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The Assumption Of The Blessed Virgin

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Pope Pius XII will be remembered in the history of theology for many things. One thinks of hand of his encyclical letters on the Church as the Mystical Bely of Christ, and on the sacred liturgy as the official worship of the Church. Theologians will ever be guided by his wise directives in the recent encyclical on sound theology, and biblical scholars will always be grateful to nim for his encouragement of scientific scriptural studies. One remembers as well his decrees concerning the extraordinary minister of Confirmation; and the Apostolic Constitution which settled the age-old dispute about the essence of the sacrament of Holy Örders.

But the most important step of his pontificate is the announced definition of the doctriar of the Assumption of Mary's body into heaven. The prospective definition makes most timely a discussion of the meaning and history of the doctrine, the reasons which impel us to accept it, and the significance of the definition itself.

Meaning of the Assumption about Our Lady her naturity. An ultimate and authorita- marriage, and list days on tive definition of the expres- carth.

All scholars are agreed that

ing the truth from the fiction

is, for a private scholar, a dif

ficult one. And, in passing, it

might be well to observe that

the historical truth of all the

When we pass from he fifth

century to the sixth, we find

clear references to the doctrine

in more respectable sources A

forerunner of the Roman Mis-

sal, the Sacramentary of Pope

a praver for the feast of the

Assumption which declares

that "on this day, the Blessed

Mother of God suffered tem-

poral death, but it was not pos-

sible that she who gave birth

to our incarnate Lord . . .

should be subjugated by

death." It should be noted that

parts of the Sacramentary are

older than the sixth century

and that Assumption prayer

About this same time the

may well be one of these.

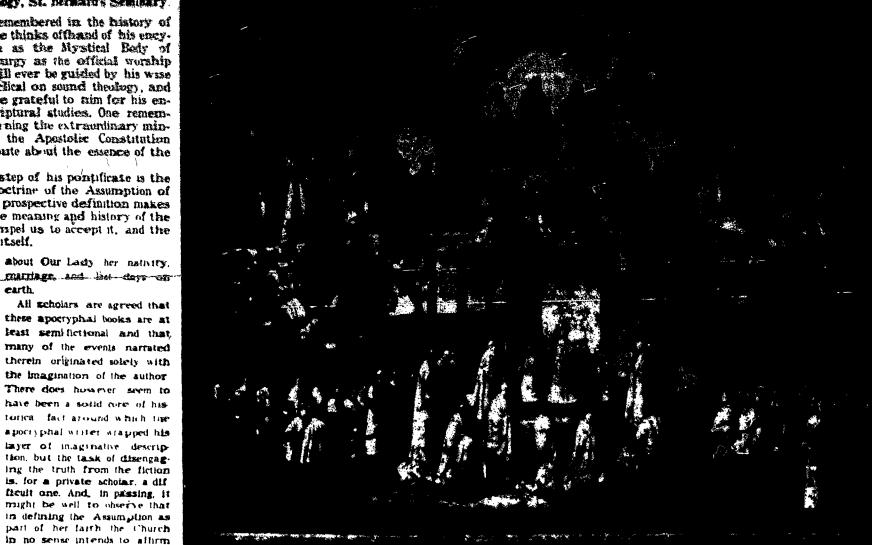
details contained in these nar

ratives

sion "the bodily Assumption of the Blessed Virgin" cannot be these apocryphal books are at given by any individual save the Pope. Only when the Papal many of the events narrated definition comes forth shall we therein originated solely with know with exactifude what is the imagination of the author contained in this prerogative There does however seem to of the Virgin Mother of God have been a solid core of his-In the strictest sense, the exterior fact around which the pression mashs no more than a pociphal writer wrapped his the glorious transferral of layer of inagenative descrip-Mary's body, joined with its thon, but the task of disengagsoul, to Heaven. Defined in this sense, the doctrine of the Assumption does not necessarby involve the death of Mary. in defining the Assumption as or an anticipated resurrection part of her fairh the Church Most Catholics, however, take a larger view of the Assumption and in their mind the doctrifie itself would imply (a) the death of Mary, (b) the miraculous preservation of herbody from decay; (c) the reunion of her beatified soul with that body; (d) the glori- St. Gregory (590-604), contains fication of the risen body; (e) the translation of it to the halls of Heaven.

We may expect that the Holy Father, in his forthcoming definition, will make official this larger concept, but there does remain the possibility that he will by pass the question of Mary's death, and define only the Assumption in the strict sense.

History of the Assumption



PROGAESHING THE DOGMA: Pope Pius IX, proclaiming the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, in St. Peter's Basilica, Romé, 1854, is the subject of this painting by Francence Podesti of Ancona (1809-1896). It is one of two frencoes by him in the Hall of the immeculate Conception in the Vati-

times, the testimonies to the favor of th definition, the Holy Father then announced that he doctrine become more numerous Such Oriental Fathers as intended to define the doctrine St. Modestus of Jerusalem, St. on Nov. 1, 1950,

John of Damascus, and St. An-The Assumption and Mistory drew of Crete have entire ser-Now to pass to the third part mons dedicated to the Assump- of this paper - the reasons tion. The insignificant opposi- which impel our assent to the tion led by Usuard, a Parisian doctrine

monk was never thought ser-The first observation to be lous enough to meril refuta made is this, that while the tion by the great medieval Assumption is a historical fact, it is not historically demon-While St. Thomas merciy alstrable Judes to the Assumption in

The Resurrection of Our his monumental Summa, his Lord is both a historical fact

can Galleries. The write shows in the upper part of the pa ing--Paradiae-with Our Lady in the place of humar, dis me bern of the United Matter Micharchy and two from Canada were present at that historie weession in 1964. Many America

turies in duration, embaranting believe that Mary in the to those who would deny the Assumption, I mean the comnon-existence of any plete claim to the possession of Mary's body. The inhabitants of Jerusalers and Ephanila: have long quarrelled over the privilege of possessing Mary's empty grave: but no city has ever presumed to present itself as the possessor of hier sacred body. This would seem to be a strong indication that the Christians of antiquity universally recognized that it was not upon the earth.

Theological Considerations Many theologians, admittlest

shops will allend the Annumption Proclamation on Nov. 1.

Mother of Godi that He. through her that pecanic main She is the mother of a devoted and omsipotent son. His deve-tion to her is shown at the ba-gioning and at the end of His public life: at the beginning, when He performed bid first miracle for her; and at the end, when even in Hig agony, He thought of her and chrosnit ted her to the care of the discipie whom He loved. His am nipotence is shown by His ability to raise others and Himself from the dead.

Now with these facts in

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discussing the water of arguments from Hot Berpture, two should be made.

First: it presentativy such person are triable to prevent a report activities arguments to behalf of the Answirn Ston, the failure would be no proof that biblical achieves it the father will be no more storesable. As \$6. Prior showing storesable. As \$6. Prior showing storesable. cull to Jelermet.

The Bille M. N which he who rune is my In the word of God there are stepline and taxes servit sectors and orderinger, to all their talene and sectors are unable to plush. My the course of these, the Chi grows in her underst the marvel jest, and desper, basight bets has ing, so that what was seen obmeurely, le demely

In the history of despite, it has happened and we other that expent acguments were not de-veloped until after the define-tion of the failer. For example, the theological literature writ-ten alter the Council of Money

The first literary reference to the Assumption, among documents now at our disposal, is contained in a semi-fictional work of the fifth century entitled "The Passing of Mary" In the early days of the Church many Christians not content with the biographical material of the New Testa ment composed many pieces of literature to fill in the gaps left by the inspired writers. These books are called the Christian "apoerypha" Some of them deal with Our Lord. and give details about His in fancy, sojourn in Egypt, and the hidden life at Nazareth. Other approcryphal works, composed about the beginning of the fifth century, purport to give biographical information

Assumption was likewise being commentary on the Angelic relebrated to the east and tr Salutation gives him an opporthe west of Rome. In the Orient the Emperor Maurice said to have commanded that the festival be kept in aciordance with sestern pratice, on the fifteenth of Ar gist And in Spain the Mira rabic liturgy speaks of Mary having been assumed into the choses of angels and virgins. after being giardened by the gift of incorrupt firsh And from the same century the voice of St Gregory of Tours is heard from Gau. The Lord commanded the holy body of Mary to be borne on a cloud to Paradise where reunsted to its soul it enjoys the meverending bliss of eternity"

As we come nearer our own

tunity to express his own faith at some length. There he as serve that the Blessed Virgin was not subject to corruption, sities she was assumed with

Later Fathers and Theologians

of faith, he nevertheless noted that it would be extremely

Catholic faith.

schoolmen.

ter tents a to Heaven. We beheve that after death she was raised and taken to Heavan Assert a so comes from the g cat theorogians of modern times. Suarez laught that if would be tash to deny the doe trine While Benedict XIV writing as a private theologian before his elevation to the chair of Peter maintained that the ductring was not an article

have the doctrine defined by

the Pope. This effort began in

1849, when two bishops ap-

pended to their petition for the

the definition of the Immaculate Conception, a similar re-

quest for the definition of the

Assumption. As time passed,

other such requests were

made, the most celebrated of

which was the petition from

nearly 200 bishops at the Vati-

can Council, in 1870. These pe-

titions continued to pour into

Rome in ever growing num-

bers, until, hy 1940 they had

come from 73' of the sees in

"But Bome herself remained

siler until May 1, 1946, when Pope Plus XII sent the secret

the Church.

sixth century-some five hundred years after the event. Future discoveries may bring rash to oppose it. And subseus an earlier account, or anquent theologians have all aftedate one presently known. firmed the doctrine, confining but as matters stand today their disputations to the relathere is a gap of some 500 tive worth of arguments in its years between the event and favor, and to the feasibility of the first reputable description defining it as an article of the of ft.

Like

It must be confessed that The Assumption Movement the silence of the first five cen-The past century saw the turies is embarassing to us. rise of whit history will know But there is also aziother emas the Assumptionist movebarassing silence, twenty cenment, a concerted effort to

the difficulties involved in an silion the Christian who de and historically demonstrable, appeal to history, have refor we have contemporary course to theological reasondocuments, worths of creing. Their points of departure denie which testify to it. are predominantly two: Mary's These documents were either Immaculate Conception, and written by men who had seen her divine maternity our risen Lord (like Matthew

and John or who at least had know from divine revelation direct contact with those who that death and dissolution are had seen Him ilike Mark and inflicted by God solely as m penalty for Original His. So In the case of the Assumpfar as the budy is concerned, tion of Our Lady, such historwe die and decay simply as a ical documents are completely penalty for war shate - 10 absent. The carliest extant lit Adam's fall, Now Mary had no erary reference which is ahare in Adam's fall, no part worthy of credence is of the whatsoever in his guild. From these two pressises, it would seem is follow that neither could the have come under the ancient curse, "unto dest fiere shalt return." If Mary was ever preserved from ain, the corruption of the soul, she should also have been preserved from the cerruption of the body, the penalty inflicing by God for sin-

> A yet stronger consideration is that derived from Mary's divine maternity. All Christians

nies the Assumption is forced to place himself. He is forced to deny either the amnipolence or the fillal devotion of Jeans. If an a devoted son survey would, He willed to protect bla mother from rot and decay, but did not to so because of In the present order, we

ills inability, then He could not be omnipatent. If, on the other hand. He was able to do so, but unwilling, then He is lacking in filial devolution. Thus to take from Mary the pretog-ative of her Assumption, in volves logically the desial a either a divine or a human excellence in Jesus,

The mind of the devou Christlan naturally release against the idea that Jeaus was so thoughtless of the hands that led Him, the lips that kissed Him, the arms that careased Him, the wordb that contained Him, and the breasts that nursed Ilim, so heedless and callous to the fate of the dear body of His mother that He left it to mouider, rot and decay in an unmarked grave. It is for this reason that one who has learned to love Jesus. and Mary, cannot bring black solf to a desilal of Mary's As

sumption. Scripture and the Assumption The theological reasonings just given are very strong, and, to my mind, are sulfi-

cient as a proof of the textile of the Assumption. It is, however, one thing to prove the Assumption to be a truth; the another thing to prove that it is a revealed truth, And, if should be remembered, before we can legitimately assent to any proposition with divines falls, we should first be morally certain that the proposition in question has been re-

Catholics know that there are two sources in which we can find those propositions which have been revealed by God for our acceptance. These sources are: the Sacrad Serietures, and the living Tradition of the Church Many Catholic writers are

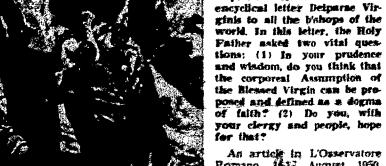
convinced that, the doctrine of the Assumption is at least im-plicity contained in the writ-ten word of God. The first text offered is that of the Proto-grapet in Gene sis, III, 15, Herein, after th victory of the expent (Satas) over a man and a woman (our first parents), God declares that He will place everiating comittes between a certain woman and her seed on the one hand, and the serpent and

(which settined the persect di-violay of Christ's in much more convincing in proving that dogma and in anomering the phi-jections against it than were in literiture of the Anle-Micene destill,

Agilit, our maders periptural proofs of the Real Presence are far more convert them were brief arguments offered by the medical actions and the ally, medern manuals of and agentics have maked finer shal-

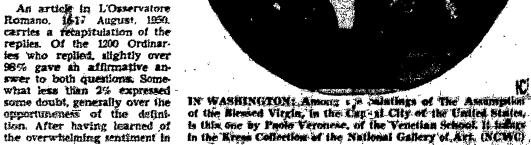
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MARY'S ASSUMPTION: This attractive engraving by an unidentified artist depicts the Assumption of Our" Mother, it is from an old Franciscan Missal, printed by Plantin at Antwerp in 1702. The Missal is in the rare book collection of the library of St. Bonaventure University; St. Bonaventursh N. J. INCWCI

ies who replied, slightly over 98% gave an affirmative answer to both questions. Somewhat less than 2% expressed some doubt, generally over the opportunement of the definition. After having learned of the overwhelming sentiment in



his seed on the other, and that