

How can the Church create new doctrine that isn't found in the Bible?

Dear Father Kerper: I have never read anywhere in the Bible about Mary being assumed to Heaven. How can the Church create new doctrine that isn't found in the Bible?

Your suspicion about “created doctrines” is perfectly on target. After all, no human being is able to “create” new truths about God and the things of God. Of course, the Church never does this. Rather, the Church, under the guidance and protection of the Holy Spirit, is able to identify and express specific truths contained within something called “the deposit of faith.” This “deposit” consists of the fullness of God’s revelation entrusted to the Church.

Because the truths of divine revelation are so vast, indeed inexhaustible, they come to light only gradually and in proper order. Hence, the most important truths, say the oneness of God, the divine nature of Christ, and the existence of the human soul, became clear thousands of years ago; other truths, like the great Marian doctrines, emerged somewhat later. Late discovery, then, is not the same as “creating” doctrine out of nothing.

The doctrine of the Assumption of Mary is a perfect example of how this works. In one sense, the Assumption of Mary is indeed “new” in that Pope Pius XII solemnly defined it as an essential and unchangeable doctrine of the Church on November 1, 1950. However, as the Holy Father made clear



in the document formally declaring the doctrine as true, belief in the Assumption of Mary extends all the way back to the earliest times of the Church.

He demonstrated this by citing three key sources. First, he pointed out that ordinary Catholic people, including his contemporaries, tended to believe strongly that Mary’s body definitely had not corrupted and that she had indeed entered Heaven with her Risen Son. This broad consensus among faithful people indicated that most people had absorbed – not created – the truth. The Holy Father also revealed that he and his predecessor Pope Pius XI had received thousands upon thousands of petitions from people urging him to proclaim the Assumption as a “defined” doctrine of Catholicism. In other words, the initiative here came from “below” not from “above.” So the Holy Father

simply verified what the vast majority of Catholics already believed.

Second, the Holy Father then surveyed the Church’s vast theological tradition, demonstrating that all sorts of theologians who had lived in various ages and cultures had clearly believed in the doctrine. Though they had expressed their beliefs in different ways, the substance of their belief had been the same. For example, theologians in the Eastern Church use the term “Dormition of Mary” for the Assumption, but the belief is the same as the Western – or Latin Rite – Church.

Third, Pope Pius XII pointed to liturgical life of the Church, specifically the feasts, prayers, icons, and painted images of Mary’s Assumption. All of these things reflect widespread popular belief in the truth. In this regard, he cited the old Latin maxim, *lex orandi, lex credendi*, which loosely means “we pray the way we believe.” Hence, if Christian people from early times have celebrated the Assumption of Mary liturgically and prayed to her as a living woman who dwells in Heaven as a bodily person, then this doctrine cannot be wrong. In other words, the “spiritual instincts” of believers detect – not make – doctrinal truth.

Now, let’s examine the matter of “biblical evidence.” To be frank, there is no direct “evidence” akin to, say, the virginal conception of Jesus, the identification of Saint Joseph as the Blessed Mother’s spouse, the ascension of the Lord and so on. However, many prominent Church Fathers found prophetic “hints” or premonitions of the Assumption of Mary embedded within Old Testament texts. For example, some saw the Ark of the Covenant, which contained the Ten Commandments and other sacred objects, as a “type” of Mary, who held within her the Divine One. Pope Pius XII asserted that the Ark acted as “a type of the most pure body of the Virgin Mary, preserved and exempt from all the corruption of the fall and raised up to such glory in heaven.” He also mentioned various “queenship” texts in the Psalms and the Canticle of Canticles.

Such passages speak of the “queen” entering the bridal chamber or somehow being exalted by the king. Here the “queen” was perceived as a prophetic version of Mary, hence a “hint” of the Assumption.

Strictly speaking, we don't really need explicit “biblical evidence” to support doctrinal truths like the Assumption. How so? Because the “deposit of faith” pertains to revealed truth, which has biblical and non-biblical elements. Genuine doctrines will always harmonize with one another.

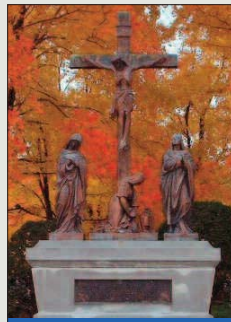
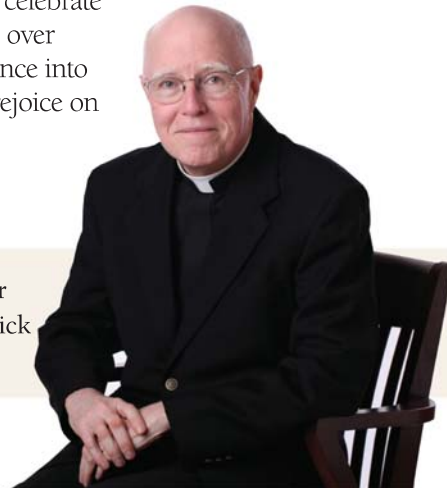
The big question remains: Why is the Assumption so important that the Church makes it a holy day of obligation? Because it teaches us an essential truth about our ultimate destiny: though we will all die we will also be raised up, body and soul, and live a completely human life forever.

Pope Pius XII made this crucial point in the document proclaiming the Assumption as a doctrine of the faith. He wrote: “The soul is not a person, but the soul, joined to the body, is a person.” By definitively teaching that Mary is already in Heaven as a complete human being, which means a union of body and soul, the Church has powerfully reaffirmed the Christian understanding of the human person. In a world that has forgotten or even disparaged the dignity of the human body, the celebration of the Assumption of Mary is perhaps more important than ever.

Allow me to make this more personal and less abstract. We believe that Mary is truly our mother in that we are members of the Body of Christ, who is her Son. Because children usually resemble their mothers, we see something of ourselves in them. And so when we, children of Mary, consider the mystery of her assumption, we glimpse for a moment the possibility of our own entrance into Heaven, not as a disembodied spirit, but as a complete human being “in the flesh.”

The Church made the Assumption a holy day of obligation in order cheer up desolate people by reminding them of the beauty and glory of eternal life already enjoyed by Mary our mother. Pope Pius XII hinted at this motive on the very first page of his proclamation of the Assumption. He lamented that the “present age (namely 1950) is weighed down by ever so many cares, anxieties, and troubles, by reason of very severe calamities that have taken place and by reason of the fact that many have strayed away from truth and virtue.” Sound familiar? And what could be more refreshing than to pause in late summer to celebrate our own Mother's triumph over bodily death and her entrance into glory? How could we not rejoice on August 15?

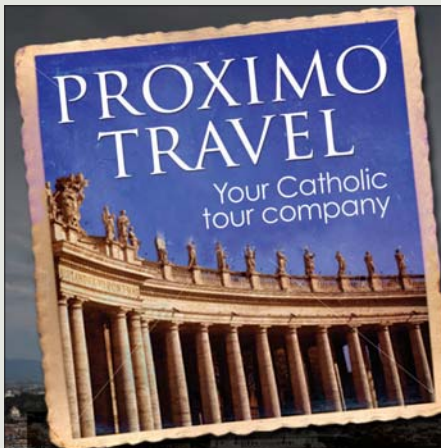
Father Michael Kerper
is the pastor of Saint Patrick
Parish in Nashua, NH.



MOUNT CALVARY CEMETERY AND MAUSOLEUM

*Call today
for more
information*

603-622-3215
mtcalvarycem.org



Trips to Scotland,
France, Ireland, Shrines
of Europe and much
more ranging from
\$3,599-\$4,899 for 2014.

Prices are ALL-INCLUSIVE
W/Airfare from anywhere
in the continental USA

VISIT OUR WEBSITE OR CALL
FOR MORE DESTINATIONS
AND DATES

Italy/Switzerland: Aug 28-Sep 9,
Sep 11-23, Sep 18-30, Sep 25-Oct 7,
Oct 9-21, Oct 16-28, Oct 23-Nov 4

Italy: Aug 30-Sep 7, Sep 6-14,
Sep 13-21, Sep 20-28, Sep 27-Oct
5, Oct 4-12, Oct 11-19, Oct 18-26,
Oct 25-Nov. 2

Ireland/Scotland: Sep 6-18,
Sep 13-25, Sep 20-Oct 2

France: Sep 6-18, Sep 13-25,
Sep 20-Oct 2

Holy Land: Aug 25-Sep 4,
Sep 1-11, Sep 10-20, Sep 15-25,
Sep 22-Oct 2, Sep 29-Oct 9,
Oct 6-16, Oct 13-23,

Holy Land/Italy: Aug 25-Sep 7,
Sep 1-14, Sep 8-21, Sep 15-28,
Sep 22-Oct 5, Sep 29-Oct 12,
Oct 6-19, Oct 13-26

Poland: Aug 30-Sep 10, Sep 6-17,
Sep 13-24

Lourdes/Fatima: Sep 4-12,
Sep 11-19, Sep 18-26

855.842.8001
Carmela A. Dupuis
Executive Director

508.340.9370
anthony@proximotravel.com
www.proximotravel.com