a person who had consented to allow her womb to bear the Son of God should treat this as a temporary thing, a physical job or natural task to be got over and done with, so that once out of the way, other physical jobs might be taken on and attachments of a normal marital character lead to their normal marital consequence in the having of other children, in this case by Joseph. And this has been felt, even independently of reflection on Mary's earthly role as spiritual instructor of Jesus, and quite apart from her long-term role of being spiritual mother of all the faithful whereby, just as

³⁰ Karl Rahner, "The Immaculate Conception," in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 1, 201–13, at 203f.

Jesus was weaned from earthly attachment, so she was also ultimately to be so weaned as to give, for example, more attachment to John *qua* spiritual son than to James *qua* son in the family.

Whatever else is said, it is clear that the descriptions “brother” and “sister” in both Hebrew and New Testament Greek can cover many different relationships, not only that of full blood brother, but of half-brother or sister, foster-brother or sister, cousin and or other close relative.

However, more particularly, in the Gospels themselves there is clear enough evidence that the brothers and sisters referred to are not blood-brothers of Jesus.

In listing some of the women who had come down from Galilee and witnessed the crucifixion, Mark (15:40) includes a Mary whom he describes as “the mother of James the less and of Joses,” two of the names he gives as names of brothers of Jesus in 6:3 in connection with a visit of Jesus to Nazareth, and in 16:1 lists the same Mary simply as “mother of James” as amongst the women who went to Jesus’ tomb to anoint his body with spices and saw the young person who told them that Jesus had risen from the dead. The same Mary is referred to by Matthew in the same context of watching the crucifixion as Mary mother of James and Joseph, using the more common Jewish name Joseph, and Matthew uses the same names in this changed form, James and Joseph, in listing brothers of Jesus in 13:55 in connection with the visit to Nazareth already spoken of by Mark in 6:3.³¹

Luke’s Gospel, like Mark and Matthew, lists “Mary mother of James” as one of those visiting the tomb, but never mentions any Joses or Joseph as amongst the “brethren of Jesus,” and the natural presumption is that Luke takes himself to be referring to the mother of the only James who has any significance for the history he tells in his Gospel and in the book of Acts, the history of Jesus’ progress from Nazareth to Jerusalem and the gospel’s progress from Jerusalem to Rome. This was the James so prominent as head of the Church in Jerusalem in Acts 12:8, 15, and 21, mentioned as one of the “pillars” of the church by Paul in Galatians 1 and 2 and with his name encapsulated within the traditional formula passed on to St. Paul as particular witness to Jesus’ Resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:7). Luke will have taken this James to be one of the brethren of Jesus referred to when he speaks of “the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, together with his brethren” (Acts 1:14) as being together with the eleven remaining original apostles in the period leading up to Pentecost and at Pentecost.

³¹ The Mary spoken of as watching the crucifixion in Mark appears as “Mary the mother of James” in Mark 16:1, and “the other Mary” in Matthew 28:1, in the context of listing the women who went to the tomb.

In all these contexts, it would be extraordinary if any Mary should be referred to as the mother of the James later so prominent in the Jerusalem Church if she was in fact the mother of Jesus. Elsewhere, from Eusebius's citations from Hegesippus, a second-century exile from Palestine, arriving in Rome after 154 and writing after 174, we learn that Clopas was brother of Joseph and father of the Simeon who succeeded James as bishop of Jerusalem in A.D. 62, and in both Mark and Matthew a "Simon" appears in the list of four brothers of Jesus, the fourth being Judas (presumably the Jude who wrote the epistle in his name). It is impossible that these four can all be brothers because of the way Hegesippus explains the relations between James and Symeon: "After the martyrdom of James the Just on the same charge as the Lord, his uncle's child Symeon the son of Clopas is next made bishop, who was put forward by all as the second in succession being cousin of Lord."³² It is in the utmost implausible that a brother of James should be referred to as his "his uncle's child," and so it would appear that of the four listed brothers only James, Joses (Joseph), and Judas (Jude) would be full brothers to each other, and Simon (Simeon) a younger cousin dying about A.D. 107. We now have the problem of the parentage of the three, who appear to be children of the Mary who is spoken of as mother of James and Joses (Joseph).

Now, when John's Gospel comes to list the women present at the crucifixion, he lists Jesus' mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene (19:25).³³ We should now consider St. John's list of women standing near the cross, and the likely interpretation that four women are listed, "his mother's sister" being distinct from "Mary the wife of Clopas," and the expression referring to his mother's sister-in-law, since otherwise we would have two Mary's as full sisters. This leads one to envisage a sister of Joseph and Clopas as being Mary the mother of James and Joses (Joseph), along with Judas (Jude).³³ And in the only recently established very small community at Nazareth at the time, it would be natural for Joseph, this sister Mary with her sons James, Joses, and Jude, and their younger brother Clopas and his son Simon, to live in

³² Hegesippus as quoted by Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiae*, IV, 22, PL 20, 380, cf. *Historia Ecclesiae*, III, 11 (I give an adapted translation).

³³ The Syriac Peshitta version of the New Testament from the beginning of the fifth century, based on Old Syriac versions going back to the second century, inserts a conjunction in John 19:25, saying "his mother and his mothers sister, and Mary of Cleophas and Mary Magdalene," a suggestion confirmed by inspection of the Jerusalem Syriac lectionary, vide J. B. Lightfoot, "The Brethren of the Lord," Dissertation II, published with *St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians* (London: Macmillan, 1887), 264 and 264 n. 1. This confirms the theory of John McHugh, *The Mother of Jesus in the New Testament* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1975), 244–49.

one household, along with the daughters of Mary mother of James or of Clopas father of Simon.³⁴ There is nothing incredible in the idea of there being so many Mary's in the Gospels, since Miriam was one of the most common Jewish names of the time, being the name of Moses's sister, just as we find many with the name James (Jakob) and Judas.

And, if Joseph had died, it would be especially natural for Jesus as heir of Joseph to live in one household or closely associated households with his mother and with Clopas and his wife and four sons and their sisters (in early tradition two sisters), particularly natural within the community which constituted Nazareth which was at the time only a very small settlement.

In the second half of the second century, the apocryphal *Protoevangelium of James* was written, one of the many non-historical works of pious imagination produced at that time. This presented an account in which Joseph had had other children by an earlier wife, and became a widower before becoming betrothed to Mary, who then gave him Jesus as a further legal son, and this theory was later accepted by Clement of Alexandria,³⁵ Origen, Hilary of Poitiers, and many other Eastern writers, while rejected outright by St. Jerome. This theory incurs the decisive disadvantage that it would have made James the legal heir to Joseph, and therefore also to David, and therefore undermined the many arguments in the Gospels and St. Paul, which depend on regarding Jesus as heir of David.

Jerome's rival theory goes in for a grand simplification in which there are taken to be only two James's referred to in the New Testament: James the son of Zebedee, brother of John, and James referred to as "brother of the Lord," whom he identified with "James son of Alphaeus," listed as one of the twelve apostles who went about with Jesus in his ministry, then iden-

³⁴ This conforms to the general picture of a large household given by Epiphanius, who gives as his general authority "the traditions of the Jews." J. B. Lightfoot, "The Brethren of the Lord," 285–86 (his references all come from Petavius's 1644–1650 text), summarised this picture as of a household headed by Joseph as being old when the virgin was espoused to him, and with his former wife having six children, four sons and two daughters Mary and Salome, the sons, St. James especially, being "called the Lord's brethren because they were brought up with Jesus." Epiphanius is described as saying that "the mother of the Lord remained ever a virgin; as the lioness is said to exhaust her fertility in the production of a single offspring [Herodotus, III, 108], so she who bore the lion of Judah could not in the nature of things become a mother a second time," and as very jealous for Joseph's honour.

³⁵ Clement in the *Stromata* in fragments preserved by Cassiodorus, 2 (*The Antenicene Fathers*, II, 573, reproducing John Potter's translation of 1715), cf J. B. Lightfoot, "The Brethren of the Lord," 279–80). In his *Commentary on Matthew*, Origen cites Clement, and the later writers follow him like sheep until the questioning of Jerome.

tifying Alphaeus with Clopas brother of Joseph.³⁶ However, it is incredible that any of the twelve who accompanied Jesus in his Galilean ministry should have been one of the brethren of Jesus, since all four Gospels make it clear that Jesus deliberately distanced himself from his family, and they were at a distance from him until the last week before the crucifixion—the picture found in Mark and Matthew being confirmed in St. John's Gospel.³⁷ In 1 Corinthians 15, when St. Paul is listing the first male witnesses of the resurrection of Jesus, he says: "I handed on to you the facts which have been imparted to me; that Christ died for our sins in accordance to the Scriptures: that he was buried, that he was raised to life on the third day, and that he appeared to Cephas [Peter], and afterwards to the twelve. Then he appeared to over five hundred of our brothers at once, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. Then he appeared to James and then afterwards to all of the apostles." We should see this appearance of Jesus to James after the Resurrection, the eldest of those "brethren" of Jesus who rejected or doubted Jesus' claims (Mark 6 and John 7), as involving a radical turning on the part of James, a turning more analogous

³⁶ Richard Bauckham gives clear argument concurring with the identification of Clopas in John with Cleophas in Luke made by J. B. Lightfoot in his "The Brethren of the Lord", 267 and 267 n. 1, and insisting that Alphaeus and Cleophas must refer to different people in his *Jude and the Relatives of Jesus in the Early Church* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1990), 17–18.

³⁷ Eastern Christendom has always kept the feasts of three separate James's, and never been tempted by Jerome's extra over-simplification. In theory the name Clopas might be reported in the guise of Alphaeus. But Jerome's whole theory ignores the fact that James (Jakob) along with Judas were perhaps the two most common male names in the time of Jesus. It is particularly incredible that James of Alphaeus, so inconspicuous amongst the twelve as to appear only ninth in Mark's list of the twelve and not mentioned as in any special family connection with Jesus, should be the one referred to elsewhere as the James who stood first amongst those referred to as brethren of Jesus and became head of the church in Jerusalem after the twelve apostles had scattered on different missions.

The Western Church has made a similar ill-justified simplification in identifying the Jude listed as amongst the four brethren of Jesus with the Judas listed alongside Judas Iscariot as amongst Jesus' twelve apostles. Thus, in Luke's list of the twelve apostles in Luke 6:14–16 (repeated in Acts with the omission of Judas Iscariot who betrayed Jesus), we find a Judas son of James listed in the eleventh place, referred to in John's Gospel as "Judas, not Iscariot," more likely son of some further James than brother of any James we know of from any other source, corresponding to Thaddaeus in the lists of Mark and Matthew (some manuscripts of Mark give the name Lebbaeus), a Thaddaeus associated with some of the same missions as Judas Thomas in later tradition. This apostle Judas, one of Jesus' closest companions during his ministry, is most unlikely to be of the family of Jesus, portrayed as distant from Jesus during his lifetime.

to the conversion of Paul on the road to Damascus than the recovery of Peter involved in Jesus' appearance to the repentant Peter, listed by Paul as the first male witness of Jesus' Resurrection. Jerome does not seem to have registered that such names as James (Jacob) and Judas (Jude) were the most popular male names in first-century Israel, associated with the ancestral Jacob and his fourth son Judah and after the latter Judas Maccabeus, the hero who freed the Jews from Greek rule. If Thomas (meaning "twin") was also named Judas, as later accounts of the missions of an apostle called Judas Thomas suggest, then there were three Judas's amongst the apostles.

The third theory is the one which modern writers so often take for granted, namely that those referred to as the brothers and sisters of Jesus were children of Joseph and Mary, the mother of Jesus, after Jesus was born, but is hardly traceable at all amongst early Christian writers. Although it is the view held by Tertullian, and apparently popular amongst the Montanists, we do not hear of it again until, about A.D. 383, Jerome takes time to refute it, referring to it as the theory of somebody called Helvidius, of whom all we know is that he wrote later than A.D. 300 since he quotes the lost commentary on Matthew by Victorinus of Pettau writing at that time. The theory appeared to Jerome and other writers of his time to constitute an unseemly novelty, and, unlike the *Protoevangelium* theory, was condemned as heretical.³⁸ It was rejected because of complete lack of evidence either in Scripture or in tradition from Palestine, for example, such tradition as is witnessed to by Hegesippus shortly after the exclusion of Jews from Jerusalem by Hadrian. It also ran contrary to the early tendency to think of Mary as the new Eve, both Justin and Irenaeus like the much earlier Ignatius beginning with the thought of Mary as virgin, followed by the thought of her as, after the death of Jesus, primarily the mother of all the faithful beginning with the beloved disciple John.

In sum, there is no evidence either in Scripture or in tradition of Mary having any children other than Jesus, and from early times, when Mary is spoken of as the Virgin Mary, this is understood in such a way as to imply not just that she was virgin at the time of bearing Jesus, but remained a virgin ever after.

³⁸ Two followers of Helvidius, Jovinianus of Milan and Bonosus, Bishop of Sardica, were condemned by synods respectively at Rome and Milan about A.D. 390, and at Capua in A.D. 392, J. B. Lightfoot, "The Brethren of the Lord," 286. The background of the error seems to lie in Tertullian's inability to understand that a person could have an opened hymen (perhaps to be closed over) while continuing to exclude intercourse with anybody, could count as fully morally a virgin, as if physical integrity and the virtue of moral virginity were the same, a distinction which Jerome seems to have been the first to understand (Gambero, *Mary and the Fathers of the Church*, 208–9). This topic requires a separate essay.

Mary's Sinlessness: The Slow Removal of Doubts and Obscurities

It is the idea of the weaning from particular non-spiritual attachments, shared with Jesus, and implying virginity, not by privation, but by completeness of attention to the exercise of her spiritual role, as Mother of the faithful, which alone explains the dogmatic status of the doctrine of Mary's perpetual virginity. We may note that this doctrine is quite unvarying (except for the Helvidian heresy) in the ancient Church and in Catholic and Orthodox Church teaching. The daughter of Zion, the culminating representative of the remnant of Israel, after bringing Jesus up and after his foster brothers had joined his disciples, has none of the work of Martha left. She leads Israel after Jesus in being weaned from earthly attachment—her attachment is to nothing earthly as alongside God, and to his followers only as for him, as to be made like him, and for his sake. And it appears very likely that it is to Mary the mother of Jesus, not Mary Magdalene, that the heretical documents of the second and third centuries most usually ascribe the title “apostle to the apostles.”³⁹

There is no sentimentality in Catholic *doctrine* in regard of Mary (though there may be a sentimentality to be purged from some *practice*). As a pattern for Christians, her heart is pierced (Luke 2:35), as her weaning from earthly priorities is completed in this kind of consent to the crucifixion. In the Rosary she accompanies her fellow-Christians in contemplating five sorrowful mysteries: Gethsemane, the scourging, the crowning with thorns, the carrying of the Cross, the crucifixion. The weaning of Mary from earthly priorities is well expounded in Augustine, Ambrose, and Jerome.⁴⁰

An Early Development and Its Later Unfolding: The Sinlessness of Mary and the Doctrine of the Immaculate Conception

Such is the background against which we must see the doctrine of Mary's freedom from sin. The way of God's working in respect of man is never to impose, but always first to raise up the desire for, and then the consent to, what he does for man, when this is outside human power and is not a human act or not a human act alone. In this way, over a long history, he prepared the Jewish people so that the whole Jewish people so far as it is faithful (the true daughter of Zion) can be conceived of under the image of being the Virgin Mother of the Messiah; and Mary, in expressing her consent, was expressing the consent of the Jewish people and she was acting

³⁹ Stephen J. Shoemaker, “Rethinking the ‘Gnostic Mary’: Mary of Nazareth and Mary of Magdala in Early Christian Tradition,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 9 (Winter 2001): 555–95.

⁴⁰ Cf. n. 11 above.

as the representative of that people. The most strikingly explicit expression of her acting in this role is in her song, the Magnificat, in Luke 1:46–55.

My soul magnifies the Lord
 and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,
 for he has regarded the low estate of his handmaiden.
 For, behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed;
 for he who is mighty has done great things for me,
 and holy is his name.
 And his mercy is on those who fear him from generation to generation.
 He has shown strength with his arm,
 he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts,
 he has put down the mighty from their thrones,
 and exalted those of low degree;
 he has filled the hungry with good things,
 and the rich he has sent empty away.
 He has helped his servant Israel,
 in remembrance of his mercy,
 as he spoke to our fathers,
 to Abraham and to his posterity for ever.

Further, she is in respect of her consent expressing and representing the consent of the whole human race. Indeed, this is ever the role of Israel: to be faithful and to live and act in ways that are on behalf of the whole human race. In small parallel to this, it can be significant that, in a town or place set in its ways against God, there may be a praying group, so that God's grace towards the wider society, his ever-renewed movements of grace towards this society, are not arbitrary impositions *ab extra*. That is, in the context of human solidarity and community (that is, community that exists *de facto* by being human beings together, not as a result of any voluntary agreement) in virtue of the existence of such a praying group, what he does is not imposed but is with some consent. Thus prayer in general exists on behalf of the whole human race: but the prayer and life of Israel, the old Israel as well as the new, on behalf of the world is appointed and secured as an explicitly revealed and still guaranteed part of this.

The primary doctrine to be considered is that of the sinlessness of Mary. This has been enshrined in Catholic and Eastern traditions from very early times, as a development of the conception of Mary in the role of a new Eve to be found in Justin and Irenaeus, finding its most lyrical expression in the poetry and writings of the Syriac fourth-century Father, Ephraem Syrus, and more sober statements in Augustine and other Western Fathers.

The doctrine enshrines the understanding that the crucial key consent—the only consent absolutely key to our salvation (a consent without reserve

or blemish)—was entirely the work of God, the perfect consent of a whole personality, with no element of her personality not behind and within this consent. This perfect consent to being mother and bearer of God, extending in Catholic understanding to consent to being free from sin only in virtue of the death of her son, was enclosed within one and the same decree of predestination as the Incarnation for man's redemption itself.⁴¹ Against this idea somebody might argue that the identity of Jesus consisted in his being eternal Son of God, and would therefore have been independent of whether God willed that he take human nature and flesh from the Virgin Mary, a Jewess born not long after the beginning of the reign of the Emperor Augustus, and whose identity was fixed by her precise conditions of ancestry, or whether from some other woman of different race or time. However, in reply one can and should answer that it was by God's choice that Jesus was born a Jew, and, before that, that by God's choice this people, the Jews, should have been formed and shaped by him in preparation precisely for this, so that we cannot make Jesus into anything else than a Jew, born at that time. It is no use picturing him as a new Apollo, Hercules, or Alexander, or as a German in the manner Hitler and some of his precursors⁴² sought to invent, or as some black Apollo or Asiatic Hercules—by God's choice he has been given to us as a Jew of the first century of the Roman empire, and we have no freedom to make him into something else of our own desiring.⁴³

The suddenness with which the announcement of the doctrine of Mary's Immaculate Conception fell upon an already largely secularized post-Reformation and Enlightenment world in 1854 made it appear a novelty, and an occasion for scandal and derision, as if the Church played

⁴¹ Cf. Karl Rahner, "The Immaculate Conception," 209–11.

⁴² For example, Houston Stewart Chamberlain (1855–1927), writing in Germany, said that "true history begins from the moment when the German with mighty hand seizes the inheritance of antiquity" and "whoever maintains that Christ was a Jew he is either ignorant or dishonest" (1899).

⁴³ Cardinal Lustiger in his *La Choix de Dieu* of 1987, translated as *Choosing God—Chosen by God* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1991), makes this point particularly strongly in his chapter 3, on pages 64 ff, 68 ff and 71–73, where he comes to see Hitler's anti-semitism as rooted in the anti-semitism of Voltaire and the Enlightenment, and the eighteenth century as a time when inheritors of Christian culture began to reject the idea of Christianity as having Jewish roots, of Jesus given to us as a Jew, not by our choice but by God's. He sums up this part of his discussion by saying: "[A]theism cannot accept that the Jew is the figure of the Absolute present in a contingent revelation, in the specificity of history. Whereas Christianity speaks of the humiliated Messiah, Maurras speaks of 'Jewish venom' that the church spread in spite of the Roman Empire. That is also what Hitler said, and the Stalinists: one must be wary of the Jews—just as one must be wary of

music while the world burnt. Yet it was nothing but the long delayed promulgation in the Western Church of what had always been certain in the Eastern Church, delayed for, from a secular point of view, technical theological reasons in the West. The witness of the Eastern Church has been unswerving, seen in typical expression in the presence of the Theotokos-hymn at the heart of the Byzantine liturgy: "It is truly proper to glorify you, who have borne God, the ever-blessed and immaculate and the Mother of our God. More honorable than the Cherubim and beyond compare more glorious than the Seraphim, who, a Virgin, gave birth to God the Word, you, truly the Mother of God, we magnify." The doctrine itself is a corollary of what was involved in Mary's full consent to be mother of a divine son, her role as the second Eve, by God freed from sin for her full participation in this role. For one should dismiss some of the entirely facetious arguments which are sometimes put forward against the doctrine of Mary's Immaculate Conception. For instance, it is suggested that, if Mary needs to be sinless in order to have a sinless son, then her parents would need to be sinless also, and so on *ad infinitum*. But such an idea is absent from Catholic and Orthodox thought. Her freedom from sin has nothing to do with the problem as to how she could be the mother of a sinless son, but rather with how she could *by a perfect consent* be the mother of God (Jesus being sinless is a somewhat subsidiary derivative of his being God).

The appearance that Catholic doctrine went further than Eastern Orthodox doctrine in its insistence on belief in the Immaculate Conception was superficial. The differences between the two traditions seem to have arisen partly because the Eastern Church, which never doubted that Mary was sinless and free of blemish, also never had to deal with Pelagius, and was therefore less troubled by the problem of what they called "ancestral sin," and felt less need to make any explicit statement about freedom from original as well as actual sin, the distinction which led to the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception as a rounding off of the statement of Mary's sinlessness, making it clear that this sinlessness depended on Christ's merits and saving work.⁴⁴

Jaroslav Pelikan also attributes the differences between the East and West to the tendency in the West to explain the transmission of original

Christians. Atheism cannot tolerate the particular presence of the Absolute in history. The only absolute it can admit is in men's hands. For the atheists, the Jew will never be reliable unless he, in turn, declares himself to be an atheist" (72–73).

⁴⁴ In *Mary in the Documents of the Church*, Paul F. Palmer conveniently collects relevant texts on pages 33f, 74–77, including Augustine, *On Nature and Grace*, 36 [42] (CSEL, 60, 263–64), Sixtus IV, Constitutions *Cum praeexcelsa*, 1476 (DB, 734) and *Grave Nimis*, 1483 (DB, 737), and Council of Trent, Session V (DB, 791), Canon

sin by some sinfulness (albeit venial) in the desires associated even with fruitful intercourse in accord with God's will, an idea he traces to Ambrose and Augustine, followed by St. Bernard. In opposition to St. Bernard, it seemed evident to Eadmer of Canterbury, companion and biographer of Anselm, and to Duns Scotus, that Mary must have been entirely free from original sin even at her conception, according to the reasoning that what God could have done and it was fitting that he should have done, he must have in fact done.

However, although St. Thomas alludes to the text "in sin my mother conceived me," he offers an argument independent of it, namely that Mary had to be under the domain of sin for at least some time in order to count amongst those redeemed from sin. And to the followers of St. Thomas, *a priori* reasoning as to what God could have done and must have done seemed improper or inadequate. Just as St. Thomas and his followers rejected any attempt to prove the doctrine of the Trinity *a priori*,⁴⁵ so they were not satisfied with the argument from fittingness, even though it had enormous popular following, reflected in the (non-authoritative) late 1429 affirmation of the Immaculate Conception by the Council of Basle. Out of respect for the parties concerned in these disputes, the constitutions of Sixtus IV in 1476, while recommending the celebration of the wondrous conception of the Virgin, simply ordered that neither those who asserted that she was conceived in sin nor those who denied it were to be accused of mortal sin.

St. Augustine had been less reticent, saying: "We must make an exception of the Holy Virgin Mary in regard to whom, out of honour to the Lord, I do not propose to have a single question raised on the subject of sin, for from him we know what abundance for overcoming sin in every particular [*ad vincendum omni ex parte peccatum*] was conferred on her who merited to conceive and bring forth Him who all admit was without sin." He then goes on to make clear that, with this exception of the Virgin, all holy men and women would admit that "if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us."⁴⁶ In echo of this,

23, Session VI, 1547 (DB, 811), saying that its decrees on original sin are not intended to extend to Mary and that the constitutions of Sixtus IV are still to be followed, as well as describing her place in the Byzantine Church Liturgy, (Palmer, *Mary*, 53–57, 61–63).

⁴⁵ Cf. Gilles Emery, *The Trinitarian Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) (translated by Francesca Aran Murphy from Editions du Cerf [Paris, 2004]), 22–26. In a parallel way, St. Thomas held that the only reason for the Incarnation that we know of is that man should be redeemed from sin, thereby rejecting any *a priori* argument for the Incarnation.

⁴⁶ St. Augustine, *On Nature and Grace*, chap. 42 (chap. 36 in a more compact numbering). In the Migne, Augustine, *Enarratio in psalmum* 34, serm. 2, n. 3 (PL 36, 335),

the Council of Trent condemned all those who say that “a man once justified . . . can through the whole of life avoid all sins, even venial sins, without a special privilege of God, as the Church holds to have been the case with the blessed Virgin” (Session VI, Canon 23, in 1547), after earlier saying that “it did not intend to include in this decree [on original sin] the blessed and immaculate Virgin Mary, mother of God”⁴⁷—yet at the same time approving the decrees of Sixtus IV with their reticence, even though by the end of the fifteenth century the doctrine was almost universally held and taught in the West.

All the workings of grace previous to the Incarnation involve grace given in anticipation of the merits of Jesus Christ—not by right of inheritance, nor by any kind of congruity, but by sheer gift,⁴⁸ just as later the children of the faithful are freed from original sin in baptism, or, in the case of the innocents of Bethlehem and with them many others before their dying, perhaps only immediately before it. In Catholic theological understanding, being freed from original sin, which those Christians who believe in original sin have always held to have taken place already whenever there is any supernatural act of love towards God in response to him, as its pre-condition and constitutive basis, and so often to have long preceded baptism. To be kept altogether free from original sin, in the circumstances of descent from Adam, represents a more complete redemption from it, not the absence of need of redemption, the most complete redemption involving being free of original sin from the first moment of existence.

The medievals regarded being freed from original sin as taking place in Jeremiah (Jer 1:5b) and in John the Baptist (“the babe leapt in my womb for joy,” Luke 1:44) at the time of their first movement in the womb (quickenings), and to have taken place as a precondition of and constitutive element in their friendship with God in all Old Testament figures (Abraham, Moses, all the prophets, etc.), and indeed a constitutive element in friendship with God in anyone before the time of the Incarnation, or anyone without knowledge of the Incarnation—always a pre-condition of being able to make any act of love towards God or do anything towards others out of love for God, whether this love be conscious or unconscious.

the text suggests that Mary died on account of sin, without specifying that it was on account of sin in her, while a Louvain manuscript used by Erasmus specifies that it was on account of Adam’s sin, and four other texts, one of A.D. 700, indicate her biological relations to Adam and to Christ, not stating either that she died on account of sin, or even that she died at all.

⁴⁷ Council of Trent, Session V, *Decree on Original Sin*, 6.

⁴⁸ Cf. Karl Rahner, “The Immaculate Conception,” 207–8.

In every case it has been understood as a free grace given in anticipation of Christ's merits or work.

Accordingly, in the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, this event, of being freed from original sin, is merely being asserted in the case of the Virgin Mary to have taken place earlier, from the first moment of her existence. She, like all others, Christ alone apart, was in need of redemption, of rescue from original sin. The difference in her case is then only this, that the extension of friendship to the human race which the work of Christ makes possible despite man's sin, in her case took place at the very moment of her coming to be—extended even before that work had taken place but still only dependently upon it and in anticipation of it. In this way, she appears, not as not needing redemption, but as most perfectly redeemed.⁴⁹

Understood in this way, there was no longer any obstacle to Pius IX's defining the doctrine in 1854. It had already been somewhat anticipated when Alexander VII spoke of Mary's soul being preserved free from original sin from the moment of its creation and infusion into the body as the basis of the solemn celebration of her conception in *Sollicitudo Omnium* of 1661, and in 1690 Alexander VIII declared it an error to regard her "purification" (Luke 2:22–24) as a purification from original sin.⁵⁰

If one asks what this insistence on Mary's sinlessness and with this on her Immaculate Conception enshrines, one's answer should be this, that these doctrines, especially the latter, constitute the consummation, the end-point, the extreme in the assertion of the doctrine of prevenient grace. God secures perfection in the preparation for his saving action at key points and in key respects: but even this preparation, and its perfection, is his work.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Rahner, "The Immaculate Conception," 206–7, 211–13.

⁵⁰ It is now more generally realized that many purifications and washings follow the use of some person or some part of the body for sacred use, and his or her or its restoration to its normal range of duties, as when the hands are washed after the scroll of one of the books of the Hebrew Bible has been handled.

⁵¹ In saying that the perfection even in the preparation for the receiving of grace is God's work and not solely man's, we are taking up a position that maximizes the role of grace to the degree compatible with free will: as it were in the spectrum of Christian views, we are, within the range of Catholic views, taking up that position, associated with Dominicans more than Jesuits, which is closest to Calvin, maximizing the role, responsibility, and initiative of God so that grace is needed even in the acceptance of grace, that is, we are reaching out to a position which makes continued assertion of human freewill not contradictory but paradoxical in the context of an all embracing antecedent divine plan and fore-ordination, so that in this instance Mary's obedience, although a free act, remains fore-ordained, and a work of God. In this way the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception is perhaps the most embarrassing of all Catholic doctrines in the context of discussions of predestination, because it is one that makes it impossible for Catholics to adopt

The doctrine of the Immaculate Conception highlights that Mary is in no way the symbol of any supposed sufficiency; not in any way the symbol of some supposed sufficiency of human wisdom independent of Revelation, or of human freedom independent of grace, to secure the way, or to open the way, to the reception of the *life of grace*.⁵² Mary's obedience or right use of freedom depended on grace; in knowledge she depended on hearing the Word and keeping it, and the foundation of her whole life in grace was an act of God, which removed her from the inheritance of alienation from God, placing her in favour, grace, friendship with God, from the first moment of her existence, an act prior in time to any acts of her will or knowledge, prior in time to any act of virtue on her part—an act of God as necessary in her case as in ours, and no more in her power than in ours, differing in her case in that it was at the first moment of her existence whereas in ours it is typically at the time of baptism, or, in adults, at the time underlying (and usually with stages preceding) conversion or repentance.

This doctrine of the Immaculate Conception needs to be seen in the wider context of the doctrine of prevenient grace and the shared Eastern and Western understanding of Mary as first, with her consent, the mother of Christ, and, by her obedient consent, co-operator in the reversal of the effects of the disobedience of the first human beings, presented to us in Genesis in the account of Adam and Eve, so as to constitute a new Eve and mother of all the new living, that is of all the faithful. It is this context which makes the doctrine of Mary's being preserved entirely from sin, and with this the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, not just a *theologoumenon* but a matter for faith. As Augustine said, "He created the Mother he had chosen."⁵³

This is why this doctrine is not on a par with medieval speculations about Jeremiah and John the Baptist. True, the early redemption of holy

many of the easier or more obvious refutations of Calvin, or easier or more obvious ways of dealing with the problem of evil.

⁵² What is here involved is the state of sanctifying grace, in Scholastic textbooks, which is arguably the same as the grace of justification in Protestant preaching. One must distinguish between the fact of being in a state of grace, i.e. the fact of being justified—facts do not have degrees, they either obtain or do not obtain—and sanctifying grace or the grace of justification in that sense in which they may have degrees i.e. as there can be degrees in a certain sense of holiness amongst those who are all in the same state in respect of being holy or set apart, whether we speak of the state of sanctifying grace or the state of being justified. In either case (sanctifying grace in one terminology and the grace of justification in another) what is involved is the work of the Holy Spirit making us just, placing us in friendship with God and developing this friendship.

⁵³ Augustine, *Sermo* 69, 3, 4 (PL 32, 442), trans. Gambero, *Mary and the Fathers of the Church*, 219.

figures such as John the Baptist and Jeremiah, involving being freed from original sin at an early stage of the unfolding of their lives, may come into the whole of what those faithful to historical revelation believe. And, besides these cases, history by its nature includes many much more incidental matters. For, if there are prophets and apostles, they have to have names, and if there is to be a sacred history, then there must be details of it which while belonging to veridical history do not belong to the essential *credal* content of the faith or its implications. But the link between Mary's preparation for her part in our salvation and her perfect consent is of the much more intimate character I have stated.

*The Real Difficulty for People Today Lies in Lack
of Understanding of the Doctrine of Original Sin*

However, the main obstacle to belief in the doctrine of Mary's Immaculate Conception for modern man is his ceasing to believe, whether he be liberal Protestant or neo-modernist Catholic, in the doctrine of original sin at all, or, as the Eastern tradition describes it, "ancestral" sin. Yet, without belief in the doctrine of original sin there can be no sense in a doctrine of Immaculate Conception affirming that Mary was entirely free from it.

If the alienation from God which mankind knows is explained in terms of a corruption by human nurture or education, or in psychological existential terms applicable to a person only insofar as he or she is old enough to be capable of *Angst*, then there will be no inheriting of any original or ancestral sin, and therefore no inherited state of sin for men and women to be freed from—no inherited state of original sin for Mary, or for John the Baptist, Jeremiah, or other prophets or saints before Christ to be freed from, or for baptism to remove from Christians, or any state of original sin to be removed in any other stage from any other person. Rather, there would be only the corruption of nurture and education, the psychological sense of alienation or dividedness, and the disorder between reason and the passions, which are said by tradition to be effects of original sin, that is, consequences of a prior actual alienation from God. By contrast, according to the doctrine of original sin, community in this alienation is not accidental to the individual's situation, like these effects, but rather a datum underlying them—human community being preserved even despite sin, allowed by God for the sake of community in salvation, since community in salvation depends on Jesus' becoming member of this spiritual community, who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin (Heb 4:15).

Therefore, in this day and age, explaining the doctrine of Mary's Immaculate Conception requires some explanation of the doctrine of original sin.

Now, in order to make the doctrine of original sin intelligible, one has to understand that the human race as God made it has the essential character of a community in which what is done by one person affects all the others, and that this is true not only genetically, physically, and psychologically, but also spiritually. Therefore, when man first turned away from God, it was not just the turning away of the first human pair, the first human community, but something which affected all other human beings.

We therefore need to understand the nature of the human solidarity which had the consequence of our inheriting this initial state of sin.

The Church Fathers offered many unsatisfactory explanations of how the justice of God was compatible with maintaining the ancestrally rooted sinfulness of man, antecedent to men's individual decisions. For instance, many of the Fathers and later theologians supposed that a spiritual effect could be passed on by the semen (even though it was not within the power of the semen alone to generate the soul). Others suggested that the inheriting of sin was the result of there being some lustful desire in all human sexual intercourse even when this intercourse was rightful and the lustful desire venial, not involving the consent of the will to lust. In modern times, the suggestions of which Gabriel Daly⁵⁴ provides an example again contribute nothing to the general problem. Instead, these suggestions offer only re-statements of the consequences of this state of sin, the facts of man's being divided within himself and experiencing himself as thus divided and the facts of deep-seated social disorder and systematic disorder in nurture; without any explanation being given as to why man is conceived and born in such settings, or of why these conditions can be regarded as arising from a disordering state of sin rather than from immaturity and yet-to-be-completed development.

The beginnings of an explanation which does not draw on ideas of transmission of ancestral sin through the semen or of the effects of lust were offered by Emile Mersch in his *Theology of the Mystical Body*⁵⁵ written before his premature death in 1940. Some metaphysical solidarity amongst men, transcending the merely biological, social, and psychological, was a positive gift of God to the human race, and not removed from man as a result of man's sin, despite the fact that sin in one person would as a result of this solidarity involve a deprivation for all—not removed, because allowed by God in view of his intention to redeem man in solidarity. It is because the Son of God, himself the Word through whom all things are made and upheld in being, entered metaphysical solidarity with

⁵⁴ Gabriel Daly, "Theological Models in the Doctrine of Original Sin," *Heythrop Journal* 13 (1972), 121–42.

⁵⁵ Emile Mersch, *The Theology of the Mystical Body* (St. Louis, MO: 1951).

man in the very act of sharing his nature, and a personal solidarity in sharing man's deprived condition "as a slave" and liable to death, truly taking on human nature while remaining divine, that he is able to redeem us, and, in redeeming us, redeem us as a community or race rather than solely in a purely individual way. Thus, it was by God's entering into solidarity with man that man was made able to enter into solidarity with God.⁵⁶

Mersch did well to restore a better understanding of the human solidarity which had the consequence of our inheriting this initial state of sin. It is only because of this human solidarity that when the Son of God became man he did not just become some one individual man amongst a crowd of individual men and women, but entered into an already established solidarity of all mankind together.

The conception of original sin as being essentially a privation, a privation of a grace which ought to be there, and which, in God's actual plan or providence for creation (not for just any possible creation but for the actual creation he chose to institute) was as it were man's birthright as man, albeit a privation of a gift above nature—and not something positive destroying man's nature in its essence or reducing it to a state of total depravity—is something essential to Catholic and Orthodox doctrine.⁵⁷ The injuries associated with original sin (social and psychological) are effects rather than the essence of original sin, and do not remove the possibility of making some right use of reason and natural virtue as in the love of children and care of others. Rather, what these injuries do is deprive these actions of direction towards the ultimate end of all human beings, knowing and loving God with a knowledge and love above natural power. They injure nature's proper orientation, but do not destroy it or make it irredeemable.

It is the human predicament to be in a state of universal solidarity in provisional alienation from God. I call this state provisional because man's being within this state of alienation is within the context of an underlying and pre-existing will of God for the salvation of all man—for, although man is in a state of alienation, that is, cut off from supernatural friendship with God, he is not outside the sphere of God's goodwill and God's desire to renew that friendship. This state is one for which God is not to blame, not responsible. Yet it is not integral to human nature, but a state which need not have obtained and ought not to have come to obtain. It is only because it is a state for which God is not responsible and which ought not to be and need not have been, and is the expression or result of some exercise of human will, that it can be described as a state of sin. Because it is not integral to human nature, Jesus did not need to share it to be human,

⁵⁶ Cf. Athanasius, *De Incarnatione*, 54, 3.

⁵⁷ This is something made very clear in Newman's famous *Letter to Pusey*.

did not need to be alienated from God, in order to be human and to redeem man, and God could make the merely human Mary entirely free from it in order that her consent on our behalf should be with her whole being, her full consent from her very roots. And, because it is not integral to human nature, human beings do not cease to be human in the act of being redeemed, or in being freed from this state of sin.

The reason why God can still be just while allowing each human being to be conceived in a state of alienation from God, with the evil consequences flowing from this alienation (the disorders in nurture and disorders in the relation between reason and passions), and impute this to man as sin, is that it would have been a greater punishment on man to rob him of his spiritually communal nature. God allowed the Fall in order by this “happy fault,” and “needful sin” (*Liturgy for the Easter Vigil*) to bring us a yet greater redemption in a new community in grace, charity, and glory in Christ.

**Section 3: The Definition of the Doctrine of the Bodily
Assumption of Mary as a Dogma, Implicated in Revelation,
as Part of a More Complete Understanding of the Christian
Faith, and Not a Mere Theologoumenon**

Let me consider next the doctrine of the corporeal (that is, bodily) Assumption of the Virgin Mary. One can have much detailed argument about the time of origin and basis of this doctrine, just as one can have parallel arguments in respect of the time or origin of the doctrine of Mary’s sinlessness. The doctrine of her sinlessness seems clear in the second and third-century Fathers, as well as in St. Augustine, so far as actual sin is concerned; and the Eastern Orthodox have always been constant in insisting on her complete sinlessness, albeit in the context of absence in the East of any development of the doctrine of original sin or of any idea of its being the result of lust in the act of procreation. The question of the Immaculate Conception, that is of Mary’s being free from her conception even from original sin, only arose in a post-Augustinian context—that is, within the context of the Western response to Pelagianism, along with mistaken theories as to how original sin was transmitted.

The case of Mary’s bodily Assumption requires more elaborate consideration. Unlike the Immaculate Conception, her Assumption was never the subject of significant doctrinal dispute, and clearly held in both Eastern and Western tradition from before the eighth century. And, although many have regarded the Eastern tradition as viewing it as a *theologoumenon* rather than a matter of dogma (an attitude appearing in Luther), the East has always celebrated the feast with equal or greater solemnity, often using the term *koimēsis* (literally “falling asleep” or “dormition”), translated *tran-*

situs, as the title for the feast even when what is celebrated is her Assumption, not just her dormition or possible freedom from death.

However, whereas the doctrine of Mary's sinlessness is evidenced from at least the second century, the clear attestation of her Assumption waited until much later. Reticence is particularly expressed by Epiphanius, writing against people who alleged that Mary lived with St. John as wife rather than mother. He then continues as follows, reinforcing the point in a second passage:⁵⁸

Scripture is simply silent, because of the greatness of the prodigy, in order not to strike the mind of man with excessive wonder. As far as I am concerned, I dare not speak out, but I maintain a meditative silence. For you would find (in scripture) hardly any news about this holy and blessed woman of whom nothing is said concerning her death. Symeon says of her: and a sword shall pierce your soul . . . " (Lk 2:35). But elsewhere, in the *Apocalypse* of John, we read that "the dragon hurled himself at the woman who had given birth to a male child" but "the wings of an eagle were given to the woman and she flew into the desert, where the dragon could not reach her" (Rev 12:13–14). This could have happened in Mary's case.

But I dare not affirm this with absolute certainty, nor do I say that she remained untouched by death, nor can I confirm whether she died. . . . We do not know if she died or if she was buried; however she did not ever have carnal relations. Let this never be said!"

His second passage reads:

If the holy virgin is dead and has been buried, surely her dormition happened with great honour; her end was most pure and crowned by virginity. If she was slain according to what is written "a sword shall pierce your soul", then she obtained glory together with the martyrs, and her holy body from which light shone forth for all the world dwelled amongst those who enjoyed the repose of the blessed. Or she continued to live. For to God it is not impossible to do whatever he wills; on the other hand, no one knows exactly what her end was.

As to Epiphanius's silence, in the very next chapter of the *Panarion*, he states his view that Mary, like Elijah, was assumed into heaven in the body and did not die.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Epiphanius, *Panarion*, chapter 78, 11 and 23, in translation taken from Luigi Gambero, *Mary and the Fathers of the Church*, 125–26, cf. Epiphanius's earlier letter to Arabia.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, chapter 78, cf. his earlier letter to Arabia.

Epiphanius is the first of the Fathers known to surmise explicitly that the Woman, who with her male child along with the rest of her offspring are hunted by the dragon in the Apocalypse 12, represents Mary, but he thinks of it only in its individual significance for Mary, even while with other Eastern fathers honouring her as holy, *theotokos*,⁶⁰ Queen, Domina (“Lady” is too weak a translation),⁶¹ and virginal workshop of the Incarnation,⁶² and insisting on her perpetual virginity of which Origen had said “There is no child of Mary except Jesus, according to the belief of those who think correctly about her.”⁶³

Meantime, in his expression of ignorance as to the end of Mary’s life on earth, Epiphanius expressed an ignorance reflected in all the Patristic texts we have from before A.D. 500. Although the earliest and best attested site of her tomb is at the site near Gethsemane in the Valley of Jehosaphat close to the Basilica of the Agony, there was a late seventh century tradition of its being on Mount Zion, and a much later legend of her dying at Ephesus. However, there is no evidence of any interest in her remains or relics, perhaps because they were not expected to be found. There are no churches known to be particularly associated with Marian devotion in Jerusalem before around A.D. 450—such churches up till then were outside Jerusalem.

In this same period, Ambrose and Augustine introduced the idea of Mary as a type or exemplar of the Church, so that, as Mary conceived Christ as virgin and mother by the Holy Spirit, so the Church conceives its children as virgin and mother, and, inasmuch it is by Mary’s original openness to being virgin mother of Christ and her cooperation by charity that the Church is so able to conceive its children, she is thereby Mother of all the baptized,⁶⁴ or, as other Fathers say, Mother of all living.⁶⁵

⁶⁰ This description, encountered in the Egyptian papyrus mentioned earlier, is also found in Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catecheses* 10, 19 (PG 33, 685A), Gregory of Nyssa, *Letter* 3 (PG 46, 1024A), Gregory Nazianzen, *Letter* 101 (PG 37, 177C–180A), and in Proclus’s great sermon, *Oratio* 1, 1 and 10 (PG 56, 681A–B and 692B), which so provoked Nestorius (Gambero, *Mary and the Fathers of the Church*, 235), cf. Gambero’s discussion of Ambrose’s remarks on how even Arians use or rather misuse the term (Gambero, *Mary and the Fathers of the Church*, 235–36).

⁶¹ *Relatio Epiphani Ep. Constantin.* gives all these descriptions: PL LXII, 498 D.

⁶² Workshop (*ergastērion*): Epiphanius, *Ancoratus* 75 (PG 43, 157B–D), Basil of Caesarea, *On the Holy Generation of Christ* 3 (PG 31, 1464A), and see Gambero, *Mary and the Fathers of the Church*, 252–53 on Proclus.

⁶³ *Commentary on John* 1, 4 (PG 14, 32; GCS 10, 8–9).

⁶⁴ Firstly we have, Ambrose, *Expositio in Lucam*, 2, 7 (PL 15, 1555), in regard to Luke 1:26–27, in the only passage in Vatican II’s constitution *Lumen Gentium* to which Paul VI appealed in naming Mary Mother of the Church (Wikipedia misdirects us to other passages, *De Institutione Virginis* 98, PL 16, 328, and another from an author approaching ca. 859), with *De Institutione Virginis* 93, PL 16, 327, and *Expositio in*

At this stage, we see the beginning of two parallel and perhaps largely independent developments, which I describe in some detail in the appendix to this paper: firstly the building by the Orthodox of numerous churches as centres of devotion to Mary, firstly in Rome and Jerusalem and then elsewhere; and secondly the proliferation of widely available narratives of the dormition, copies of which survive, perhaps because no longer quickly destroyed because some had been pruned of heresy.

Moreover, as I show in the appendix, these narratives showed quite varied conceptions of "the heavens" and of "paradise," rendering any conception of an assumption into paradise ambiguous. Some order was brought into these varying ideas of the afterlife by the development, first, of the ideas of Jesus at his Resurrection and Ascension bringing the holy dead from a state of waiting to the presence of God himself, second, of Purgatory as a state of being purified with the certain hope of heaven in the sense of the place of the immediate presence and vision of God, quite distinct from Sheol or Hades as a place of the shades of all the dead, and utterly distinct from Gehenna or Hell proper as the place whose principal pain was knowledge of everlasting loss of the vision of God, the vision of God into which the saints when perfected immediately enter even before having their bodies restored. And a clear distinction came to be made between an earthly paradise and heaven as the place of God's immediate presence in glory.⁶⁶

Lucam 2, 4 (PL 15, 1561) translated in Gambero, *Mary and the Fathers of the Church*, 198–99. Secondly, we have Augustine on Mary as Mother of the faithful in the reference given earlier, and further references taking up the theme of Mary as type (Gambero, *Mary and the Fathers of the Church*, 223).

⁶⁵ Peter Chrysologus like Ephraem takes advantage of the suggestiveness of the phrase "Mary and the other Mary" visiting the tomb, taking a liberty foreign to the more scholarly Fathers. Ephraem says: "Why did the Lord first show his resurrection to a woman and not to men? A mystery is here revealed to us with regard to the Church and the Lord's Mother. The Virgin received the first beginning of his advent on earth, and to a woman he himself showed his resurrection from the sepulchre. Both at the beginning and at the end it is his Mother's name that is there, and resounds. It was a Mary that received him on his coming into life, and saw also the angels at the sepulchre. The Virgin Mary is, again, the figure of the Church, which received the first-fruits of the Gospel. [A] Mary saw him, representing the Church. Blessed is he who brought joy to the Church and to [a] Mary. Let us call the Church by the name of Mary; for she is worthy of the double name." (*Sermo ad Nocturnum Dominicae Resurrectionis*, 2, 3, trans. Livius, 268, from Lamy, *Sancti Ephraem Syri*, 1, 531–37 (Mechlin, 1882–92). Chrysologus takes the same passage from Matthew to present Mary and Eve respectively, making Mary now mother of all living (*Sermo* 74, 3, PL 52, 409, trans. Gambero, *Mary and the Fathers of the Church*, 299).

⁶⁶ Considering the way versions of the earlier dormition narratives, sanitized so as to be free of Gnostic ideas, but sometimes retaining elements of the earlier

The most likely cause of these two developments lies in the freedom given by theological clarifications of 381–451. Firstly, the clear establishment of the doctrine of the Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, by the First Council of Constantinople in 381, and the agreement of the canon of the New Testament (doubts about the Apocalypse lingered, the Armenian church accepting it as canonical only in the twelfth century), left no room for doubt as to Mary's purely human, purely creaturely, nature and status, in Augustine's terms the object only of some kind of *dulia*, and not of the *latria* due only to God, and so setting her in absolute contrast with her divine son. In 431, the council of Ephesus insisted on the unity of the person (*hypostasis*) of Christ, so that the same person, Jesus, Son of God, of one being (*ousia*) with his Father, was conceived and born of Mary, and afterwards crucified, resurrected, and glorified. This gave Mary the singular position of being the *theotokos*, or Mother of God, appropriately compared to the "Ark of the Covenant," a figure applied to Mary by Hippolytus, Dionysius of Alexandria, and Gregory Thaumaturgus of Caesarea in the third century, and by Athanasius, Cyril of Jerusalem, and Ephrem in the fourth, as well as a much greater number in the fifth and later, inviting the idea of such an Ark being of incorruptible wood⁶⁷ and its having its place in the Temple. Moreover, the fullness with which Jesus took on our human character, so eloquently expressed by Cyril of Alexandria, took dogmatic expression at the Council of Chalcedon in 451 (reinforced at the Third Council of Constantinople in 681 by unqualified insistence on his having a fully human intellect and will). This made it unmistakable that Mary's motherhood was, not just the taking on of a biological function, but a real motherhood of a genuinely human son by a human mother. This invites marvellous portrayals of human intimacy, for example, between mother and son at the foot of the Cross in Cyril of Alexandria and later in Romanos the Melodist (trans. Gambero, *Mary and the Fathers of the Church*, 246, 333–37).

cosmography, developed a new and remarkably extended circulation in the middle ages, instanced by the versions to be met with in Ireland and in Anglo-Saxon England, it is perhaps fortunate that the whole genre became extinct before the massive extension of the gospel after 1500. See Mary Clayton, *The Apocryphal Gospels of Mary in Anglo-Saxon England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). One may compare this post-700 example with the earlier, long lasting, and more far-flung spread of translations of Tatian's *Diatessaron*, revealing its influence from Iceland and Norway and the whole Germanic world to Georgia, Persia, and the Arabic world from before 200 to at least 1300 (W. L. Petersen, "The Diatessaron of Tatian," in *The Text of the New Testament*, ed. B. D. Ehrman and M. W. Holmes [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995], 77–96).

⁶⁷ Cf. Hippolytus, PG, vol. 10, 864–65.

At this stage it became now possible to look at matters clearly. We first envisage the fully divine, fully human redeemer Jesus Christ, his sacrifice on earth accomplished, so that by it he eternally intercedes for us, and by the Holy Spirit makes himself present invisibly in the world, and concretely in the Eucharist mysteriously makes his sacrifice present again and makes himself food to renew the Spirit in us. And the Church could now envisage, alongside him, Mary as the perfectly redeemed making perfect response to God's saving work, and now brought fully human, body and soul, into heaven, sharing the victory of her son, leading the worship of the Church, and, in a fuller knowledge, able to care and pray for every human being that they should be given grace to accept God's salvation, leading the human prayer that we be spared our deserts. At the same time, belief concerning Mary could be freed from confusions which came from Jewish and later speculations about any detailed mapping of the locations of the dead, as well as from speculations and practices of a Gnostic or pagan kind.

Hitherto the tendency had been for the Fathers to interpret the Woman of the Apocalypse as the Church, even though this required dextrous eisegesis to explain why the child was male. It was only later and in the West, that it became standard to interpret the Woman as first of all Mary, Christ as her male child and her offspring as the faithful. Thus Quodvultdeus, Bishop of Carthage and a disciple of Augustine writing before A.D. 450, tells us that "The woman [whose child the dragon in the Apocalypse, signifying the devil, sought to eat] signifies Mary, who, being spotless, brought forth our spotless Head. who herself also showed forth in herself a figure of holy Church, so that as she in bringing forth a Son remained a Virgin, so the Church also should during the whole of time bring forth his members, and yet not lose her virginity."⁶⁸ And Primasius, Bishop of the nearby Hadramentum, in his commentary on the Apocalypse of around A.D. 540, established this identification of the Woman with Mary as standard in the West thereafter.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ *De Trad. Symb. ad Catech.* 4, 1, PL 40, 661, a sermon preached to catechumens on handing over the Creed to them, attributed to Quodvultdeus in *Corpus Christianorum Series Latina* 46, 182, cf. Livius, 269.

⁶⁹ E. A. Matter, "The Apocalypse in Early Medieval Exegesis," *The Apocalypse in the Middle Ages*, 44, 46–47 (Ithaca: Cornell, 1992), cf. Hugo Rahner, *Our Lady and the Church*, 105–9 (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1961), trans. Sebastian Bullough from *Maria und die Kirche*, 1961. In *Expositio super septem visiones Libri Apocalypsis* 4: 3, 4, PL 17, 876, attributed to Berengardus of Auxerre, from Ferrières, ca. 859, we read: "By the woman here we may also understand the Blessed Virgin Mary, because she is the Mother of the Church, for she brought forth him who is the Head of the Church, and is herself the daughter of the Church, since she is the greatest member of the Church. The dragon, then, stood before the woman,

Both the development in thought seen in Quodvultdeus and Primasius in Roman North Africa and the ideas inspiring the church building and liturgical developments in Jerusalem described in the Appendix below arose from a refusal to dissociate the significance of Mary's role as God-bearer or Mother of God from her present situation, drawing the natural consequence of Athanasius's insight as I will cite it below. The effects of this development of thought was seen not only in Jerusalem, but also in Rome and Alexandria, as witnessed when Theodosius I of Alexandria introduced a new feast of the Assumption as opposed to the death of Mary, attempting to approximate the Jerusalem date.

It was therefore natural for the Emperor Maurice, who reigned from A.D. 582 to 602, around or before A.D. 600 to decree that Mary's *koimēsis*⁷⁰ understood as meaning being taken body and soul to the place of the throne of God be celebrated at the Jerusalem date of August 15th throughout what he conceived as the empire. In Rome, while there is a legend of the church of Santa Maria Maggiore being on the site of a church built in honour of Mary by Pope Liberius (352–366), archaeological evidence indicates that the present church was probably first built in the early 400s and completed under Pope Sixtus III (432–440), dedicated by him to Mary as Mother of God, before there is any reason to suppose that any apocryphal *transitus* literature was circulating in the West.⁷¹ In *Munificentissimus Deus*, Pius XII notes that the Feast of Mary's Dormition on 15th August had already been established by the time of Pope Sergius I (680–701) as one of the four major feasts of Mary along with her nativity, the Annunciation, and her Purification (the day of Jesus' Presentation). Adrian I (772–795) referred to the feast of the 15th of August as marking that the Virgin Mary could not be held down by the bonds of death, and Leo IV (845–855) referred to

that on her giving birth he might devour her Son; because at the outset of Christ's birth the dragon had the intention of slaying him by means of Herod his minister. He stands also before the woman, that is to say, the Church, in order to destroy by temptation to evil those whom by baptism she brings forth to God." (trans. Livius, *The Blessed Virgin in the Fathers of the First Six Centuries*, 271 (London: Burns and Oates, 1893). Rahner, 109, points out that much of the vision still concerns the Church for Haymo of Auxerre, from Halberstadt, observed that much of the vision concerned the lot of the elect, the further offspring of the Woman, in their suffering on earth after her child had been caught up to the throne of God.

⁷⁰ Nikephoros Kallistos Xanthopoulos (ca. 1256–1335), *Historia Ecclesiastica*, 1.17.28 PG 147, 292, confirmed by *Liber Pontificalis*, II, 508.

⁷¹ In its present form, what is called the Gelasian decree, outlawing the "book called the *transitus* of the holy Mary" and all the books of Leucius, is almost certainly later than Pope Gelasius (492–96), although it may explain the pruning of heretical elements from documents coming to Gaul and influencing Gregory of Tours and perhaps the Pseudo-Melito (cf. appendix, section b below).

it as the Feast of the Assumption, while Nicholas I (858–867) spoke of it as observed “since antiquity” with a fast day on the preceding day.

There is the same clarity in the sermons of Germanus of Constantinople, Andrew of Crete, and John Damascene in the early eighth century as in Pius XII. Of all these authors, John Damascene in his three sermons on the Assumption is fullest in providing theological reasoning for the belief, regarding the witnesses to the Assumption as being rather the company of the angels and saints in heaven, these being more significant than any apostles present at the time of the event. Much of his theological argumentation is of the kind appealing to Old Testament figures of the Virgin Mary which Pius XII presents amongst the preliminaries to his main argument. The sermons of John Damascene are scarcely marked at all by the earlier apocryphal constructions, although he does suppose some apostles present at the tomb.

It is important that Pius XII in his presentation of the doctrine of the Assumption in 1950 paid no attention to any of the apocryphal writings which survive, for what are evidently good reasons, granted their low historical quality.

What is characteristic of the sermons of Germanus, Andrew of Crete, and John Damascene,⁷² as well as of Pius XII, is to present the Assumption in a way which makes it a special privilege of the Virgin Mary, in virtue of relationship to her son and to the Church, giving it a rationale and role which removes it from any close analogy to the assumptions of Enoch, Moses, and Elijah in earlier Jewish thinking, each thought of as already bodily in paradise, even before the Resurrection, and perhaps also of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob along with them according to the words of Jesus, or even of the saints or holy ones who were raised up and seen in Jerusalem, of whom St. Matthew speaks.⁷³ Germanus, Andrew of Crete, and John Damascene all clearly represent Mary as taken body and soul directly into the presence of her son, so that the possibility of her being in some lower heaven or any paradise less than the highest heaven does not arise.

⁷² It is plain that St Modestus of Jerusalem (died A.D. 634) should be added to this list, cf. PG 86, 3277–312, see Juniper Carol in his *Mariology* (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1957).

⁷³ With speaking of heaven as “the bosom of Abraham,” thinking of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as amongst the living and not the dead, and assuming the presence in body of Enoch and Elijah in paradise or in heaven and God’s possession (by the ministry of Michael the Archangel, in struggle against the Devil and presumably without corruption) of the body of Moses (*The Epistle of Jude*, verse 9, probably citing *The Testament of Moses*, both written against the background of Deuteronomy 34:6–7), who with Elijah appears bodily with Jesus at the Transfiguration, it does not readily fit that Mary, the final representative, wait until the end of the ages to be raised.

She is taken bodily to heaven, not simply by right of her being the culminating representative of the old Israel, but because of her Motherhood of God, these making her the Woman in the Apocalypse 12, a figure which, it now seems clear, at the same time represents three realities: firstly, Mary herself, as, amongst the Fathers, Epiphanius surmised and exegetes from Quodvultdeus onwards held, secondly, the new Israel, the Church, and thirdly, the old Israel, as some modern exegetes suggest, following other of the Fathers.

One has to note the intimate connection between the bodiliness of man and man's capacity to communicate with other human beings, expressing himself by using his body, so that, in virtue of Christ's Resurrection and Ascension, heaven now has a bodily aspect (whatever manner of body humankind are to have in heaven, cf. 1 Cor 15:35–55). And the idea of Jesus being bodily in heaven in complete bodily solitariness is probably not a coherent conception, certainly not fitting; and not present in Scripture.⁷⁴ There is no trace in Scripture of any idea that the Old Testament figures would wait until the last days, along with St. Paul and the other saints, before being taken up into heaven and the very presence of God, there to have the kind of immediacy to the presence of God portrayed in the book of Revelation 21–22—even though before Christ's own Resurrection, the Jewish conception seems to have been only of some kind of earthly paradise. It is the days of Jesus' ministry with the completion of that ministry in the Passion and Resurrection that prophets and kings are portrayed as waiting for (Lk 10:23–4; 1 Pet 1:10ff; Heb 11:39–40) so that those that went before might enter into their inheritance with the Church, Jesus "going (ahead) to prepare a place for you," in his "Father's house" where "there are many abiding-places." In the Eastern Church, amongst the Old Testament figures, the Patriarchs and prophets have always been thought of as amongst the saints as ones who could pray for us, along with the saints, and not only John the Baptist, Mary's spouse Joseph, Joachim and Anne, as in the modern Western rite liturgies. And, in the iconography of Christ's descent into Hades, he has long been portrayed as triumphantly leading a repentant Adam and Eve as well as a troop of others along with the saintly dead out of Sheol or Hades into heaven with him.

⁷⁴ Karl Rahner, in his "The Interpretation of the Dogma of the Assumption," *Theological Investigations*, vol. 1, 215–27, makes this point particularly well in pages 220–23, after making an eloquent statement of the traditional view connecting the descent into Hell proper with the Resurrection, as a bringing of many of the dead from Hades into heaven, now having a bodily dimension (218–20)—a view strikingly opposed to that put forward by von Balthasar.

But early piety and the historical developments in the liturgy require to be thought of in a wider context, for the question arises how it is that this doctrine of the Assumption in respect of the Virgin Mary is not just a pious speculation, nor merely a subsidiary consequence of scriptural data to be put alongside the salvation (not the bodily assumption) of the eleven apostles and St. Paul, but rather credally implicated as belonging to the Christian faith understood as a corpus or integrated whole. It is a matter of this doctrine being integral to this corpus of understanding, not in the sense that those who do not realize this truth or have hitherto seen it as only a theological opinion (*theologoumenon*) are not of the faith, but dogmatically integral in that it belongs, not historically accidentally like the identity of the lesser little known apostles, but rather, more importantly, by reason of the structure of the whole to that whole of which the creed enshrines the core and root. What is it, then, that makes the Assumption dogmatically important in a way in which the salvation of individually named apostles is not, or not in most cases?⁷⁵

It is because of the need to answer this question that Pius XII's insistence that all the considerations and arguments of the Fathers and the theologians about the Assumption are founded upon Scripture as on their ultimate foundation is vital, especially the character of the considerations which he mentions as making the virgin Mary different—including the considerations reflected in the Roman and Byzantine liturgies to which he alludes. That is, they do not depend on appeal to facts accidental to the understanding of the sense of Scripture taken as a whole such as extra-scriptural traditions concerning Mary's tomb. The answer to this question lies in the growing insight into the inseparability of Mary's motherhood of Jesus and her bodily assumption into heaven in the sense of the immediate presence of God himself, an inseparability realized in Jerusalem and Rome as seen in the development of their liturgies, and which amounts to a simple unfolding of the consequences of the thought of Athanasius:

O noble virgin, . . . who is your equal in greatness, O dwelling place of God the word? . . . You are the Ark in which is found the golden vessel containing the true manna, that is the flesh in which divinity resides. . . .

⁷⁵ The second epistle to Timothy expresses a certainty of receiving the crown of salvation which Paul lacked when he wrote 1 Corinthians 9:26–27. And John 21 adds to the reasons for supposing that the salvation of Peter may be integral to the doctrine of the Church; and, with him, that of John, who with Mary represented the faithful remnant of Israel at the foot of the Cross and who unlike Peter believed in the Resurrection in seeing the graveclothes (Jn 20), and I leave open the question whether the salvation of the eleven may be important or integral to the faith.

You surpass it [the fertile earth and its fruits], for it is written “the earth is my footstool”. But you carry within you the feet, the head and the entire body of the perfect God.

If I say that heaven is exalted, yet it does not equal you . . . you are greater than all [the angels and archangels] for the angels and archangels . . . dare not speak in his presence, while you speak to him freely. . . . [Y]ou are greater than they [the cherubim], for the cherubim carry the throne of God, while you hold God in your hands. . . . [Y]ou are greater [than the seraphim], for the seraphim cover their faces with their wings unable to look upon the perfect glory, while you not only gaze upon his face but caress it and offer your breasts to His holy mouth. . . .

As for Eve, she is the mother of the dead. . . . He [her husband] ate of it [the fruit she gave him], and he died.

In you . . . dwells the son of God. . . . Truly he has given us his body and we have eaten of it. That is how life came to all, and all have come to life by the mercy of God your beloved son. That is why your spirit is full of joy in God your saviour!⁷⁶

Pius XII particularly associates both Mary’s Immaculate Conception and her Assumption with her being Mother of God, this being understood as inseparable first from her consent to being mother of Jesus, her keeping things in mind, hearing the word of God and keeping it, and then from her consent to his way of obedience even to death on the Cross, so that her heart would be pierced also, giving her a unique closeness of spiritual association with the work of Jesus. Therefore the Assumption is not merely an incidental fact, along with the salvation of the lesser known apostles (what do we know of James the son of Alphaeus, and how much would it matter for faith if his name had been different?), to be piously believed but perhaps not of dogmatic significance. Rather the dogmatic significance of the Assumption arises from its connection with the motherhood of Mary as having spiritual as well as physical aspects, making her not just the key representative of the older Israel in her motherhood of the Messiah, but also spiritual mother of the Church, of all the faithful.

Nor is there any greater difficulty in supposing Mary’s Assumption to be corporeal rather than merely an assumption of her soul than to suppose that Jesus’ Ascension was an ascension of body and not merely of soul to God. The belief in the Assumption is a further expression of the belief in the unity of man, in the body’s being an integral part of man’s nature to be restored in the restoration of man and in the Resurrection. And if the wages of sin are death, and with death corruption, then Mary’s Assumption will be a corollary of her sinlessness. And the Fathers of the Church did not fail to

⁷⁶ Athanasius, “Homily of the Papyrus of Turin,” ed. T. Lefort, in *Le Muséon* 71, 1958, 216–17, trans. Gambero, *Mary and the Fathers of the Church*, 106–7.

trace these implications as we can see from the writings of St. Germanus of Constantinople, St. Andrew of Crete, and St. John Damascene, in the last of whom belief in Mary's Assumption is above all explicit and emphasized.⁷⁷ And Christ's bodily ascension to glory gives heaven a bodily aspect making it difficult to suppose that he did not take more than one to be present with him bodily in heaven in the interval before his second coming—for mankind, two does not constitute a complete community.

The Significance of Mary's Membership of the Old Israel

It is notable that it should be the summit and culminating representative of the older Israel, the person in virtue of physical relation to whom Jesus was a Jew (cf. Gal 4:4), who takes on this role of spiritual motherhood of the Church. What is enshrined here is what one might express in this way, that the old Israel is spiritually mother to the new Israel. Full appreciation of the dogmatic position of Mary is indissolubly linked to willingness to acknowledge the persisting role of God's remaining elder people, the Jews, in the whole working out of man's salvation. And, in this age in which so many Jews have died as they understand it "for the sanctification of the Name," it would seem unmistakable that they have a share in the lot of Jesus, as his blood brothers.⁷⁸

The Post-Pentecostal and Eschatological Character of the Assumption

A distinction must be made between the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption, since clearly the Assumption is a post-Pentecostal phenomenon. As such it relates to God's bringing Mary not to a state to have been anticipated in any real or hypothetical dispensation independent of, or prior to, the Incarnation (for example, not such as Adam and Eve, whether as real or as symbolic figures, should have anticipated), but to a state involving co-sonship or daughterhood of the Father with the Son of God in his human nature, that is, involving the peculiar activity of the Holy Spirit whereby we cry, "Abba! Father!" as if from within the Trinity itself. In this way it contrasts with the Immaculate Conception, which is a pre-Pentecostal phenomenon

⁷⁷ In *Mary in the Documents of the Church*, Palmer surveys the roots of tradition on Mary's death, or dormition, pp. 57–58, 64f, and he gives citations from *Sermons on the Falling Asleep of the Mother of God*, by Germanus of Constantinople, 1 (PG 98, 345); Andrew of Crete, 1 (PG 97, 1080–81); and John Damascene, 2, 14, (PG 96, 740–41) (Palmer, *Mary*, 57–61).

⁷⁸ Their piety towards Mary, alongside many other signs, suggest that many Muslims may have hope of her protection beside the others who "profess to hold the faith of Abraham and worship the one merciful God" (Vatican II, *De Ecclesia*, chapter 1, 16).

belonging to what is anticipatory of the work of salvation by Christ (his work on behalf of all men, men before, men during, and men after the time of his life in the flesh on earth). It therefore brings together the double role of Mary as the most complete embodiment of the role of the elder Israel and the most perfect fruit of the work of Christ.

Mary and the Doctrine of the Church: False Simplifications

There is a stereotyped caricature of Catholic doctrine according to which Catholic doctrine of the Virgin Mary as the type, or image, representing the nature of the Church embodies a conception of the Church as perfect, of which papal infallibility and the rest of Catholic doctrine in respect of Church authority are supposedly consequences.

But this stereotype presents a quite false picture of the shape of Catholic doctrine.

The doctrine of papal infallibility is an element within the general doctrine of the infallibility of the Roman Catholic communion in history, a communion conceived of as by Christ's institution structured in a certain way for the sake of her unique and universal historic mission, according to the commands "As the Father hath sent me, so I send you" (Jn 20:21), and "Go baptize . . . I am with you always unto the end of the world" (Mt 28:19–20). That is, it arises within the doctrine of the Church only insofar as the Church is occupied in continuing the active ministry of Christ, of preaching repentance and the "good news" in hope of enriching human lives by the charity, word, and sacraments which God extends through the Church and, with this, the active ministry of teaching and guardianship within the Church, that is, the aspects of the Church of which Peter, given the title of Rock as representative of Christ himself, is the type, albeit failing his master in many respects but not in such a way as to definitively shipwreck the Church. Accordingly, although the infallibility of the Church of which papal infallibility is a facet may *make possible* certain perfections of holiness in the Church, it persists despite lack of holiness in many individuals and ill-conception of many of their plans, and in no way presumes the Church Militant's perfection in holiness. Rather, as willy-nilly God will not let Israel lose her vocation, so willy-nilly God preserves the Church Militant as an historical communion, disciplined to share and teach one faith to the nations: and of this aspect Mary is not the appropriate type, but rather Peter, the sinner who repents and loves.

However, the Church has to take the role of the disciple before it can take on any role under the Holy Spirit as teacher and guardian of God's gifts to the Church. And, it is first Mary and then John the beloved disciple who are primary exemplars of this aspect of the Church.

If one asks in what respect Mary is the primary type of the Church, it is of the Church as the Bride of Christ, perfect in holiness, consenting, desiring, receptive rather than agentive, contemplative rather than active, praying for God to act, rather than acting in God's name: the type of that which will remain of the Church vis-a-vis Christ in heaven (when the Church Militant and the papacy have passed away), as Christ will then be as ever Head of the Church vis-a-vis the Father, as well as type of all his members as sons and daughters individually of the Father, and indeed himself identical to the Church in that sense in which we are his members or limbs.

Meantime, it is the holiness of the Church in its totality, Mary and the saints forming one community with those who follow Christ on earth, which by their prayer provides the context of human consent and desire in heaven and on earth for the preservation of the Church's Magisterium from definitive error and the maintenance of the integrity of the sacraments. The word preached will not return to God empty and the sacraments will not be unavailing, although there is no automatic guarantee of the hearers or receivers being well disposed.

The Proportions of the Faith

As to the *proportions* of the faith, we are not intended to assess the significance or weight, whether of the parts of the Old Testament, or of the parts of the New Testament, according to quantity of words. Equality of the scriptural works in respect of the facts of canonicity and inspiration does not involve equality of role. The liturgy of the Church, whether weekly or more frequent, was centred on the thanksgiving (*eucharistia*) and making concrete memorial (*anamnesis*) of the Passion and Resurrection and giving us food preparing us for when we would be with Jesus in the banquet of heaven. And the high point of the readings was in the readings of what Justin described as the memoirs of the apostles, by his time long embodied in the Gospels. For the Church, the way the Jewish Scriptures were read and expounded gave their prophetic role chief place, so that they were read in this light. As for Rabbinic Judaism, the Torah was the guide to the interpretation of the rest of Scripture, so for the Church the Gospels had hierarchical priority amongst the Scriptures, without in either case excluding the inspiration of the rest of Scripture.

The sheer volume of the Epistles of Paul, plus the likelihood that *in their finalized literary form* some should be taken to have chronological priority, has given them excessive prominence in thinking about the character of early Christian preaching and teaching. The Epistles are directed towards particular situations and the needs of particular churches, controversies, and individuals, and in doctrine show concerns only with Christ's title,

Passion, and Resurrection, and future return with the public memorial of these in the Eucharist, and with general moral teaching. However, these epistles all presuppose that their recipients will have *already* been instructed in the central elements of the Gospel, the life of Jesus, and Christian moral teaching. They say nothing of Jesus' baptism by John, his temptations, life of prayer, poverty, preaching and healing, his parables or his miracles, and in this way show how far they are from being direct presentations of the whole Gospel about Jesus, or of what manner of man gave his life for us.

The centrality of the Passion and Resurrection to baptism and to the Eucharist, and the importance of oral traditions about these and in respect of the baptism, sayings, and works of Jesus, make it plain that the Gospels, *so far as their content is concerned*, together with parts of Acts (namely, the various sermons), are (along with the earliest creeds or baptismal confessions, and earliest Eucharistic liturgies) more representative of the Church's earliest preaching and teaching than the Epistles.

In the meantime, St. Paul speaks of Jesus as "born of woman, born under the law"; the same link which made Jesus a Jew also made him a member of the human race. This makes it difficult to think that the idea of Mary as in a particular way the key representative of the Old Israel was alien to St. Paul—the elder Israel upon which the Gentile churches have been grafted in St. Paul's conception.

In three of the books with the title "Gospel," above all St. John, Mary does play a peculiarly important role, reflected in the creeds. This makes the fact that in the second and third centuries there is no vacillation in the readiness of the Fathers to think of Mary as taking on the role of Eve (Eve the mother of all the living), more significant as evidence of how Scripture is to be interpreted so far as it concerns Mary. The Fathers are picking up a key idea in a way which is in the spirit of the Gospels as witnesses to the manner of God's Revelation of himself to us, belonging to the unfolding of the Church's understanding of the wisdom from God delivered to its hearing and guardianship.

Dedication

I have written these wide-ranging remarks in the hope that they increase understanding among believers in the God of Israel. Mary always stands in the Church as spokesperson for the poor and deprived, one who calls upon men and women to repent and to come to peace, and calls upon God to have patience and spare. In her life of poverty with Jesus' disciples, of faithfulness and obedience, and of chastity, she continued the evangelical life in which her son had preceded her, and appears to have been thought of by some in the second century as the apostle to the apostles.

Emphasis on the doctrines I have picked out does not destroy the evangelical and scriptural proportions of faith. These doctrines are best seen within their context within the Church's life, a context shaped by the prominence of the "Our Father" and the dominant place of the Eucharist. The latter fixes Catholic orientation towards the risen Jesus as present now, in the Eucharist giving us immediate address to the Father, and centering Catholic life on Christ's Passion for the sake of us all, sealing the Covenant with us, and making himself our food as wayfarers and pilgrims, vehicles of our being strengthened by the Holy Spirit and opened to his guidance. The teachings about Mary do not obscure these central realities. Rather each doctrine about the Virgin Mary points to truths about Christ and about God's way of working with man, beginning with the case Ignatius of Antioch makes plain: if it was the Son of God who died on the cross for us, it must have been the Son of God who was conceived and born of Mary; this was to be the basis of the rejection of Nestorianism in 431.

Moreover, it is always God's way to work beforehand to raise up human consent before any intended action on his part, and so Mary's consent to be his mother was vital to our salvation, and this same element of participation in his work is seen in her willing presence at the foot of the cross where "her heart would be pierced also," and in her presence with the apostles waiting in prayer for the Holy Spirit to come at Pentecost. Her joining Christ in prayer for the salvation of man and her bodily assumption into heaven are post-Pentecostal examples of her going before us. Accordingly, Catholic teachings in regard to the Virgin Mary lend strength to our hold on the universal truths about Christ and about God's way of working with man, and their denial turns out in the end to weaken our hold on the doctrines Christians share. In the meantime in her role in the Church she stands as representative of the Jews as the elder Israel.

My main aim in this essay has been to show why these doctrines should have a dogmatic place, rather than resting solely as *theologoumena*. This dogmatic place arises from the uniqueness of her human relation and role in respect of her son.

Appendix: The Buildings, Liturgy, and Apocryphal Literature Relating to Mary, and her Death, Falling Asleep, or Assumption, 400–800 C.E.

Churches Built In and Around Jerusalem Over the First Seven Centuries

The periods of preparation and feasts structuring the Church's year established in the first two centuries appear to have been limited to Easter, the Ascension, and Pentecost, together with a long period of perhaps up to nine

weeks completed on Good Friday and Holy Saturday. Within this structure, memorials to the saints, Christmas and Epiphany, and the emergence of the feasts particularly associated with Mary were added over an extended period—Christmas, Epiphany and the feasts associated with Mary being only established between A.D. 250 and 600 to offer the extreme possibilities.

The earliest churches established in Jerusalem appear to have been the “Church of the Apostles,” reputed to be on the site of the last supper, the location of the apostles before and after Pentecost, and preceding Constantine; Constantine’s Basilica of the Holy Sepulchre, completed in his lifetime; and St. Helena’s Basilica of the Eleona (olives), on the Mount of Olives, completed before the visit of the pilgrim Egeria from Gaul or Spain between A.D. 381 and 384, the Basilica of the Eleona being associated with Jesus’ Ascension and with the agony of Gethsemane. Shortly after Egeria, the Emperor Theodosius I built a larger Mount Zion church close to the Church of the Apostles, initially called the “Church of the Pillars” because surrounded by a colonnade, and in A.D. 415 transformed by John II of Jerusalem into the Basilica of Hagia Sion.⁷⁹ Mount Zion does not seem to have been associated with Mary’s dormition until the seventh century when Sophronius mentions it,⁸⁰ and it became a centre of devotion to the dormition only in the eighth century.⁸¹

In the early fourth century, it appears that the principal feast of the Memory of Mary in the Jerusalem community was associated with an “Old” Kathisma Church at the site of a rock on which she was supposed to have sat to take a pause for rest on the way to Bethlehem before the birth of Jesus, with readings associated with the Nativity of Jesus in the Jerusalem Armenian lectionary of the period; and speculative identifications have been made of the later buried sites of the supposed “Old” Kathisma Church and a larger “New” Kathisma Church nearby which replaced it with sites at Ramat Rahel and Mar Elias, both to the East of the road between Bethlehem and Jerusalem,⁸² although the dating of this feast

⁷⁹ Destroyed in 1009 by the Fatimid Caliphs of Egypt.

⁸⁰ Sophronius, *Anacreontic Hymns*; cf. Stephen J. Shoemaker, *Ancient Traditions of the Virgin Mother’s Dormition and Assumption* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 128.

⁸¹ Shoemaker, *Ancient Traditions*, 139–40. Such a development would fit with the idea of Mary’s body as the “Ark of the Covenant.”

⁸² *Ibid.*, 82–138. Stephen Shoemaker presents this argument from the Jerusalem Armenian Lectionary, suggestive of the practice around A.D. 420–440, and from the evidence arising from diggings at the later buried sites of the supposed “Old” Kathisma Church and a larger “New” Kathisma Church nearby, which replaced it with sites at Ramat Rahel and Mar Elias, both to the east of the road between Bethlehem and Jerusalem.

is uncertain.⁸³ In Egypt a feast in memory of Mary on 16th January may have been associated with the Nativity of Christ and the flight into Egypt before becoming celebrated as the Feast of Mary's Dormition in or before the sixth century. Stephen Shoemaker has opened a rich seam of speculations as to different ways in which these two sites may have been thought of in the period from the late second century onwards, and to possible changes in the celebration of the birth of Christ, perhaps from mid-May and then mid-August before being celebrated at the winter feast.⁸⁴

In sum, there is no good evidence of any shrines to Mary in Jerusalem until after A.D. 450. It has to be recalled that Christ's birth, associated by St. Cyprian with the time of the winter solstice, had its celebration on the 25th of December made widespread only by Constantine, probably effective only in the West, since in the East the early celebration of Christ's birth is associated only with Epiphany, and that only in the Greek and Syrian Churches after A.D. 350. We may presume that Bethlehem was a centre of devotion focused on the birth of Christ before St. Helena had a basilica erected there, and the Jerusalem liturgy of the Nativity of Christ involved a daily progress from Bethlehem to Jerusalem in the period of the 6th to the 13th of January at the time of Egeria's visit. With these feasts of the birth of Christ being so late, it is unsurprising that there are no churches to Mary in Jerusalem before A.D. 450.

This is the stage where we see the beginning of two parallel and largely independent developments, firstly the building by the Orthodox of numerous churches as centres of devotion to Mary, firstly in and near Jerusalem and then in other cities, and secondly the appearance of widely available narratives of the dormition.

From A.D. 450 onwards, churches in Jerusalem in honour of Mary multiply. The principal feast for the veneration of Mary by the Jerusalem community came to be celebrated around the 15th of August, and thus entirely distinct from Christ's birth celebrated in January. It now centred around a supposed tomb of Mary on the site of a necropolis with first-century burial caves cut into the rock, a cross-shaped church with a tomb in its centre being built in the mid-fifth century, the tomb being isolated

⁸³ Shoemaker takes the Jerusalem Armenian Lectionary to put this feast on the 15th of August, but Van Esbroeck in reviewing Shoemaker's *Ancient Traditions* in the *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 55 (2004), 334–36, suggests that the earliest text is defective and that this date was put in in the time of the Emperor Maurice.

⁸⁴ Shoemaker, "Christmas in the Qur'an: The Qur'anic Account of Jesus' Nativity and Palestinian Local Tradition," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 28 (2003): 22–35; cf. 16–22, on the legends associated with these sites; cf. n. 100 below.

by quarrying out the surrounding rock,⁸⁵ and now to be found in an underground rock-cut cave in the present Church of the Sepulchre of Mary in the valley of Jehoshaphat, on the foothills of the Mount of Olives, close to Gethsemane.⁸⁶ Under the patriarch Elias (494–516), the Nea, or “new,” church to the Theotokos (Mother of God), central to old Jerusalem, began to be constructed, but this was only completed and consecrated under Justinian in A.D. 543. Then, in the late 500s, Orthodox Christians built a larger octagonal church linked to the Tomb Church, an action possibly preceding its being decreed by the Byzantine Emperor Maurice that the Feast of the Assumption to be celebrated over the whole empire on the 15th of August. This church was destroyed in the Persian invasion (614), but another church was soon built, held jointly with Muslims.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ It is just conceivable that the Emperor Marcian (A.D. 450–467) and his wife Pulcheria, dying in A.D. 453, had been strongly opposed to Nestorianism and devoted to the Virgin Mary. But the rest of the account interpolated in the late eighth or ninth century into the sermons of John of Damascus on the Assumption and attributed to the “Euthymian History” seems to be pure invention—namely the statement that Marcian and Pulcheria had asked Juvenal, bishop of Jerusalem, to send the body of the Mother of God to Constantinople, but that they were told that her tomb, when opened, upon the request of St. Thomas, had been found empty, and so he instead sent Mary’s robe or shroud, hitherto preserved in the church of Gethsemane, but Constantinople preserved earlier legends of how the shroud concerned got to Constantinople (Shoemaker, *Ancient Traditions*, 71–74). The legend about St. Thomas must have originated sometime after 550. In one speculation, these legends were designed to give prestige to the *blachernitissa*, an encaustic icon (now at Mt. Athos) preserved at the Church of Our Lady of Blachernae, thought to have saved Constantinople from the Persians in 626 and later from the Arabs.

⁸⁶ The present Church is the first monument that is seen on the left side after crossing the bridge over the Kidron Brook, just before the Basilica of the Agony (Gethsemane).

⁸⁷ A niche south of the tomb is a *mihrab* indicating the direction of Mecca, and was installed when Muslims had joint rights to the church. The Tomb of the Virgin is venerated by Muslims because it was said that, during his Night Journey from Mecca to Jerusalem, the Prophet Muhammad saw a light over Mary’s tomb, and that Caliph Umar prayed at Gethsemane in 638.

The rest of the history of the site is clearer.

A later Crusaders’ church was destroyed by Saladin (1187) and all that was left was the south entrance and staircase. The site was taken over by Franciscans after the Crusaders left, and has since been shared with the Greeks, Armenians, Syrians, and Copts from Egypt and Ethiopia. In the present lower church at the bottom of the stairs is a Byzantine (fifth-century) crypt, partly hewn out of rock and featuring original Byzantine masonry. There is a built apse to the west and a longer rock-cut apse to the east, in which Mary’s tomb is marked by a small square chapel. The altar inside the tomb conceals the remains of a bench tomb that may date from the first century.

*Apocryphal Literature Relating to the Death,
Falling Asleep, or Assumption of the Virgin Mary*

This date A.D. 450 is also marked by the sudden proliferation of narratives of Mary's *transitus*, "falling asleep" or dormition, texts which still survive, although their forebears had been destroyed as heretical or because of their greater number. These evidently developed on the basis of earlier now lost written documents going back more than a century beforehand, concerned with Mary's dormition, and in some cases some sort of bodily assumption. The character of the archetypes of the several traditions of *transitus* narrative are such as to give them very little or no historical value, and their background before A.D. 400 shows signs of emergence from a background of a Jewish cosmography of seven heavens, which began to appear by the middle of the first century and for instance influenced the "Second Enoch" (not the earlier and more important book of Enoch which some considered a candidate for being part of the canon of Scripture). These archetypes commonly end up by taking Mary's body (or both her body and soul) only to some paradise or third heaven as an intermediary place, rather than directly to the very presence of God itself, all the texts being marked by signs of being rooted in late Jewish traditions about the fate of the dead in the afterlife. However, it must be recognized that amongst the Fathers and in late Jewish writing, we find quite varied portrayals of paradise, in more than one conception of the third heaven, some like St. Paul's 2 Corinthians 10, independent of the "seven heavens" cosmography, which made the seventh heaven the place of God's presence. Most of these had an influence on one or other of the later versions of the two types of text described below.⁸⁸

There are two main archetypes underlying the earliest surviving texts.⁸⁹ Both combine a full embracing of the Old Testament roots of Christianity and the value of physical creation with an idea that only those with the spirit hiddenly in them are capable of receiving the secret gnosis which gives salvation.

The so-called "palm of the tree of life" group of texts appears to come from a fourth-century archetype⁹⁰ which combines reference to a palm

⁸⁸ Cf. Shoemaker, *Ancient Traditions*, 181–89.

⁸⁹ This division of the texts into two groups is owed to Michel Van Esbroeck, *Aux origines de la Dormition de la Vierge*, Collected Studies Series (Aldershot: Variorum, 1995). I consider the two families in the same order as Stephen Shoemaker, opposite to that adopted by Mary Clayton to whose *The Apocryphal Gospels of Mary in Anglo-Saxon England* I owe much of my early information.

⁹⁰ Richard Bauckham, *The Fate of the Dead* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 345–46, shows that this archetype preceded and influenced the better known *Apocalypse of Paul*, dated at A.D. 400; Shoemaker, *Ancient Traditions*, 42–45.

from the Tree of Life brought to Mary by an angel with reference to a secret book given to her by Jesus when he was five, marking that the original archetype must have been in Greek,⁹¹ and in which the “Archon” and Christ have an intermediary demiurgical role, ideas coming from fourth-century Gnosticism. These Gnostic ideas of a secret knowledge or gnosis and a demiurge are still evident in the main fifth-century witnesses to this archetype,⁹² but have been entirely removed in the possibly fifth-century Latin Pseudo-Melito, a document known to Bede,⁹³ in Gregory of Tours’s précis in his late sixth-century *In gloria Martyrium*,⁹⁴ and in the early seventh-century homily of John of Thessalonica.⁹⁵ Likewise, except for fragments, the earliest Coptic texts⁹⁶ come from the “palm of the Tree of Life” group, but are free of any of their cosmography and free of Gnostic ideas, but are distinguishable by first centering their concern on a dormi-

⁹¹ Shoemaker, *Ancient Traditions*, 220–25, shows how the confusions between a book or leaf of a book and a branch or palm leaf, such as one finds in the Ethiopic and Syriac versions, can only be explained by reference to their being translations from a Greek original, the word *biblion* for book and *brabeion* for palm or baton of victory becoming confused, Shoemaker, *Ancient Traditions*, 40–42.

⁹² These main witnesses are rooted in the Syriac Obsequies, fragments of which were put together by William Wright, while the fuller Ethiopic *Liber Requiei* allowing the gaps in Wright’s version to be reconstructed. The two are collated with a Georgian version in S. J. Shoemaker’s translation, Shoemaker, *Ancient Traditions*, 290–350, while a later Greek version attributed to “St. John” the Theologian and Evangelist has been reconstructed by Antoine Wenger (Shoemaker, *Ancient Traditions*, 35 with its n. 70), and is translated in S. J. Shoemaker, *Ancient Traditions*, 351–69, a related version appearing in Irish around A.D. 712, (Shoemaker, *Ancient Traditions*, 37 with its n. 35), presumably imported after the sixth century reestablishment of Catholicism.

⁹³ Mary Clayton refers to this as transitus B, and Stephen Shoemaker has presented a translation of it on his website at www.uoregon.edu/~sshoeak/texts/dormitionL/dormitionL1.htm.

⁹⁴ Shoemaker, *Ancient Traditions*, 37.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 35, 79, 217. John of Thessalonica shows strong awareness of relying upon and “cleansing” a previous narrative, evidently the one reconstructed by Wenger; see n. 92 above.

⁹⁶ The Sahidic Pseudo-Evodius “Homily on the Dormition,” translated in Shoemaker, *Ancient Traditions*, 397–407, from the early sixth century, along with the Pseudo-Cyril of Jerusalem, presented by Shoemaker at www.uoregon.edu/~sshoeak/texts/coptic/Cyril.htm, both concerned with a dormition feast of 16th January (to be contrasted with the Bohairic version of the Pseudo-Evodius which followed Theodosius of Alexandria’s introduction of the Feast of the Assumption on 9th August around 566, presented by Shoemaker at www.uoregon.edu/~sshoeak/texts/coptic/Evodius.htm). Sahidic was the leading pre-Islamic Coptic dialect from Upper Egypt; around 300 it began to be written in literary form, including translations of major portions of the Bible. By the sixth century, a standardized spelling had been attained throughout Egypt. Almost

tion, without an assumption, celebrated on 16th January, probably at first thought of as initiating a period of waiting until the end—the date itself conceivably related to the flight into Egypt, and in any case passed on to some of the churches in Gaul—and then after A.D. 566/67 introducing a second feast explicitly of the assumption into the presence of God on 9th August.

The second archetype, with a fourth-century Greek original which was probably the basis of Epiphanius's account of the "Kollyridians" (given this name from their liturgical use of *kollyris* or cakes of rye bread) in the 370s, has its earliest surviving expressions in the Syriac *Six Books* and some early Syriac fragments, with a story involving travel between Bethlehem and Jerusalem, and which made the narrative of the dormition the conclusion of a life of Mary beginning with the *Protoevangelium of James* (about her nativity and dedication) and stories of the infancy of Jesus. These include liturgical elements occupied with the cycle connected with sowing and the harvest, suggestive of a connection with pagan concerns with fertility, but again these are absent from many later narratives derived from these beginnings including the Greek discourse on the dormition attributed to John the Theologian, which had a long popularity.⁹⁷ They appear in forms which survive after A.D. 450, and are soon purified of Gnostic ideas and mostly exhibit the more informal and open conception of paradise mentioned above, rather than the seven heavens cosmography.

In sum, none of the text traditions of which we have evidence appear to have any historical roots beyond possibly some tradition about the place of Mary's burial, and, although these documents show piety, they show no theological sense. The fact that all the narratives of Mary's dormition and of her Assumption known to us, *so far as they appeal to historical traditions*, represent sanitized versions of these entirely non-historical archetypes with their Gnostic, or in some cases possibly pagan, elements makes it vital

all native authors wrote in this dialect of Coptic. Sahidic was, beginning in the ninth century C.E., challenged by Bohairic.

The Bohairic (or Memphitic) dialect originated in the western Nile delta (Lower Egypt). The earliest Bohairic manuscripts date to the fourth century C.E., but most texts come from the ninth century and later; this may be due to poor preservation conditions for texts in the humid regions of northern Egypt. It shows several conservative features in lexicon and phonology not found in other dialects. Bohairic is the dialect used today as the liturgical language of the Coptic Orthodox Church, replacing Sahidic some time in the eleventh century. In contemporary liturgical use, there are two traditions of pronunciation, arising from successive reforms in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

⁹⁷ Presented by Shoemaker at www.uoregon.edu/~sshoemak/texts/dormitionG2/dormitionG2.htm.

to clarify the doctrinal basis and content of the liturgy celebrated in Jerusalem after A.D. 500.

*Evidence as to the Character of the Liturgy and Devotions
Associated with Mary in Jerusalem from A.D. 500.*

Accordingly, we need to return to consider what evidence we have of the nature of the Jerusalem liturgy in the sixth century, so far as it centred on Mary. From the tenth-century Klardjedi Georgian homiliary and associated calendar we seem to have the best evidence of the liturgy in Jerusalem of the early sixth century before the completion of the Nea Church in central Jerusalem, associating the Nativity with the Assumption and suggesting a three-day stational progress from the tomb church at the Valley of Jehoshaphat near Gethsemane alluded to above,⁹⁸ and one of whose key readings for this liturgy make it pellucidly clear that Mary, compared to the Ark of the Covenant, is being assumed into the presence of God⁹⁹ (not to any intermediate heaven such as we find in the earliest fifth-century dormition narratives). And there is no reason for doubting that it would be the same conception of the Assumption, as a taking of Mary, body and soul, into the very presence of God which would have been associated with the five-day, 13th to 17th August, with its conclusion at the Nea Church, a liturgy of which our best evidence seems to be provided by the Palestinian Georgian homiliary preserved in Sinai, which appears to represent the state of the Jerusalem liturgy in the later sixth and the seventh century, envisaging a stational progress over 13th to 17th August with its principal feast to the *Theotokos* at the summit of the stational progress, following celebrations associated with the tomb.¹⁰⁰ At some stage late in the 500s the earlier Tomb Church was replaced by the new octagonal Tomb Church beside the tomb. (Any sixth and seventh stational progress would not, it seems, have concluded at Mount Zion until the eighth century, Justinian's Church of the Nea, central to old Jerusalem, having, it would seem, been only incompletely destroyed by the Persians in 614, or else restored, and continuing in use until the time of Chalmagne).¹⁰¹ In the meantime, in Egypt, in A.D. 566/67, the Coptic patriarch Theodosius of Alexandria instituted a feast of the Assumption on 9th August, presenting it as timed to occur 206 days after the Feast of the

⁹⁸ Shoemaker, *Ancient Traditions*, 118–25.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 126–27.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 132–37, 139.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 137–40, cf. 128. Mount Zion had earlier been associated only with the Church of the Apostles associated with the Last Supper and the meetings of the early Jerusalem church.

Burial and Dormition of Mary, celebrated in Egypt on 16th January. Theodosius's homily for this feast, showing some influence from the palm narrative tradition, constitutes the earliest non-pseudonymous Coptic discourse on the dormition and assumption which we have,¹⁰² and, although influenced by the palm narrative tradition in accord with Coptic tradition thinking of the Assumption as that of Mary's body to heaven to join her soul, he says her body "abides by Him that none can abide by, and approaches Him that none can approach unto. It is bright: and is adorned and is arrayed in the glory of the Trinity," speaking of the astonishment in heaven of her going ahead of the whole of creation. By contrast, the Pseudo-Melito popular in the West and the Pseudo-John the Theologian popular in the East each allow only a three day separation of soul and body, perhaps reminiscent of the resurrection of Jesus himself, both taking Mary to paradise as the place of Christ.

Against this background, there is no reason to doubt that when the Emperor Maurice promulgated the Feast of the Assumption for the whole of his empire around A.D. 600 on the date 15th August used at the newly built octagonal Basilica adjacent to the tomb, what his preachers would have understood by this would have been a bodily assumption, not more than three days after the placing of Mary's body in the tomb, body and soul to be everlastingly in the presence of God.

Note on the Muslim Position

In Muslim belief, Mary remained a virgin in Jesus' conception and birth, although some of the accounts represent Mary as alone in a desert place while bearing and giving birth to Jesus, and only rejoining her family afterwards, Jesus showing himself for who he was by an extraordinary precocity, his speaking from the time of his birth. In the Qur'an, Sura 3 on Jesus and Sura 19 on Mary show strong signs of the influence not only of Luke's Gospel, but also of the apocryphal *Protoevangelium* and Infancy Gospels. The Qur'an seems to think of Mary as sister of Moses and Aaron, children of Amran, grandson of Levi (Exodus 16:18–20), as well as perhaps thinking of Hagar as a model of Mary (Sura 19, vv. 16–26), perhaps influenced by legends about the Kathisma sites.¹⁰³

¹⁰² For some discussion and a translation of the full text, see www.uoregon.edu/~sshomak/texts/coptic/Theodosius.htm from Stephen Shoemaker's website.

¹⁰³ Shoemaker, in his "Christmas in the Qur'an," 15–35, discusses the legends surviving from, at the earliest, the late second century (although possibly only from much later) associating first one and then the other Kathisma site with an early birth of Jesus before reaching Bethlehem, although another early legend associated them with a resting place on the way to Egypt."

The combination of these ideas with the confusion whether Christians thought that the Trinity consisted of the Father, the Son, and Mary, found in the Hadith, suggests that his main source of information (or, rather, misinformation) about Christianity was some group with views akin to those that lay behind the *Six Books* traditions. How Muhammad might fail to attain orthodox Christian belief is made more intelligible by the extremes of Christian divisions in the Levant in his time, vividly portrayed in Dalrymple's portrayal of the conditions in Edessa¹⁰⁴ in the period of the monk John Moschos's travels exactly at the time of Muhammad's personal formation of belief, before any beginning of his marauding and military activity or that of his successors.

It is an experienced fact that many Muslims on occasion ask Christian priests and laymen to ask Mary to pray for them or to ask for Mary's help, although attention to the saints is disapproved of by the stricter tradition of the Wahhabis. This practice is very intelligible in the context of the emergence of Muhammad's belief and that of his followers, well exhibited in John Damascene's perception of Islam as a fresh Christian heresy and the ambiguities of the Qur'an as examined by R. C. Zaehner.¹⁰⁵ N V

¹⁰⁴ William Dalrymple, *From the Holy Mountain* (London: HarperCollins, 1997), 65–68, cf. 69–77, 106–11, and in regard to John Moschos, 11–14.

¹⁰⁵ Zaehner, *At Sundry Times*, 195–217. Pages 203 to 208 indicate Qur'anic references to Mary, which would be seen within the general context of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim reverence for saints, exemplified earlier in the struggles between Christians and Jews in Antioch for possession of the shrines of the Maccabees. See also Dalrymple, *From the Holy Mountain*, 185–91, in the context of pages 148–84.