

# THE ASSUMPTION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN IN ECUMENICAL PERSPECTIVE

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**I**N TRACING the narrow and often rocky pathway of ecumenical dialogue back to 1950, one would come face to face with a time of tension and contradiction. The centuries-old schism between Roman Catholics and the rest of Christianity was in danger of growing deeper.

The Roman Catholic Church had emerged from the trials of the Second World War with a new vigour and unity of purpose. Marian devotion was basic to its spiritual life as it stood steadfast against the corrupting influences of modernity. Roman Catholic Christians were rejoicing in the promulgation of the dogma of the Assumption of the blessed Virgin. They were flocking to Rome for the Holy Year declared by Pius XII, the event which marked the high point of his long and tumultuous reign. In the promulgation of the dogma of the Assumption, the papacy had given the seal of its authority to the rich and growing stream of marian piety that had for so long supported the faith of its people.

By contrast, protestant Christians viewed these events with consternation and fear. This new marian definition, the outpouring of piety, and the monolithic and militant power of the papacy were perceived as the impending renewal of ancient hostilities amongst the people of God. The thin lines of ecumenical dialogue were now in danger of collapse.

Protestant theologians viewed this new definition as more than non-biblical. They decried it as anti-biblical. Rumours were spreading among Protestants that the catholic theologians were ultimately aiming to replace the doctrine of the Trinity with a doctrine of quaternity — Father, Son, Holy Spirit, and blessed Virgin. Serious question arose as to whether Roman Catholicism was not lapsing into a kind of new paganism centred on a mother-

goddess. Such musings were not the preserve of a lunatic fringe but issued from the leading and most responsible protestant theologians. Karl Barth, Reinhold Niebuhr, Emil Brunner, George Barrois, among others, decried the arrogance of papal power in proclaiming new dogmas. They saw in the new dogmas a rejection of the sole mediatorship of Christ.<sup>1</sup>

In the years just before Pius XII pronounced the definition of the dogma of the Assumption, ecumenically oriented theologians Anton Fischer, Karl Rahner, Friedrich Heiler, Berthold Altaner, Karl Adam, Edmund Schlink, Walter Kuenneth, and others who chose to remain anonymous expressed fears that such a definition would permanently end dialogue between Roman Catholics and Protestants.<sup>2</sup> However, such voices of dissent held little importance for Roman Catholics who overwhelmingly accepted the definition. Ninety-six per cent of the petitions to the Holy Office on this question supported an immediate definition of the Assumption. But for Protestants, the anxieties on this point were deep and widely felt. Kuenneth was not untypical in his alarm. Such a definition, he said, would force a sharp alternative upon believers to choose Christ or Mary as the centre of the life of faith. The dogma of the Assumption seemed to open the way to further definitions of Mary as co-mediatrix of grace and perhaps even some form of her divinization. She had been spoken of as 'co-redemptrix' in encyclicals of Leo XIII, Pius X, Benedict XV, and Pius XI. Walter von Loewenich saw the beginnings of a process that would end with the triumph of 'the evident paganism in popular marian piety'.<sup>3</sup>

Now over thirty years later, it is good to note that these dire prophecies did not come to fulfilment. Today there is not only a general ecumenical dialogue but, more particularly, ecumenical dialogue about Mary. The present day ecumenical work on marian questions has grown out of Vatican II and the redirection and clarification it gave to marian doctrine and piety in its schema on the church, *Lumen Gentium*. For example, the Ecumenical Society of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Britain and the United States has been a means of carrying out this new dialogue on Mary. The Society has discovered not only new historical and theological knowledge but also a deeper sharing in the mystery of salvation and Mary's place in it.<sup>4</sup>

While extensive public discourse on Mary is of recent origin, there is already a significant history of ecumenical mariological reflection. Since the beginning of this century, Friedrich Heiler, Karl Bernard

Ritter, Max Thurian, Evelyn Underhill, Charles A. Briggs, Eric Mascall, Stephen Benko, John de Satgé, J. A. Ross Mackenzie, Thomas Boslooper, and the *Una Sancta* movement have explored the scope of ecumenical affirmations about Mary.<sup>5</sup> It is becoming quite possible to identify affirmations about Mary on which there is a high measure of ecumenical agreement.

The dogma of the Assumption of the blessed Virgin is an affirmation on which no ecumenical discourse has been attempted. What, then, are the grounds, and what are the limits through which a theologian in the reformed tradition may undertake the explication of a new perspective on the dogma of the Assumption of the blessed Virgin?

*The possibility and limits of discourse*

The possibility of discourse about the Assumption of Mary lies within the development of Protestantism itself. While protestant theology is rooted in the reformers, Protestants are not limited simply to replicating the theology of the sixteenth century. Whenever I participate in ecumenical work, I appear as the heir of John Calvin, John Knox, the Synod of Dort, and the Westminster Assembly, with perhaps some footnotes to Karl Barth. There is an advantage in this because it allows roman catholic, anglican, and orthodox participants to identify my position clearly and simply. Yet my own constructive work is based not only on the classical figures of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries but also on Friedrich Schleiermacher, Albrecht Ritschl, Ernst Troeltsch, and modern critical biblical scholarship. The reformed tradition has taken leadership in ecumenical affairs and has been shaped by anglican and roman catholic theologians as well as by philosophers and historians of religion. In fact, recent contributions from the history and phenomenology of religion have made this analysis of the Assumption possible.

The limits to discourse on the dogma of the Assumption spring from the reformed understanding of the sole mediatorship of Christ. All teachings on the place of Mary in the plan of salvation must be tested against 1 Tim 2,5. 'For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.' Any marian definition that establishes her as a separate and additional source of grace from her son is to be rejected. For contemporary reformed theology, as for its sixteenth-century founders, nothing must compromise the sole sufficiency of Christ in salvation. Of equal

importance with *sola Scriptura*, *sola fide*, and *sola gratia* is the affirmation of *sola Christi*.

The limits to discourse on the Assumption of Mary are also set by how the dogma of the Assumption relates to what is taught by scripture. This is a complex matter which needs detailed attention.

### *The Assumption and the Bible*

Both roman catholic and protestant theologians recognize that the dogma of the Assumption of the blessed Virgin is not found in scripture. The most promising approach to this question is suggested by Michael Schmaus. 'The holy scripture indeed offers no explicit witness. It is nevertheless the foundation for the definition by the Church.'<sup>6</sup> A similar position was taken by the historian George Soell. The dogma of the Assumption developed out of the piety of the people of God and has been given theological expression by the reflection of the Church.<sup>7</sup> Yet it is possible to investigate the biblical materials that provide the foundation on which the Church built.

Four biblical texts have figured prominently in the theological work on the Assumption. They are the *proto-evangelium* of Gen 3,15, the angelic greeting of Lk 1,28, and the words from the *Magnificat*, Lk 1,42 and 1,48.<sup>8</sup> The *proto-evangelium* has its setting in the cursing of the serpent by God at the expulsion from Eden. 'I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed: he shall bruise (or crush) your head, and you shall bruise his heel.' In Luke are the words of the Annunciation of Gabriel to Mary: 'And he came to her and said, "Hail, O favoured one, the Lord is with you!"' (1,28); the words of Elizabeth: 'Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!' (1,42b); and from the *Magnificat*, the words of Mary: 'For behold henceforth all generations will call me blessed' (1,48b).

The relating of these texts to the Assumption of Mary is based upon theological rather than historical-critical exegesis. As Raymond Brown has shown, a purely historical-critical exegesis cannot support the marian teachings of the Church.<sup>9</sup> Marian theologians have approached these texts through a theological exegesis that appeals to the *sensus plenior*, the fuller meaning of the text as part of holy scripture. Catholic interpretation has found the fuller meaning of these texts by relating them to the unfolding life of the Church. The aim of such interpretations has been to show how these texts have been expounded in the piety and faith of the people of God.

The theological exegesis of Gen 3,15 makes a messianic interpre-

tation of the text, following the lead of Jewish interpreters in the *Targums*, medieval Christian theologies, and John Calvin. The text foretells the enmity between the devil and the human race, the heirs of Eve. But it points to a very particular heir who will strike back at the forces of evil, the Messiah Jesus. However, the identification of this text with Mary presupposes still another interpretive move. This is based upon the typological relationship between Eve and Mary, the second Eve. It is the Son of the new Eve, Mary's Son who will strike the decisive blow against the power of evil. This relationship between Eve and Mary was established in the patristic literature and has become a normative part of Catholic theological exegesis.<sup>10</sup>

The matter of identification in the Luke texts is less complex. Mary is the 'blessed' or 'favoured one' with whom the Lord dwells (1,28b). Mary is 'blessed' as is her child (Greek: *eulogeō*), according to the words of Elizabeth (1,42b). The *Magnificat* foretells the time when 'all generations' will call her 'blessed' (Greek: *makaria* [1,48b]). The Greek word translated 'blessed' here is more than a polite honorific term. The 'blessed' are those who stand in a special relationship to God. In the early patristic literature, it was used as a characterization of the martyrs. The highest expression of this 'blessedness' was in the possibility of their ascension into heaven to dwell in the immediate presence of God.<sup>11</sup>

The crucial turn of the argument for the unfolding of the importance of this text for the dogma of the Assumption is the future tense of the verb in verse 1,48: 'All generations *will* call me blessed'. The full meaning of Mary's blessedness is only to be known in the future. God's acting through her for human salvation points beyond her being the mother of Jesus. It points to the consummation of salvation in the kingdom of God. Hence, theological interpretation has related these Lucan texts to the promises of eschatological salvation, such as that in 1 Cor 15,20-28. Mary was related not only to her role in the Incarnation but also to the final consummation of salvation in the kingdom. Just as Mary's place in the history of salvation was foretold in the Old Testament and came to historical expression in the birth of Jesus, it will reach full realization at the end of history.

To come back, then, to the suggestion of Schmaus and Soell: scripture does not contain an explicit witness to the dogma of the Assumption. However, scripture gives indications of the foundation of the dogma. But its full development awaited its unfolding in the life of the Church. The foundation for the dogma is in New

Testament eschatology. It lies in the interpretation of Mary in relation to the final salvation of the kingdom as well as to the incarnation itself. Interpreted this way, Mary may be seen as revealing the scope and nature of the salvation that the whole people of God will enter at the end of time. The dogma of the Assumption has its foundations in Mary as the sign of hope.

*The nature of christian hope*

The key to understanding the line of development that leads to the dogma of the Assumption lies in the complex New Testament teachings on eschatology. Three affirmations about the kingdom of God are made in the New Testament.

First, the kingdom has been established in the life, death, resurrection-ascension of Jesus. In this sense, the kingdom of God is a present reality. To use the language of scholarly debate, the New Testament teaches a 'realized eschatology'. To speak theologically, the New Testament affirms that in Jesus Christ, God has given all the salvation there ever will be, or will ever need to be.

Secondly, the kingdom of God is coming in the future. It is not now fully present in human history. In this sense, the New Testament also teaches a 'futuristic eschatology'. The full actualization of the kingdom awaits the end times that are marked by the resurrection of the bodies and the final judgment.

Finally, because Jesus's life, death, resurrection, ascension have already established the kingdom, it is already possible to share fragmentarily in its reality, even while awaiting its full actualization at the end of history. The faithful now receive through the Holy Spirit the 'first fruits' (Rom 8,23) or the 'guarantee' (2 Cor 1,22; 5,5; Eph 1,14) of the full salvation of the kingdom.

According to the New Testament, the salvation granted in the kingdom is not solely in the future. It is also present here and now. The Spirit gives the *charismata*, the 'spiritual gifts', which are real, although limited, participations in the kingdom of God. These spiritual gifts are accessible now because the kingdom is not being made through human action but exists already in virtue of what God has done in Christ.

According to Wolfhart Pannenberg, the reality of the kingdom of God is 'proleptic' — past, present, and future.<sup>12</sup> The full salvation of humankind in the kingdom of God has appeared 'proleptically' in Jesus Christ. A *prolepsis* is a rhetorical device. It is an anticipation of an ending or conclusion that is introduced into a story or argument

before the actual conclusion is reached. It is literally 'an end' before 'the end'.

As Pannenberg introduced this term into his work on the relationship of Jesus to the kingdom of God, he enlarged the meaning of the term to more than a rhetorical device. To say the kingdom of God has appeared proleptically in Jesus Christ means that in Jesus the nature and the power of the kingdom have been bestowed. Jesus gives more than a picture of the kingdom: he is the empowerment for the life of the kingdom. Jesus Christ is the *end* of history who has appeared in the midst of history, so that men and women may *now* share in the kingdom, although its full reality has not yet appeared. This means that the Church lives between the time of the bestowal of salvation and its completion. Yet, the Church is not without the powers of the kingdom. The Church lives out of the *charismata*, the presently known bits and pieces of kingdom power whereby the people of God are assured of the reality of the kingdom.

In the Gospel of John, the great eschatological events of the resurrection of the body and the final judgment are described as present realities (John 3,19. 5,24-30. 11,24-25). According to John it is possible by faith to experience both judgment and resurrection in the present. The purely futuristic resurrection of Jewish eschatology is set aside in Jesus's response to Martha at the raising of Lazarus. Martha appears as the proponent of a futuristic eschatology. 'I know that he *will rise* again in the resurrection on the last day.' To which Jesus replies, 'I *am* the resurrection and the life' (Jn 11,24). The shift of verb tense here is crucial. Martha spoke of the resurrection in the future, while Jesus spoke in the present. This is not to imply that resurrection and judgment are only present; they are also future. There will be an end-point at which the judgment and redemption given the world by Jesus will reach its completion. But until then, it is still possible to share proleptically in the saving events.

Another important dimension of New Testament eschatology for approaching the dogma of the Assumption is the affirmation that the full salvation given in the kingdom includes the body. There are many texts for this. The promise to the faithful is the transformation of their bodies 'to be like his glorious body, by the power which enables him even to subject all things to himself' (Phil 3,21). The salvation in Jesus Christ is not a rescue of only the immortal soul from an earthly body, as in gnosticism. The final salvation includes all levels of human existence because it is grounded in the bodily resurrection of Jesus.<sup>13</sup> The eschatological glorification of the body

completes the rescue of the whole of God's creation. Nothing that was created, and therefore 'good' (Gen 1,3-31), is excluded from redemption. But at the present, the faithful do not see this full 'redemption of our bodies' (Rom 8,23). Central to the christian hope is the promise for the redemption of the body.

*A line of development*

What emerges from the New Testament is not proof of the dogma but an identification of the basis from which it could be viewed as a legitimate development. This basis has three aspects. First, the kingdom of God has already been established in Jesus Christ. He is the proleptic *eschaton*. Secondly, although the full actuality of redemption is not present in history, there is real participation in the kingdom now. Finally, the full redemption of the kingdom includes the transformation of the body. Within this framework a movement towards belief in the Assumption of the blessed Virgin becomes a possibility.

Mary has her place as the foremost member within the Communion of Saints. She has been redeemed by her son, as have the whole people of God. She is not the source of that redemption but the supreme embodiment of it. She is not redemptrix but receptrix of grace. She has already received the final redemption in the kingdom of God. She has been redeemed body and soul. She has entered already into the full salvation that the pilgrim people of God know only in fragments. Mary has already entered the anticipated salvation of the faithful. The dogma of the Assumption of the blessed Virgin is the confession that she has entered fully into the salvation of the kingdom of God. In her, what the faithful now know as fragmentary 'gifts' or 'foretastes' have come to full expression. All aspects of her humanity have been transformed into the new life of the kingdom. Mary is the expression of the proleptic nature of the kingdom. She is the sign of hope living amidst the people of God to embody the full salvation for which they long.

Now the question emerges as to how this suggested line of development relates to what was actually defined when the dogma was promulgated in the encyclical, *Munificentissimus Deus*.

*Munificentissimus Deus*

The definition of the dogma of the Assumption of the blessed Virgin in the encyclical *Munificentissimus Deus* was more circumspect in its language than was the often florid language of marian piety that so worried ecumenical theologians. The definition is not based

on any claims for the historicity of the stories of Mary's Assumption, such as those in *De Transitu Virginis Mariae Liber*. A wide range of theologians have made it clear that legends and artistic representations of the Assumption of the blessed Virgin express the dogma but do not establish it.<sup>14</sup>

It is evident from the text of the encyclical that a clear distinction has been made between the Assumption of Mary and the resurrection of Jesus in respect to their historicity. The definition of the dogma does not relate the Assumption to a particular point in history. Nor is there any pronouncement in it on the question of the existence of an early cult at the site of the tomb of the Virgin. The definition of Mary's place in the order of salvation is not vindicated by reference to a particular chain of historical events. The encyclical says simply that 'at the end of her earthly life' (*expleto terrestri vitae cursu*) Mary was 'assumed body and soul into heavenly glory (*fuisse corpore et anima ad caelestem gloriam assumptam*).<sup>15</sup> By contrast, the resurrection of Jesus is tied to a particular time and place. It was known by eye-witnesses who supported its historicity (1 Cor 15, 3-8). According to Schmaus, 'The Assumption of Mary does not admit of proof through historical facts but exclusively from theological argument'.<sup>16</sup>

The Assumption is not a parallel to or a substitute for the resurrection of Jesus. It is, instead, the first and most complete reception of that salvation brought about by the life, death, resurrection-ascension of Jesus. The Assumption points to the reality of full salvation, both body and soul, that will be ours eschatologically.

#### *The meaning of Assumption*

There remains a crucial matter with which any reinterpretation of the Assumption must deal. The definition of the Assumption does use a spatial metaphor to characterize the change in being through which Mary passes. The definition speaks of Mary as *ad caelestem gloriam assumptam*, and earlier in the text, the more pictorial verb 'taken up' (*corpore et anima ad supernam caeli gloriam eveheretur*) is used to characterize the Assumption. It is clear that the definition does not state a literal upward flight of the body of Mary to heaven. The question remains: What does Assumption mean? The answer to this question lies in the phenomenological analysis of the spatial metaphors used in religious discourse.

Mircea Eliade made a phenomenological analysis that allows the uncovering of the structures of being implicit in the spatial language

of religion. He analyzed such terms as 'ascension to heaven', 'bodily assumption', or being 'taken up into heavenly glory'. Viewed in the context of the history of religions, Eliade argued that the notion of a flight to heaven does not imply divinization.<sup>17</sup> The prophet, sage, or hero is taken into the heavenly realms to be shown its secrets but does not thereby become divine. Such a person is and remains human. Jewish and early christian apocalyptic literature know nothing of apotheosis, although they speak of seers such as Daniel, Enoch, Esdras, and John of Patmos being taken, temporarily at least, into the heavenly court. The person who has been taken into heaven does not cease being human. Instead, his or her humanity takes on a new configuration.

Eliade suggested two words to characterize the new being of one who has been taken up into heaven: freedom and transcendence. The person who is 'assumed' or 'taken up' has and retains a human identity. However, that person has entered an existence that transcends the limitations of humanity as it is now known. The person has transcended that form of human life still bound by sin and death. He or she is able to fulfil the human potential that has been perverted before. This freedom implies no loss of materiality.

The Assumption must in no case be given a gnostic interpretation. Rather, the body of Mary can be said now to exist in freedom from decay. This freedom discloses the full extent of the salvation granted in Christ. Salvation in Christ embraces all levels of existence — the biological as well as the spiritual dimension of human life. In the Assumption, Mary does not become less human than we are. She becomes more fully human because she has entered into the fulfilment promised in Christ: 'Beloved, we are God's children now; it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears we shall be like him . . . ' (Jn 3,2).

Mary has been 'assumed' (*assumptam*) into the divine life in her totality (*corpore et anima*), not by way of negation of her humanity but by its fulfilment. She has retained her humanity and has been loosed from the power of sin and death. Similarly with the use of the verb *evehetur* (imperfect, passive, subjunctive of *eveho*), the implications are twofold. It is not simply the 'taking up' or 'bearing out' of Mary from this earth. In the classical writers, the verb *eveho* is used also to characterize an elevation to a new rank. The verb was used to indicate the elevation of a person to the rank of consul. The basic metaphor behind the verb is that of enrichment or enhancement, not negation of human existence.

*Causa efficiens — causa instrumentalis*

The scope of ecumenical reflection is set by the conviction that Mary is not the *causa efficiens* but the *causa instrumentalis* of redemption. She does not create grace on her own but makes participation in the grace of her Son possible. In the modern marian definitions, the danger of making Mary a *causa efficiens* has appeared as the place of Mary, in the history of salvation, was given ever greater pre-eminence. However, Schmaus was probably right, on a strictly academic theological level, when he said, 'The objection of Protestants to the new dogma rests for the most part on a misunderstanding . . .'.<sup>18</sup> Yet much that was being taught and practised in popular piety reflected a deponent christology that looked to Mary for graces that could not be obtained from her more formidable and judgmental Son.

Hence, it was important for ecumenical understanding, when clarification on this point was given by Vatican II in *Lumen Gentium*. Here it was said that while 'she is acknowledged and honoured as being truly the Mother of God and Mother of the Redeemer, she was redeemed in an especially sublime manner by reason of the merits of her Son . . .'. When *Lumen Gentium* spoke of Mary being 'redeemed in an especially sublime manner', the reference was to the dogmas of the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption of the blessed Virgin. Nonetheless, 'she is one with all human beings in the need for salvation'. Mary is not a co-ordinate or supplementary redeemer with her Son. Instead, she takes her place in the communion of Saints, albeit at its head, 'Therefore she is also hailed as a pre-eminent and altogether singular member of the Church, and as the Church's model and excellent exemplar in faith and charity'.<sup>19</sup>

The sole source of grace is God's action in Jesus Christ. Mary is a means, in the power of the Holy Spirit, by which this grace may be more fully appropriated by the faithful. As the Church's model, Mary in her Assumption is celebrated as having entered already into the full redemption of soul and body that the Church as a whole awaits in the *eschaton*. Mary becomes in her Assumption the prolepsis of the absolute salvation established in Christ but not as yet actualized fully.

*Mary and the reception of revelation*

The lines of an ecumenical reinterpretation of the dogma of the Assumption of the blessed Virgin may be traced historically. The basis of ecumenical interpretation is in the unique role of Mary in

the history of salvation. She was the one who was graced by the Spirit and able to say 'yes' to the divine Word. So she bore the Saviour and is confessed as *Theotokos*. But Mary shared in more than the birth of Jesus. Mary is part of the ongoing history of salvation that reaches its fulfilment in the kingdom of God. She is the one who will ultimately be called 'blessed' by 'all generations'.

In the life of the people of God, there was a growing awareness of Mary as the one who had already entered fully into the salvation of body and soul for which all long. Mary became a sign of hope to the community of faith. It is the reality of this hope that is celebrated in the Assumption of the blessed Virgin. The Roman Catholic Church has given dogmatic authority to this vision of Mary in *Munificentissimus Deus*. And at Vatican II, the Assumption and the other marian teachings were given a fresh illumination by *Lumen Gentium* that has enabled these teachings to become part of the emerging dialogue in the Church.

What then can be said of this particular marian teaching and its reinterpretation from the perspective of the reformed tradition? Both negative and positive conclusions are possible. The Churches of the reformed tradition cannot receive the dogma of the Assumption as a belief necessary for salvation. It cannot be made binding on the consciences of the faithful. While the dogma of the Assumption developed out of traditions found in scripture, it lacks the full biblical justification necessary for a binding dogmatic assertion. Saving faith is faith in Jesus Christ. This faith is made in response to the saving act of God in Christ. It must not be obscured by additional beliefs, laws, or practices. But this is not to say that the marian teachings, and more particularly, the Assumption may not have an important and creative function in the life of faith.

The Assumption of Mary is a way by which the Church receives the revelation of eschatological salvation in the kingdom of God. She brings to explicit personal expression what has been implicitly received in the act of faith. She becomes the exemplar of full salvation that keeps this hope alive in the midst of a world that rejects all hope of final deliverance.

When the Church looks to Mary, it is being guided and inspired in actualizing all that faith in her Son implies. Mary is not a special source of revelation. She is the concrete expression of the revelation that has been received by the people of God through the power of the Holy Spirit. Mary has received in its fulness the salvation that we have received only in bits and pieces.

The reception of revelation is not a passive process in which a specific content is poured into empty human receptacles. The reception of revelation is active appropriation involving all dimensions of human life in their varied historical forms. The Assumption of Mary is part of the unfolding of the one redemption in Christ as it has been received throughout history by men and women. This reception involves the fulness of human existence. This reception of revelation illumines not only the relations of a son to his father but of a son to his mother. The marian teachings represent the broadening reception of revelation into the realm of the feminine, the family, of the whole creation and its hopes.

The reception of revelation throughout history has increasingly taken on more fully what it means to be human. Mary, the recepatrix of grace, stands before the Church as the sign of hope. She is the prolepsis of the ultimate salvation in the kingdom of God by which the faithful may now live. She expresses fully the salvation which is granted to us only fragmentarily as we wait 'with the whole creation groaning in travail' for that final adoption as sons and daughters, 'the redemption of our bodies' (Rom 8,23). We look to her as the one who already has been 'assumed body and soul into heavenly glory'.

To the measure that such a marian piety helps the people of God to realize more fully the redemption in Christ, this piety is to be received with joy. As we wait with her who has already passed into the life of the kingdom, we can hear her voice raised with ours saying, 'Even so, come, Lord Jesus'.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Olson, John Frederick: 'A Protestant Views the Assumption', in *The Christian Century*, 67 (October, 1950), pp 1161-62. Barrois, G. A.: 'Rise of Marian Theology', in *Theology Today* 12 (January 1956), pp 463-76 and 'If the Pope Defines the Assumption' in *The Christian Century*, 66 (August, 1949) pp 912-14. Niebuhr, Reinhold: 'Pagan Goddess?', in *Time* 55 (June, 1950), p 61 and 'Pope's Domesticated God', in *The Christian Century*, 67 (January, 1950), pp 74-75. Ebeling, Gerhard: 'Zur Frage Nach dem Sinn des marieologischen Dogmas', in *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*. 47 (1950), pp 387-91. Heiler, Friedrich: *Das neue Mariendogma im Lichte der Geschichte und im Urteil der Oekumene* (Munich, 1951). Barth, Karl: *Ad Limina Apostolorum*, trans Keith R. Crim (Richmond, 1968) pp 57-62.

<sup>2</sup> Heiler: *Das neue Mariendogma*. Rahner, Karl: 'Zum Sinn des Assumpta-Dogmas', in *Schriften zur Theologie* (Einsiedeln, 1967), pp 239-52. Loewenich, Walton von: *Modern Catholicism*, trs Reginald H. Fuller (London, 1959), pp 202-19.

<sup>3</sup> von Loewenich: *op. cit.*, pp 190-94.

<sup>4</sup> Carroll, Eamon R.: *Understanding the Mother of Jesus* (Wilmington, Del., 1979), pp 37-61. Dawe, Donald G.: *From Dysfunction to Disbelief: The Virgin Mary in Reformed Theology* (Ecumenical Society of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Washington, 1977). *International Ecumenical Conference — Theme: Looking Forward*, reprinted from *One in Christ*, papers presented at the International Conference of the Ecumenical Society of the Blessed Virgin Mary, 28 September — 1 October 1979.

<sup>5</sup> The periodical and monograph literature is already too great to be listed here. Of special help for this essay have been Benko, Stephen: *Protestants, Catholics and Mary* (Valley Forge, 1968); Boslooper, Thomas: *The Virgin Birth* (Philadelphia, 1962); De Satgé, John: *Down to Earth* (Wilmington, 1976).

<sup>6</sup> Schmaus, Michael: *Katholische Dogmatik* (Munich, 1955), Vol V, 7, 4, p 226. See also Soell, George: *Handbuch der Dogmengeschichte*, (Frieburg, 1978), Vol 111, pp 223-25.

<sup>7</sup> Schmaus: *op. cit.*, p 224.

<sup>8</sup> For a comprehensive review of biblical background, see Rush, Alfred C.: 'Scriptural Texts and the Assumption in the *Transitus Mariae*', in *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 12 (October, 1950), pp 367-78.

<sup>9</sup> Brown, Raymond: *The Birth of the Messiah* (Garden City, 1977), pp 32-38 and 286-365. His early work was open to theological exegesis. See *The Sensus Plenior of Sacred Scripture* (Baltimore, 1955).

<sup>10</sup> Mackenzie, J. A. Ross: 'The Patristic Witness to the Virgin Mary as the New Eve', in *Marian Studies*, 28 (1978).

<sup>11</sup> For the philological background on *makarios*, see Arndt, William F.: and Gingrich, F. Wilbur: *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 2nd edition (Chicago, 1979), pp 486-87.

<sup>12</sup> Pannenburg, Wolfhart: *Jesus: God-Man*, trans Duane Priebe (Philadelphia, 1964), pp 106-08.

<sup>13</sup> Pannenburg: *op. cit.*, pp 66-73.

<sup>14</sup> Scheeben, Joseph Matthias: *Handbuch der Katholischen Dogmatik*, 2nd edition (Freiburg, 1954), Vol VI/2, 1755-1758, pp 450-53. Schmaus: *op. cit.*, V, 7, 4, p 224. Soell: *op. cit.*, III, 4, pp 223-25. James, Montague R.: *The Apocryphal New Testament* (Oxford, 1955), pp 194-227.

<sup>15</sup> Denzinger, 1222. *Munificentissimus Deus*, 44.

<sup>16</sup> Schmaus: *op. cit.*, p 224.

<sup>17</sup> Eliade, Mircea, *Myths, Dreams, and Mysteries* (New York, 1960), pp 99-110.

<sup>18</sup> Schmaus: *op. cit.*, p 225.

<sup>19</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, 53.