

“Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away”:

The Use of Scripture and the Fathers in *Munificentissimus Deus*

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Introduction

In a packed Saint Peter’s Square in 1950, Pope Pius XII declared the second and most recent papal dogmatic declaration on the Virgin Mary. Following the example of his predecessor Pope Pius IX who proclaimed the Immaculate Conception of Mary as dogma in 1854, and the theology of papal authority set forth by the First Vatican Council, Pope Pius XII dogmatically declared the assumption of Mary body and soul into heaven as worthy of belief and binding on the faithful. As to the reasoning for declaring such a definition at that particular moment in history, John Saward wrote:

Pope Pius saw that the Assumption struck a prophetic blow against the institutionalized individualism of the modern world, its competitive and alienated spirit, demonstrated in a global way in the Second World War, which had ended only five years before, and daily seen in men’s lives. A dogma that is based on an indestructible relationship of Mother and Son, and of the Son with humanity, has much to offer the world.¹

¹ Rev. John Saward, M.A., “The Assumption”, *Mary’s Place in Christian Dialogue*, edited by Alberic Stacpoole, O.S.B. (Middlegreen: St Paul Publications, 1982), p. 120. This analysis on Pope Pius XII’s motives in issuing *Munificentissimus Deus* appear to be valid if we read it side-by-side with this address given by the Holy Father at the time of the document’s publication:

The world is without peace, is tormented on every side by hostility, division, opposition, and hatred, because faith has grown weak, and almost all sense of love and brotherhood in Christ has been lost, while we pray in all ardor that she who has been assumed may be a sign to the return to human hearts of the warmth of human affection and life. We do not tire in reminding this

In the document *Munificentissimus Deus*, that details the nature and reasoning for the Marian definition, the Holy Father sought the authority of both Scripture and tradition to show a basis for belief in a statement regarding Mary that has both no explicit Scriptural account and no historical record on the event of her passing from this life. The purpose of this paper will be to survey the sources used by Pope Pius XII and to make note of how (and if) his statements in *Munificentissimus Deus* are in harmony with the tradition of the Church – particularly from the patristic period. This will be done in in three parts. First, the references that Pope Pius XII makes to the liturgy, early popes, and certain Eastern fathers will be discussed highlighting the Holy Father’s insistence of these factors as serving a historical basis for a long-standing belief of the Church. Second, this paper will briefly examine the purpose of typology in biblical exegesis and the use of typology in *Munificentissimus Deus*. This will be done through a survey of certain Marian types mentioned in the papal document such as Ark of the Covenant, Queen-Mother, and Spouse. Third, this paper will look at the use of New Testament passages in *Munificentissimus Deus* and the appropriateness of these references. Within the sections that treat Old Testament types and the New Testament, the writings of some Fathers of the patristic period that reference these passages of Scripture will be examined and compared with their usage in *Munificentissimus Deus*. Lastly, by way of conclusion, this paper will provide certain questions related to ecumenical dialogue that need further reflection as we look move closer and closer to the eightieth anniversary of the dogmatic declaration of Mary’s bodily Assumption into heaven.

world that nothing can ever prevail over the fact and the knowledge that we are all children of one and the same Mother, Mary, who is alive in heaven and is a bond of union for the Mystical Body of Christ, as new Eve, and new Mother of the Living, who wishes to lead all men to the truth and the grace of her divine Son.” (*AAAS*, ser 2, V. 17, n. 15 (November 4, 1950), 781.)

Liturgical and Papal Precedent

After highlighting early Christian affirmation of Mary's bodily assumption into heaven from the witness of sacred architecture and images, the many areas of the world "placed under the special patronage and guardianship"² of Mary assumed, the religious institutes founded (and approved) with this Marian privilege as a foundational charism, and after reminding Catholics that the fourth glorious mystery of the Rosary calls to mind Mary's assumption, Pius XII begins to lay out a historical narrative of Christian belief in the dogma through reliance on ancient liturgical books and the authority of his predecessors. It is important to note again that Pius XII is not seeking to find historical evidence for the reality of Mary's passing from this life and her bodily assumption into heaven. Despite not having any documented eyewitness accounts, and the lack of references to the event in the first centuries of Christianity, the historical development that Pius XII traces of the early Christian confession in Mary's assumption helps to establish the credibility and the reasonability of the dogmatic assertion. By referencing the ancient Christian liturgical heritage, and the ecclesial acts of approval of this mystery, Pius XII gives nod to the assertion that the Church can define truths of the faith as dogma that are both explicit in the deposit of faith *and* virtually implicit.³ While the dogma of Mary's assumption is not explicitly found in the deposit of faith as it was handed on to the Apostles by Christ, it has been explicitly affirmed, believed, and celebrated by the Church as being implicit because of her role as the New Eve and the *Theotokos*.

In his appeal to the authority of the Church's liturgical patrimony, Pope Pius XII cites a eucharological prayer from the tenth century Gregorian Sacramentary specific to the liturgical commemoration of

² Pope Pius XII, *Munificentissimus Deus* (hereafter: *MD*), no. 15.

³ For discussion on the relationship between formally explicit and virtually implicit articles of faith within divine revelation see Joseph Duhr, *The Glorious Assumption of the Mother of God* (Paris: La Maison de la Bonne Presse, 1948).

Mary's assumption, "Venerable to us, O Lord, is the festivity of this day on which the holy Mother of God suffered temporal death, but still could not be kept down by the bonds of death, who has begotten your Son our Lord incarnate from herself."⁴ Likewise, Pius XII also will cite from the Gallican sacramentary, whose prayers are less sobering than the words of the Gregorian and later Roman rite, that speaks of the end of Mary's life as "an ineffable mystery all the more worthy of praise as the Virgin's Assumption is something unique among men."⁵ Looking to the East, Pius XII cites a prayer that bespeaks of the rich liturgical tradition of the East, and of the East's emphasis on Mary's dormition as something connected to her virginal motherhood, "God, the King of the universe, has granted you favors that surpass nature. As he kept you a virgin in childbirth, thus he has kept your body incorrupt in the tomb and has glorified it by his divine act of transferring it from the tomb."⁶ One thing to note of interest is that Pius XII will use these liturgical texts to show that the idea of Mary's repose and assumption was already "known and accepted by Christ's faithful" rather than the date of the feast itself being the primary source of knowledge and inspiration because "the liturgy of the Church does not engender the Catholic faith, but rather springs from it."⁷

In addition to the liturgical affirmation of the Church regarding Mary's assumption into heaven, the precedent set by the predecessors of Pius XII is shown as another historical aid to the reasonability and fittingness of the dogma. While citing the Gregorian Sacramentary,

⁴ Referenced in *MD*, 17.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.* The citation of this Eastern liturgical prayer is obscure as the Vatican website simply marks it as coming from: "Menaei Totius Anni" – which is especially confusing as it is a Latin name for an Eastern text. Further research finds that the prayer, in fact, comes from the sticheron for 6th Ode of the First Canon, Feast of the Dormition: Νέμει σοι τὰ ὑπέρ φύσιν, Ἄναξ ὁ πάντων Θεός· ἐν γὰρ τῷ τίκτειν, Παρθένον ὥσπερ ἐφυλάξεν, οὕτως ἐν τάφῳ τὸ σῶμα διετήρησεν, ἀδιάφθορον, καὶ συνεδόξασε, θεία μεταστάσει, γέρα σοι ὥσπερ Υἱὸς Μητρὶ χαριζόμενος.

⁷ *MD*, 20.

Pius XII also makes note that this text was sent by Adrian I (d. 795 AD) to the emperor Charlemagne. References are also made to Sergius I (d. 701 AD) and the stationary procession he prescribed for four feasts of Mary (one of which was the Dormition on August 15). Leo IV (d. 855 AD) made law that a vigil be observed for the feast of the Assumption (as it was already being called at this time) and that this feast has its own octave. The historical evidence for a fast on the day prior to the feast is also affirmed through the writings of Nicolas I (d. 867 AD). While some might argue that this argument from papal authority is a product of ultramontanist thought inherited from the Vatican I, the mention of these popes of the later patristic era does have real value in that it shows an ecclesial approval in the West that grew over time - albeit later than the feast's development in the Eastern church. Despite the liturgical commemoration of the Dormition in the East being traced back to the end of the fifth century, where there was a basilica in Gethsemane venerating Mary's "tomb", the liturgical celebration of Mary's assumption in the West began much later. While there are many reasons speculating this later development in the West, it can be stated that there are no references to the existence of the feast earlier than the mid-seventh century.⁸

The Authority of the Fathers

After briefly establishing the liturgical historicity of the celebration of Mary's Dormition and Assumption, Pius XII is then able to move forward in highlighting the homilies of certain Fathers who preached in honor of this feast. It is interesting to note that Pope Pius XII in *Munificentissimus Deus* selects three Eastern Fathers for this: John Damascene, Germanus of Constantinople, and Modestus of Jerusalem (simply referred to as a "very ancient writer"). His first reference is an excerpt from a homily of John Damascene (d. ~ 749 AD) in honor of Mary's Dormition:

⁸ For more speculation on the later development of Mary's Assumption in the West see, L. Everett, C.S.S.R., "Mary's Death and Bodily Assumption", *Mariology Vol. 2*, ed. Juniper B. Carol, O.F.M., (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing Company, 1957) pp. 477-481.

It was fitting that she, who had kept her virginity intact in childbirth, should keep her own body free from all corruption even after death. It was fitting that she, who had carried the Creator as a child at her breast, should dwell in the divine tabernacles. It was fitting that the spouse, whom the Father had taken to himself, should live in the divine mansions. It was fitting that she, who had seen her Son upon the cross and who had thereby received into her heart the sword of sorrow which she had escaped in the act of giving birth to him, should look upon him as he sits with the Father. It was fitting that God's Mother should possess what belongs to her Son, and that she should be honored by every creature as the Mother and as the handmaid of God.⁹

It is important to note here that, like his contemporaries, John Damascene emphasizes Mary's other privileges of divine maternity and virginal motherhood, with the Assumption being a logical consequence of these realities. His reference of Germanus of Constantinople (d. 730 AD) is of interest in that the passage he cites highlights the privileged purity of Mary as a reason for her Dormition:

You are she who, as it is written, appears in beauty, and your virginal body is all holy, all chaste, entirely the dwelling place of God, so that it is henceforth completely exempt from dissolution into dust. Though still human, it is changed into the heavenly

⁹ John Damascene, *On the Holy and Glorious Dormition and Transformation of Our Lady Mary, Mother of God and Ever-Virgin, Homily II*, n. 14. All translations from the Eastern fathers comes from: Brian E. Daley, S.J., trans. *On the Dormition of Mary: Early Patristic Homilies*. Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1998.

life of incorruptibility, truly living and glorious,
undamaged and sharing in perfect life.¹⁰

While this excerpt from Germanus is noteworthy for its emphasis on Mary's virginal purity as a reason for her being assumed into heavenly glory, a word of caution must be stated to avoid making any sort of anachronistic assumptions of this passage showing evidence of a patristic belief in the Immaculate Conception. Mary's virginal purity is affirmed by Germanus, yet it cannot be clearly discerned whether this is in connection to Mary being redeemed from the moment of her conception and, therefore, without the stain of original sin.¹¹ Lastly, Pope Pius XII cites Modestus of Jerusalem who, in an encomium on the Dormition, writes:

As the most glorious Mother of Christ, our Savior and God and the giver of life and immortality, has been endowed with life by him, she has received an eternal incorruptibility of the body together with him who has raised her up from the tomb and has taken her up to himself in a way known only to him.¹²

While evidence for a liturgical celebration of this mystery of Mary can be traced to a couple centuries before the time of these Eastern Fathers, their words are some of the earliest references that we have to Mary's dormition and assumption – apart from fourth century apocryphal writings and late sixth century homilies from Churches

¹⁰ Germanus of Constantinople, *On the Most Venerable Dormition of the Holy Mother of God*, Homily I, n. 5.

¹¹ For an excellent text on the Eastern and Western understanding of the Immaculate Conception (especially with Eastern writers that might be more in favor of the theology) see: Christiaan W. Kappes, *The Immaculate Conception: Why Thomas Aquinas Denied, While John Duns Scotus, Gregory Palamas, & Mark Eugenius Professed the Absolute Immaculate Existence of Mary* (New Bedford: Academy of the Immaculate, 2014).

¹² Modestus of Jerusalem, *Encomium on the Dormition of the Holy Mother of God and Ever-Virgin Mary*, n. 14.

that rejected the Christological decrees of the Council of Chalcedon. As Brian Daley, SJ comments on this phenomenon:

It was only in the early seventh century...after the official acceptance of the feast into the calendar of imperial “Great” Church, that Greek preachers and theologians, as far as the extant literature shows, began the challenging process of interpreting the significance for Christians of the feast of Mary’s dormition, and the non-Biblical story it celebrates, within the context of the whole tradition of orthodox faith and worship.¹³

While one could speculate the reasons as to why Pope Pius XII did not utilize either the non-Chalcedonian and Apocryphal writings in *Munificentissimus Deus*¹⁴, their importance should continue to be stressed as they present us with a pious devotion of early Christians to this mystery of Mary that preceded any definition or solemn approval of the institutional Church. That being said, to critique *Munificentissimus Deus* as a document that is found lacking in its use of historical data would be to misunderstand the nature of a text that is both ecclesial and dogmatic in tone. A papal dogmatic document is not intended to serve as a historically critical text on the antiquity of Christian honoring of Mary being assumed into heavenly glory. Rather, its purpose is to briefly expound on that which brings us to see this mystery as being reasonable, fitting, and – therefore- worthy of belief. As the late Mariologist Juniper Carol, O.F.M. wrote on this issue prior to the 1950 declaration:

¹³ Brian Daley, S.J., trans. *On the Dormition of Mary: Early Patristic Homilies* (Crestwood: Saint Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1998). p. 12.

¹⁴ For example, L. Everett, C.S.S.R. writes, “Doubtless the Holy Father made no mention of the Apocrypha due to the fact that many non-Catholic critics maintain that the later tradition of the Church expressing belief in the Assumption is an outgrowth of them.” (“Mary’s Death and Bodily Assumption”, *Mariology Vol. 2*, p. 483.)

In order to establish the continuity of a given doctrine throughout the ages it is not necessary that we possess an uninterrupted chain of explicit testimonies linking our times with the apostolic period. The reason for this is quite obvious. Since the custody and infallible interpretation of the deposit of faith has been entrusted by God to a living organism which is the Church, and since the Church of today is the same moral person it was in the first of second century, it follows logically that whatever the Church of today holds and teaches as pertaining to the original deposit of revelation was also held and taught (at least implicitly) by the Church of the first centuries.¹⁵

As we will see, what was given by Christ to the apostles (both explicitly and implicitly) up to the day of Pentecost, and entrusted to the living organism of the Church, would be further elaborated and interpreted to bring those implicit realities more visible and tangible to the believing community. An examination into the nature of typology, its limits and parameters, and its use in both the writings of the Fathers and in *Munificentissimus Deus* will bring forth issues related to biblical interpretation, the teaching authority of the Church, and – ultimately – Christian unity.

The Use of Typology in *Munificentissimus Deus*

After referencing certain Fathers and their affirmation of the mystery of Mary's Assumption and Dormition, Pope Pius XII moves to expound on the biblical justification such a belief. Without any clear direct reference from Scripture to the end of Mary's earthly life and what immediately followed, one might argue that there are profound problems with establishing such a dogmatic affirmation of something not only lacking in historical evidence, but also lacking in the written

¹⁵ Juniper Carol, O.F.M., "The Definability of Mary's Assumption", *The American Ecclesiastical Review*, Vol. 118, 1948, pp. 164-165.

word of God. This issue appears to be ever-present in the writing of *Munificentissimus Deus* as Pope Pius XII will recognize that “often there are theologians and preachers who, following in the footsteps of the holy Fathers, have been *rather free in their use of events and expressions taken from Sacred Scripture* to explain their belief in the Assumption.”¹⁶ Without using any technical terms such as typology, the typical/spiritual sense of interpretation, or analogy¹⁷, Pope Pius XII recognizes that the Fathers of the Church - and subsequent theologians - studied persons, places, events, and objects in the Bible that foreshadow that which God makes present and visible in salvation history. For our discussion on this topic as it relates to the solemn definition of Mary’s Assumption, we will unpack the Catholic understanding of typology and its implications in early Christian biblical interpretation – specifically in relation to the defense of Mary’s Dormition and Assumption.

As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* clearly states that such an understanding of Scripture is due to the unity of God’s plan, this unity allows for possibility that the “realities and events about which it [Scripture] speaks can be signs.”¹⁸ Because this possibility comes from such a unity that is unfolded within the biblical narrative, the study and discernment of these signs cannot be seen as some type of study being imposed on the scriptural text from outside. What bears witness to this fundamental aspect of typology is that the biblical authors themselves (especially Paul) will show how people, places, and events in the Old Testament are shadows of realities that are fulfilled in Christ and his Church.¹⁹ In addition to Paul’s comparison

¹⁶ *MD*, 26. My emphasis.

¹⁷ This is not to say that typology and analogy are the same thing. It is important to stress this point that the Greek conception of allegory is not the same as the biblical and Semitic understanding of typology as something found within the sacred text.

¹⁸ *CCC*, n. 117.

¹⁹ “Typology is not simply applied to the Bible; it is something applied within the Bible. Because typology was used by the authors of the Bible, studying the Bible in terms of typology is a valid approach to understanding salvation history. The point is important to stress, since typology is

of Adam and Jesus (Romans 5:12-21), another example of typological interpretation being applied within the biblical texts can be found in 1 Corinthians 10:1-5:

I want you to know, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same supernatural food and all drank the same supernatural drink. For they drank from the supernatural Rock which followed them, and the Rock was Christ. Nevertheless, with most of them God was not pleased; for they were overthrown in the wilderness.

While the question as to the nature of Paul's typology and to the extent that it should be valued (whether it is something strictly moral to exhort early Christians against idolatry or there is a sacramental quality to it) is a topic for further discussion that cannot be found in this paper²⁰, the New Testament discernment of signs behind the people, places, and events of the Old Testament can present us with a biblical precedent for what the Fathers would do as interpreters of Scripture. For early Christian theology, the discernment of various types within Scripture brings to light the inner coherence of the various texts and presents the believer with, what *Dei Verbum* calls, a "true divine pedagogy".²¹ This spiritual interpretation of Scripture

sometimes confused with a method of biblical interpretation that Christian theologians adopted from the world of classical antiquity." S. Hahn (editor), "Typology", *Catholic Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 2009), p. 929.

²⁰ For more information on various modern Protestant scholars and their respective understanding of biblical typology and its use see: M. Levering, "The Validity and Scope of Typological Exegesis", *Mary's Bodily Assumption* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2015), pp. 83-110.

²¹ "The principal purpose to which the plan of the old covenant was directed was to prepare for the coming of Christ, the redeemer of all and of the messianic kingdom, to announce this coming by prophecy (see Luke 24:44; John 5:39; 1 Peter 1:10), and to indicate its meaning through various types (see 1 Cor. 10:12). Now the books of the Old Testament, in

also allowed early Christians to find hints and inklings of Mary's fate within the biblical text. Aside for the exposition of Genesis 3:15 and the implications of the enmity that God places between the woman of the future and her seed against the serpent and his, the Fathers discerned certain realities of the Old Testament that found anticipated a Mariological fulfillment centered on Christ and his saving mission. Therefore, because of the lack of explicit biblical reference to the historical event of Mary's death and bodily assumption into heaven, the Fathers were prone to apply these principles of typological interpretation and be, as Pius XII writes, "rather free in their use of events and expressions taken from Sacred Scripture."²² With this affirmation from Pope Pius XII, the pope will mention a few texts of the Old Testament as typologically significant with regards to Mary's bodily Assumption: Ark, Queen, and Bride.

Mary as New Ark of the Covenant

The first type that Pope Pius XII mentions as important to the Fathers is the Ark of the Covenant:

Thus, to mention only a few of the texts rather frequently cited in this fashion, some have employed the words of the psalmist: "Arise, O Lord, into your resting place: you and the ark, which you have sanctified"(Ps. 131:8); and have looked upon the Ark of the Covenant, built of incorruptible wood and

accordance with the state of mankind before the time of salvation established by Christ, reveal to all men the knowledge of God and of man and the ways in which God, just and merciful, deals with men. These books, though they also contain some things which are incomplete and temporary, nevertheless show us true divine pedagogy. These same books, then, give expression to a lively sense of God, contain a store of sublime teachings about God, sound wisdom about human life, and a wonderful treasury of prayers, and in them the mystery of our salvation is present in a hidden way. Christians should receive them with reverence." *Dei Verbum*, 15.

²² *MD*, 26.

placed in the Lord's temple, as a type of the most pure body of the Virgin Mary, preserved and exempt from all the corruption of the tomb and raised up to such glory in heaven.²³

As the Ark is first described to us in the Exodus, its significance is not underemphasized as it becomes the place on earth that God dwells among his people. Inside the Ark were fragments of the Ten Commandments – broken following Israel's egregious idolatry (Exodus 31-32), fragments of the miraculous manna (Exodus 16:34) and the rod of Aaron the high priest (Numbers 17:10). With Mary as the New Ark, her womb becomes that vessel in which God dwells among his people, containing within her Christ Jesus who is the fulfillment of the law (Matthew 5:17), our spiritual nourishment (John 6:49ff), and our high priest (Hebrews 4:14-16). The typological significance of Mary as the New Ark is of real importance in how the later Fathers understood the assumption of Mary. Stefano Manelli points out, "In the mystery of Mary's Assumption into heaven, in the splendor of glory, is realized most fully the incorruptibility of the Ark, the perennial dwelling place of God."²⁴ In his *Ecce Mater* in honor of the Dormition of Mary, Modestus of Jerusalem brings to light the typological significance of Mary as the New Ark of the New Covenant:

She [Mary] is not carried like Moses' ark of old, drawn by oxen, but she is escorted and surrounded by an army, heaven's holy angels. She is not an ark made by hands, not plated with gold, but is God's spiritual handiwork, resplendent all over with the radiance of the holy and life-giving Spirit, who descended upon her. She does not contain the vessel of manna and the tablets of the covenant, but the Lord who provided both the manna and the eternal blessings promised in

²³ *MD*, n. 26.

²⁴ Stefano Manelli, F.I., *All Generations Shall Call Me Blessed: Biblical Mariology* (New Bedford: Academy of the Immaculate, 2005), p. 67.

the Old and New Covenants, and who was born as her child – he who freed from the curse of the Law those who have faith in him. She does not contain the rod of Aaron, nor is she crowned with glorious cherubim, but rather the incomparably more glorious rod of Jesse, revealed by the prophet and overshadowed by the almighty power of the Father on high (Is 11:1; Lk 1:35). She does not move before the Hebrew people, like that former ark, but follows the God who has appeared on earth in flesh furnished by her; she is called blessed by angels and by men and women, for the glory of the one who magnified her above all ranks of heaven and earth, as she cries out her holy words, “My soul glorifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my savior.” (Lk 1:40).²⁵

The exposition of Mary’s visitation to her cousin Elizabeth and the reference to Mary’s canticle of praise in the Magnificat is also significant in our typological understanding of Mary as the New Ark if one compares this narrative with the story of the Ark approaching Jerusalem before David the King (cf. 2 Sam 6). In addition to Modestus’ exposition of Psalm 131:8, Andrew of Crete in a homily celebrating Mary’s dormition also sees Mary as a typological fulfillment, strikingly seeing the Psalm verse as an act of David praying to Christ: “God’s ancestor David prayed to Christ on your behalf.”²⁶ John Damascene as well finds Mary in Psalm 131:8 as, unlike the inanimate and physical ark, “the living, spiritual ark of the Lord” that has “gone up to the resting-place of her Son.”²⁷

Mary as Queen Mother

²⁵ Modestus of Jerusalem, *An Encomium on the Dormition of Our Most Holy Lady, Mary, Mother of God and Ever-Virgin*, n. 4.

²⁶ Andrew of Crete, *On the Dormition: Homily III*, n. 6.

²⁷ John Damascene, *A Discourse on the Dormition: Homily III*, n. 2.

Pope Pius XII in *Munificentissimus Deus* moves to show another biblical type of Mary that had been interpreted by the Fathers as a sign of her Dormition and Assumption, “Treating of this subject, they also describe her as the Queen entering triumphantly into the royal halls of heaven and sitting at the right hand of the divine Redeemer.”²⁸ The citations within the dogmatic statement take note of Psalm 45(44), a psalm that is attributed to the “Sons of Korah” – Levitical singers for the sanctuary in Jerusalem – that is considered a love song and one of great praise following the song of lament found in Psalm 44 (43):

Hear, O daughter, consider, and incline your ear;
forget your people and your father’s house;
and the king will desire your beauty.
Since he is your lord, bow to him;
the people of Tyre will court your favor with gifts,
the richest of the people with all kinds of wealth.
The daughter of the king is decked in her
chamber with gold-woven robes,
in many-colored robes she is led to the king,
with her virgin companions, her escort, in her train.
(Psalm 45(44):10-14)

As the Holy Father mentions the Fathers’ use of Psalm 45 (44) he points to Mary as the Queen in the new Davidic kingdom who joins her son and king in the royal halls of heaven. To begin to have an adequate understanding of this typological image it is important for one to take a historical and political note of how leadership and authority was seen within the royal Davidic family. While the kingdom of Israel was like the other kingdoms of that period, in that polygamy was a common practice within a royal family, it was dissimilar in that the queen was not one of the king’s wives (either the first married or the most favored) but his mother. The mother was given the title “queen mother” – *gebirah* – and she was given a place of authority within the kingdom and honor before the king’s

²⁸ *MD*, 26.

subjects. Our biblical understanding of the queen mother can be found in the historical books of the Old Testament (especially 1 Kings and 2 Chronicles) and in the prophetic literature (see Jer. 13:18; 29:2). For example, 1 Kings mentions Adonijah's request that Bathsheba beseech her on Solomon for favor. The encounter between Adonijah and Bathsheba, and her entrance into the royal halls of her son after he had been coronated king following the death of his father David are particularly striking:

Then Adonijah the son of Haggith came to Bathsheba the mother of Solomon. And she said, "Do you come peaceably?" He said, "Peaceably." Then he said, "I have something to say to you." She said, "Say on"...and he said, "Pray ask King Solomon – he will not refuse you - to give me Abishad the Shunammite as my wife." Bathsheba said, "Very well; I will speak for you to the king."...So Bathsheba went to King Solomon, to speak to him on behalf of Adonijah. And the king rose to meet her, and bowed down to her; then he sat on his throne, and had a throne brought for the king's mother, and she sat on his right. (1 Kings 2:13-14, 17-20)

From these passages we can gain two insights into the relationship between the king and his mother, and relationship between the queen mother and the king's subjects. *One*, the king gives due honor to his mother in ways that signify her queenship role. The king rises to meet her and "bowed down to her" showing a sign of deference and respect that signifies the king's respect for his mother as an equal and, in a certain sense, someone that he himself might be subject to through his act of veneration. This is different from how Bathsheba approached her husband David when it was not the king who bowed to her but Bathsheba who bows to her king. (Cf. 1 Kings 1:16-17). With Bathsheba's son now on the throne, it is now the son who bows and shows respect for his mother. This honor of the king's mother acting as a ruling queen is further emphasized with the king having a throne brought for his mother so that she can sit at his right.

Two, the relationship between the *gebirah* and the people of Israel (as depicted in her conversation with Adonijah) is one in which the queen mother has the power and authority to intercede before the king of their behalf. Moreover, there appears to be an understanding that the queen mother *will* be heard by the king and that the king would not be able to refuse his mother's requests. With an understanding of queen mother, and her roles and functions within the Davidic kingdom, some scholars will identify parallels between the narratives in 1 Kings and 2 Chronicles with Elizabeth's greeting of Mary at the Visitation referring to her as "mother of my Lord" (Lk. 1:41-45) and Mary's intercession on behalf of the stewards at the Wedding of Cana (Jn. 2).²⁹

Looking to the Fathers we find many references to the Old Testament *gebirah*, specifically Psalm 45 (44) cited by Pope Pius XII in *Munificentissimus Deus*. Theoteknos of Livias, in an encomium in honor of Mary's Assumption, cites Psalm 45 (44) with regards to Mary's presentation in the temple by her mother Anna.³⁰ Modestus of Jerusalem would go on to say that David (in Psalm 45(44) – even if the psalm was most likely not written by David himself) "foresaw" that Mary would have the role of being the virgin Mother of God

²⁹ See, B. Pitre, *Jesus and the Jewish Roots of Mary: Unveiling the Mother of the Messiah*. (New York: Image, 2018) pp. 83-86; S. Manelli, F.I., *All Generations Shall Call Me Blessed: Biblical Mariology*. (New Bedford: Academy of the Immaculate, 2055). pp. 178-180, 331-344.

³⁰ "She was begotten like the cherubim, from pure and spotless clay. For while she was still in the loins of her father Joachim, her mother Anna received a message from a holy angel, who said to her, "Your seed shall be spoken of throughout all the world." Therefore Anna brought her to the temple of the Lord as an offering. And during all her time there, the maiden stood alongside Christ the king, "at his right hand, splendidly clothed in a robe of gold," as the prophet says, "*Listen, daughter and see, and incline your ear; forget your people and your father's house. The king desires your beauty: he is your Lord – pay homage to him.*" (Theoteknos of Livias, *An Encomium on the Assumption of the Holy Mother of God*, n. 2)

“for the salvation of all the world”.³¹ John Damascene, in his homilies on Mary’s Dormition, sees her entrance into heavenly glory as fulfillment of Psalm 45(44) writing:

You [Mary] have gone on to the very royal throne of your Son, where you see him with your own eyes and rejoice; you stand beside him in great, indescribably freedom... You are a blessing for the world, sanctification for all things, rest for the weary, consolation for the grieving, healing for the sick, a harbor for the storm-tossed, forgiveness for sinners, friendly encouragement for the sorrowing, ready help for all who call on you. (*Homily I on the Dormition*, no. 11)

Finally, John Damascene, in another homily, strikingly refers to Mary as “queen” in his depiction of the moment of Mary’s passing from death into eternal life, “Some of them [angels] would have acted as a guard of honor for her spotless, holy soul, and would have ascended with it on its way to heaven, until they had brought the Queen to her royal throne.”³²

Spotless Bride

The last Old Testament typological image that Pope Pius XII highlights in *Munificentissimus Deus* is the image of Mary as the chaste and pure Spouse of the Bridegroom found especially in the wisdom literature. Pope Pius XII writes:

Likewise they [the Fathers and theologians] mention the Spouse of the Canticles "that goes up by the desert, as a pillar of smoke of aromatical spices, of myrrh and frankincense" to be crowned. These are

³¹ Modestus of Jerusalem, *Economium on the Dormition of Our Most Holy Lady, Mary, Mother of God and Ever-Virgin*, n. 8.

³² John Damascene, *Homily II on the Dormition*, n. 11.

proposed as depicting that heavenly Queen and heavenly Spouse who has been lifted up to the courts of heaven with the divine Bridegroom.³³

The passages that Pius XII references in this regard are Song of Songs 3:6; 4:8; 6:9, and these are passages commonly cited by the Fathers in their celebration of Mary's Assumption. This is clearly seen in the writings of early Christian thinkers like Theoteknos³⁴, Andrew of Crete³⁵, and John Damascene who – in a very striking way – attributes this passage from the Song of Songs to Mary while connecting it to her other privileges of queen and divine maternity:

Come down, come down, O Lord, and pay your mother the debt you owe her, the return she deserves for having nourished you. Open your divine arms; receive your mother's soul, you who on the cross entrusted your own spirit into your Father's hand. Call to her in a gentle whisper, "Come, my beautiful one, my dear one, you who in your virginity are more radiant than the sun. You gave me a share in what was yours; come, enjoy what is mine! Mother, come to your Son! Come, reign with him who became poor with you by being born from you!" Go, mistress, go!

³³ *MD*, 26.

³⁴ "Suddenly there was thunder and a great earthquake; and they saw the holy virgin being taken up into heaven, so that there, where a place had been prepared for her by her Son, she might abide in free access to him, joining the choirs of angels and the company of prophets and apostles...She has "sought her beloved and found him", as is written in the Song of Songs. (Theoteknos of Livias, *Encomium on the Dormition*, n. 7.).

³⁵ "The holy book of Canticles described you in advance, when it made this hidden allusion: "Who is this who comes up from the desert like a column of smoke, breathing myrrh and incense made from all the merchant's powders?" The same holy book also foretold you when its author wrote, "Here is Solomon's resting place; he has made its posts of silver, its base of gold, its steps of porphyry. Within it is paved with stone, [a gift of] love from the daughters of Jerusalem." And further: "Come out, daughters of Sion, and gaze on King Solomon. He is wearing the crown with which his mother crowned him on his wedding day, on the day of his heart's delight.'" (Andrew of Crete, *Homily III on the Dormition*, n. 6).

Do not first go up, as Moses did, and then die, but die, and so go up! Place your soul in the hands of your own Son! Give what is made of earth to the earth, since that, too, will be raised up with you.³⁶
(*Homily III on the Dormition*, n. 6)

Within this discussion of Mary as the new queen mother, and a type of the spouse of the bridegroom, requires more elaboration – than can be given in this paper - on this unique privilege being in harmony with her other privileges and titles such as being the New Eve and the new Ark of the Covenant. While the relationship between these privileges is touched on in *Munificentissimus Deus*, the exposition is brief and lacks a depth into the biblical Mary in relationship with the rest of the sacred text. Despite the sparse references to the Mary of the Scriptures that could have (possibly) assisted in the ecumenical issues of the dogmatic degree, *Munificentissimus Deus* can reasonably be said to be a building-block in the twentieth-century Magisterial teaching on Mary. Matthew Levering comments further on this:

By comparison to *Munificentissimus Deus*, *Lumen Gentium* and *Redemptoris Mater* rely more heavily on the biblical portraits of the events of Mary's life. Unlike *Munificentissimus Deus*, of course, these documents do not focus on Mary's Assumption. Rather, *Lumen Gentium* and *Redemptoris Mater* set for a biblical theology of Mary that aims to help believers understand why the Church teaches what it does about Mary. The goal is to show how the Church's teaching on Mary as the immaculately conceived mother of God, perpetual virgin, new Eve, intercessor, and "woman clothed with the sun" hold together. The Annunciation, the Visitation, the presentation of the infant Jesus at the Temple, the wedding of Cana, the Cross, and Pentecost provide the key landmarks for the documents' reflections,

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along with Genesis 3:15, Ephesians 5:27, and Revelation 12.³⁷

After a brief survey of the Old Testament types cited by Pope Pius XII in *Munificentissimus Deus*, and finding their use amongst the Fathers, it is important that we also briefly look at the New Testament passages cited by the Holy Father to ascertain either their use or misuse according to how it is similar to their use by the Fathers. This will be done by looking at three passages in particular: the Annunciation account and the greeting of the archangel Gabriel to Mary (Luke 1:28), Paul's writings on Christ the New Adam (Romans 5-6) along with his first letter to the Church in Corinth (1 Cor 15:50-57), and finally the mysterious woman clothed with the sun and the moon under her feet in the Apocalypse (Rev 12:1).

Luke 1:28 – “Hail, full of grace!”

In his reflection on scholastic theologians and their witness to belief in Mary's bodily assumption into heaven, Pope Pius XII writes:

Similarly, they [scholastic theologians] have given special attention to these words of the New Testament: "Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you, blessed are you among women," (Lk. 1:28) since they saw, in the mystery of the Assumption, the fulfillment of that most perfect grace granted to the Blessed Virgin and the special blessing that countered the curse of Eve.³⁸

Even though Luke 1:28 is mentioned (specifically) with connection to the period of scholasticism, it may be beneficial to compare this reference to the angelic salutation with the use of this passage from the Fathers in their words on the mystery of Mary's Assumption.

³⁷ Matthew Levering, *Mary's Bodily Assumption* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2015), p. 31.

³⁸ *MD*, 27.

From the very start it is important to note that while Pope Pius XII may see Luke 1:28 as a passage that connects the privilege of Mary's Assumption with her Immaculate Conception, it is not the intent of this paper to apply the Western theology of original sin and preservative redemption (anachronistically) back onto the Fathers who also cite Luke 1:28. While one might argue that a "golden thread" of belief in Mary's sinlessness can be traced back to the early Church³⁹, this is not the topic of this paper. Rather, by comparing the use of Luke 1:28 in *Munificentissimus Deus* (which is absolutely a reference in connection to the Catholic belief of the Immaculate Conception) with its use among the Fathers, this paper will attempt to show how such the angelic salutation has been used in defense of Mary's Dormition and Assumption.

Modestus of Jerusalem will cite Luke 1:28 in a narrative that he provides on how the angels are "eager to see and admire her [Mary's] divine beauty, shining with God's glory... They longed to see her form so "full of grace" (Lk 1:28) from which he [Jesus] formed himself by the Holy Spirit and became, in truth, mortal in form while remaining what he was and "existing in the form of God" (Phil 2:6).⁴⁰ In a style that is particular to John Damascene, we find this Eastern Father expounding on the words of the angel Gabriel, "With Gabriel, the chief of the angels, let us cry out, "Hail full of grace, the Lord is with you!" (Lk. 1:28) Hail, inexhaustible ocean of grace! Hail, our

³⁹ "We can, for example, cite both an Eastern Father and a Western Father in a defense of Mary's purity and sinlessness:

"Only you [Jesus] and your Mother are more beautiful than everything. For on you, O Lord, there is no mark; neither is there any stain in your Mother." (Ephrem, *Nisibene Hymns* 27.8).

"We must except the holy Virgin Mary, concerning whom I wish to raise no question when it touches the subject of sins, out of honor to the Lord; for from Him we know what abundance of grace for overcoming sin in every particular was conferred upon her who had the merit to conceive and bear Him who undoubtedly had no sin." (Augustine, *On Nature and Grace*, n. 42).

⁴⁰ Modestus of Jerusalem, *Encomium on the Dormition*, no. 8.

only salve for sorrow! Hail, medicine that banishes pain from every heart! Hail, you through whom death has been banished, and life made welcome!⁴¹ In like fashion, John Damascene will also urge his congregation to use the angelic salutation as a starting point of “holy songs” before Mary -as if the individual could mystically be present at the time of her death – calling to mind the idea of the liturgy as a living anamnesis:

Let us raise holy songs, in words such as these: “Hail, full of grace! The Lord is with you!” (Lk. 1:28) Hail, you who were predestined to be Mother of God! Hail, you who were chosen before all ages by God’s will, most holy shoot of the earth, vessel of the divine fire, sacred image of the Holy Spirit, spring of the water of life, paradise for the tree of life, living branch of the holy vine that flows with nectar and ambrosia, river filled with the perfumes of the Spirit, field of divine wheat, rose glowing with virginity and *breathing the fragrance of grace*, lily robed like a queen, ewe who gave birth to the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, workshop of our salvation, higher than the angelic powers, servant and mother! *Come, let us surround that spotless tomb and let us drink of God’s grace.*⁴²

Pauline Theology and Mary’s Assumption

Highlighting the importance the Fathers stressed on Mary as the New Eve, Pope Pius XII in *Munificentissimus Deus* notices a connection to the Apostle Paul and his writings concerning both the victory of the Christ the New Adam (Romans 5-6) and the hopeful anticipation of the resurrection of the body (1 Corinthians 15:35-58). The Holy Father writes:

⁴¹ John Damascene, *Homily II on the Dormition*, no. 16.

⁴² My emphasis. John Damascene, *Homily III on the Dormition*, no, 5.

We must remember especially that, since the second century, the Virgin Mary has been designated by the holy Fathers as the new Eve, who, although subject to the new Adam, is most intimately associated with him in that struggle against the infernal foe which, as foretold in the protoevangelium, would finally result in that most complete victory over the sin and death which are always mentioned together in the writings of the Apostle of the Gentiles.⁴³

While the Fathers have commonly understood Mary to be the New Eve since – as far as extant records show – the second century beginning with Irenaeus⁴⁴, the Mariological implications of Romans

⁴³ *MD*, no. 39.

⁴⁴ “In accordance with this design, Mary the Virgin is found obedient, saying, “Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to your word.” (Luke 1:38) But Eve was disobedient; for she did not obey when as yet she was a virgin. And even as she, having indeed a husband, Adam, but being nevertheless as yet a virgin (for in Paradise “they were both naked, and were not ashamed”, (Genesis 2:25) inasmuch as they, having been created a short time previously, had no understanding of the procreation of children: for it was necessary that they should first come to adult age, and then multiply from that time onward), having become disobedient, was made the cause of death, both to herself and to the entire human race; so also did Mary, having a man betrothed [to her], and being nevertheless a virgin, by yielding obedience, become the cause of salvation, both to herself and the whole human race. And on this account does the law term a woman betrothed to a man, the wife of him who had betrothed her, although she was as yet a virgin; thus indicating the back-reference from Mary to Eve, because what is joined together could not otherwise be put asunder than by inversion of the process by which these bonds of union had arisen; so that the former ties be cancelled by the latter, that the latter may set the former again at liberty. And it has, in fact, happened that the first compact looses from the second tie, but that the second tie takes the position of the first which has been cancelled. For this reason, did the Lord declare that “the first should in truth be last, and the last first.” (Matthew 19:30, Matthew 20:16) And the prophet, too, indicates the same, saying, instead of fathers, children have been born unto you. For the Lord, having

5-6 is not so easily found.⁴⁵ Focusing specifically on 1 Corinthians 15:35-57, we find several references to this Pauline passage from the Fathers in their defense and praise of Mary's bodily assumption into heaven.

In response to the question of how the dead will be raised and what kind of body they will possess (Cf. 1 Cor 15:35), Paul moves into a sweeping exposition on the diversity of material creation and their respective "glory" as befits their unique nature (Cf. 1 Cor 15:36-41). From here Paul affirms the belief in the resurrection of the body to a glorified body because "just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven." (1 Cor 15:49). Affirming the reality of new life that comes about through the resurrection of Christ, Paul can say "The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Cor 15:56-57). From these words of Paul, Pope Pius XII shows how the fathers and doctors of the Church saw Mary's bodily Assumption into heaven as the first fruit of Christ's resurrection in which "death is swallowed up in victory." (Cf. 1 Cor 15:54).⁴⁶ Andrew of Crete, for example, looks to

been born the First-begotten of the dead, (cf. Revelation 1:5) and receiving into His bosom the ancient fathers, has regenerated them into the life of God, He having been made Himself the beginning of those that live, as Adam became the beginning of those who die. (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:20-22) Wherefore also Luke, commencing the genealogy with the Lord, carried it back to Adam, indicating that it was He who regenerated them into the Gospel of life, and not they Him. And thus also it was that the knot of Eve's disobedience was loosed by the obedience of Mary. For what the virgin Eve had bound fast through unbelief, this did the virgin Mary set free through faith." (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, III.22.4)

⁴⁵ There is one reference to Romans 5:21 that we find in a homily on the Dormition by Andrew of Crete, yet it is not used specifically in reference to Mary as the New Eve in relationship with her Son the New Adam. (see: Andrew of Crete, *Homily II on the Dormition*, no. 3).

⁴⁶ "Consequently, just as the glorious resurrection of Christ was an essential part and the final sign of this victory, so that struggle which was common to the Blessed Virgin and her divine Son should be brought to a close by the glorification of her virginal body, for the same Apostle says: "When this

the Pauline theology of death and the resurrection of the body as the basis for his defense of Mary's Dormition. Rather than starting from the person of Mary and the event of the Dormition, Andrew of Crete begins his homily with a discourse on death and what death means for the follower of Christ:

It is death's tyranny, real death, when we who die are not allowed to return to life again. But if we die and then live again after death – indeed, live a better life – then clearly that is not so much a death as a sleep [literally: dormition], a passage into a second life... Indeed, if I must speak the truth, the death that is natural to the human race even reached as far as Mary: not that it held her captive as it holds us, or that it overcame her – far from it! But it touched her enough to let her experience that sleep that is for us... Mary's death was, we might say, a parallel to that first sleep, which fell upon the first human being when his rib was removed to complete the creation of our race.⁴⁷

Likewise, John Damascene will cite from Paul's words in his affirmation of both the mystery of Mary's Assumption and a real death she succumbed to:

See how the one who overcame the defining limits of nature in her childbearing now gives way to those same limits and submits her unsullied body to death! It was only right for that body to 'lay aside what is mortal and put on immortality' (1 Cor 15:52), since the Lord of nature himself did not refuse the test of death.⁴⁸

mortal thing hath put on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: Death is swallowed up in victory."⁴⁷ (MD, 39)

⁴⁷ Andrew of Crete, *Homily II on the Dormition*, no. 2; 4.

⁴⁸ John Damascene, *Homily I on the Dormition*, no. 10.

The affirmation of Mary's death (dormition, "falling asleep") that we find in both Andrew of Crete and John Damascene are just two examples of what appears to have been more of a commonly held belief in early Christianity.⁴⁹ This being said, the dogmatic definition of Pope Pius XII deliberately leaves the question of the nature of Mary's death undefined – only to say "having completed the course of Her earthly life was assumed body and soul into heavenly glory". Questions considering the nature of Mary's death, whether her Dormition can be considered a death, and the virtue of Mary's death being a "falling asleep" unlike the gruesome and agonizing death of her Son, remain to be discerned and discussed.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ This death that was commonly believed and affirmed (especially in the East) is a different death than what any other person experiences. Therefore, it would be wrong to assume that the Fathers, in their affirmation of Mary's Dormition and Assumption, believed that Mary suffered a common death with the rest of humanity. "This perspective is to be preferred to that which hypothesizes a common death for Mary, because it better corresponds to the role of Mary as New Eve: She "died" in the same way in which Eve would have "died" if she had not sinned. The death would not be marked by sin and by its consequences, and thus it would be a joyous passage to true life. Mary is without sin, and so she cannot die as we sinners do." (M. Gagliardi, *Truth is a Synthesis: Catholic Dogmatic Theology* (Steubenville: Emmaus Academic, 2020), p. 511).

⁵⁰ Certain Fathers, like Bernard of Clairvaux, acknowledged that Mary did experience suffering in a great degree – and especially suffering in union with her Son. Looking to Simeon's prophecy of Mary in Luke 2:34 ("and you yourself a sword will pierce"), Bernard saw Mary as a victim in union with the divine Victim, "Do not marvel, O brothers, when it is said that Mary was a martyr in spirit. The martyrdom of the Virgin is set forth both in the prophecy of Simeon and in the actual story of our Lord's Passion... Truly, O blessed Mother, a sword has pierced your heart. For only passing through your heart could a sword enter the flesh of your Son. (Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermones de tempore: in dominica infra octavam Assumptionis*, no. 14).

Revelation 12 – The Mysterious Woman

A particular reference to Scripture that Pope Pius XII uses in the dogmatic declaration of *Munificentissimus Deus* is Revelation 12:1, “And a great portent appeared in heaven, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars” What makes this Scriptural citation interesting is that, while Pius XII affirms its usage amongst the scholastic theologians of the Western church, it is a passage that was not typically given a Mariological interpretation by the early Church. On the contrary, almost every commentary on Revelation that we have from the first few centuries - which is not much, considering the attitude of suspicion that the early Church had towards the apocalyptic text – attributes the Church to the woman that John sees. It's not until the writings of the Latin father Quodvultdeus in the fifth century that we find an identification of the woman in Revelation 12 with the Virgin Mary:

In the apocalypse of John the Apostle it is written that “the dragon stood before the woman who was about to bring forth, that when she had delivered her child, he might devour it . . . No one of you is ignorant of this: that the dragon is the devil; nor of this: that the woman signifies the Virgin Mary, who being inviolate, brought forth our Head inviolate; at the same time she represented in her person Holy Church in figure, that as she remained a virgin in bringing forth her Son, so also the Church brings forth His members at all times, without any loss to her virginity.⁵¹

Considering the suspicion that some of the local churches had of the inspiration of Revelation, and the later post-Ephesus development of a more public celebration of Mary's Dormition and Bodily Assumption, this later affirmation of the Mary as the woman in

⁵¹ Quodvultdeus, *De Symbolo*, no. 3

Revelation 12 might not necessarily be considered as something foreign or in opposition to the earlier commentaries that acknowledged the mysterious woman as a personification of the Church on earth. By taking the “both/and” approach and affirming that the woman of Revelation 12 is *both* Mary and the Church, some scholars will see this as an interpretation of the Scriptural text that affirms both a christotypical and an ecclesiotypical Mariology.⁵² The problem of arriving at a universal ecclesial consensus on the woman in Revelation 12 is, however, not something easily solved. One might also argue that due to the short reference by Pope Pius XII to this scriptural passage, *Munificentissimus Deus* does not assist much in furthering an ecumenical discussion on the placement of Revelation 12 in the Church’s understanding of Mary. It might well be argued that the reference made in *Munificentissimus Deus* leaves some things to be desired. Examples of what might have been of benefit are 1) the theology of the woman in Revelation 12 being Mary as the New Eve – creating “bookends” of Scripture with Eve in Genesis 3:15, and 2) Mary in Revelation 12:1, and the relationship between Revelation 12:1 and the Marian title of New Ark of the Covenant as made clear by the fact of John’s vision of the Ark before the woman appears.⁵³

⁵² “It is our conviction that the “woman” is Mary, *also exemplifying the Church*, that is to say, she is Mary as a physical person, the Mother of Jesus, and she is Mary as a mystical figure, Mother of all the believers, “heavenly model” of the Church (*Lumen Gentium*, no. 65). The “Woman” of Revelation recapitulates and expresses the total reality of Mary’s divine and ecclesial maternity. The “Woman” of Revelation recapitulates and expresses the whole reality of the divine Motherhood and of the ecclesial Motherhood of Mary.” (S. Manelli, *All Generations Shall Call Me Blessed: Biblical Mariology* (New Bedford: Academy of the Immaculate, 2005) p. 413)

⁵³ For more information on Revelation 12 in *Munificentissimus Deus* see: Bissonnette, George (1951) "The Twelfth Chapter of the Apocalypse, and Our Lady's Assumption," *Marian Studies*: Vol. 2, Article 12. Available at:

https://ecommons.udayton.edu/marian_studies/vol2/iss1/12.

Ecumenical Reflections

Where (and how) can this overview of the Scriptural and patristic sources in *Munificentissimus Deus* lead the Catholic Church to a more fruitful ecumenical dialogue with other Christian churches? Rather than “settling the issue” of Mary’s assumption for the global Christian community, the document published on November 1, 1950 continues to present challenges to the ecumenical movement. It is my opinion that these challenges are not bad, nor should they be a cause of frustration. Looking at what came after *Munificentissimus Deus*, with the promulgation of *Lumen Gentium* and its chapter on Mary⁵⁴, and the papal encyclical *Redemptoris Mater* by John Paul II, one can argue that the dogmatic decree of Pope Pius XII gave rise to future Magisterial teaching on Mary that followed a more biblical and patristic foundation. As it might be argued by some that Paul VI’s *Humane Vitae* needed John Paul II’s catechesis on Christian anthropology and the theology of the body, so to did *Munificentissimus Deus* require later documents to flesh out what had been stated so poignantly and definitively. By way of conclusion, I would like to suggest three issues that come out of *Munificentissimus Deus* that call for further discussion and discerning in our continued attempt at Christian unity.

One, the use of Scripture in the dogmatic statement brings to discussion issues in typology and biblical interpretation. As the use of typology, its limits, and its scope, is an issue of much importance within Catholic and Protestant biblical scholarship, so too does this intimately bound it together with another issue of importance: *Mary*. By returning to the biblical basis for belief in Mary and her privileges, a more fruitful dialogue between apostolic and reformed churches may take place. In addition to this, the issue of “fittingness” as a

⁵⁴ For a good reference on Mary in *Lumen Gentium* and the Mariological aftermath of the Second Vatican Council see: J. Ratzinger, “On the Position of Mariology and Marian Spirituality Within the Totality of Faith and Theology”, *The Church and Women: A Compendium* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), pp. 67-79.

principle coming from typology and biblical interpretation should be further clarified – as this line of reasoning (*potuit, deuit, ergo fecit*) was used in both Pope Pius IX's dogmatic statement on Mary's Immaculate Conception and Pius XII's *Munificentissimus Deus*.

Two, the solemn definition made by Pope Pius XII can bring us to a greater discussion on the role of the laity in the process of dogmatic declarations, and the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church. As the Holy Father notes the overwhelmingly positive response to a dogmatic declaration with the petitions of lay faithful from all over the world,⁵⁵ this gives rise to a need for further discernment on the role that the faithful have in the Church's development of doctrine, and the relationship between the episcopacy and the laity. Thomas A. O'Meara, O.P. will write:

The People of the Church play an important role in the development of doctrine, for they too are guided in their faith by the Spirit...The Spirit of God is not confined to the hierarchy. The Holy Ghost permeates all the members of the Church and may lead any of them to contribute to the development of doctrine. In an organize and vital way the spiritual currents in the Church find expression in the bishops.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ "But those whom "the Holy Spirit has placed as bishops to rule the Church of God" gave an almost unanimous affirmative response to both these questions. This "outstanding agreement of the Catholic prelates and the faithful," affirming that the bodily Assumption of God's Mother into heaven can be defined as a dogma of faith, since it shows us the concordant teaching of the Church's ordinary doctrinal authority and the concordant faith of the Christian people which the same doctrinal authority sustains and directs, thus by itself and in an entirely certain and infallible way, manifests this privilege as a truth revealed by God and contained in that divine deposit which Christ has delivered to his Spouse to be guarded faithfully and to be taught infallibly." (*MD*, 12)

⁵⁶ Thomas A. O'Meara, O.P., *Mary in Protestant and Catholic Theology* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1966), p. 287.

Three, the reality of *Munificentissimus Deus* and the dogma of papal infallibility behind it should lead Christians to a greater understanding of papal authority that serves (positively) to Christian unity, rather than a hinderance to it. Through the aid of the Second Vatican Council's teaching on the relationship between Scripture, tradition, and the Magisterium in its document *Dei Verbum*, scholars may be able to go back to this Marian statement from Pope Pius XII and find it in a new light that affirms the successor of Peter as a steward and servant of the deposit of faith, and as a teacher whose competence in providing instruction to the Church comes from Christ and not from any power originating from himself. As O'Meara writes:

It is this sacramental activity of Christ and the Spirit in the Church which makes the Petrine succession in time and doctrine at all feasible. Rather than see the papacy as an unbelievable power, we should try to see it as bound to the Word of God, circumscribed by revelation, a crucial human point of vertical contact with Christ the Founder, and, most of all, the servant of the entire Church.⁵⁷

With each year bringing us closer to the eightieth anniversary of *Munificentissimus Deus*, I believe that it is important that theologians remain together in dialogue, discernment, and prayer on these issues of the relationship between Scripture and tradition and papal authority, as they are related to the Church's understanding of the Virgin Mary and her place in the divine economy. From this conviction comes the hope that we can gather with Our Lady, as the apostles did in the upper room on the day of Pentecost and be together in real unity.

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⁵⁷ *Ibid.* p. 292.