

Sixty years ago, on November 1, 1950, Pope Pius XII proclaimed the dogma of the Assumption of Mary. We may wonder how a religious family with the name “Assumption” might have contributed to this event. It would be presumptuous to think that the Assumption had any influence whatsoever on the Pope’s decision, but it is legitimate to think that certain of its most eminent members helped to bring this idea to maturity, thus preparing the Pope to make his proclamation during the Holy Year.

Among the steps leading up to this definition, the scholarly research, the meetings and the pontifical commissions that were organized, the work done by Father Martin Jugie (1878-1954) holds a particularly important place. The monumental work (747 pages long), *The Death and the Assumption of the Virgin Mary published by*
this historical/doctrinal student in 1944, by the Pope’s own admission, furnished the solid foundation that prepared and hastened the definition of the dogma. This theologian of the “Echos d’Orient” team, a humble and austere man, in publishing this volume could hardly have imagined a better reward than the proclamation of the dogma of the Assumption. When this brilliant professor of Oriental Theological Institute published his book, he dedicated it naturally to Pope Pius XII, protector of the Assumption family. In fact, in 1931, Pope Pius XI had named Eugenio Pacelli, at the time Vatican Secretary of State, Cardinal protector of the religious families of the Assumption.

Once he had become Pope, the Assumption maintained a special place in his heart and he frequently expressed his affection and attachment to it. But the Congregation received news of this proclamation with great enthusiasm. Father Gervais Quenard, Superior General at the time, heard the news during the National Pilgrimage at Lourdes. He communicated great joy immediately to the entire family, as he said, “because the Assumption is the name of our religious family.” (Circular Letter, #5, 22 August 1950) We should also mention the thesis of Father Antoine Wenger, which he defended in 1948 and later published in 1956, with the title “The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin in the Byzantine Tradition.” On the occasion of this event, the Assumption Congregations sent the Pope a telegram of congratulations, to which the Pope responded through a message from his delegate Monsignor Montini, the future Paul VI. A few days later, on December 8$^{th}$, Father Jugie was invited with other theologians who had collaborated on the preparation of the definition of the dogma to pray the rosary with the Pope in his private chapel.

In his book, Father Jugie develops in particular a topic that he called “the timeliness and advantages of a solemn definition of the doctrine of the Assumption.” He writes: “In the Church’s treasury of divinely revealed truths there is one doctrine that would be most useful in bringing about a new order…”

According to him, the affirmation of the doctrine of the Assumption is an effective way of fighting against the contemporary error of a materialist culture that insists on well-being and pleasure but forgets the goal and ultimate meaning of our human existence. This culture, to his way of thinking, aims at denying the existence of another life for all human beings, as well as the spirituality and the immortality of the soul. This doctrine, on the other hand, reaffirms the provisional character of our bodily death which, in Christian terms, should more properly be called “sleep” or “dormition”. It should be noted that Pius XII promulgated the dogma of the Assumption not on August 15th as we might expect, but on November 1, 1950, All Saints Day, in order to place Mary clearly within the communion of all saints. The Assumption is the eschatological icon of the Church. Let us recall on this 60 thanniv ersary of the proclamation of the dogma of the Assumption that Mary remains a sign of hope and of consolation for God’s people on their pilgrimage: “The Mother of Jesus, already glorified in body and soul, is the image and the beginning of the perfection of the Church in eternity.” ( *Lumen Gentium* , #68)

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