

## ARCIC II (MARY) 453a/00

**THE SCRIPTURAL BASIS  
OF THE DOGMAS OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION AND THE ASSUMPTION  
OF THE MOTHER OF GOD**

Adelbert Denaux

This paper presents a summary dossier of the use of Scripture with respect to the dogmas of the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption of Mary in the official texts of the Teaching Authority of the Roman Catholic Church, and in two recent ecumenical documents dealing with Marian issues. This survey is followed by some hermeneutical reflections and by a short discussion of the legitimacy of reading a fuller sense in a number of texts, which are commonly used with respect to the two Marian dogmas. This paper is nothing more than a discussion paper.

### **1. The Use of Scripture in the Apostolic Constitutions of 1854 and 1950**

The official texts publishing the Marian dogmas develop certain arguments in favour of the doctrine, among which the idea that the doctrine is in accordance with Scripture. Let us first look at the way in which Scripture is used by the Popes.

#### *a. Ineffabilis Deus (1854)*

- After asserting that the supreme reason for the privilege of the Immaculate Conception is ultimately the divine motherhood, the text develops a liturgical argument. Within this context, a reference to Scripture is given:

"And hence the very words with which the *Sacred Scriptures speak of Uncreated Wisdom* and set forth his eternal origin, both in its ecclesiastical offices and in its liturgy, has been wont to apply likewise to the origin of the Blessed Virgin, inasmuch as God, by one and the same decree, had established the origin of Mary and the Incarnation of Divine Wisdom".

Probably the text refers here to the use of Wisdom texts in the liturgical formulas of the Feast of the Immaculate Conception. The text sees some analogy between the Incarnation and the birth of Mary, in that some Wisdom texts can be applied to both events.

- The doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, as stated in the ordinary teaching of the Church, is not against Scripture. This is explicitly said in connection with the Council of Trent:

"the Fathers of Trent sufficiently intimated by this declaration that the Blessed Virgin Mary was free from the original stain; and thus they clearly signified that *nothing could be reasonably cited from the Sacred Scriptures*, from Tradition, or from the authority of the Fathers, *which would in any way be opposed to so great a prerogative of the Blessed Virgin*".

This is a rather negative argument: the Fathers at the Council of Trent are convinced that the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception is not against Scripture.

- Then comes a more positive description, in which some texts of Scripture are quoted in favour of the doctrine:

"These ecclesiastical writers in quoting the words by which at the beginning of the world God announced his merciful remedies prepared for the regeneration of mankind - words by which he crushed the audacity of the deceitful serpent and wondrously raised up the hope of our race, saying, "I will put enmities between you and the woman, between your seed and her seed" (**Gen 3:15**) - taught that by this divine prophecy the merciful Redeemer of mankind, Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, was clearly foretold: That his most Blessed Mother, the Virgin Mary, was prophetically indicated; and, at the same time, the very enmity of both against the evil one was significantly expressed. Hence, just as Christ, the Mediator between God and man, assumed human nature, blotted the handwriting of the decree that stood against us, and fastened it triumphantly to the cross, so the most holy Virgin, united with him by a most intimate and indissoluble bond, was, with him and through him, eternally at enmity with the evil serpent, and most completely triumphed over him, and thus crushed his head with her immaculate foot."

- Then, the text applies a typological reading of Scripture, and enumerates a series of biblical types pointing at the mystery of the immaculate conception:

"This sublime and singular privilege of the Blessed Virgin, together with her most excellent innocence, purity, holiness and freedom from every stain of sin, as well as the unspeakable abundance and greatness of all heavenly graces, virtues and privileges

- these the Fathers beheld in that ark of Noah, which was built by divine command and escaped entirely safe and sound from the common shipwreck of the whole world; (cf. **Gen 6:9**)

- in the ladder which Jacob saw reaching from the earth to heaven, by whose rungs the angels of God ascended and descended, and on whose top the Lord himself leaned' (cf. **Gen 28:12**)

- in that bush which Moses saw in the holy place burning on all sides, which was not consumed or injured in any way but grew green and blossomed beautifully; (cf. **Ex 3:2**)

- in that impregnable tower before the enemy, from which hung a thousand bucklers and all the armour of the strong; (cf. **Cant 4:4**)

- in that garden enclosed on all sides, which cannot be violated or corrupted by any deceitful plots; (cf. **Cant 4:12**)

- as in that resplendent city of God, which has its foundations on the holy mountains; (cf. **Ps 87:1**)

- in that most august temple of God, which, radiant with divine splendours, is full of the glory of God; (Cf. **Is 6:1-4**)

- and in very many other biblical types of this kind. In such allusions the Fathers taught that the exalted dignity of the Mother of God, her spotless innocence and her sanctity unstained by any fault, had been prophesied in a wonderful manner."

- Moreover, the language the Fathers use to describe this mystery is strongly influenced by the words of the prophets:

"In like manner did they use *the words of the prophets* to describe this wondrous abundance of divine gifts and the original innocence of the Virgin of whom Jesus was born. They celebrated the august Virgin as the spotless dove, as the holy Jerusalem, as the exalted throne of God, as the ark and house of holiness which Eternal Wisdom built, and as that Queen who, abounding in delights and leaning on her Beloved, came forth from the mouth of the Most High, entirely perfect, beautiful, most dear to God and never stained with the least blemish."

- The annunciation story contains an allusion to Mary's immaculate conception:

"When the Fathers and writers of the Church meditated on the fact that the most Blessed Virgin was, in the name and by order of God himself, proclaimed full of grace (cf. **Lk 1:28**) by the Angel Gabriel when he announced her most sublime dignity of Mother of God, they thought that this singular and solemn salutation, never heard before, showed that the Mother of God is the seat of all divine graces and is adorned with all gifts of the Holy Spirit. To them Mary is an almost infinite treasury, an inexhaustible abyss of these gifts, to such an extent that she was never subject to the curse and was, together with her Son, the only partaker of perpetual benediction. Hence she was worthy to hear Elizabeth, inspired by the Holy Spirit, exclaim: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb." (cf. **Lk 1:42**)

- The Fathers also develop a biblical comparison between Mary and Eve:

Hence, it is the clear and unanimous opinion of the Fathers that the most glorious Virgin, for whom "he who is mighty has done great things," was resplendent with such an abundance of heavenly gifts, with such a fullness of grace and with such innocence, that she is an unspeakable miracle of God -- indeed, the crown of all miracles and truly the Mother of God; that she approaches as near to God himself as is possible for a created being; and that she is above all men and angels in glory. Hence, to demonstrate the original innocence and sanctity of the Mother of God, not only did they frequently compare her to Eve while yet a virgin, while yet innocence, while yet incorrupt, while not yet deceived by the deadly snares of the most treacherous serpent; but they have also exalted her above Eve with a wonderful variety of expressions. Eve listened to the serpent with lamentable consequences; she fell from original innocence and became his slave. The most Blessed Virgin, on the contrary, ever increased her original gift, and not only never lent an ear to the serpent, but by divinely given power she utterly destroyed the force and dominion of the evil one."

- Finally, the Fathers make use of Biblical figures:

"Accordingly, the Fathers have never ceased to call the Mother of God the lily among thorns, the land entirely intact, the Virgin undefiled, immaculate, ever blessed, and free from all contagion of sin, she from whom was formed the new Adam, the flawless, brightest, and most beautiful paradise of innocence, immortality and delights planted by God himself and protected against all the snares of the poisonous serpent, the incorruptible wood that the worm of sin had never corrupted, the fountain ever clear and sealed with the power of the Holy Spirit, the most holy temple, the treasure of immortality, the one and only daughter of life -- not of death -- the plant not of anger but of grace, through the singular providence of God growing ever green contrary to the common law, coming as it does from a corrupted and tainted root."

b. *Munificentissimus Deus* (1950)

- The document does not study the Scriptures for themselves. It rather examines the tradition and the way in which the Fathers and Christian writers have referred to or used the Bible to underscore the doctrine of the Assumption of Mary. Within this framework, it is stated:

"Among the scholastic theologians there have been many who, wishing to inquire more profoundly into divinely revealed truths and desirous of showing the harmony that exists between what is termed the theological demonstration and the Catholic faith, have always considered it worthy of note that *this privilege of the Virgin Mary's Assumption is in wonderful accord with those divine truths given us in Holy Scripture*".

- The document seems to be aware that the use of Scripture in these matters is of a special kind:

"Often there are theologians and preachers who, following the footsteps of the Holy Fathers (cf. St. John Damascene, *Encomium in dormitionem Dei Genetricis semperque Virginis Mariae*, Hom II, n. 11; and also the *Encomium* attributed to St. Modestus), have been rather free in their use of events and expressions taken from Sacred Scripture to explain their belief in the Assumption. Thus, to mention a few of the texts frequently cited in this fashion,"

- Old Testament texts:

"some have employed the words of the Psalmist: 'Arise, O Lord, into thy resting place; thou and the ark, which thou has sanctified' (**Ps 131:8**);

and have looked upon the *Ark of the Covenant*, built of incorruptible wood and placed in the Lord's temple, as a type of the most pure body of the Virgin Mary, preserved and exempted from all corruption of the tomb and raised up to such glory in heaven.

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. (**Ps 44:10,14ff.**)

Likewise they mention the Spouse of the Canticles "that goes up by the desert, as a pillar of smoke of aromatical spices, or myrrh and frankincense" to be crowned. (**Cant 3:6; cf. also 4:8; 6:9**)

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

- New Testament texts:

"Moreover, the scholastic Doctors have recognised the Assumption of the Virgin Mother of God as something signified, not only in various figures of the Old Testament, but also in that Woman clothed with the Sun, whom John the Apostle contemplated on the island of Patmos (**Rev 12:1 ff.**).

Similarly they have given special attention to these words of the New Testament: "Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee, blessed art thou amongst women" (**Lk 1:28**), since they saw, in the mystery of the Assumption, the fulfilment of that most perfect grace granted to the Blessed Virgin and the special blessing that countered the curse of Eve."

- Then follows a series of authors who defend the doctrine of the Assumption: Amadeus, bishop of Lausanne, Anthony of Padua, Albert the Great, Thomas, Bonaventure, Bernardine of Siena, Robert Bellarmine, Francis of Sales, Alphonsus, Peter Canisius, Suarez. This leads to the conclusion: "All these proofs and considerations of the Holy Fathers and the theologians are based upon the Sacred Writings as their ultimate foundation". One of these writers receives special attention with respect to the use of Scripture:

"Among the holy writers who at that time employed statements and various images and analogies of Sacred Scripture to illustrate and to confirm the doctrine of the Assumption, which they piously believed, the Evangelical Doctor St. Anthony of Padua holds a special place. On the feast of the day of Assumption, while explaining the Prophet's words: 'I will glorify the place of my feet' (**Is 61:13**), he stated it as certain that the divine Redeemer had bedecked with supreme glory His most beloved Mother from whom He has received human flesh. He asserts that 'you have here a clear statement that the Blessed Virgin has been assumed in her body, which was the place of the Lord's feet. Hence it is that the holy Psalmist writes: 'Arise, O Lord, into thy resting place: thou and the ark which thou has sanctified'" (**Ps 131:8**). And he asserts that, just as Jesus Christ has risen from the right hand of the Father, so likewise the ark of His sanctification 'has risen up, since on this day the Virgin Mother has been taken up to her heavenly dwelling'."

- Finally, the Mary-Eve parallel is evoked again:

"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 (**Gen 3:15**), finally resulted in that most complete victory over the sin and death which are always mentioned together in the writings of the Apostle of the Gentiles (**Rom 5 - 6; 1 Cor 15:21-26,54-57**). 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 mortal thing hath put on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: Death is swallowed up in victory.' (**1 Cor 15:54**)."

#### Conclusion

- The drafters of the text express the strong conviction that the Marian doctrines that are defined are not against Scripture. They are ultimately founded in Scripture.
- The drafters are using a set of specific biblical texts (more from the Old than from the New Testament), but also biblical images, types, etc.
- The drafters are making use of the Bible in the traditional sense, that means in the line of the great tradition of the Fathers and ecclesiastical writers, more from the Latin than from the Greek tradition. There seems to be no awareness of modern, historical-critical methods of reading the Bible. This is quite understandable for the text of 1854; less understandable, however, in 1950.

## 2. Recent Catholic Teaching: Vatican II (1964) and the Catechism of the Catholic Church (1994)

a. When describing the function of the blessed Virgin in the plan of salvation, in Chapter VIII of the Constitution on the Church (LG, 55-59), the Fathers of Vatican II refer to the Immaculate Conception and to the Assumption in the following way:

"The Father of mercies willed that the Incarnation should be preceded by assent on the part of the predestined mother, so that just as a woman had a share in bringing about death, so also a woman should contribute to life. This is preeminently true of the Mother of Jesus, who gave to the world the Life that renews all things, and who was enriched by God with gifts appropriate to such a role. It is no wonder then that it was customary for the Fathers to refer to the Mother of God as all holy and free from every stain of sin, as though fashioned by the Holy Spirit and formed as a new creature. Enriched from the first instant of her conception with the splendour of an entirely unique holiness, the virgin of Nazareth is hailed by the heralding angel, by divine command, as 'full of grace' (cf. **Lk 1:28**), and to the heavenly messenger she replies: 'Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it done unto me according to thy word' (Lk 1:38). Thus the daughter of Adam, Mary, consenting to the word of God, became the Mother of Jesus. Committing herself wholeheartedly and impeded by no sin to God's saving will, she devoted herself totally, as a handmaid of the Lord, to the person and work of her Son, under and with him, serving the mystery of redemption, by the grace of Almighty God." (LG, 56).

"Finally the Immaculate Virgin preserved free from all stain of original sin, was taken up body and soul into heavenly glory, when her earthly life was over, and exalted by the Lord as Queen over all things, that she might be the more fully conformed to her Son, the Lord of lords, (cf. Rev 19:16) and conqueror of sin and death." (LG, 59)

It should be noted that LG is very sober in quoting biblical texts in support of the two Marian doctrines: only one text, regularly used in the Tradition, is mentioned in connection with the Immaculate Conception, Lk 1:28.

b. The same is true with respect to the Catechism of the Catholic Church:

490 To be come the mother of the Saviour, Mary "was enriched by God with gifts appropriate to such a role." [LG, 56] The angel Gabriel at the moment of the annunciation salutes her as "full of grace". [Lk 1:28] In fact, in order for Mary to be able to give the free assent of her faith to the announcement of her vocation, it was necessary that she be wholly borne by God's grace.

491 Through the centuries the Church has become ever more aware that Mary, "full of grace" through God, [Lk 1:28] was redeemed from the moment of her conception. That is what the dogma of the Immaculate Conception confesses, as Pope Pius IX proclaimed in 1854: The most Blessed Virgin Mary was, from the first moment of her conception, by a singular grace and privilege of almighty God and by virtue of the merits of Jesus Christ, Saviour of the human race, preserved immune from all stain of original sin. [DS 2803]

492 The "splendour of an entirely unique holiness" by which Mary is "enriched from the first instant of her conception" comes wholly from Christ: she is "redeemed, in a more exalted fashion, by reason of the merits of her Son". [LG 53,56] The Father blessed Mary more than any other created person "in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places" and chose her "in Christ before the foundation of the world, to be holy and blameless before him in love". [Eph 1:3-4]

493 The Fathers of the Eastern tradition call the Mother of God "the All-Holy" (Panagia),

and celebrate her as "free from any stain of sin, as though fashioned by the Holy Spirit and formed as a new creature".[LG 56] By the grace of God Mary remained free of every personal sin her whole life long.

966 "Finally the Immaculate Virgin, preserved free from all stain of original sin, when the course of her earthly life was finished, was taken up body and soul into heavenly glory, and exalted by the Lord as Queen over all things, so that she might be the more fully conformed to her Son, the Lord of lords and conqueror of sin and death."[LG 59] The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin is a singular participation in her Son's Resurrection and an anticipation of the resurrection of other Christians: "In giving birth you kept your virginity; in your Dormition you did not leave the world, O Mother of God, but were joined to the source of Life. You conceived the living God and, by your prayers, will deliver our souls from death'." [Byzantine Liturgy, Feast of the Dormition, 15 August, Troparion]

### 3. Two recent ecumenical documents

#### a. *Lutheran/Roman Catholic Dialogue in the U.S.A. (1992)*

In the Common Statement "The One Mediator, the Saints, and Mary" (1992), from the Lutheran/Roman Catholic Dialogue in the USA, it is stated that Lutherans overwhelmingly rejected the dogma of the Immaculate Conception as defined in 1854 for the following reasons: "the normative Confessional assertion that all descendants of Adam and Eve except Christ are "conceived and born in sin" (CA 2:1); that there are no positive biblical testimonies to Mary's exemption from original sin; and that the definition itself was unwarranted assertion of papal authority, one made after consulting only Roman Catholics" (§ 87). The first two reasons have to do with the question of Scriptural basis, the third with the question of authority. The first two reasons are intertwined: that all descendants of Adam are conceived and born in sin is positively expressed in Scripture, whereas it is never said explicitly in Scripture that Mary is an exemption to this general rule.

"The dogma of the Assumption (1950) gives rise to similar divergences. Catholics generally agree that neither the Immaculate Conception nor the Assumption is taught as such in Scripture or in early patristic tradition. They see these dogmas as having limited grounding in certain biblical teachings, such as Mary's being 'highly favored' by God and her unique maternal relationship to Jesus. Beyond this, many theologians appeal to various biblical types and figures of Mary as developed in the tradition. These having included the typology of Mary as the 'second Eve' and the interpretation of her as the 'woman clothed with the sun' in Revelation 12. Modern authors, including Pius XII in his bull of 1950, see a nexus between the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption: it was appropriate for Mary, being preserved from original sin, to be exempted from subjection to the power of death and corruption" (§ 88). This description is well illustrated in the quotations given above of the relevant texts in the two bulls. In contrast to this, "generally Lutherans reject the doctrine as lacking support in the Scriptures and in the early patristic tradition" (§ 89).

In general, the document deals more with the question of the invocation of Mary and the Saints (and the implications of this for the belief in the unique mediatorship of Jesus Christ), than with the question of the two Marian dogmas.

#### b. *Le Groupe des Dombes (1997-98)*

In their document "Marie", the *Groupe des Dombes* affirms that the Christians issuing from the Reformation have rejected the two dogmas mainly because they have no explicit biblical foundation. Hence, the dialogue between Catholics and protestants on this doctrine touches the classical issues concerning the normativity of scriptural witness, the reading and understanding of Scripture within the living Tradition of the Church, the "sensus fidei" of the faithful (which, in this case, finds expression in popular piety), the role of the teaching authority as well as the "reception" of magisterial definitions (§ 240). These issues have been treated in our previous documents. We have to examine whether these documents can help us to clarify our differing opinions on this point. It is the conviction of the writers of the document that the ecumenical dialogue should examine in what measure the dogmas of the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption are not affirming something "new" (this the protestants), but are interpretations of a given of Christian faith that ultimately has its foundation in the witness of the Bible, hence interpretations that are legitimate and that should find their right place in the "hierarchy of truths" (§ 243).

### 3. Critical Reflections

#### a. *Founded in Scripture?*

Behind the critical distance of the churches issued from the Reformation with respect to the two recent Marian dogmas of the Catholic Church, there is a more general question: how should a doctrine defined by the Church in the course of history be related to the divine revelation contained in the Scriptures. It is the question of the necessity of a biblical foundation of a Christian doctrine. All Christian Confessions accept that a doctrine should ultimately be founded upon the Scriptures as the expression of God's revealed truth. That means, new doctrines cannot be received by the faithful unless it is clear that they are an expression in one way or another of the divine revelation which is contained in a normative way in the Holy Scriptures. However, there are different possibilities of thinking about the scriptural "foundation" of doctrines:

- A doctrine can be explicitly formulated in Scriptures (e.g. the divinity of Jesus Christ). These doctrines are an integral part of the Tradition of the Church.
- It is possible that a doctrine is not explicitly expressed in the Holy Scriptures although it is recognised as being founded in the Bible (e.g. the divine motherhood of Mary: it is explicitly said that Mary is the mother of Jesus Christ, but the title of *theotokos* is derived from the fact that her son Jesus Christ is called "Son of God", or even "God" in the New Testament). In this case it can be said that the doctrine is implicitly present in the Holy Scriptures.
- There are doctrines which, according to some, are not against Scripture and in that sense ultimately founded in Scripture; such doctrines have grown in the course of history in different forms (popular piety, liturgical tradition, theological reflection, church teaching, etc.); they are not explicitly mentioned in the Bible, but their content is implied in and coherent with other doctrines that are attested in Scripture. Catholics do think that this is the case with the two Marian dogmas of 1854 and 1950: they are part of a post-biblical tradition which is a legitimate development of Scripture. According to them, both dogmas are closely linked to the central Marian doctrine contained explicitly in Scripture, i.e. her virginal motherhood and hence her solidarity with the destiny of her Son Jesus Christ. Other Christians, however, do not agree with this opinion.
- There are doctrines which are contrary to the Scriptures. These doctrines should be rejected. Protestants would think, for example, that the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of Mary is against Scripture because it seems to negate the biblical truth that all men are born in sin. The burden of the proof lies here on the shoulders of Catholics. The universal sinfulness of all human



beings is an explicit teaching of Scripture, whereas the Immaculate Conception is not. Hence it should be shown that both doctrines are not contradictory, but compatible.

*b. Wider meanings beyond the literal?*

The modern mind, commonly trained in an historical-critical reading of the Bible, is generally less familiar with traditional readings of the Bible. Obviously the scientific reading of the Bible has focused its attention almost exclusively on the literal meaning of the text, that is the meaning which the biblical author intended and conveyed to his original readers by what he wrote. However, in order to understand the use of the Bible in Church documents such as the bulls defining the two Marian dogmas under discussion, one should at least consider the possibility of meanings going beyond the literal one. These wider meanings can be gained either from recognising God's role as author (a fuller sense intended by God, which the human authors did not foresee; this type of interpretation can be described in various ways: spiritual sense, typology, promise and fulfilment [OT/NT], *sensus plenior*), from the placement of a book within the canon (the full meaning of a text is only given within the context of the whole Bible; sometimes this is called "canonical" interpretation), or from subsequent reading (the meaning of a text is the result of an interaction between writing and reader, not only the original readers but also future readers, until today) (cf. R.E. BROWN, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, New York a.o., 1997, pp. 35-47).

The question arises whether a new wider meaning going beyond the literal meaning is legitimate or not. Who can judge this? (the church, the teaching authority within the church?); by what criteria? One of the criteria could be that the fuller sense has to be homogeneous with the literal sense, that it should not contradict the central message of the Bible, etc.

Catholic theologians have applied this approach to some biblical texts. With respect to the *Immaculate Conception*, three texts are regularly referred to:

- **Gen 3:15**: the literal meaning could be: between Satan (symbolised by the snake) and his offspring (his companions), on the one hand, and Eve and her offspring (the human race), on the other hand, there will be enmity and struggle. The offspring of Eve will ultimately obtain the final and definitive victory over Satan and his company, even when it is wounded by sin. In Eve's offspring the Messiah is included, whose strength will give humanity the victory over the power of evil. The passage thus contains an indirect allusion to the Messiah. Taking the offspring of the woman in individual sense and applying it to the Redeemer (already in the Septuagint: *autos?*), some began to interpret the woman as Mary, the mother of the Redeemer. This Marian-messianic interpretation is defended, from the 2nd century onwards by certain Fathers like Irenaeus, Epiphanius, Isidore of Péluse, Cyprian, Leo the Great, but the majority of the Fathers do not know it. When participating in the definitive victory of her Son, Mary could not have been under the dominion of Evil (Cf. L. Ott, *Précis de théologie dogmatique*, Paris, s.d. [1957], p. 287).

- **Lk 1:28**: *kecharitômenè* "favoured woman". The phrase functions here almost as a proper name (cf. Judg 6:12). The pf. pass. ptc. can be understood as a so-called theological passive: it designates Mary as the recipient of divine favour and means "favoured by God". This interpretation explains why Mary wondered what such greeting might mean (1:29). And the angel insists: "You have found favor (*charis*) with God" (1:30). The context suggests that the *charis* which makes her *kecharitômenè* is the grace of conceiving the Son of the Most High. "She is favored by God to be the mother of the descendant of David and the Son of the Most High. Even though the pf. ptc.

might express a state or condition of divine favor, that favor is to be understood of the unique role that she is to perform in conceiving God's Messiah" (J. FITZMYER, *Luke I*, 1981, pp. 345-346). However, the perfect tense can point to a grace received in the past. Moreover, the content of the favour accorded by God may imply the redemption of sins, as becomes evident in Eph 1:6-7, where the same verb *charitoô* is closely linked to the idea of redemption and forgiveness of trespasses. Hence the fuller sense used with respect to the Immaculate conception can be said to be in line with the literal sense. "Beginning in patristic times, theological tradition understood *kecharitômenè* in a fuller sense, which does not contradict the Lucan pf. ptc., but which certainly goes beyond it" (*Ibid.*, p. 346). The Latin rendering *gratia plena*, "full of grace", has made more easy the later development in the sense of a fullness of God's favour or grace which Mary possesses already at the moment the angel addresses her.

- **Lk 1:41-42**: Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, proclaims: "Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb" (1:42). The reason for her being blessed is given in the following parallel clause. Elizabeth thus recognises the "favour" (1:28) with which Mary has been graced by God. In this verse also, the pf. pass. ptc. points to the condition of God's blessing or favour bestowed upon her (literal sense). Her blessing is put into parallel with the blessing of God which rests on Jesus Christ as a human being. This parallelism could suggest that Mary, just like Christ, has been exempted from all sin, from the beginning of her existence (fuller sense).

With respect to the bodily *Assumption of Mary*, no direct witnesses of Scriptures can be given. The possibility of bodily assumption before the second coming of the Lord is not excluded by 1 Cor 15:23 and sensed in advance in Mt 27:52-53 (the resurrection [and glorification?] of the "saints" of the Old Testament).

- Scholastic theologians have concluded from the fullness of grace of Mary, about which Lk 1:28 speaks, to the bodily assumption and glorification of Mary. Being full of grace, she has been preserved from the triple malediction of sin (Gen 3:16-19).

- **Rev 12:1**: the woman clothed with the sun is interpreted by most scholars in an ecclesiological sense: it refers to a collectivity (Israel 12:5, the Christian Church 12:13, the New Jerusalem: 21:2: so the identity of the woman is in transition). This literal sense is, however, transcended by interpreters who understand the text also with reference to Mary. It seems to us that a secondary reference to Mary is possible but only as an accommodated reading of Revelation 12.

- Some Fathers and theologians apply to the mystery of the Assumption of Mary such texts as Ps 131:8; Rev 11:19; Cant 8:5.

- Modern theologians usually refer to **Gen 3:15**. Understanding the offspring of the woman as Christ, and the woman as Mary, they conclude that Mary participated intensively in the struggle of Christ against Satan as well as in his victory, hence also in his victory over death. Literally, the text does not refer to Mary but to Eve. The tradition, however, as early as the 2nd Century (Justin) has understood Mary as the new Eve. Another example of reading a fuller sense in the text.