

**MARY:**

**FROM *KENOSIS* TO GLORY**



**Rev. Joseph C. Henchey, CSS**

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## INTRODUCTION

### MARY ASSUMED INTO HEAVEN: Participant in Christ's Resurrection – FROM HER *KENOSIS* TO GLORY <sup>1</sup>

#### 1. The Christological Hymn in the Epistle to the Thessalonians [cf. Ph 2:5-11]:

a. At the beginning of these reflections, it is more than worthwhile to ponder prayerfully the Christological Hymn in one of Paul's 'Letters of Captivity', the third Psalm for First Vesper's for the Lord's day, most Saturday evenings of the year. For our purposes here, it makes little difference for the thought here whether it is known that this could be a pre-Pauline composition, or not. It is possible – and has weighty adherents for both positions - that Paul did compose this himself as many believe; and it is also possible that this is an ancient Liturgical Hymn, either Baptismal, or Eucharistic – which Paul is now including in this important letter. In this connection, there are other instances where Paul inserts into his prose similar cadences or rhythms – and his end result is, as in his passage on charity [cf. 1 Co 13], that he composes a genuine hymn.

b. It is of great interest here to follow the classical division of this *Carmen Christi*:

- His **pre-existence** [cf. v. 6; cf. Jn 1:1, ff.];
- His **abasement, his *kenosis***, through His Incarnation, and throughout
- His earthly sojourn, through to its end – through His Sacred Stigmata inflicted on the Cross. [vv. 7-8]
- His **exaltation** through the Resurrection into Heaven, through the intervention of the Father [vv. 9-11].

c. From the theological point of view, the key word here is the *hapax legomenon*, ***kenosis*** in the verb form, it is in the reflexive: He emptied, despoiled, abased, **Himself**. There is thus indicated that Jesus Christ, in and through His humanity, freely disposed of His external Divine Glory, which is His right. Even in assuming humanity, He could have been 'transfigured' not only 'suddenly' – but throughout His earthly sojourn.

In the noun form, the substantive acquires in Christian usage a 'technical' two-fold sense – with which there is indicated the abasement of the Son of God in the Incarnation – and His literal Self-emptying, in bleeding to death, with His Body broken, on Calvary.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Candido Pozo, SJ, "Maria Assunta partecipe alla risurrezione di Cristo: dalla *Kenosi* alla gloria", in: *L'Assunzione di Maria, Madre di Dio. Significato storico-salvifico a 50 anni della definizione dogmatica*. Pontificia Academia Mariana Internationalis. Città del Vaticano 2001, pp. Pp. 247- 261]

d. In contrast with the **Form of God** [*morphe theou*], which is His due, He has taken on the Form of a Slave, Servant [*morphe doulou*]. This '**form of the Slave/Servant**' is assumed by the Son of God by the very fact of making Himself like all men, and being recognized in all His external reality as man. This is prolonged, intensified even further, in that He **humbled Himself**, making Himself **obedient unto death, death on the Cross**. To 'obey' is the attitude which corresponds to the Servant – and this exercise went on throughout His entire life – from the beginning, in Nazareth, where He was **subject** to Mary and Joseph. In the end, His was the most shameful, painful of deaths that would perhaps be possible for us to imagine. And thus, His disciples until the end of time are called to **preach, to live** the life of the Crucified and Risen Christ – already a scandal for those imagining a powerful, perhaps military Messiah – and a stupidity for the wisdom of this age [cf. 1 Co 1:23]. Death on the Cross – bleeding to death through His Sacred Stigmata - is the supreme level of the **kenosis** of the Son of God.

e. In any case, Jesus Christ accepted death on the Cross out of obedience, and it is this obedience that gives moral value to His **sacrifice**. A challenge to imitate by His followers in their own lives. The Letter to the Hebrews present Christ to us as One who has received a body – and, in the face of the inefficacy of the sacrifices of the Old Law, **He offers Himself totally to His Father**: *Behold, I come, O God, to do Your Will!* [cf. Heb 10:7]. By this **total Self-giving**, the whole life of Jesus on earth acquires a unity of meaning and a sense, radically orientated toward the Cross and the resurrection – from Crib to Grave, in the Father's eternal plan. Toward this ultimate destiny for the salvation of the World Jesus directs Himself consciously, even freely desiring it, uniting Himself constantly to His Father's Will, while it still seemed time-wise in the distance: *There is a Baptism that I must receive – and I am in anguish until it will be fulfilled* [cf. Lk 12:50]. Once this moment arrived, in His Prayers before mass in Gethsemane, despite the natural human repugnance expressed through His human nature at the prospect of His violent death, He will accept the will of his Father: **it is not what I will, but Your Will be done!** [cf. Mk 14:36]. In this manner, because Jesus Christ by embracing His Cross, fulfills the Father's will – and thus, the entire Paschal Mystery, from beginning to culmination, is the **School of Obedience** – lived in the Church by the **obedience of faith**, by which each believer dedicates his/her whole being to the Paschal Christ.

f. This life-long, loving, humble obedience on the part of the Divine Son, the Father's Servant, infinitely pleased Him – precisely through his humble obedience that Father will **raise Him up** and has bestowed on Him a Name that is above all names, so that at the name of **Jesus**, every knee shall bend following His resurrection in heaven, on earth, and in *sheol*, and every tongue will proclaim that Jesus Christ is the Lord, to the Glory of God the Father [cf. Ph 2:9-11]. There does not exist any doubt that the Name which the Father grants to Jesus because of His obedience, is a

Divine Name, *Yahweh*. . What other meaning could such an expression of Paul have for a Jew of those times – the Name-above-all-names would have to be **divine**. In the Christological Hymn, therefore, the Name of **Jesus**, would indicate that supreme Name which Jesus receives from His Father for His loving obedience unto His Death on the Cross: the Name *Yahweh*, which in the Greek LXX translation is *Kyrios*, remains for the Church the conclusive Profession of Faith, confessing the divinity of the messiah Jesus Christ – risen from the dead. His Divinity was received already in the Incarnation, and believed only in the Resurrection.

g. Naturally, this does not intend to claim that Jesus had finally ‘achieved’ the divine status only through his obedience in the Passion and as a result of that loving obedience. Jesus Christ already pre-existed the Incarnation – from all eternity He indeed was the *Logos*, who was with God, who already was God [cf. Jn 1:1, ff.]! Even though he took on the form of a Slave, He never lost that intimate reality as a divine Person – as hard as His prayer might be to grasp for all of us: *My God, My God, why have You abandoned Me...?* [cf. Ps 22]. ‘Ontologically’ He remained what He always is, far above everything else, the God blessed for all ages [cf. Rm 9:5].

h. However, at the same time His *kenosis* consisted in His abandonment of all external glory, such as shown briefly on the day of the transfiguration on the way to Calvary – such manifestations would be his rightful due as the Only-begotten Son of God. Thus, His ‘exaltation’ after His life-long loving obedience implies that He put on again that external glory which is due to Him eternally. God, in raising up His Crucified Son, has made Jesus ‘the Lord and Messiah’ [cf. Ac 2:25] – as is stated in Peter’s proclamation on the Day of Pentecost. The Resurrection of Jesus Christ is not in any way to be reduced to His miracles of bringing back again to this life those He raised during His public life. In these individuals, those who were raised up - as Jairus’ daughter, the only son of the widow of Naim, or Lazarus - were brought back to this earthly life and they remained subjected to the laws of this life and would eventually die again. However, in Jesus’ unique condition, He was not simply restored to this mortal life, but rather He is exalted, raised up, to the right hand of the Father [cf. Ac 2:33] and is therefore His human nature is endowed with immortality. To understand the terms of this mystery, it cannot be forgotten that Jesus received through His exaltation a participation in the Sovereignty of God and that he alone possesses immortality [cf. 1 Tm 6:16] and that he alone can see to it that a mortal body would be vested with immortality [cf. 1 Co 15:53-54].

## 2. Participants in His Death and Resurrection

a. In this same letter to the Philippians, St. Paul traces an impressive program for the Christian life, consisting in that which each believer, with regard to Christ, can have in the participation in the sufferings of Jesus Christ, by becoming conformed to Him in His death, with the hope of achieving the resurrection of the

dead [cf. Ph 3:10, f.]. There is thus traced out a manner of living the earthly existence which consists in sharing in the *kenosis* of Christ – in this way, we will likewise participate also, one day, in His exaltation.

b. Here on earth, each disciple of Jesus Christ is called to realize that which St. Paul said of himself: ***I make up for what is lacking in the sufferings of Jesus Christ, in behalf of His Body, which is the Church!*** [cf. Col 1:24]. There is placed in direct connection the words *in our own flesh* with the words, *that which is lacking* with the personal sufferings of Jesus Christ – even though, technically, from the perspective of ‘objective redemption’ Christ’s sufferings provided an inexhaustible font of grace for salvation. Every Christian is invited to live assuming a state of *kenosis* in the following of Jesus Christ. This invitation proceeds from Jesus Himself: ***If anyone of you wants to come after Me, let him/her takes up his/her Cross every day, and follow Me!*** [cf. Lk 9:23].

c. For those who accept this combination of Jesus’ words, He promises a glorious resurrection at the end of human history: This is the will of My Father, that each one should see the Son and believe in Him, and thus will have eternal life: and I will raise him up on the last day! [cf. Jn 6:40]. Thus, Jesus’ resurrection is not a fact all closed up in itself: Christ has risen from the dead, the **first-fruits** of those who sleep... [cf. 1 Co 15:20]. This phrase indicates a process that was opened on the day of the Lord’s Resurrection, to extend itself one day – the ‘last’ day, in Jn’s terminology [cf. Jn 6] – to our own resurrection. The ‘first-fruits’ are a very promising sign of an abundant harvest. The same idea is expressed in Col 1:18: Jesus Christ is the **Beginning, the First-born** of those who rise from the dead!

d. Our glorious resurrection through which we will participate in the exaltation of Jesus, will take place in a temporal moment that proves to be conclusive for human history, in connection with a concrete event which we call *Parousia*:

- Thus, St. Paul writes to Thessalonians: the Lord Himself, at the signal given, at the voice of the Archangel, at the blast of the divine trumpet, will descend from heaven; and first of all, those dead in Christ will rise up again; then, we, the living,, those who have remained, will be together taken up above the clouds into the air for an encounter with the Lord! [cf. 1 Th 4:17-17].
- With even more sober descriptive style, but with great technical precision, Paul expresses himself thus to the Corinthians: As all die in Adam, so all will have life again in Jesus Christ. Each one, though, in his own order: first, Christ, who is the **First-fruits**; then, at His Parousia, those who belong to Christ [cf. 1 Co 15:22-23].

These texts establish a fundamental distinction: while Jesus Christ, as the **First-fruits** Who guarantees the future resurrection of His own followers, has already been raised up, **those who belong to Christ**, will rise up in connection with the glorious coming of the Risen Lord Himself, i.e., with His *Parousia*. There is a clear distinction: Jesus Christ Himself, and then those who are of Christ. It is in this context that we need to ponder the sublime meaning of the Assumption of Mary.

### 3. The Singular Nature of Mary's Participation in the Kenosis of Jesus Christ:

a. It might be preferable to name the passage of Luke's Gospel that is ordinarily called **The Annunciation of Mary** [cf. Lk 1:26-38], The Vocation of Mary. In fact, also as a literary genre, the account does not pertain to that of announcements, but follows more the vocation pattern. An account of 'Announcement' culminates in communicating the content of that which the Lord wishes to announce – while the Vocation Accounts have as their end the seeking and the giving of some response. And this is the situation here in Mary's 'Annunciation':

- after having made known the difficulties that for her to be the Mother of God could involve her proposal of a virginal life [cf. v. 34] –
- and, after having heard the response to this difficulty that the Angels offers to her [v. 35 a] –

Mary fully accepts the call that God makes to her by means of the Angel ***Behold, the handmaid of the Lord, let it be done unto me according to Your word!*** [v. 38]. In Mary's response attention is drawn to the emphasis which is given to her self-designation as **slave, servant, handmaid**. Because of the importance of this term, it is very easy to discover here a definite parallelism with the importance that this word has in the Christological Hymn in the Epistle to the Philippians – the same word that is applied there in the masculine to Jesus Christ.

Furthermore, if in this Hymn the ontological slavery of Jesus Christ, through His human nature, is prolonged in the corresponding attitude of His **loving obedience**, so, too, in the case of Mary, her proclamation as the Servant of the Lord is accompanied by her total **self-giving to the carrying out of the will of God: *let it be done to [in] me according to Your word.*** This slight shift in the translation here might indicate even better the **total self-giving** of Mary over into the hands of God and His Will.

b. John Paul II, in his Marian Encyclical,<sup>2</sup> has noted that this full **self-giving** of Mary in her response to the Angel is in full harmony with the words of the son

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<sup>2</sup> cf. *Redemptoris Mater* # 13.

who, according to Hebrews, upon entering into this world says to the Father: ***You have not wanted neither sacrifice, nor oblation – but rather you have prepared a body for me... Behold, I come... to do, o God, Your will*** [cf. Heb 10:5-7]. In like manner, in Mary's case, the believer discovers himself before an act of oblation that will give a unifying sense to her entire life. Thus, Mary **abandons herself entirely before God** manifesting **that obsequium, obedience of faith** [cf. DV 5]. In her maternal, spousal faith, she responds to Him Who was addressing her through His envoy, the Angel. She thus offers to God the **full obsequium of intellect and will**. She has responded, therefore, with her **total self**, as a woman – and in this response of faith were contained a perfect cooperation with the **grace of God which precedes and accompanies** and a perfect availability to the action of the Holy Spirit, Who continuously perfects our theological faith with His seven gifts.

c. The concrete circumstances in which Mary brings to fulfillment her **obedience of faith** are both simple and poor. She is a peasant girl of Nazareth. In her regard, as happened to Nathanael would hear in his response to Jesus, the Son of Mary could have avoided the question in a spontaneous manner: Can anything good come from Nazareth? [cf. Jn 1:46]. In this, Mary follows the options of her son. She has accepted to be the Mother of the Messiah. However, this maternity is not exhausted in the biological fact of life. In accepting this Maternity, Mary unites her destiny to the destiny of her son: the joys of Jesus will also be her joys, as we learn from the Rosary, and the Mysteries of Light - His sadness and sufferings will also be hers, as will a share in His Glorious Resurrection<sup>3</sup>.

d. As for what pertains to the sufferings throughout the life of the BVM, it is most helpful to keep in mind the Prophecy of Simeon [cf. Lk 2:34-35] – which John Paul II, in a suggestive manner, considers to be a **second Annunciation to Mary**.<sup>4</sup> This Annunciation contains two elements:

regarding Jesus, it is said that He will be a **Sign of Contradiction** [cf. Lk 2:34] – i.e., a much discussed 'standard', or 'banner'. This theme seems to have impressed **JP II** in that in the Retreat he preached to Paul VI when he was still a Cardinal, concentrated on this all of his reflections;

as a consequence of this battle around the Person of Jesus Christ and the opposition that He had to endure, Mary, too, would have much to suffer: *...and your own soul will be pierced by the sword* [cf. Lk 2:35].

On the one hand, Simeon expresses the concrete historical dimension in which the Divine Son will complete His Personal Mission from the Father, i.e., in the lack of comprehension and in suffering – and then, on the other there is the annunciation to

<sup>3</sup> Cf. John Paul II, Apostolic Letter, *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, October 14, 2002 – 24<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his becoming Pope.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *Redemptoris Mater* # 16.



Mary that she will be called upon to live out her obedience of faith in her suffering along-side that of the suffering Savior, and that her ecclesial maternity will be harsh and painful. There appears thus a singular participation of Mary in the *kenotic* situation of Jesus Christ, in that situation through which Jesus makes Himself obedient unto His death on the Cross [cf. Ph 2:8].

e. Mary's Pilgrimage of Faith was not lacking in the challenge of extended obscurity. This appears clearly in Nazareth, during that long period of the Hidden Life of Jesus Christ. The Pope indicates that in these long years, using the expression of St. John of the Cross,<sup>5</sup> Mary lived the **Night of faith**, in so far as a thick veil covered over the reality of the mystery before her eyes. The usage of this terminology seems rather normal in the writings of JP II – as this very theme provided the subject matter of his doctoral research at the ANGELICUM: ***Faith in St. John of the Cross***. It could very well be that the Church has not yet sufficiently meditated on these aspects of the mystery of Mary – i.e., **the extended maternal accompaniment of Mary in Nazareth**. To her, the Angel had said that on the part of God, glorious truths would be said about her Beloved son: ***He will be great, He will be called the son of the Most High – to Him, the Lord God will give the Throne of David, His Father, and He will reign over the House of Jacob forever, and His reign will have no end!*** [cf. Lk 1: 32-33].

f. She was challenged to believe with the passing of each day, even though the years that passed were not only those of His Infancy, but also His early youth, and His growing in age in wisdom to mature manhood – which tradition considers to be about the age of 30 that He remained in the simply family life of an ordinary laborer. Paradoxically, in the crushing routine of every day nothing of the 'great realities', the 'wonders of God', seemed to appear – He hardly seemed to be a Messiah: Mary did not understand, but treasured these things in her heart [cf. Lk 2:19, 51]. Mary lived the Family Life with Jesus and Joseph through long years, again an indefinite period of expectancy, disconcerting surely at times, doing routine daily tasks that did not seem to have any relationship with His Personal Mission from the Father – not even did these tasks of the monotonous routine seem to have anything to do with the spectacular description she received from the Angel. Her treasuring all this in her heart, also included the idea of comparing what she had been told, and what she saw unfold before her very eyes. It is, therefore, challenging to try to contemplate in this manner that Mary, for many years, remained in the intimacy with the Mystery of her son and advanced in her **Daily Pilgrimage of Faith**. In all truth, Mary lived in intimacy with this extraordinary Mystery of some silence, only through her faith.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Cf. St. John of the Cross, *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, 2, 3, 4-6.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. *Redemptoris Mater*, 17.

g. The veil became particularly dense on Calvary. There, standing by the Cross, while she never took back her **FIAT** of the Annunciation, she no doubt had to remember, still one more time, the grandiose proclamation from the Angel: **He will be great, and He will be called the Son of the Most High – to Him the Lord God will give the Throne of David, His Father, and He will reign over the House of Jacob forever, and His Reign will not end** [cf. Lk 1:32-33]. In her wildest imagination – or worst fears, she never would have imagined that her Beloved Jesus of Nazareth would have as His ‘Throne’, the bitter Roman Cross of Calvary, outside of the capital, Jerusalem. When she would keep in mind the First Annunciation, mixed with much joy, and a foreboding grief that her Son would be a **Sign of Contradiction**, she believed in it all, even standing by the Cross – by simply being there, in her stance of a hoped resurrection, Mary’s very presence would seem ‘to give the lie to the words of the angel’. In no moment of her life did there appear in any greater **Splendor of the Truth**, the heroicity of her **Obedience of Faith**. Mary in her silence of Advent, remains faithful in her Profession, in the face of the inscrutable designs of God, Whose paths are indeed inaccessible [cf. Rm 11:13]. Long before there had been the **ambitious migration** of exodus – her Pilgrimage of faith was none the easier. In no other moment of Mary’s life does she manifest so clearly her full participation, association in the redemptive work of Jesus Christ, in its most arduous, difficult, painful aspects.

h. The grand theological theme which expresses the singular association of Mary with Jesus Christ is that of the **New Eve**. Precisely due to the individuality of Mary’s association in the Life of Jesus Christ, ‘from the very beginning’, shows her intimate, unique sharing in the terrible **Spiritual Combat** with the awesome Powers of Darkness – all this led Pope Pius XII, in his Definition of the Dogma of the Assumption of Mary into heaven<sup>7</sup> to declare that Mary’s share, that Mary’s participation in the eventual glorification of her son, Jesus Christ, would have to be singular, unique:

- the consideration of Mary as the **New Eve** seems to have appeared for the first time with St. Justin [around 150] – the great martyr for the Truth. In the years following, in a very short period of time, this theme was presented by St. Irenaeus, the Church Father who offers the best development perhaps of **re-capitulation** of all believers within Jesus Christ. And then Tertullian developed the thought.
- The idea common to this perspective of Mary, from the early and brilliant theology of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, can be summarized in these terms: the First Eve dialogued with the devil – she eventually disobeyed God and this eventually brought humanity to death and ruin – whereas, Mary, **the**

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Pius XII, Apostolic Constitution, **Munificentissimus Deus**, 1950.

**Second Eve**, dialogued only with the **Angel**, **obeyed God** in her **Pilgrimage of Faith** throughout her life-time, and she brought forth into the light the Savior of Humanity, and with Him, eternal salvation.

- in a parallel manner with which the First Eve was in collaboration with Adam in the work of sin and destruction, so, the **Second Eve, the BVM**, collaborates with the New Adam, Jesus Christ, in the work of Redemption. Because this theme knew so quickly a real profound development, the supposition is that this parallel was already well known and developed in faith circles even long before St. Justin. If this supposition is so, then we are already in the apostolic times.
- there is no doubt that the Apostolic Tradition already had presented Jesus as the **New Adam** – as is noted explicitly by Paul [cf. 1 Co 15:45]. The converging testimonies of the Fathers, beginning as we have already noted in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century, would make one think that this Apostolic Preaching saw along-side of Him the feminine person of a **New Eve**. In this doctrine of exceptional authority, also for its antiquity, which goes back practically to the Apostolic era, refers to the singular and outstanding cooperation of the **New Eve** with Jesus Christ, in His work as reparation. No other human being has been associated as she was in the salvific work of Jesus in this world. Mary, and only Mary, said her **FIAT** which permitted in her free will the realization of the redemptive Incarnation. Her **FIAT** is the way she became united intimately in the development of **Jesus' total Self-gift** for the redemption of the human race which would culminate in His crucifixion. Therefore, by the anticipated grace of her Coming son was united to the later *kenosis* of her only begotten son.

#### 4. The Unique Nature of Mary's Participation in the Exaltation of Christ: Mary's Corporal Assumption:

a. Pius XII in his Apostolic Constitution defining the assumption, noted above, ***Munificentissimus Deus***, exposed the fundamental theological principle for the Assumption of Mary. He deduced the necessity of a special participation of the Most Holy Virgin in Christ's Victory, beginning with his special participation in the Spiritual Combat of the savior against the Powers of Darkness. In deliberate manner, there emerge those formulations that insist on this that in Mary's Assumption, there took place her very special participation in the exaltation of Jesus Christ. It does not seem that Pius XII, in defining this truth, wished to express just something already evident and common to all Christians. There surely was no intention on the part of His Holiness to reduce the content of the dogma to the mere affirmation that happened in her what would be common to all Christians at their deaths.

b. It seems somewhat surprising that some of the theologians of a generation, or so ago, would essentially level Mary's participation in Christ's victory to the same as that of all Christians. Almost from the outset, following the publication of the Pope's Apostolic Constitution, there were such opinions being expressed. Some based their reasoning on the fact that when Blessed Pius IXth defined the Immaculate Conception of Mary, he had presented this privilege as something granted to her *by the singular grace and privilege* of the omnipotent God – while expressions of such a nature are not present in Pius XII's document.

1.] With regard to this, it is only right to point out that even though in the formula itself of the definition, Mary's role is not presented so much as a 'privilege' – but, the same cannot be said of other sections of the papal document. On the contrary, the Holy Father clearly taught that in his Constitution where he expressly stated that by her Assumption, Mary achieved as it were, the Crown of her privileges'<sup>8</sup>

2.] Other theologians have noted that the reason why in the case of the Assumption, the Pope does not insist on the note of Mary's privilege with that absolute language, as can be noted in the document regarding the definition of the Immaculate Conception. However, the differences noted in the expressions between the two documents defining the Immaculate Conception in 1854 and the Assumption in 1950 clearly have other roots. These are different and do not lead to the pretext of not differentiating the eschatological lot of Mary with regard to the privileges of other Christians – and the distinctions between the two documents need to be noted with a more nuanced presentation.

3.] In the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, the Pope is treating of a fundamental exclusivity of the condition of Mary when compared with that of other human beings. Whereas, in the case of the Assumption, there exists a difference in the *anticipated* realization of the final destiny of the glorious resurrection, to which all the just are destined. The *anticipation* of this common Resurrection indicates what is truly proper, specific to the definition itself of the Assumption – but, at the same time, it points toward a common future destiny towards which all the just are directed. This explains that in the definition itself – which cannot be then stretched to include the over-all teaching of the Apostolic Constitution – there may not be employed terms of singularity which would have rather suggested something totally exclusive in her situation – which is true of the Immaculate Conception. However, regarding the Assumption, this lies within the realm of all Christians.

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<sup>8</sup> cf. D-S # 3902.

4.] Furthermore, the **Profession of Faith** of Paul VI interprets what is 'proper' to Mary's Assumption as an **anticipated participation in the Glorious Resurrection of her Son**: *The Most Blessed Virgin, the Immaculate, at the end of her earthly life, was assumed in body and soul to the glory of heaven, and rendered similar to her Son, Who has risen from the dead, and she achieved, in anticipation the lot of all the just...*<sup>9</sup>

5.] On its part, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith insists on this same manner of understanding the Dogma of the Assumption: *The Church in her reaching regarding the destiny of human beings after death excludes any interpretation which would lead to empty the sense of the Assumption of Mary in what pertains to that which is able to be referred to her in a unique manner; i.e., in the sense that the bodily glorification of the Virgin anticipates that glorification which is destined for all the elect.* Once more, in a Document of the Magisterium there is rejected the tendency to level the situation of Mary's Assumption to that which will one day happen to all the just, not in need of purification, immediately after death, and there is placed the singular nature of Mary's Assumption in the fact of implying an **anticipated corporal glorification** with regard to the final resurrection of the just.

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### SUMMARY

[1] The application of the concept of **anticipation** to an eschatological reality, such as the Assumption, does produce difficulties from some theologians. The tendency to deny the existence of every type of temporal categories in eschatological realities – as would be done whenever one speaks in their regard concerning a 'before' and 'after' – a tendency that usually is catalogued as *atemporalism*. This still finds adherents in present-day theology, not only Protestant, but also some Catholics.

[2] It is not possible to list here a detailed discussion regarding the difficulties that this tendency has in eschatology. It would suffice here to indicate that even though it is not possible to apply to the 'beyond' those categories of our time here on earth, this does not mean that human beings, created as they are, remain now through death, excluded from all notion of time. In fact, the notion of eternity of classical theology, contains not only the full sense of the term, i.e., without beginning or end – but also that of a possession fully simultaneous and perfected in it.

[3] It remains impossible to think that a created being, i.e., a being which would not have infinite perfection, would be capable of a possession so absolute [without a succession of acts] of his own life. This obliges one to introduce a notion of time different from that of 'physical time' – which Card. Ratzinger calls 'human,

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. Paul VI, **Profession of faith**, # 15.

anthropological time', time which is also **memory**. While 'physical time' is measured by corporal movement – that of the hands of a watch, or in the last analysis, that of the movement of the stars – whereas 'anthropological time' would be implied in the succession of psychological acts by means of which the soul possesses its own life. At any rate, 'time' is always a 'succession of acts', and thus there can be distinguished a 'before' and an 'after'- which is evidently in some way, a temporal category, whatever be the manner with which this succession might be perceived on the eschatological level.

[4] This notion is intelligible because St. Paul [cf. 1 Th 4:13-18] speaks of the resurrection from the dead with formulae of the future – as also that only in this way would the theme of expectancy of the souls of the martyrs acquire meaning, as is noted in Ac 6:9-11: ... *certain people found that they could not stand up against Stephen because of his wisdom* [cf. Ac 6:9-11].

[5] In any case, a correct theology of the Assumption, conscious of the fact **that Mary has risen in anticipation**, where there is brought out the profound religious sense of this dogma. There are certain serious motives to affirm that the glorious resurrection of the body gives to the Blessed an intensive increase of the beatific possession of God and not only an accidental joy. The corporal glorification has been granted to Mary because, through it, she obtains the perfect possession of God.

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## A. MARY ASSUMED INTO HEAVEN:

### A SIGN OF HOPE AND CONSOLATION FOR THE PILGRIM PEOPLE OF GOD<sup>10</sup>

#### Introduction:

[1] The II<sup>nd</sup> Vatican Council teaches us that Mary is a Sign of Sure Hope and of Solace for God's People in Pilgrimage [cf. LG 68]:

In the bodily and spiritual glory which she possesses in heaven, the Mother of Jesus continues in this present world as the Image and first flowering of the Church, as she is to be perfected in the world to come. Likewise, Mary shines forth on earth, until the day of the Lord shall come [cf. 2 P 3:10], as a **sign of sure hope and solace** for the Pilgrim People of God.

[1] In other words: the BVM, assumed into heaven, participates in fullness in the resurrection of her beloved Son, Jesus Christ – and she shines out across the seasons of life as a sign of consolation. In her, in fact, humanity which is still in pilgrimage along the twisting paths of history can foresee and foretaste the ultimate goal toward which its entire pilgrimage is directed.

[3] The Church, as the heart of humanity, comprehends then, that Mary assumed is not an exception, but rather an **anticipation**. In Mary, glorified along-side her Most Beloved Son, the community of believers – as the Council has instructed us - admires and exalts the most sublime fruit of the redemption. In Mary, the Church is able to contemplate joyfully, as in a most pure Icon, image, all that she, in her totality – desires, and hopes to be [cf. SC 103].

[4] The ultimate destiny of the BVM is what is awaiting us. The announcement, proclamation of this Good News, has already become a lived reality in the person of the Holy Virgin. This has now been translated into an exercise of merciful consolation towards human beings down through the long centuries in the life of the Church. Modern humanity, in particular, might indeed find much joy in this Advent announcement, assailed as each man, woman and child may be: what are we after all is said and done – where did we come from – where are we headed? Does life make any sense? Already from this Premise there may be noted that there has opened up for us a kind of Marian Pastoral and Theology that needs to be promulgated – with a renewed sense of sensibility. This might be done in sanctuaries dedicated to her, of course, but also in religious communities with their own particular 'Mariology.'

[5] From so many corners, the dedicated religious might be bombarded with the conviction that in this *consumeristic society* the country is losing its sense of values –

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. Aristide M. Serra, OSM, in: *L'Assunzione di Maria, Madre di Dio. Significato storico-salvifico a 50 anni della definizione dogmatica*. Vaticano 2001, pp. 203-26, *passim*.

particularly those values of ultimate worth – we are we going as a nation, a people? Is this the *terminal Generation*, is this present Church situation the end result of all our struggles and pain, self-denial? Is there anything after all this? Is it enough – or even desirable to hope for a long life? Is this why so many get all involved in cults, ‘satanic ritual, and so many other aberrations – the appeal of fundamentalism? The late Cardinal Cushing of Boston had as his Episcopal motto ***Ut cognoscant Te*** - and there is the challenge from St. Paul, to his struggling community of Philippi:

***... I count everything as loss... if only I can gain Christ, and be given a place in him, with an uprightness that I have gained, not from the Law, but through faith in Christ, an uprightness in God, based on faith; that I may come to know Him and the power of His resurrection, and partake of His sufferings by being molded to the pattern of His death, striving towards the goal of resurrection from the dead. Not that I have secured it already, not yet reached my goal, but I am still pursuing it in the attempt to take hold of the prize for which Christ took hold of me...! [cf. Ph 3:8, ff.]***

[6] Multiple and varied is the consolation that the Risen Lord gives to His Church. There is a very special dimension of this Gift of Consolation that the Lord bestows: there is a distinct reconciliation between this present life, and our future destiny – there is a harmony between heaven and earth – our earth of Liturgies are a foretaste of the heavenly celebrations – there is a real continuity between what we already are and what we will be. The life of faith for St. Thomas is already the ***inchoatio vitae aeternae!*** Sometimes an immature faith would give rise to false consolations:

- to consider this present life as a Valley of Tears, and little more – where the only possible stance for any thinking human being is to weep until Paradise is bestowed – this would be the idea that here on earth all that we have are sufferings, trials – and later on will be the reward, recompense;
- to denigrate this world and to avoid all aspects of it – in order to seek God, as though he had not left any ‘values’ for our use in order to reach Him;
- to look on earthy consolations always with suspicion, with some negativity – as though we had to pass through this terrible night of human existence, in unpleasant lodgings. This would devalue rather radically the progress of Salvation History unfolding within us, and all around us. We cannot separate our present existence from sharing in this History of salvation, either by rejection or by an ever fuller immersion;
- to evaluate our present existence as worthless, negative – reducing it to a sort of passage towards that supreme reconciliation which will be realized only when time ends, in eternity. This would be to read Christianity merely as an escape route from an un-acceptable reality – to distract our attention from an untenable present world,



in order to undertake immediately the flight towards heaven, which is above and beyond us. Any dallying with false consolations distances us even further from authentic love from God and from His truth. There is a reality of earthly goods.

[7] Life is worth living – especially when we keep before our eyes the ICON of the transfigured, and eventually risen Lord – and Mary as assumed body and soul into heaven. There is a clear biblical thread and commentary on the Resurrection as an expression of Consolation, all flowing from the Mercy of God. According to an ancient tradition immersed deeply in sacred Scripture, the ‘Resurrection from the Dead’ is conceived as the conclusive apex and the most sublime expression of consolation, or mercy, that the God of the Covenant grants to His People.

[8] There is a deep, and ‘logical’ bond, or inter-relationship that the biblical message shares between ‘resurrection’ and “Consolation/Mercy”. It is useful to reflect on the biblical passages that are the under-pinning of this tradition. With St. Ignatius of Loyola, who in His 4<sup>th</sup> week of the exercises, creates a [non-biblical] scene of the Risen Jesus coming back to His Mother – and there are ancient writings that described the old Festival of the Dormition of the BVM being consoled and conducted home by the risen Lord.

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## **B. BIBLICAL and JUDAIC REFLECTIONS ON THE RESURRECTION and CONSOLATION**

Late in the OT period – and almost at the dawn of the NT era - the People of Israel was gradually seeing mature in their collective faith and certain acquisition of extraordinary consequence. It might be described by us now as ***the perfect consolation*** that the merciful Lord God of the Covenant was drawing up with his People – and this was nothing other than the **final resurrection of the dead**.

That special day was called **the Day of mercy [cf. 2 M 7:29]**. In that day – the date of which would remain unknown to them, while they remained certain that some day it would happen – was earlier described by the great Prophet Isaiah, the Advent prophet:

... On this mountain, for all peoples, Yahweh Sabaoth is preparing a banquet of rich food, a banquet of fine wines, of succulent food, of well-strained wines. On this mountain, He has destroyed the veil which used to veil all peoples, the pall enveloping all nations; He has destroyed death forever. Lord Yahweh has wiped away the tears from every cheek; He has taken His people’s shame away, everywhere on earth, for Yahweh has spoken. And on that day, it will be said: ‘Look, this is our God – in him we put our hope in Him. Let us exult and rejoice

since he has saved us. For Yahweh's hand will rest on this mountain... [cf. Is 25:6, ff.]

The Prophet Daniel seems to have known something about it:

... that will be a time of great distress, unparalleled since nations first came into existence. When that time comes, your own people will be spared – all those whose names are found written in the Book. Of those who are sleeping in the Land of Dust, many will awaken, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting disgrace. Those who are wise will shine as brightly as the expanse of the heavens, and those who have instructed many in uprightness, as bright as stars for all eternity... the Book will be sealed... [cf. Dn 12:2, ff.].

The **Book** noted here is the **Book of Life** [cf. Ex 32:32, f.; Ps 69:28; 139:16; Is 4:3; Dn 7:10; Lk 10:20; Rv 20: 12]. The ancient poetry in the Psalms also offers its hope:

... So, my heart rejoices, my soul delights, my body, too, will rest secure, for you will not abandon me to Sheol, you cannot allow your faithful servant to see the abyss. You will teach me the path of life, unbounded joy in Your presence, at Your right hand delights forever... [cf. Ps 16:9, ff.].

These texts – and possibly others – may be the very threshold of the NT – when that special **Day** will dawn with Jesus Christ, Who has come **not to abolish, but to fulfill all this** [cf. Mt 5:17].

## [I] OT

**2 M 7: 1-41**: the core of this extraordinary passage of the 'Sorrowful Mother' is full of hope for generations. Here a few of the central passages will be cited:

... [After the execution of her last son, the 7<sup>th</sup>!]... the Mother was especially admirable and worthy of honorable remembrance, for she watched the death of seven sons in the course of a single day, and bravely endured it because of her hopes in the Lord. Indeed she encouraged each of them in their ancestral tongue: filled with noble conviction, she reinforced her womanly argument with manly courage, saying to them: *I do not know how you appeared in my womb; it was not I who endowed you with breath and life. I had not the shaping of your every part. And hence, the Creator of the world, Who made everyone and ordained the origin of all things, will in His Mercy give you back breath and life, since for the sake of His laws you have no concern for yourselves.*

Antiochus thought he was being ridiculed, suspecting insult in the tone of her voice; and as the youngest was still alive he appealed to him not with mere words but with promises on oath to make him both rich and happy if he would abandon the traditions of his ancestors; he would make him his Friend and entrust him with public office. The young man took no notice at all, and so the

king then appealed to the mother, urging her to advise the youth to save his life. After a great deal of urging on his part, she agreed to try persuasion on her son. Bending over him, she fooled the cruel tyrant with these words, uttered in their ancestral tongue: *My son, have pity on me; I carried you nine month in my womb, and suckled you for three years, fed and reared you to the age you are now, and provided for you. I implore you, my child, look at the earth and sky and everything in them, and consider you God made them out of what did not exist, and that human beings come into being in the same way. Do not fear this executioner, but prove yourself worthy of your brothers and accept death, **so that I may receive you back with them in the Day of Mercy...** [cf. 2 M 7: 20-29]*

While Genesis speaks of creation out of *chaos* - here, in one of the last books of the OT, we come to the eventual faith of the Church – that God created out of nothing, with the same power that He would call the Seven Sons out of the Dust of their tombs, on **the great Day of Mercy!**

The settings for the Books of Maccabees are those terrible persecutions after the pre-mature death of Alexander the Great. The lands that he conquered were divided among his generals – and the general who received Jerusalem was called Antiochus [167-164] – who tried to ‘Hellenize’ the Israelites. They resisted, and a terrible persecution broke out which was truly terrifying. This led to the birth within Israel to a sublime faith in the corporal resurrection from the dead. The just Israelite, persecuted unto death, even undergoing a terrible martyrdom of a most violent and cruel death, will be ransomed and redeemed by God Himself with resurrection and eternal life. Both the wicked and the just will appear before the Judgment of the Eternal, Who will render to each one according to his works, whether good or bad.

Faith in the final resurrection came almost immediately to be conceived as Consolation – Mercy, and this is clearly attested in these extraordinary pages of 2 M 7. The faith of these heroic Israelites is expressed in this chapter, here on the lips of the first of the 7 brothers being martyred, v. 6: **The Lord God is watching and certainly feels sorry for us, as Moses declared in his song [cf. Dt 32:36] which clearly states that He will take pity on his servants!**

From the a second testimony, or ‘witness’ which follows, there may be deduced that the Divine Compassion towards His People is called ***consolation [paraklesis]*** and it consists in the resurrection: **... Cruel brute! You may discharge us from this world, but the King of the World will raise us up, since we die for His laws, to live again forever...! [v. 9].**

As the fourth son neared his end under grueling torment, he offers this third proclamation of the resurrection:

... The king and his attendants were astounded at the young man's courage and his utter indifference to suffering. When the third son was dead, they subjected the fourth to the same torments and tortures... The king and his attendants were astounded at the young man's courage and his utter indifference to suffering. When the third son was dead, they subjected the fourth to the same torments and tortures. When he neared his end he cried: *Ours is the better choice, to meet death at men's hands, yet relying on God's promise that we shall be raised up by Him; whereas for you, there can be no resurrection to new life...*! [vv. 12, ff.].

Thus, it seems quite clear from these late OT texts that the hoped for resurrection is extended also to the body. This is quite evident, too, in the faith of the fourth brother: ... ***After him, they tortured another brother, who on being asked for his tongue promptly thrust it out and boldly held out his hands, courageously saying: Heaven gave me these limbs; for the sake of his laws I have no concern for them; from Him I hope to receive them again...***! [cf. vv. 10, ff.].

The heroic Mother of the Seven Sons offers her 'witness' in the midst of this carnage of her beloved family – and has remained most worthy of recollection for people of faith down through the ages, receiving a glorious memory. She supported all of this in her sublime Hope placed in the Lord Himself – she, in fact, ***comforted, encouraged, instilled hope into*** her seven sons, always in the hope of a final resurrection. In her testimony, she brings together **the Creator of the World, the Day of Mercy**, and the **Final Resurrection**. In this exhortation of the Mother, the sacred author transfuses the matured faith of the Jewish community, persecuted unto death in still another pogrom. God manifested His power when He created the world and the human race out of nothing [vv. 23 a, 28]. This same Creative Power of God will be revealed anew when He will bring about these sons' rising again to a **new and eternal life**. This will be the lot of those who will die for the **TORAH** [cf. vv. 9, 23, 29, 36]. The heroic faith in God the Creator is now placed in God the Savior – and each act of Redemption is a new Creation.

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#### Ct 8:5 and the ancient Targum:

***... Who is this coming up from the desert leaning on her lover? I awakened you under the apple tree, where your mother conceived you, where she who bore you conceived you...***!

In its primary - literal and natural sense, the verse evokes a scene of nuptial intimacy. The beloved Bride abandons herself to the embrace of her much loved Husband – coming up out of the desert. This place is presented either as a place of punishment, or testing – whereas in Hoseah it is the place of Israel's original *engagement* with the Lord, with a view to future consummated Nuptials:

**... But, I am going to seduce her and lead her back into the desert, and speak to her heart...!** [cf. Ho 2:16]. The Lord originally discovered His People in the Blood of the lamb in the new-spring time of a new creation in the Book of Exodus. Israel went back on its nuptial agreement – so, here the Lord speaks of the Babylonian exile, a return to the desert migrations of purification – where the Lord will speak to the heart of His re-conquered wayward Bride. The **apple tree** always seems to served as the scene of loving encounters, reflected even in the American love song that came out during the Second World War, a departing soldier singing to his beloved: **... Don't sit under the apple tree with anyone else but me, with anyone else but me!** As this was the scene of Israel's first birth, the old Jewish *Targum* understood this as the Spouse coming to life again – precisely where she had been conceived. This is the scene of New Life!

The Greek version of the LXX seems to unfold in the allegorical and figurative sense – the Bride is the Community of Israel, who comes forth from the Land of Slavery, in order to set out across the desert – comforted and supported every step of the way by the loving care of her Lord and Husband. She will respond as she did when she was young, as she will be rendered young again, renewed, coming to new life. The Lord will have purified her, in order to render her suited to receive anew the Precious **Gift of the Torah**. **The Psalmist reminds the Israelites:** *... The precepts [the TORAH] of the Lord are honest, joy for the heart; the commandments of Yahweh are pure, light for the eyes!* [cf. Ps 19:8].

The apple-tree also evokes the grove into which Moses led his little flock in the Desert Storm when this activity was followed by the entire Mountain blowing up, and the Lord speaking to Moses from the Volcano eruptions. There the Lord espoused His beloved People as His blushing Bride. This is the story of the **Merciful Ever-lasting Covenant founded on the TORAH**. In like manner, always at the foot of the sacred Mountain of Horeb-Sinai, the Lord **awakens-raises up** Israel. There, in the original story [cf. ex 19:16]: *...Now at daybreak two days later, [on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day], there were peals of thunder and flashes of lightning, a dense cloud on the mountain and a very loud trumpet blast...!* [cf. ex 19:16] – a scene somewhat distantly reminiscent of the **Transfiguration**, in preparation for the Resurrection. It is at the sound of the **Trumpet** that will be used to call forth the deceased of ages long gone, from their tombs to new life, so that the whole people will be involved in that grandiose event of its story.

Surprisingly the ancient Jewish Targum re-reads this Ct 8:5 and gives to it an interesting re-reading in the hopes of a resurrection – in a general way, this is how the ancient, Aramaic reading unfolds:

... Thus spoke the Prophet Solomon: when the dead come to life again, the Mount of Olives will be squashed – and all the dead of Israel will come up from down under toward it, and also the just who will have died in exile will

come by the way of the caverns under the ground – and they will come up from down under to the Mount of Olives. On the other hand, the wicked who have died and who have been buried in the land of Israel, will be exiled, as one would throw a stone long-shot. At that time, all the inhabitants of the earth will say: *What is the merit of this people, who come up from the land in such extraordinary numbers, as on that day in which it came up out of the desert into the land of Israel and will take delight in the love of its Lord, as on the day in which he first saw them under Mount Sinai, in order to receive His Torah? And in that day, Sion, who is the Mother of Israel, will bring forth her sons into the light, and Jerusalem will accept all the exiles!*

From this ancient document it is easy to see the notable paraphrasing that this ancient Targum introduces into the original Hebrew of Ct 8:5, leading the whole passage into an eschatological-messianic direction. From Chapter 7:2, in fact, the Targum of the Canticles addresses itself to the ultimate redemption that God will grant to His People. This consists in the gathering of the exiles through the intervention of the coming Messiah, sent by the Lord – and in the final resurrection of all the dead. Both of these aspects of this epilogue of Salvation History converge on Sion-Jerusalem – and this place, now ‘spiritualized’, is the one chosen beforehand where there will be manifested that perfect salvation in which the Lord will gratify His People.

The Targum on the passage chosen Ct 8:5 is centered upon the resurrection of the dead. This concerns the deceased of Israel, both the just, as well as the wicked – as in the line from Daniel 12. For those wicked Israelites, already buried in Palestine, there will be – so to speak – a resurrection of condemnation, because they will be rejected from the sacred soil of Israel – as one would hit a stone, aimlessly, with a stick – or aim a rock with a sling-shot. The just, on the other hand, will rise up out of their tombs in order to re-assemble within the sacred precincts of the Holy City walls. In fact, Sion-Jerusalem is presented here much like a maternal womb in which all the risen are re-generated: both those buried in the Holy Land, as well as those long forgotten buried in the lands of exile.

This is a marvelous phenomenon, which arouse – that for which the first Exodus was only a pre-figure, when Israel, coming up out of the land of Slavery, crossed the desert, and fulfilled its pilgrimage towards the Promised Lands universal stupor. In that coming up out of the land of the tombs towards Sion-Jerusalem, all the peoples see the fulfillment of the last great Exodus: ... *Who is this arising like the dawn, fair as the moon, resplendent as the sun, formidable as an army...*[cf. Ct 6:10] – perhaps somewhat reminiscent of Rv 12:1 ... ***Now a great sign appeared in the heaven: a woman robed with the sun, standing on the moon, and on her head a crown of 12 stars...!***

With this wondrous resurrection from the dead, Sion-Jerusalem see fulfilled to perfection her own maternity, from that moment that the innumerable assembly of her children comes up out of the bosom of her blessed soil, in order to return to life.

Once more, in these ancient, non-biblical compositions, there is clearly connected the hope of the Resurrection as the Hope of long ago – this is a message of Consolation: Console My People, console My people – says the Lord God – speak to the heart of Israel! Her long exile is over! [cf. Is 40:1]. Thus, the Resurrection from the dead in Sion-Jerusalem appears as the extreme act of Divine Consolation, from God's merciful love towards Israel. The inhabitants of the land, in fact, on seeing the dead of Israel who come back to life exclaims: what merit do this people have – who takes delight in the love in the love of its Lord? It will be said, then, that God has made this sinful people his 'pet...His baby'! The God of Israel is a Mother-God! [cf. Ps 131, the God who 'weans' Israel, and allows her to be abandoned into the arms of His **merciful, maternal love**].

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#### Is 66:7-9, 12-14 and the Ancient Targum:

*... Before being in labor, she has given birth. Before the birth pangs, she has been delivered of a child. Who ever heard of such anything like this? Can a country be born in one day? Can a nation be brought forth all at once? For Zion, scarcely in labor, has brought forth her children! Shall I open the womb and not bring to birth? Says Yahweh. Shall I bring to birth, close the womb? Says your God ... For Yahweh says this: Look, I am going to send peace flowing over her like a river, and like a stream in spite the glory of the nations. You will be suckled, carried on her hip and fondled in her lap. As a mother comforts ha child, so I shall comfort you; you will be comforted in Jerusalem. At the sight your heart will rejoice; and your limbs regain vigor like the grass. To His servants, Yahweh will reveal His hand, but to His enemies, His fury...*

These celebrated verses celebrate again Sion-Jerusalem as the Sanctuary of god's **Maternal Consolation** - as in the first verse of Ps 51, the **Miserere**: God as **hesed** – a deep healthy masculine bond of friendship; **rehem**, the care of the maternal womb – and a **nurse**, not un-like a Florence Nightingale, leaning down over someone who is terribly ill, piteously wounded, in this case, by sin [cf. Ho 11 – leaning down over the crib to give His infant something to eat].

With the tenderness of a Mother, the Lord God Himself promises to nourish the Israelites: He will carry them in His bosom; He will caress them on His knee. The *feminine mystique* in god attains here one of its heights: **As a Mother consoles her son, so I will console you. In Jerusalem, you will be consoled. You will see and your heart rejoice, your limbs regain vigor like the grass...!**

On the wave of the nascent hope in the resurrection of the dead, Is 66 becomes the object of further study in our own time. The ancient Jewish Targum, in fact, reinterprets this passage, by referring to the day of the King-Messiah who is coming – and applies this also to the deceased of Israel who will rise up again from their tombs, when the Messianic era will dawn anew.

The ancient Aramaic Targum of this Is 66 is as follows: Before she is overtaken with her birth pangs, she will be delivered – before there comes over her that fear as the pains of one giving birth, so her King, the Messiah, will be revealed. Who has ever heard of anything like this? Whoever has seen anything like this? Can a whole land be brought into being in one day? Can a People be created in a single instant? Because Sion will be **consoled**, and will be filled with an imprisoned people of her exiles. I the Lord have **created** the world from the beginning, says the Lord. I have created every person, and have dispersed them among the peoples and I will gather together all your prisoners, says your God... Since the Lord says this: For indeed I will gather all towards her, as the peace will flow like the River Euphrates - it will be like a river at the full, thus will be the richness of the peoples – and they will be nourished. You will be carried in My arms, and on my knees You will be nourished. Like one whom a Mother consoles, so I will **console** you; and in Jerusalem you will be **consoled**. And you will see this, and your hearts will rejoice, and your limbs will flourish like fresh grass. And the hand of the Lord will be made manifest to His servants – and He will direct His disdain against His enemies...!

It is good to ponder this ancient, non-inspired Targum interpretation of the inspired verses of **Is 66**. The results emerge very clearly – while the original Hebrew text referred to the return of the exiles from Babylon to Jerusalem, at the end of the Exile [that began in 587], the Aramaic Targum re-reads this Oracle of Isaiah in an Eschatological-Messianic key. All is projected to that epoch in which there will be revealed the Messiah, the King of Sion. In those days, God Himself will console Sion, bring back to her bosom those great numbers of exiles, spread among the Gentiles. A fact like this is equal to a **Second Creation** – in fact, the power poured out by God in creating the world and each person, is the same power that He employs in rendering Jerusalem the ‘Mother’ of her children, led back to her from the dispersion of the Babylonian Exile. [St. Thomas Aquinas would one day teach that there is a greater expenditure of the power of God in the conversion of one sinner than in the creation of a thousand worlds like this one!] Once these numbers will have returned to Sion, God will pour out on His people the abundance of peace, and will make the glory of His People shine out.

The Lord promises to pet the Israelites, adding a neighboring concept to the original text. He will carry them in His bosom, and will nourish them on His knees. Jerusalem will become in that manner the very Sanctuary of Consolation, with which



God gratifies His People, with the tenderness of a **Mother**. At the sight of such an out-pouring of grace, the heart of every Israelite will exult with joy – and **their bodies will flourish like new grass!**

This expression seems to be a manifestation of that faith in the **resurrection of the bodies**. In fact, in **Psalms 72**, one of the more celebrated Messianic Psalms, speaks of this same image: ... ***May wheat abound in the land, waving on the heights of the hills, like Lebanon with its fruits and flowers at their best, like the grasses of the earth...*** [v. 16]. The subject of the verb remains indeterminate. Perhaps it is to be identified with the poor and wretched who will find in the messianic King their suc-**cor**, and vindicator. Some of the early Jewish writers would identify these who would spring to new life again those just who will come back to Jerusalem after death in exile.

Your limbs will regain vigor like the grass! [cf. Is 66:14]: from the very earliest days in Christianity, this verse became a prophecy of the resurrection. Irenaeus, at the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century stated that the One Who at the beginning had created humanity, has promised all human beings a **second generation**, after it has been dissolved in the earth. Irenaeus then adds other OT texts to support his views of the resurrection [cf. Is 26:19; 66:14; Ezk 37:1-41]. Tertullian, in his turn, confirmed the Church's faith in the resurrection by invoking, among other passages those of Ezk 37:1-41; Mt 4:2; Is 66:14; 26:19]. And so would St. Thomas Aquinas!<sup>11</sup>

Aimon of Halberstadt [+ 853] was a little known writer from the late Patristic age, depending much on St. Jerome, and he was able to make this connection: ***As a Mother consoles her children, so will the Lord console His children. In Jerusalem they will be consoled*** [cf. Is 66:13]. This promise prepared the way for this saying of Jesus: ***Behold, I will be with you all days, even to the consummation of the earth*** [cf. Mt 28:20]. And in the Heavenly Jerusalem will the children of God be consoled in His presence.

***You will see your limbs flourish like the new grass!*** [cf. Is 66:14] – in the eternal beatitude, according to this writer, you will see God as He is, according to that other promise of the Lord: ... ***Blessed are the pure of heart, for they will see God!*** [cf. Mt 5:8]. And your hearts will rejoice without end, because no one will be able to take away from you your joy [cf. Jn 16:21, f.] When the day of Judgment will arrive your limbs, your whole bodies, having received immortality, will spring into life, they will arise, re-vested in green, that is, the body will be imbued with vigor, all will be flourishing in the day of Judgment. Then, since they will serve the Lord in body and soul, so they will exult in body and soul in eternal beatitude.

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, *In Isaiam*, 66.

The hand of the Lord will be made manifest to His Servant, and He will lash out against His enemies [cf. Is 66:14 c-d]. These words, in the proper sense, seem to refer to the day of Judgment. In fact, the **Hand** of the Lord is **His Son** – because by means of him, God the Father has made all. In the day of Judgment He will be recognized as benign and gentle among His faithful ones, while towards the wicked, He will show Himself decisive and will punish them... In the Day of Judgment, though, the Lord will render Himself manifest to His servants and He will say to the: ***Come, blessed of My Father!*** [cf. Mt 25:31]. And He will lash out against the wicked, to whom He will say: ***Go far from me, wicked, into eternal fire!*** [cf. Mt 25:41].

So – since Christian exegesis, at such an early age in the history of biblical interpretation, has interpreted Is 66:14 as a promise of the future resurrection, it can be presumed that this happened in so far as the Hebrew expressions opened the way for this – and Christianity simply **explicitated** it under divine inspiration. So, **the Resurrection of the Dead** is the proof of that most **tender maternal affection** with which God **consoles** His People, in the Hour of its Definitive redemption.

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## [II] NT

The usual understanding is that most likely Paul's letters to the Thessalonians were the first NT document – and the 'Johannine School' might have drawn this body of literature to a conclusion – so, from beginning to end there is presented to the faithful the dream of **New Hope**:

### **1 Th 4:13-18:**

*... We want you to be quite certain, brothers, about those who have fallen asleep, to make sure that you do not grieve for them, as others do who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again, and that in the same way, God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. We can tell you this from the Lord's own teaching, that we who are still alive for the Lord's coming will not have any disadvantage over those who have fallen asleep. At the signal given by the voice of the Archangel and the trumpet of God, the Lord Himself will come down from heaven; those who have died in Christ will be the first to rise, and only after that shall we who remain alive, be taken up in the clouds together with them, to meet the Lord in the air. This is the way we shall be with the Lord forever. With such thoughts as these, then, you should encourage one another...*

The evangelization of the City of Thessalonika took place during Paul's second missionary journey, perhaps at the beginning of the year 50 [cf. Ac 17:1-9]. The opposition from the Jewish community forced Paul to continue his journey, first toward Berea and then toward Athens [cf. Ac 17:10-18]. From Athens, then, the Apostle sent Timothy to Thessalonika, in order to confirm the neophytes of that

Church in the faith and to have news concerning them [cf. 1 Th 3:1-5] After the failure of his Discourse in the Areopagus, he returned to Corinth [cf. Ac 17:16-18]. Two or three months later, the arrival of Paul in that city was met with that of Timothy, in order to give him an up-date on the situation of the faithful of Thessalonika [cf. 1 Th 3:2, 6; Ac 18:5] The Letter sent by the apostle at the beginning of the year 51, therefore, would be the first of the Pauline Letters in the order of time – and thus, with this document, there begins the literary body of the entire NT.

The components of the young community of Thessalonika put a very hard question to Paul: what is the lot of those who have fallen asleep in the Lord – i.e., those who have already died in Jesus Christ. The text above is Paul's response. The Apostle does not want that the brothers and sisters evangelized by him into the faith should remain in ignorance regarding a theme that is of such vital importance: he does not want them to be said like others who do not have faith [cf. v. 13] The world which has not yet arrived at knowing the Gospel of Jesus Christ is understandably afflicted. But, this is not the case with those who believe in Jesus Christ. Jesus in fact has died and has risen up again. If we do indeed believe this, we need to hold it for certain that God will gather with Jesus also those who have fallen asleep in Him [cf. v. 14]. On certainty of this nature, Paul establishes the consolation which he offers to his fellow believers, living in Thessalonika.

Biblical 'consolation' is always founded on the events of salvation that the Lord works in behalf of His People. And, since sacred Scripture is the authoritative document which renders witness to these events, Paul could write: all that has been written before us, has been written for our consolation, so that in virtue of the perseverance and of the consolation that comes to us from the scriptures, we keep alive our hope. And may the God of Perseverance and Consolation grant you to have toward each other those same sentiments following the example of Christ Jesus [cf. Rm 15:4-5].

In the first place, therefore, the Apostle repeats with firmness the intimate connection existing between the death-resurrection of Jesus and the com-sharing, co-participation of the faithful in the same mystery, presented in terms of the 'gathering.'

From the affirmation of the fact, the Apostle passes over to treat certain modalities of the same. His discourse is intertwined with the word of the Lord [cf. v. 15]. From the over-all picture of his argumentation, Paul seems to think also that the Parousia of the Lord should be taking place shortly [cf. v. 15 – we, the living, those who remain in life at the Second Coming of the Lord]. The consequence of the terms employed by him, used to describe this final Christophany – at an order - at the voice of the Archangel and at the sound of the Trumpet of God – we will be drawn up into the clouds – in order to meet the Lord in the air [vv. 16-17] – all of this makes up part

of the repertoire of those images already borrowed from the Apocalyptic literature, with particular reference to the grand Theophany of Sinai long ago [cf. ex 19-20]. Beyond these categories of description, that are tributaries of a conventional language bound to a culture by now surpassed, there remains the basic nucleus of the Christian faith: **we will always be with the Lord, as He first came to us as *Emmanuel!***

On the basis of these words, the faithful of Thessalonika ought to find every reason for their mutual consolation that will be strong enough to bring some calm to their sadness [v. 13]. In Jesus' Resurrection resides all our Hope. The Risen One awakens us from the sleep of death: **Christ has risen from the dead, the first-born of those who have fallen asleep!** [cf. 1 Co 15:20; cf. Mt 9:24; Jn 11:11].

### **2 Th 2:16-17:**

***... keep the traditions that we taught you, whether by word of mouth or by letter. May our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and God our Father Who has given us His love and, through His grace, such ceaseless encouragement and such sure hope, encourage you and strengthen you in every good word and deed.***

According to a traditional opinion, still retained by many scholars, 2<sup>nd</sup> Th would have been written by Paul while he was in Corinth, towards the middle of the year 51 – therefore, not long after 1 Th, sent to the neophytes of the same community. Many are the verbal and thematic connections between 1 Th and 2 Th – but, at the same time, there are numerous and important differences, especially in what pertains to Eschatology.

In recent times, an increasing number of exegetes are taking up a more refined position. The Epistle would not be that of Paul, but authored by some exponent of his 'school' – who would have composed it near the end of the first century. Therefore, this could be classified as an epigraphic document. In order to respond to the various types of restlessness aroused by the delay of the Lord's Parousia, this anonymous author favors that which the apostle has written in 1 Th regarding the final coming of the Risen Christ, retained already proximate in time [cf. 1 Th 4:13-17]. Contextually, the author is concerned with clarifying the thought of the Apostle, indicating that which he would have said in this new situation. In this Letter, therefore, there would not be retained the voice of the Paul of history, but rather that of his school. Thus, 2 Th would not, then, be addressed to a particular community, but much more to all the churches that are found confronting the same challenges.

In 2 Th 2:1-12, the author of the Epistle imparts various directives regarding the Parousia of our Lord Jesus Christ and regarding our reunion with him [v. 1] Indeed

it is certain that the Lord Jesus, on the day of His glorious coming, will destroy the powers of evil with the breath of his mouth [cf. Vv. 3-4, 8]. Now, however, it is the time in which there has spread the mystery of iniquity [v. 7]. The Day of the Lord has **not yet** come [v. 2]. It is necessary to await it in the love of God and in the patience of Jesus Christ [v. 5]. That which is of greatest importance is to assume loyally the commitment demanded of a normal life [vv. 6, 11], to eat one's own bread, working in peace! [v. 12].

The particular perspective of our argument pops up again in 2 Th 2:16 – this makes up part of the exhortation contained in vv. 15:17 – be strong and faithful in the traditions that you have already learned from our words, as from our Letter. And the Lord Jesus Christ and God our Father, Who has loved us and have given us, by His grace, an eternal consolation and a good hope – may He console your hearts and confirm them in every work and word of God!

The *traditions learned from our word and from our letter* [v. 15] certainly include – and under a special title – also those questions aroused by the theme of the *Parousia*. This particular accentuation is required by the context of vv. 1-12, which proceed immediately, and from the eschatological tenor of v. 14, where the prospect is presented in the possession of the *glory* of our Lord Jesus Christ.

It is this, the Glory of the Risen One, the Glory of His power [cf. 2 Th 1:9] that will be shared among all His saints, who have believed in Him [cf. 2 Th 1:10]. He will provide relief to those who are afflicted, when there will be manifested the Lord Jesus from heaven with the Angels of His power in that day [cf. 2 Th 1:7, 10].

This full communion of the Risen One, in the Day of the Parousia, is due to the initiative of our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and of God the Father, who have loved us, by giving to us – out of pure grace- an eternal consolation and a good hope. For a second time, Paul evangelizes the 'resurrection' of Jesus Christ in terms of consolation. In its turn, consolation generates Hope, which makes up part of the Messianic Blessings with which the God of the Covenant heaps upon His People: He has filled the hungry with good things! [cf. Lk 1:51].

#### **In cc. 14-16:**

In the prolonged Priestly Prayer of Farewell pronounced at the Last Supper addressed to the disciples, there appear the themes of consolation/resurrection. These need to be re-read in the light of the Pasch, with reference now to Jesus Christ, and then also to His Holy Spirit.

In a proleptic synthesis, we can see that Jesus Christ consoles the disciples promising to return among them with His Resurrection, and to send upon them, then, the Spirit, Paraclete, the *Consoler* – as the effect of His Resurrection.

**[1.] Jesus consoles the Disciples, promising to return among them with His Resurrection:**

***... Do not let your hearts be troubled, You trust in God, trust also in Me. In My Father's house there are many places to live in, otherwise I would have told you. I am going now to prepare a place for you, and after I have gone and prepared you a place, I shall return so that you may be with Me where I am... Do not let your hearts be troubled, or afraid. You heard Me say: I am going away and shall return...! [cf. Jn 14:1-13, 27, f.].***

The 'return' of Jesus indicates that He will come to take His own', is n to be identified here with the Parousia at the end of time, i.e., with His coming at the end of this historical period, when the entire world will be invested fully with the effects of His resurrection. It is rather the 'return' of Easter, consequent upon His 'going' to the father [cf. Jn 14:28] On the day of His Resurrection, Jesus reveals that He is the Divine Son of the father [cf. Jn 14:20 – *on that day, you will know that I am in the Father...* ] He and the Father are One [cf. Jn 10:30]. In this colloquy with His disciples, Jesus combines His 'going' to the Father, i.e., His dying – and His 'return' among the disciples, and this implies the resurrection in this context. The substantial communion of Jesus with the Father, is His proper 'place', the 'location', i.e., the Mystical temple of the New Covenant, within which the Glorified Jesus leads all His disciples [cf. Jn 14:20: *on that day you will know that I am in the Father, you in Me and I in you!*]

From that day onward, the disciples become the Children of the Father and the Brothers and sisters of Jesus [cf. Jn 20:17]. In the Trinitarian intimacy of Jesus with the Father [cf. Jn 10:30], there are gathered the dispersed sons and daughters of God [cf. Jn 11:52].

In conclusion: the 'disturbance provoked in His disciples by Jesus' death, is then comforted by the Word of Jesus Himself, Who promises to 'return' among them: the resurrection will be a consolation for them!

Jesus then says:

***... In all truth I tell you, you will be weeping and wailing while the world will rejoice; you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn to joy. A woman in childbirth suffers because her time has come; but when she has given to the child she forgets her suffering in her joy that a human being has been born into the world. So it is with you: you are sad now, but I shall see you again, and your hearts will be full of joy. And that joy no one will take from you... [cf. Jn 16:20-22]***

These words of Jesus, in the imminence of His Passion, sound like a Prophecy of Consolation. Like the woman feels within her own womb the pains of child-birth, so the disciples experience with some bitterness and deaths in the hour of the passion of Jesus Christ. And as the drama of the child-bearing is absorbed by the

ecstatic coming to flower of a new life, so the sadness of this agony will be dissolved in the joy that they will experience when Jesus will show Himself alive to them after His passion and death [cf. Ac 1:3].

The coming to fulfillment of this Prophecy begins with the first appearance of the Risen Jesus to His disciples. The evening of Easter, they were closed in the Cenacle room out of fear of their adversaries [cf. Jn 20:19]. As Jesus had foreseen, the world exulted and the disciples were sad. All of a sudden, their sadness dissipated, since Jesus returned among His own: Jesus came and stood in the midst of them [cf. Jn 20:19]. He had promised: *But, I will see you again and your heart will rejoice* [cf. Jn 16:22]. And now the Evangelist could write: *and the disciples rejoiced to the Lord* [cf. Jn 20:20]. This phrase seems to call to mind this other one from the Prophet Isaiah, noted above: *You will see Him and your heart will rejoice!* [cf. Is 66:14]. The consolation of the Risen One will dry the tears of His disciples [cf. Rv 21:4; Jn 20:13, 15].

**[2.] The Resurrection of Jesus and the Gift of the Spirit-Consoler** : in rising from the dead, Jesus returns to His disciples in order to remain with them, not with His physical presence, as in the Pre-Paschal period, but rather through the medium of His Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, who *consols* the believers. The Pasch, then, opens up the Pneumatic Dimension of that *consolation which the Risen Jesus pours out on His disciples. Jesus had promised this:*

*... I shall ask the Father and He will give you Another Paraclete to be with you forever, the Spirit of truth... I shall not leave you orphans; I shall come to you...* [cf. Jn 14:16, ff.].

In the biblical tradition, the orphan and the widow were considered to be the type of persons who were all sole alone, abandoned, defenseless and at the whim of the powerful. In a similar manner, the disciples of the rabbi were considered orphans at the death of their Masters.

As long as Jesus was with His disciples, He in Person guarded them in the Name of His father [cf. Jn 17:12]. Now, however, that He is raised up from their visible contact with him, He does not abandon them to themselves, but promises them another form of presence: that of His Holy Spirit.

Jesus is conscious that the opposition manifested against His Person during His pre-Easter ministry, would continue also after His departure, and throughout the long course of human history. The disciples will encounter a variety of sufferings on the part of this 'world', as from those who reject Jesus Christ [cf. Jn 15:18-25; 16:33]. Between Jesus and this world there has descended on the scene something like a grandiose legal process: the problem is that of knowing from what part the truth lies, the just cause – if on the part of this world, which rejects and condemns Jesus as so

many of His contemporaries did [cf. Jn 3:18, f.; 19:15] – or, from the part of Jesus, Who declares that He will overcome the world by His death [cf. Jn 12:31; 16:11, 33].

At the heart of this harsh confrontation, there emerges the role, so to speak, of the Paraclete as defense attorney – people’s attorney. He renders testimony in behalf of Jesus Christ [cf. Jn 16:26] – He espouses Jesus’ cause in all its dimensions, by operating actively in the midst of His disciples [cf. Jn 14:1 - He will dwell within you and will be with you!]. The Paraclete is such, and is revealed as the *Consoler* – in so far as He moves to assist the believers – He assists them in order to confirm them ever more in their adherence to the Truth of the Word of Jesus [cf. Jn 14:26; 16:13-15]. In the strength of this **interior Magisterium**, He arouses in the hearts of the faithful the unfailing certainty that this world, due to its incredulity, is a sinner and that Jesus Christ has triumphed over it [cf. Jn 16:8-11]. From their part, the faithful can make their own and share in the victory of Jesus Christ in virtue over their faith [cf. 1 Jn 5:4, f.].

In a word: the Holy Spirit, source and font of consolation, is the fruit of the Gift of the Risen Christ, come back after death [cf. Jn 7:39; 19:30]. He will pour Him out upon the Community His disciples on Easter [cf. Jn 20:19-23], in showing His sacred stigmata. With the sending of the Holy Spirit, the Risen One returns among His ‘own.’ This means: through the out-pouring of the Paraclete, Jesus makes Himself present to His ‘own’ in another manner, real even though invisible.

**[3.] The Consoler-Spirit and the Resurrection of the Disciples: a New Creation:** there are still other words of Jesus from which it is possible to obtain further suggestions in order to respond to the following question: in what sense does the Holy Spirit reveal Himself as the Consoler of His Followers? In what manner does His Consolation consist, which He offers to them? The passage to which I refer is that of John [cf. 14:16-20]:

*... I will ask the Father and he will give you another Paraclete, to be with you forever, the Spirit of Truth, whom the world can never accept, since it neither sees nor knows Him; but you know Him, because He is with you, He is in you. I will not leave you orphans; I shall come to you. In a short time the world will no longer see Me; but you will see that I live and you also will live. On that day, you will know that I am in My Father and you in Me and I in you...!*

Following the various connections of the passage cited here, we can reach this explanation, that unfolds in two moments:

- in the first place, the Holy Spirit consoles the Disciples in so far as He consents that they would **see** Jesus – i.e., He places them in a position to recognize Jesus Christ as the Risen One.



- in the second place, in giving this illumination to them, the Spirit provides for them a *participation* in the resurrection of Jesus – the Spirit makes of all disciples the ‘Risen in the Risen Son of God – and the life of the Risen Lord, is poured over the believers through the intervention of the Holy Spirit. This is like a **New Creation**. To each of these two disciples, some reflection needs to be given in which it will be manifested how the Spirit consoles the disciples, in so far as He renders them *co-sharers* in Jesus’ Resurrection.

a. **The Spirit Consoler leads the Disciples forward to SEE Jesus:** Christ places in evidence a contrast that exists between the *world* and the *disciples* – the world will no longer see Jesus – whereas the disciples will indeed see Him. These truths need to be pondered:

- The ‘**world**’ in Jn’s theology means on a number of occasions those who reject Jesus Christ – it refers to the opposition to Jesus Christ and to His Word of Truth [cf. Jn 15:18-25; 16:33].

***And yet in a little while the world will not see Me any longer!*** [cf. Jn 14:19] – this is the way Jesus spoke in reference to His death and resurrection. The phrase – and yet in a little while - derives from the Prophetic Language [cf. Is 10:25; Jr 51:33] and brings out the more the imminence of the judgment of God. It is that which Jesus declared to the crowd: ... *Now is the judgment on this world; now the Prince of this world will be cast outside ... And yet in a little while and you will see Me no more; and then in a little while, you will see Me – because I am going to the Father* [cf. Jn 12:31; 16:16-17; cf. 7:33].

The ‘world’ – i.e., those who reject Jesus – will not see His Person any more. The ‘world’ will not see it because of its incredulity. Already during the pre-Easter ministry of Jesus, the *world* was unable to receive the Spirit – the *world* did not succeed in seeing Him, and in knowing Him, in so far as it refused to recognize His action in that which Jesus did and achieved [cf. Jn 14:17; 1:32; 3:34; 6:63]. After Easter, the *world* was crystallized in the same chosen enclosure – it would not arrive at the point of believing that Jesus, through His death, is alive with the Father, and in the midst of His disciples [cf. Jn 14:20; 16:9-10]. The *world* will be incapable of realizing the presence of the Risen Lord in His visible, exterior effects – Who would be able to arouse the Spirit of Truth [cf. Jn 14:17], Who pours out over the believers that mutual love [cf. 1 Jn 3:23-24], communion with the Church [cf. Jn 4:6].

In brief: the life of the Risen Lord cannot be communicated to anyone who, through the fault of incredulity, excludes himself from salvation: *whoever does not have the Son, does not have life...* [cf. 1 Jn 5:12; Jn 3:18]. Into

this area of darkness, Jesus cannot reveal Himself, because His Word was not first received [c f. Jn 14:22, 24[]].

- **The Disciples, though, will see Him:** they will be able to have contact with him, who has returned from the dead and has risen to new life [cf. Jn 16:22; 20:20]. They will see Him, though, with the eye of faith, with that look which the Spirit-Consoler knows how to communicate. Beginning then with the grand Easter revelation – *on that day* - as Jesus put it, *you will know that I am in the Father, and you are in Me, and I am in you!* [cf. Jn 14:20].

In virtue of the Spirit Consoler, the disciples will be introduced into the knowledge of the Mystery of Jesus into the knowledge of the Mystery of Jesus, of His sublime identity, of the Word of Truth announced by Him [cf. Jn 14:17, 26; 16:13-15].

Beginning with the grand Easter revelation – *on that day* - they will learn to profess Jesus Christ as the Messiah, the Christ, the Son of God [cf. Jn 20:31]. He is indeed the Divine Son of the Heavenly Father, and the point of encounter between men and God: *On that day, you will know that I am in the father, you in Me and I in you...* [cf. Jn 14:20] The Spirit *Paraclete*, the Gift of the Risen Christ, will lead the disciples to contemplate the Person of Jesus, as the Son of the Father, equal to Him in the Divinity.

**b. The Vision of the Risen Lord, given by the Spirit Consoler, is the Beginning of the Resurrection – it is a NEW CREATION:**

Illumined and guided by the Spirit *Consoler*, the disciples *see* the Risen Jesus with the eye of Faith. Therefore, the life that emanates from the Risen Christ is transfused into them: *But you will see Me, because I live and you will also live!* [cf. Jn 14:19]. John will write further: *Whoever has the Son, has the life!* [cf. 1 Jn 5:12; Jn 3:16]. This means that to the believers there has been communicated that vital power of the Lord's Resurrection [cf. Ep 2:4, ff.: *But God, rich in Mercy, for that great love with which He has loved us, as dead men who were still in their sins, has brought us to live anew in Jesus Christ... With Him, He has also raised us up and has made us sit in the heavens, in Christ Jesus...*] He had declared: *In Truth I say to you: to whoever listens to me to My word and who believes in the One who has sent me, HAS eternal life and does not stand before the judgment, but has passed over from the death to life. In truth, I say to you: the Hour has come, and this is it, in which the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who will have listened to the Voice of the Son of God, and those Who will have listened to Him, WILL LIVE!* [cf. Jn 5:24, f.]. The HOUR which has come is that of the Paschal Mystery, understood as the death and the resurrection of Jesus. This is the conception that is well known of the HOUR OF JESUS CHRIST, according to the 4<sup>th</sup> Gospel. Here is anticipated in a proleptic sense, as

a bit earlier in Jn 4:21, 23: *Believe Me, woman, the Hour has come... and it is this one in which the true adorers will adore the Father in the Spirit and in truth.*

The life of the Spirit, poured out by the Risen Jesus, is wondrously signified by the first appearance of Jesus in the Cenacle, narrated by Jn [cf. 20:19-23]: *Jesus breathed on the Apostles and said: Receive the Holy Spirit; whose sins you remit, they are forgiven them – and whose sins you do not remit, they will not be remitted* [cf. vv. 22-23].

The Gift of the Spirit which **ex-spire**s from the Risen Christ takes away, remits sin – which is death – and this Gift now creates a New Life, that according to the Spirit [cf. Jn 3:5]. The Spirit Who is poured forth by the Christ who has come anew to life from the dead is therefore, the architect of a resurrection, which is indeed a New Creation. The use of special verbs has a profound theological effect in these sublime mysteries: to breathe forth, to ex-spire, in v. 22:

- This is the same verb which appears in the LXX version of the **Genesis Creation story**: *The Lord God formed man with the dust of the soil, and breathed into his nostrils a breath of life and man became a living being* [cf. Gn 2:7; Ws 15:11].
- This same verb returns in **the extraordinary vision of Ezechiel**, where the Spirit vivifies, causes the dry bones to rise up. *The Lord then adds: Prophecy to the spirit, prophecy, son of man, and announce to the spirit: The Lord god says: Spirit, come from the four winds and breathe over these dead bones, so that they might live again* [cf. Ezk 37:9].
- The late Fr. Raymond Brown was able to summarize quite well **the infusion of the Holy Spirit**, expressed in the passage of Jn 20:22: *After saying this, He breathed on them: Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone's sins, they are forgiven – if you retain anyone's sins, they are retained...* Symbolically, Jn proclaims that symbolically that precisely as in the **First Creation** God breathed into humanity a vital spirit – so, now, in the moment of the **New Creation**, Jesus breathes His own Spirit into His disciples, giving them eternal life. In the impressive vision of the valley of the Dry Bones, granted to Ezk [37:3-5], whom God addresses calling him *Son of Man*, He Himself just recently having come up out of the tomb, speaks as the Risen Lord and sees to it that the breath of eternal life should enter into all those who listen and receive His Word.

In summary: John perceives and works through the pairing of **resurrection-consolation** in a Christological and Pneumatological key. In fact, the Holy Spirit *consoles* the believers, rendering them co-participants in the **resurrection/new life** which emanates from the Risen Lord. Furthermore, the elements gathered into this

paragraph dedicated to the theme of **resurrection/Consolation** in the 4<sup>th</sup> Gospel, permit the careful reader to individuate a series of many associations between **cc. 14, 16, 20 of John** – and **Isaiah 66**. Between these two segments of god's Word, there is clear the coming together of four separate themes:

- **the child-bearing pain of a woman** [cf. Is 66:7-8 & Jn 16:21];
- **super-abundant peace** [cf. Is 66:12 Jn 14:27; 20:19, 21];
- **Joy** [cf. Is 66:14 & Jn 16:21-22; 20:20];
- **the resurrection**, insinuated by the Isaiaam image of the bones that flower once more [cf. Is 66:14, and the respective Targum interpretation] – and then realized in the Gift of the Spirit, which is the principle of the re-birth to New Life [cf. Jn 20:22].

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#### **Rv 21:1-4:**

*... Then I saw a New Heaven and a New earth; the first heaven and the first earth had disappeared now, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a Bride dressed for her husband. Then, I heard a loud voice call from the throne, 'Look, here God lives among human beings. He will make His home among them, and they will be His People and He will be their God, EMMANUEL! He will wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there will be no more death, and no more mourning or sadness, or pain. The world of the past is gone...!*

The final, eschatological renewal has been realized by the Risen Christ in the New Jerusalem, and is described in these terms by the seer of the Apocalypse. It is not the destruction that the Lord wants, but rather a radical transformation of this world which is the ultimate and perfecting effect of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The *newness* celebrated by the Apocalypse is that emerging from the Paschal Mystery [cf. Rv 5:9; 14:3]. The energy immersed by the Risen Lord in the entire cosmos is such that it succeeds in overwhelming the brutal onslaught of the forces of evil. Jesus had said: *You will have tribulation in this world; but have confidence: I have overcome the world!* [cf. Jn 16:33]. Therefore, there is given to us the expectancy – and, at long last – the 'vision', i.e., the effective fulfillment of a New Heaven and a New earth [cf. Rv 21:1], a New Jerusalem [v. 2] – where God chooses to make himself our tent companion [v. 3]. There might be thus noted in fullness the dream of a **God-with-Humanity, an EMMANUEL** [cf. 3].

The Incarnation of the Word and the Post-Easter exaltation of the Crucified are at the origin of these great and wondrous marvels [cf. Rv 5:3]. Coming forth from the

Father in order to come into this world [cf. Jn 16:28], the Word has become flesh and has set up his Tent of Meeting in our midst [cf. Jn 1:14]. Leaving now this world in order to go to the Father [cf. Jn 16:28], Jesus promises: *On that day, you will understand that I am in the Father, you in Me and I in you!* [cf. Jn 14:20] Therefore, on the same throne the Father, the Conquering Christ and His Disciples will all sit, co-sharers in His Victory [cf. Rv 3:21; 7:5] One and the same tent may offer hospitality for god and humanity [cf. Rv 21:3] – these form one thing, one sole reality, a **family** [cf. Ep 2:19] – believers become **the family members of God Himself, with one and the same ABBA!**

What are the effects of this intimate communion of life, of this closeness and indwelling of God within us? The Seer responds: *He will wipe away all tears from their eyes!* [cf. Rv 21:4]. This is the stupendous image of a God, both **Woman and Mother!** This image was already anticipated in Rv 7:17, and is derived from the great apocalypse of Isaiah [cf. 25:5, and the Holy Mountain with its rich banquet]. All that happened before, or the terrible wounds that evil inflicted on this world, by deeply disturbing it, are now **healed**. All the causes which determine the tears of humanity, that have accompanied the presence of evil. There will even disappear physical death, which is contrary to the Living god of Life – there will be no more violent homicide, which provokes the pain and the despairing cry of crowds beyond number: there will come to an end the agony of all those, oppressed by injustice, battle tirelessly just to keep alive – these causes of evil are quite similar to the scheme of the four seals noted earlier in the apocalypse [cf. 6:1-8]. The whole matter is a process that is already in act. There occurs only to direct attentively one's attention, in order to notice what is happening: *Look! I am making all things new!* [cf. Rv 21:5].

An appropriate comment at this visage of the Consoler God, Who Himself dries every tear from our eyes, is supplied by at least two other passages in the Johannine tradition:

**- Jn 20:13-15:**

*... The Angels said to Mary Magdalene: Woman, why are you weeping? They have taken my Lord away, she replied, and I do not know where they have put Him. As she said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, though she did not realize it was Jesus, Jesus said to her: Woman, why are you weeping. Who are you looking for? Supposing Him to be the gardener, she said: Sir, if you have taken Him away, tell me where You have put Him, and I will go and remove Him. Jesus said MARY! She turned round then and said to Him in Hebrew, RABBUNI! Which means Master!*

What is supremely suggestive here is the fact that Jesus, takes the initiative and asks her: *Why are you weeping?* This means that He, before we do, asks us the reason for our tears. He precedes us in wanting to give meaning to our suffering and

to the endless fatigue of searching with which our journey of faith is characterized: it is a path that is not urged along by any philosophy, but it is heading onward toward a Person, His Divine Person Who has Risen! It is He Who having risen from the dead, conquers death and opens up for us the path of life without end, in loving communion with Him and with the Father. Therefore, there is no further reason for our being afflicted: *Do not let your hearts be troubled. Have faith in god and have trust in Me... I am going to prepare a place for you – and when I will be gone and will have prepared a place, I will return and will take you with me, so that you might also be where I am..* [cf. Jn 14:1, ff.]. There is thus realized the ardent prayer that Jesus directed toward His Father at the eve of His passion: ... *Father, I want that also those whom You have given to Me, might be where I am, so that they might contemplate My glory, that which You have given to Me; since You have loved me even before the creation of the world..!* [cf. Jn 17:24].

### **Summary**

The Book of the Apocalypse also of the Johannine tradition, describes the Seer of Patmos who, in tears, confesses:

*... No one, either in heaven or on earth, nor under the death, will be able to open the Book and to read it. I cried much, because there was not found anyone worthy of opening up the Book and of reading it. One of the Ancients said to me: Do not cry anymore; the Lion of the Tribe of Judah has conquered, the Shoot of David, and He will open the Book and its seven seals* [cf. Rv 5:3-5].

Jesus with His Sacred Stigmata has opened up the Scriptures for us:

**... Be especially attentive to the content and unity of the whole Scripture. Different as the books which comprise it may be, Scripture is a unity by reason of the unity of God's plan, of which Christ Jesus is the center and heart, open since His Passion [cf. Lk 24:25-27, 44-46]. The phrase, *heart of Christi*, can refer to sacred Scripture, which makes known His heart, closed before the Passion, as the scripture was obscure: But the Scripture has been opened since the Passion, since those who from then on have understood it, consider and discern in what way the prophecies must be interpreted... [cf. CCC # 112].**

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### **PRESENT DAY REFLECTIONS**

***... Console, console My People!***