

Robert Sungenis Debates James White on:

The Bodily Assumption of Mary

James White writes:

The Bodily Assumption, Scripture and Tradition

For a number of years now I have been presenting to audiences, classes, and just about anyone who would lend me their ear, the concept of the Marian dogmas (and the Bodily Assumption of Mary in particular) as the single best example of sola ecclesia I can find. What is sola ecclesia? It is the concept that the Roman Church (exemplified in the Papacy especially) is the sole and final authority in all matters. Scripture and Tradition (whatever that is in particular) are subservient to the Church, despite Rome's protests otherwise. A moment's reflection demonstrates why this is: Rome claims to define both what Scripture is (the canon), and what Scripture says (interpretation of particular passages, as well as the message of Scripture en toto). Likewise, she claims to be able to determine what is "tradition" (Irenaeus' statement that Mary is a parallel to Eve is "tradition," but his statement that Jesus lived to be more than 50, despite the fact he specifically claims this is a tradition passed on by the Apostle John, is not "tradition") and what this tradition then means. Hence, if you control the definition of both the content and meaning of both Scripture and Tradition and you claim to be infallible as well (meaning you cannot retract what you have decided these things teach and have officially defined these views in the past), the result is inevitable: sola ecclesia. The Church as the final authority in all things. And this is exactly what we see in the promulgation of "dogmas" such as the Immaculate Conception and the Bodily Assumption of Mary.

It is not my intention to discuss these dogmas specifically in this article. You will find a written discussion of them in my book, *Mary---Another Redeemer?* and an audio debate on them on our web site (click here for the section of the debate on the Immaculate Conception, and here for the section on the Bodily Assumption). Instead, I wish to use this dogma as an example of how Roman Catholic apologists use erroneous argumentation to press their cause. My work as an apologist would be so much easier if everyone had to study debate and logic in school...or in life. Politicians would be able to present only 3% of their current verbiage if the public was able to identify flaws in argumentation and reasoning and shoot them down in flames as soon as they were uttered. Public discourse would have a completely different character to it if, in fact, people held logic and rationality in high esteem, and strove to think in a clear, orderly fashion. Unfortunately, bad arguments are often the most effective arguments, if by effectiveness we refer to convincing people you are right by whatever means you can. Advertising is normally based upon using logically invalid arguments to convince people they need your good or service. And, judging by the billions of dollars spent on advertising in our land, it obviously works. The same is true in religious debate: most often it is bad argumentation that carries the day. It is the argument that stirs the emotions (rather than the mind) that often wins the debate or gains the convert. Technical errors in argumentation are not always easy to detect. If you speak with

confidence and a sense of authority, you can often skate right past the need to substantiate your assertions, use proper argumentation, and no one will be the wiser.

A Recent Example: Let us take as an example a response given by **Robert Sungenis** in a book he edited titled *Not By Scripture Alone*. In his chapter "Point/Counterpoint: Protestant Objections and Catholic Answers," Mr. Sungenis provides responses to common arguments raised by Protestant apologists (myself included). At one point he attempts to respond to the assertion made by **Norman Geisler** and **Ralph MacKenzie** that the Bodily Assumption demonstrates that Rome's dogmatic definitions are suspect. Specifically:

"Second, support from tradition for the dogma of the bodily assumption of Mary is late and weak. Yet in spite of the lack of any real evidence from Scripture or any substantial evidence from the teachings of the early church fathers, Rome chose to pronounce this an infallible truth of the Catholic faith. In short, Roman Catholic dogmas are not the product of rationally weighing the evidence of tradition but rather of arbitrarily choosing which of the many conflicting traditions they wish to pronounce infallible" (*Roman Catholics and Evangelicals: Agreements and Differences*, 1995, p. 198).

(a) Now, let us note the specifics of this assertion, one with which I would be in full agreement: 1) Historical or "traditional" support for the dogma of the assumption is late and weak. This is a fact beyond controversy. All reputable historians and theologians admit this. 2) There is no real scriptural evidence for the assumption, another thing admitted by reputable theologians. 3) Rome has defined this dogma as an infallible truth of the Catholic faith. It is not an "option," but is de fide, definitional of what it means to be Catholic. 4) Given the preceding facts, it follows that at least this Roman dogma was not forced upon the Church by the weight of evidence, but is, in fact, the result of an arbitrary process (i.e., sola ecclesia!). Now, how does Mr. Sungenis respond to this consistent, solid argument? His response is found on pages 256 and 257 of his book. Let's look at it:

R. Sungenis: First, we cannot help but see a smoke screen in this apologist's argument. Let's say we agree, for the sake of argument, that documentation on the Assumption of Mary is 'late and weak.' But now let us turn the tables: documentation on Baptistmal Regeneration and the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist are two of the most thoroughly addressed and substantiated doctrines in the writings of the Church Fathers, yet this particular Protestant apologist believes in neither of them. So, is 'documentation,' whether early or late, the real issue for him? Obviously not. In effect, it is this apologist who is 'arbitrarily choosing' which dogmas from the Church Fathers he wishes to believe, despite the overwhelming evidence of views contrary to his.

Second, we must insist that whether 'late' or 'weak' in this apologist's opinion, the fact remains that the Church Fathers wrote enough, and Scripture said enough, to warrant the Church to investigate and judge whether the doctrine of the Assumption was valid. The issue is not the amount of evidence but the Church's right to warrant a judgment on the available evidence, just as a judge in a court of law can call for a hearing and from this decide whether there is sufficient evidence for a trial and verdict. The issue is the authority of the Church, not the Assumption of Mary, per se.

Second, Protestants have no evidence from either Church Fathers or Scripture that the Assumption of Mary is not true. If, as they claim, Scripture is silent on the issue, well, Scripture is silent on a lot of issues, but that does not make the particular issue untrue or non-existent.

Third, the concept of being assumed into heaven is not foreign to Scripture (e.g., Enoch, Elijah, and possibly Moses).

Fourth, the doctrine of the Assumption of Mary, since it is consistent with the concept of assumption in Scripture, is not in the least detrimental to the sensitivities and logic of the Christian faith."

James White: Now, I hasten to point out that the mere act of giving a defense that sounds reasonable is half the battle for the Roman Catholic apologist. Why? Because of the ignorance of the Protestant listener regarding the fact that Rome has come up with arguments in favor of her beliefs. The very fact of any kind of argument is normally shocking to the Protestant who has never once considered the responses of the Roman camp. Whether those arguments are valid is, unfortunately, often a completely different issue. The fact that the Catholic doesn't reply with, "Well, ask my priest" (as many a nominal Catholic does) is normally enough to fluster the Protestant who hasn't done his or her homework. But, the obvious question is, does the response hold? Let's look closely at it and see. Smoke Screens? The first response provided is normally your strongest attempt at substantiating your position. And if you are going to attempt to shift the grounds of the debate, you will normally do so very quickly, so as to have time to convince the audience that you have given an answer, even when you have actually avoided the issue. This is exactly what Mr. Sungenis does here. Let's look again at the first argument provided:

R. Sungenis: I don't know why he does this, but Dr. White frequently chooses to portray the responses of his opponents as psychological manipulations. He accuses his opponents of utilizing a secret stratagem to avoid direct answers, when, in reality, they are merely showing the inconsistencies in the critic's arguments. In using such psychological labels, Dr. White, whether intentionally or unintentionally, unnecessarily demonizes his opponents, making it appear that they are not interested in truth, but only out to distort the facts and manipulate the audience. But is this not a psychological ploy in itself? Psychologically, there is no better way to prep your audience than by telling them that your opponent is not interested in truth but merely desires to use psychology to manipulate them. Perhaps what is really going on here is, as they call it in psychology, "projection," that is, accusing someone else of the very thing one is doing. A study of Dr. White's rebuttals shows that he often manipulates his audience by first attacking the credibility and integrity of his opponents, prior to answering the opponent's assertions.

we cannot help but see a smoke screen in this apologist's argument. Let's say we agree, for the sake of argument, that documentation on the Assumption of Mary is 'late and weak.' But now let us turn the tables: documentation on Baptistmal Regeneration and the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist are two of the most thoroughly addressed and substantiated doctrines in the writings of the Church Fathers, yet this particular Protestant apologist believes in neither of them. So, is 'documentation,' whether early or late, the real issue for him? Obviously not. In effect, it is this apologist who is 'arbitrarily choosing' which dogmas from the Church Fathers he wishes to believe, despite the overwhelming evidence of views contrary to his."

James White: Let's try to diagram this argument: 1) The Protestant apologist is using bad argumentation, a smoke-screen (assertion) 2) The Protestant's argument is invalid because: a) The early Fathers believed in baptismal regeneration and the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, (assertion) and b) The Protestant does not believe in these dogmas (fact), therefore c) The Protestant is guilty of arbitrarily choosing which dogmas he wishes to believe (conclusion) But what, specifically, does this have to do with the assertion made by Geisler and MacKenzie? Neither would claim that their faith is, in fact, the ancient and constant faith of the "Church," nor that it represents a "unanimous consent" of the early Fathers. Nor would either writer claim that their church has been invested with the authority to define infallibly dogmas such as the assumption of Mary. Even if a person were to grant the assertion that the early Fathers believed in baptismal regeneration and the presence of Christ in the Eucharist as Sungenis asserts (and the second half of that is highly debatable), what does this logically have to do with the observation made by Geisler and MacKenzie? Obviously, nothing at all. This argument shifts the grounds away from examining the claim of Rome that she is able to define dogma infallibly and that she does so on the basis of Scripture and Tradition (the bodily assumption demonstrating this is untrue) to a polemic assertion that the Protestant is inconsistent to accept some of what the early Fathers taught but not all. Logically, Sungenis' argument is invalid.

R. Sungenis: The point remains that, even if the evidence of the Assumption were 'early and strong' as opposed to 'weak and late,' Geisler and MacKenzie would still not believe in the Assumption of Mary. One proof of this is that many doctrines that are 'early and strong' in the Fathers are denied by Geisler and MacKenzie. This means that 'early and strong' or 'weak and late' is not the real issue for them. The real issue is that Geisler and MacKenzie want the freedom to accept or reject the doctrines from the Fathers as they see fit.

James White: We might note, just in passing, that his argument is also self-refuting. Rome does pick and choose between the conflicting teachings and traditions of the early Church. Rome does not embrace, for example, either of the two most popular theories of the atonement that predominated the first thousand years of Church history: the ransom to Satan theory and the recapitulation theory. Why not? If there is some inherent flaw in exercising discernment in reading the writings of ancient Christians (are we not to do the same thing today?), why doesn't this likewise constitute a "smoke screen" when Rome does it?

R. Sungenis: First, yes, Rome does discern which teachings from the early church to believe. That is how God protects the Church. Otherwise, there would be total chaos, not unlike what we see in the tens-of-thousands of Protestant denominations today, all claiming something different from Scripture. Yes, Rome, with the help of the Holy Spirit, decided many things, such as the consubstantial Trinity, Christ as homoousios, the canon of Scripture, and many other doctrines.

Second, the "ransom to Satan" theory of atonement was not as popular as Dr. White deems it to be. Few Fathers had given credence to the idea. The only ones on record are: Origen on Romans 3:24 in PG 14, 945; PG 13, 1397; Ambrose on 1 Peter 1:18 in PL 16, 1299; an implied agreement by Jerome in PL 26, 480; Augustine in one oblique instance, De Trinitate 13, 15 (PL 42, 1029; NPNF I, vol. 3, p. 178. As for the recapitulation theory, the evidence is just as small. No mention of either of the theories is given at the Councils of Nicea, Chalcedon,

Constantinople, Ephesus, or Orange, and certainly not at the Council of Trent. Logically, it was a theory that needed to be rooted out, which the Church did.

James White: So we see that the first part of Sungenis' argument fails a basic examination for logical coherence. Let us move to the second argument. *Sola Ecclesia Illustrated Second*, we must insist that whether "late" or "weak" in this apologist's opinion, the fact remains that the Church Fathers wrote enough, and Scripture said enough, to warrant the Church to investigate and judge whether the doctrine of the Assumption was valid. The issue is not the amount of evidence but the Church's right to warrant a judgment on the available evidence, just as a judge in a court of law can call for a hearing and from this decide whether there is sufficient evidence for a trial and verdict. The issue is the authority of the Church, not the Assumption of Mary, *per se*. Let us again attempt to diagram this argument: 1) There was sufficient scriptural and patristic evidence to "warrant" Rome's investigation and judgment of the doctrine (assertion) 2) The issue is not evidence but ecclesiastical authority (assertion) This is really the heart of the argument, and is, in fact, a clear statement of *sola ecclesia*. No evidence is offered regarding what scriptural and patristic evidence there was that led to an investigation and judgment of the doctrine. There is, in point of fact, no biblical evidence.

R. Sungenis: The Catholic Church clearly teaches that she is the servant of Scripture (*Dei Verbum*, Vatican II). But where Scripture is either silent or unclear, the Church is specially guided by the Holy Spirit to determine what the faithful are to believe. The Church had such guidance when she dogmatically declared that Christ was *homoousios*, not *homoiosios*, since Scripture is silent on the nature of Christ. The Church did this when she declared, by the Holy Spirit's guidance, that the NT contains 27 books, something about which Scripture is silent. The Church continues to do this today. Why? Because Jesus told her: "I will ask the Father and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you FOREVER." Notice that the guidance of the Holy Spirit does not stop with the apostles. God continues to guide the Church today. But logically, the Holy Spirit can't be giving different answers to different people. He can only be giving one truth and it must be a continual truth. That is what you have in the Catholic Church, and which has been the case for 2000 years, since no dogma she has declared has ever changed.

Second, notice the premise of Dr. White's argument, i.e., that there is no biblical evidence for the Assumption of Mary. Let's grant for the sake of argument that this is correct (laying aside what some deem as an oblique reference to the Assumption of Mary in Revelation 12). Now we will turn the tables. Using Dr. White's only accepted infallible authority, the Bible, where does the Bible teach that doctrines, such as the Assumption of Mary, must be taught in Scripture in order to be true? For that matter, where does the Bible teach that any doctrine we believe today must come only from the Bible? The answer is: NONE.

This is where the doctrine of *Sola Scriptura* traps its unwitting proponents, like a fly in a spider's web. For everything, let me emphasize EVERYTHING, they claim as inerrant truth on faith and morals must come from the Bible. Anytime you are in a discussion with a Protestant and he makes an assertion about where truth is to be found, ask him, "Where does the Bible teach that doctrine is only to come from the Bible?" If he points to such and such verse, he has trapped himself again, this time permanently. Why? Because any verse of Scripture that he claims is teaching that the Bible is the only source of doctrine (i.e., *Sola Scriptura*; and we are assuming

inerrant doctrinal teaching), means that that verse was teaching Sola Scriptura to the first century Christians who were alive at the time the supposed verse was written. It would also be teaching Sola Scriptura to Christians of today, since the same interpretation given to the first century Christians must be the same interpretation for Christians today, being that one cannot have opposite interpretations of the same verse. It is an accepted fact, among both Catholics and Protestants, that the apostles and prophets gave oral instruction to the first century Christians, in addition to written instruction contained in the Bible. This was no ordinary oral instruction. In 1 Thessalonians 2:13, Paul says that this oral revelation to the people was to be considered the very words of God himself. This is also why in 2 Thessalonians 2:15 Paul told these same Thessalonians to preserve the oral instruction, along with the written.

Now here is the unanswerable problem, if you haven't discovered it already. How can the Bible be teaching the first century Christians that only the Bible is their inerrant source of authority, if at the same time, oral revelation was still being given to them?? You can't claim that there is only one source of authority (the Bible) while allowing two sources of authority (the Bible and oral revelation). Logically, the Bible cannot teach Sola Scriptura to the first century Christians. If it did, it would be contradicting itself, as well as the oral revelation that was still being given. This is the trap of Sola Scriptura, and it is an inescapable trap.

James White: Every attempt on Rome's part to come up with any has always resulted in the most absurd eisegesis that her more scholarly proponents do not even make the attempt, admitting that express scriptural support is not to be had (see the discussion in *Mary---Another Redeemer?* pp. 51-55 and attached notes). The same is to be said about patristic sources. Roman historians admit that the first historical reference to the concept is not found in orthodox Christian writings, but in the writings of heretics, specifically, in the *Transitus* literature of the late fifth century. This literature was condemned as heretical by the bishop of Rome, Gelasius, in A.D. 495. Generations of Christians lived and died without ever once uttering a word about a dogma that is now defined infallibly by Rome. Clement of Rome, Ignatius, Tertullian, Irenaeus, Melito, Cyprian, Athanasius, Augustine, Theodoriet, Cyril of Jerusalem, Chrysostom—they all lived and died, wrote volume after volume of theology and preached thousands and thousands of sermons, but never once taught as a doctrine the idea of the bodily assumption of Mary. And so is it not logical that we ask the question: why should anyone today embrace as definitional of the Christian faith itself a doctrine unknown to the Scriptures and the earliest Christians?

R. Sungenis: No one will argue that certitude regarding the Assumption of Mary is not to be found in the patristic evidence. However, the subject was discussed by some of the Fathers, with various opinions. For example, Epiphanius (c. 377), questioning the possibilities of Mary's end, states: "...or she remained alive, since nothing is impossible with God and He can do whatever He desires, for her end no one knows" (*Panarion*, 78, 23). Augustine says Mary died, whereas Ambrose says he is not sure. The mere fact that the demise of Mary was even being discussed, which was not that case of any other New Testament person, shows that, among the Fathers, something was different about Mary.

It's not as if no one had ever discussed the issue of Mary's assumption, but that is not the impression you receive when reading Dr. White's comments. Dr. White tries very hard to give the impression that the idea of an Assumption of Mary appeared suddenly in the 20th century by

papal fiat, but this is not the case at all. **John Damascene** in the seventh century (*Second Homily on the Dormition of Mary*) seems to give clear evidence that Mary was assumed into heaven. John Damascene wrote during the era of Byzantine liturgy. Also during this time is **St. Germanus of Constantinople** (d. 733) and **Modestus, bishop of Jerusalem** (d. 634), who teach that Mary was assumed into heaven. Also, in the *Sacramentary of Adrian I* sent to Charlemagne, Mary's Assumption is affirmed. Prior to these witnesses, **Theoteknos, Bishop of Livias** in Palestine, from the sixth century, affirmed the Assumption of Mary in four separate instances.

Dr. White also tries to cast doubt on the viability of Mary's Assumption by referring to the *Transitus Mariae* (Passage of Mary) documents of **Pseudo-Melito**. Granted, in the *Decretum Gelasianum*, Gelasius rejected these documents, since some of them contained fanciful stories similar to other apocryphal literature. But that is not the issue at stake here. The issue is that these documents show a undying concern with the Assumption of Mary in the early church, since the *Transitus Mariae* documents have been dated as early as the second or third century. The interesting fact that Dr. White does not reveal about the *Transitus Mariae* is that much of it claimed that Mary had actually died and was not assumed into heaven. Perhaps this was why it was rejected by Gelasius, either because it denied the Assumption, or because its contents contained conflicting accounts of what occurred.

The point in fact is that Epiphanius' fourth century question about Mary's demise was still unanswered. As the centuries pass, there is a constant question, one that will not go away, of whether: (a) Mary died, and (b) Mary was assumed into heaven, with no dogmatic answer to either. The question did not cease up until 1950. At this time, it became a consensus that Mary was indeed assumed into heaven. Finally, in the late 1940's, Pius XII wrote to all the bishops of the world and asked them their opinion. 99% wrote back and said they believed that Mary was Assumed into Heaven. Here is a perfect example of how the Church's bishops, in union with the Pope, fulfill the statement in Matthew 18:18 concerning their prerogative to bind and loose.

James White: Logically, then, the burden lies upon the Roman apologist. But does Mr. Sungenis shoulder this burden? No, he does not even try. He simply makes the assertion that there was "enough evidence." I deny the assertion. He now has to prove it. An assertion without proof has no logical validity as an argument. But in reality, Rome's claim is not based upon Scripture or history: it is a claim based upon the authority Rome claims for herself as the infallible Church. Sola ecclesia. This is merely the statement of that claim. Whether the assumption took place or not is, in fact, epistemologically irrelevant for the faithful follower of sola ecclesia. The Church says it did, hence, it did, period. If the Church says you must believe it, you believe it. Period. The discussion is, in reality, closed at this point. There can be no rational discourse, because at its root, the doctrine is not held on that basis. It is held on the authority of the Roman Church. Appeals to things such as Scripture and Tradition are, in fact, unnecessary, and are far better candidates for the term 'smoke-screen' than anything else.

R. Sungenis: Considering that 1 Timothy 3:15 says "the Church is the pillar and ground of the truth," which is, of course, a timeless truth, then it is Scripture itself which contradicts Dr. White's assertion that the Church cannot make such decisions about the Assumption of Mary. The most Scripture says about itself is that it is "profitable" for teaching, not "self-sufficient," not "perfect," not "the only infallible authority," etc. There were plenty of Greek words Paul could

have used in 2 Timothy 3:16 if he desired to teach that Scripture was the all-sufficient source for truth on faith and moral (such as the Greek words *autokreia* or *hikanos*) but he did not.

Moreover, as we said above, Paul could not deem Scripture as the sole and final authority, since he and the other apostles were still giving oral revelation at the time 2 Timothy 3:16 was written. But if Dr. White still wants to claim that Scripture is the self-sufficient authority for questions of faith and morals, and if he believes that Scripture teaches its doctrines very clearly, then we would ask him for one clear, perspicuous, unambiguous statement from Scripture that says so. Mind you, we are not asking for passages which extol the virtue of Scripture, but a passage that clearly teaches Scripture, as opposed to Tradition and the Church, is the only and final authority for faith and morals. If Dr. White can find such a verse of Scripture, I will join the Reformed Baptist Church, of which he is a member. :)

James White: Thus far, then, we have no valid argumentation whatsoever in response to the assertion made by the Protestant apologist(s). In fact, we have verification: by saying the actual assumption is not the issue, but the Church's authority, Sungenis has, unwittingly, confirmed what Geisler and MacKenzie had asserted: that the dogma is the arbitrary result of the Church's authority, not the result of the preponderance of the scriptural and patristic evidence. Logically, Sungenis has just capitulated, all while making it look like he is giving an answer!

R. Sungenis: It is Dr. White who has capitulated, since he has made it look as if Scripture teaches that it is the final authority, but he has not proven that assertion. In reality, Dr. White and I are both stuck, just on different ends of the stick. He doesn't have a verse for Sola Scriptura, and I don't have one for the Assumption of Mary. But here is where Dr. White's religion is a contradiction, and mine is consistent, since his religion requires that everything he believes inerrantly about faith and morals must come only from the Bible, whereas mine does not.

James White: Scripture Doesn't Condemn It: The next section contains a typographical error. He had already said, "second," so the next should start with "third," instead of "second." Second, Protestants have no evidence from either Church Fathers or Scripture that the Assumption of Mary is not true. If, as they claim, Scripture is silent on the issue, well, Scripture is silent on a lot of issues, but that does not make the particular issue untrue or non-existent. Trying to outline this particular argument is difficult, it is so transparently invalid: 1) Scripture and Church history do not make the assertion that the assumption is untrue (assertion) 2) Scripture is silent on this, and many other issues. (fact) 3) Scriptural silence does not mean a particular unmentioned issue is untrue or non-existent (assertion). This kind of argumentation truly strikes one as being desperate. There is no specific Scriptural condemnation of the Book of Mormon, the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, Wookies, Gungans, the Men in Black, leprechauns, the Loch Ness Monster, and any number of other things. But, if someone were to come along and make belief in Wookies definitional of the Christian faith, we would have good reason to point to the utter lack of scriptural and patristic testimony as reason for rejection of the claim that such a doctrine is apostolic. This argument is fallacious on its face: it is Mr. Sungenis' job to substantiate the positive assertion that the assumption is an apostolic doctrine binding upon Christians. Saying, "well, the Bible doesn't condemn it" is not a logical argument.

R. Sungenis: Here Dr. White tries to dilute the argument by putting the Assumption of Mary on the same level as Mormons and Wookies. I could add a few myself. For example, the Bible doesn't speak about men on Mars, the price of ATT stock, or my mother's kitchen sink. And of course, if someone were to come along and make belief in Martians a criterion for the Christian faith, of course, no one would have to believe them. But that is where Dr. White's analogy stops. The difference between Martians and Mary's Assumption is that there are: (1) possible allusions to her Assumption in Scripture (Revelation 12, which no one has disproved, and which Pope Pius IX and Pope Paul VI have confirmed); (2) there are other assumptions into heaven recorded in Scripture (Enoch, Elijah); (3) there is discussion among the Fathers concerning Mary's final end (Epiphanius, Ambrose); and (4) there is a strong belief in the Assumption in the mid- to late-first millennium of Christianity. Martians don't appear in any of these sources, and neither do Mormons or Wookies, not even a hint. But there is enough question about the Assumption of Mary in all these sources to warrant an investigation as to whether her Assumption actually did occur. Thus, when we say that Scripture does not negate Mary's Assumption, it is just one more piece of the evidence which helps in determining what actually occurred. The question of Mary's Assumption needs an answer. At least from Scripture we know that the possibility of an assumption for Mary is not negated.

James White: It is Consistent: Mr. Sungenis concludes with two more statements: Third, the concept of being assumed into heaven is not foreign to Scripture (e.g., Enoch, Elijah, and possibly Moses). Fourth, the doctrine of the Assumption of Mary, since it is consistent with the concept of assumption in Scripture, is not in the least detrimental to the sensitivities and logic of the Christian faith. Again, let's summarize: 1) People were assumed into heaven in Scripture (fact) 2) Mary's assumption is therefore not inconsistent with the fact that others have been assumed into heaven. (assertion) 3) The doctrine is not detrimental to the Christian faith (conclusion) There is no question that some few people were assumed into heaven by God. This is undisputed. Of course, nowhere in the statements of Geisler and MacKenzie do we see them saying that God could not have assumed Mary into heaven. No one makes that argument. Hence, we again see here the shifting of the grounds of the question. No one has asserted that assumption, per se, is inconsistent with the Christian faith. What has been said is that there is no basis, Scriptural or patristic, for the infallible definition of the assumption of Mary as a dogma of the Christian faith.

R. Sungenis: Let me pause here to remind the reader that there is indeed a Scripture for the infallible definition of the assumption of Mary as a dogma of the Christian faith. Surprised? Don't be. It comes from Acts 15, which is the Scriptural precedent for papal authority. In Acts 15, Peter determined, solely, unalterably, and without any direct Scriptural mandate, that circumcision would no longer be required of converts to the Christian faith. Pope Pius XII did the same thing in 1950. He solely, unalterably, and without any direct Scriptural mandate, affirmed that Mary indeed was assumed into heaven.

James White: Saying "it happened to Enoch, it could happen to Mary" is no more of a logical argument than if someone began teaching as an apostolic, dogmatic teaching that we should kill our enemies if they make fun of us by pointing to the incident when a bear killed children for mocking a prophet, and saying, "See, it is not inconsistent with Scripture."

R. Sungenis: It seems that Dr. White believes that the more outlandish he can make his analogies against Mary's assumption, the more valid his argument is going to be. But in my opinion, all it shows is his desperation. Despite his analogy, the fact remains that assumption into heaven is not a foreign idea to Scripture. Granted, no one is using this to prove that Mary was assumed into heaven. Rather, it is just one more piece of evidence which the Church examines, among all the other evidences, to determine whether Mary was assumed. If the Church knows that other people were assumed into heaven, then this lends credence to the possibility that Mary was assumed, no more, no less.

James White: Surely claiming infallible dogmatic status for something places a great burden of proof upon the defender of such a belief, and we can feel for Mr. Sungenis and his compatriots given the tremendous task that they must undertake. But it does not follow that the standard can be lowered just because they may not feel up to the task of defending Rome's assertions. The bar is set by Rome, not by the Protestant apologist who responds to her claims.

R. Sungenis: Indeed, the bar is set by Rome, in allegiance to Christ, the very person who said He would send the Spirit to guide the Church FOREVER (John 14:16). We DO set the bar very high, since, unlike Protestants who tolerate every wind of doctrine in their tens-of-thousands of denominations, the Catholic Church holds to only one set of dogmas, dogmas which have never changed and never will change. Conversely, Dr. White's Baptist denomination has over one hundred separate denominations, each believing something different about Christianity.

James White: Conclusion: So we see how again the Roman Catholic apologist is forced to use numerous invalid arguments and to in fact argue in a circle ("the assumption is true because Rome says it is") to defend Rome's dogmatic assertions. Unfortunately, many do not wish to invest the effort to think through the arguments, outline the assertions, and discover for themselves the errors inherent in the system. But to the person who loves truth and values freedom from the bondage of tradition and man-made religious beliefs, such is the price that must be paid. We are called to "struggle" and "contend" for the faith once for all delivered to the saints. That faith delivered to the saints of which Jude spoke (Jude 3) did not include the bodily assumption of Mary.

R. Sungenis: Although it is obvious that Dr. White attacks what he feels is the weakest link in the Catholic chain of dogma (since the Assumption of Mary has little patristic and scriptural evidence), from our point of view it shows the utter strength of the Catholic Church. For in the face of small patristic and scriptural evidence, she, like Peter in Acts 15, can boldly stand up, in the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and declare what her people should believe in faith and morals. Dr. White simply doesn't have an answer to Acts 15, for it is crystal clear that Peter, without Scripture, made the determination for the Church for all time. All that Dr. White will claim is that Acts 15 does not apply to the Roman Papacy. But Acts 15 is the precedent of authority and setting of dogma that Scripture gives us, the very Scripture that Dr. White claims to follow. Conversely, Dr. White, though appearing to have freedom, is, in reality, trapped by his own devices, for he cannot say anything that Scripture does not say. Thus, he has few answers for the real tough questions of today, e.g., contraception, abortion, cloning, test-tube babies, and many other questions, since the Bible does not address them specifically. Dr. White can't even tell us which books belong in the Bible, or when inspiration ceased, or whether God will speak again.

Although he claims that oral tradition is not a viable concern today, he doesn't have a verse of Scripture which teaches that the command to preserve oral tradition (2 Thessalonians 2:15) was rescinded. Although he claims that oral tradition is confined to the information recorded in Scripture, he does not have a verse of Scripture which teaches such a confinement. So who is obeying the Scripture? Of course, it is the Catholic Church, for they continue to obey the command in 2 Thessalonians 2:15, whereas Dr. White ignores it. Thank God for the Catholic Church.

James White: (a) I note that Mr. Sungenis did not include at this point the rest of the citation from Geisler and MacKenzie. It reads, "The so-called unanimous consent of the Fathers to which Trent commanded allegiance is a fiction; no such consent actually exists since the Fathers often held diametrically opposing views. In fact, not even a majority, to say nothing of unanimous consent, can be found among the early fathers on some traditions that were later pronounced infallibly true."

R. Sungenis: I didn't quote the rest of the passage because Geisler and MacKenzie give few, if any, examples of their claim. For example, they state that the Fathers had widely diverging views on the Eucharist, but they do not cite any examples. Suffice it to say, Geisler and MacKenzie's book is one of the poorest books I have ever seen in dealing with patristic evidence, at least from Protestants who call themselves scholars. If you're interested in a refutation of their book with regard to the Eucharist (as well as a refutation of Dr. White's comments on the Eucharist), get my book *Not By Bread Alone* and look up the references to Geisler and MacKenzie. You will understand what I mean.

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