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THE FATHERHOOD OF  
ST. JOSEPH

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BY

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TRANSLATED BY

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*Monk of Conception Abbey*

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## TO ST. JOSEPH

Protector of your God, good Joseph  
Guiding His steps across the worn shop floor,  
Teaching His little hands to hold the saw,  
Opening at His beseeching glance the door.

Performer of the little tasks that grace  
The life of men in little, lovely ways,  
Starting the Son of God on His great road  
With gentle, peaceful, happy childhood days.

From Calvary His anguished eyes could look  
Upon a world which had not understood;  
And yet He could remember—Joseph there,  
Joseph, long dead, Joseph had been so good.



## *Preface*

The following theological discussions about St. Joseph, the chaste spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary and virginal father of our Savior, the God-man, are substantially identical with a series of discourses given by the author at Innsbruck University. Yielding to repeated requests I now give them to the public with a few changes of minor importance. It is hoped that the work, originally intended for theologians and therefore couched in somewhat technical theological language, may yet be of interest to other educated men and women interested in theological questions.

May the book contribute toward a greater devotion to the great patriarch whose rank in the kingdom of God yields only to that of the God-man Himself and His blessed virginal Mother.

THE AUTHOR

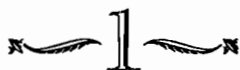


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## *Introduction*

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### I. HISTORICAL NOTES ON THE DEVOTION TO ST. JOSEPH

THE veneration of St. Joseph, the virginal spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, in its essence and foundation is as old as the Church itself. For the august position and dignity of the holy patriarch is, as we shall see, unmistakably founded on Holy Scripture, i.e., the Gospels. Yet, like many other doctrines and institutions of the Church, it passed through a process of development that sometimes was peculiar indeed, yet on the whole really wonderful. Joseph Seitz in his valuable work on "*The Veneration of St. Joseph in Its Historical Development*" (1908) has shown this in detail. It is to be regretted that he does not go further than the Council of Trent; a continuation promised by him does not seem to have been published. Another historical account, shorter, but in its way excellent, was given us by the well-known historian Otto Pfülf, S.J.<sup>1</sup> He traces the development from the origin of the Church to the end of the nineteenth century. Both

<sup>1</sup>In two articles in *Stimmen aus Maria-Laach*, Vol. XXXVIII (1890).

of these accounts are most serviceable to one who wishes to study the historical development in detail. Although the aim of the following discussions is not historical but dogmatic, it may be both interesting and helpful for our purpose if we point out and emphasize, under the guidance of these two authors, some highlights of that development.

In the first three or four centuries of the Church we find few traces of a pronounced veneration of St. Joseph, a fact which is called strange and is made much of by the opponents of this devotion. But in this religious veneration as in every other, it is well to make a distinction between private veneration where an individual, in his heart alone perhaps, recognizes and full of wonder beholds the exalted position of St. Joseph in the kingdom of God and his great holiness, and external and public veneration which finds expression in common public devotions, feast days, altars, and churches erected in honor of St. Joseph.

The former, the private or rather interior veneration, has certainly existed ever since the origin of the Church; it was bound to arise as soon as believing and thoughtful Christians applied themselves to pious and attentive reading of the Gospels, especially the chapters on the childhood and youth of our Savior, and they came to know the august personality of St. Joseph; the latter, the common or public veneration, could by exterior circumstances be arrested, and this is what actually happened. In the first centuries of Christianity it was of prime importance that the Redeemer, the God-man, should be recognized and believed in as a divine person, no easy task for a human society intellectually and

morally depraved and therefore unwilling and almost unable to accept the sublime Christian mysteries, especially the virginal birth of the divine Savior by Mary the Mother of God. Hence it could scarcely be helped that St. Joseph, who was not the natural father of the Redeemer, yet could easily be taken, and frequently was taken, to be the natural father, had to remain in the background in order that the honor of the God-man and of his Virgin Mother could remain intact.

One other circumstance may have had a share in preventing a public veneration of St. Joseph to develop during the earliest Christian times. It was the time of the first expansion of Christianity and of the cruel persecution of Christians. In such times it was natural that every other human greatness and nobility, even if supernatural, had to yield precedence to the marvelous heroism and the constancy unto death of the apostles and the other martyrs. Such examples were more striking, and would attract the attention and arouse the compassion of the faithful much more than the greatness and holiness, noble in his silent self-sacrifice, but less conspicuous, of the spouse, or husband, of the mother of God. Later on, when the Christian religion had gained a firm footing and had permeated the very lives of men, the veneration of St. Joseph, too, began to develop and spread especially in the Oriental Church. Here already in the third century we find not a few evidences of it, and in the ninth century it seems to have reached a high state of development nearly everywhere. That this development was practically restricted to the Orient, is evidently explained by the history of the times.

For over the Western countries the storm of the migration of peoples had broken and had left them a huge heap of ruins. Here the urgent need was to civilize and Christianize the barbarous hordes that had invaded central and southern Europe, and to save from utter extinction and to revitalize the Roman inhabitants, vanquished as they were, and humbled or almost exterminated. It is not to be wondered at that out of this period, so turbulent, fermenting and all but relapsing into barbarism, few if any documents are available that could bear witness to any public devotion to St. Joseph. There was no printing press, and the stormy times were not favorable to the development or the recording of religious devotions. The same is true of other devotions and institutions which were certainly existing. Lack of documents from this period is, therefore, not sufficient in our case to allow a conclusion that such a devotion did not exist. Least of all can the fact that the veneration of St. Joseph, both in theory and in practice, required a considerable time to assert itself, develop and spread, warrant any misgivings, if we consider and appraise it from the dogmatical standpoint. It shares its fate not only with other devotions but with other and quite essential institutions and even definite dogmas of the Catholic Church. I mention only the primacy of the Roman Pontiff, the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, both of which emerged only by and by into the full and general consciousness of the Church and the theoretical and practical acceptance by all its members, and it was not till the nineteenth century that they were solemnly declared by the Church

as revealed truths. However, when the task mentioned above had been in the main accomplished and the Christian religion, after the devastations by the barbarian invaders, was reviving and blossoming again, the veneration of St. Joseph, too, became alive, and with the twelfth century began to strike deeper and stronger roots in Christian life and produced abundant flowers and fruits. This was especially owing to two of the greatest men of the century, the Venerable Abbot Rupert of Deutz (d. 1135) and St. Bernard (d. 1155) who never tired of proclaiming the greatness and sanctity of the holy patriarch and promoting his veneration.

And ever since then this devotion developed more and more and spread farther and farther with every succeeding century. Chief credit for this is due to a number of outstanding men and women, theologians and saints, such as Pierre d'Ailly, Gerson (chancellor of the university of Paris), St. Bernardine of Siena (1444), Bernardine of Feltre (1494), Bernardine de Busto (1500), Thomas Cajetan (de Vio), St. Theresa of Avila, St. Francis de Sales, St. Vincent de Paul, St. Alphonsus Liguori, and others. The various religious orders, as Franciscans, Dominicans, Carmelites, Jesuits, and Redemptorists, vied with one another in the veneration of the holy patriarch and endeavored to bring about its acceptance everywhere. The veneration of St. Joseph spread from diocese to diocese and began to flourish even in missionary districts in foreign countries. Royal courts, such as the Bourbons in Paris and the Hapsburgs in Vienna and Brussels, gave it sincere

and active support and so had no little share in its growth.<sup>2</sup>

This is not the place to trace its development further; only one phase of it deserves to be pointed out here, in order to prepare the way for a better understanding of the dogmatic discussion that is to follow, namely, the wonderful advance this devotion has made since the pontificate of Pius IX. Pius IX was himself fervently devoted to St. Joseph and, when raised to the papal throne in 1847, at once set out to promote this veneration in the whole Church. On September 10 of the same year he extended to the whole Church the feast of the Patronage of St. Joseph which before that time had been kept only in a number of individual dioceses. His predecessors Pius VIII and Gregory XVI had already endowed with indulgences the pious meditation of the seven sorrows and joys of St. Joseph; Pius IX increased those indulgences considerably soon after the beginning of his pontificate (February 1, 1847). On June 11, 1855, he enriched with great spiritual favors the daily devotion to St. Joseph during the month of March, and on April 27, 1865, he issued a decree that had for its aim, or effect, to make the month of March, as it were, the counterpart of the month of May, inasmuch as the month of March was to be dedicated to St. Joseph as the month of May is especially dedicated to the Blessed Virgin. With this Pope's approval and encouragement the confraternity of the Cord of St. Joseph was established in Verona, March 19, 1860, and was soon after that raised by him to the rank of an archconfraternity and enriched with many indulgences, its salutary in-

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Plülf, *loc. cit.*

fluence being widespread among both clergy and people. Other measures, more important and far reaching, will be mentioned later.

The example of this great Pope was followed by members of the episcopate, encouraged and sometimes, we may surmise, directly instigated by him. Thus, not to mention individual princes of the Church, several provincial synods (e.g., those of Vienna in Austria [1858], Prague in Bohemia [1860], Kalocsa in Hungary [1862], Baltimore [1866], New Granada in Colombia [1868], Bordeaux in France [1868]) enacted decrees in which they called the faithful to a fervent veneration of St. Joseph, sometimes giving to understand that after the Mother of God, St. Joseph deserved the first place in their devotion. An especially clear expression of the sentiments of the Catholic episcopate of that time in regard to the veneration of St. Joseph was the postulations addressed by them to the Apostolic See or to the Vatican Council, in which they asked for an increased liturgical cultus of the saint. The first petition had been sent to the Congregation of Rites in 1869; it bore the signatures of many, especially Italian, bishops, priests, and laymen, but was not acted on, probably because the Vatican Council was soon to convene. Three other petitions were offered by members of the Vatican Council itself. These resembled each other and in substantial agreement asked the Council that it would solemnly declare St. Joseph the first patron and protector, after the Blessed Virgin, of the whole Church, and would accord to him, next to the Mother of God, the highest liturgical veneration. The first petition was signed by 153 fathers of the Council,

the second by the 43 religious superiors general present at the Council, the third by 118 fathers of the Council. That there were not more signers need not cause surprise nor does it reflect on the contents of these petitions; for scarcely had the canvassing for signatures begun when the critical situation in Europe and the outbreak of the Franco-German war caused the suspension of the Council. Thus no more signatures could be collected and the petitions could not be acted upon. They were not without result, however. And this brings us back to Pius IX.

This Pope himself gave an answer to these petitions and met their wishes to a great extent, in fact in all essential parts. In his name and by his orders, on December 8, 1870, a decree of the Congregation of Rites was publicly read during the divine services in the three papal basilicas, of the Vatican, the Lateran, and Mary Major, in which decree, with special reference to the petitions addressed to the Council, the chaste spouse of the Blessed Virgin, in consideration of his exalted position in the Holy Family, was solemnly declared the patron of the whole Catholic Church, and his feast was raised to the rank of a double of the first class. Not content with this solemn act, Pius IX in the next year (July 7, 1871) addressed an apostolic letter to the whole Catholic world in which he repeated the proclamation of the patronage of St. Joseph over the whole Catholic church that had been published in the Roman basilicas, and still further extended the liturgical cult of the holy patriarch. He prescribed that the Creed should be said in the Mass on the feasts of St. Joseph, that in the prayer *A cunctis* immediately after the name of the Blessed



Virgin Mary the words "with Blessed Joseph" should be inserted, and that in the divine office likewise the *suffragium* in honor of St. Joseph should be said following that of the Blessed Virgin. With these enactments Pius IX crowned his work of advancing the veneration of St. Joseph.

The succeeding popes followed in his footsteps. Leo XIII, the great teacher in St. Peter's chair, on August 15, 1889, addressed a splendid encyclical to the Catholic world, to instruct the faithful with apostolic authority on the eminent dignity, power, and holiness of St. Joseph who, as he indicated, in these respects occupies the first place after the Mother of God in the kingdom of God. So he hoped to bring it about that the veneration of the saint and trust in his power to help them would strike ever deeper roots in the hearts of the faithful. He also recommends the dedication, in a special manner, of the month of March to St. Joseph and calls upon all the bishops of the world to second him, the supreme teacher and pastor of the Church, in his endeavors to advance the veneration of our great and lovable saint. Leo XIII took another step: in two apostolic briefs he recommended most warmly the association of the Holy Family that had been in existence for some time, and invited all Catholic families of the whole world to join it and to dedicate themselves to the Holy Family of Nazareth. In the first of them (June 14, 1892) he calls St. Joseph the acknowledged head of the Holy Family and the illustrious saint who represented paternal authority for Jesus in this world. In the second (June 20, 1892) he repeated that invitation and enriched that association with many indulgences and

privileges, recommending and enjoining on the members prayers in which St. Joseph is invoked as the holy protector of Jesus and Mary.

Leo's saintly successor, Pius X, who in baptism had been given the name of Joseph, would not fail in doing his part to further this devotion. By decree of the Congregation of Rites of March 18, 1909, he approved the Litany of St. Joseph proposed to him by many bishops and religious superiors, had it inserted in the liturgical books, and recommended it for public and private use. The pontificate of Benedict XV brought another distinction to the liturgical cult of the holy patriarch. By his orders the Congregation of Rites issued a decree (April 9, 1919) by which the Masses of St. Joseph were given a new and special preface. Under Pius XI by a decree of the Congregation of Rites (August 9, 1922) in the rite of extreme unction and in the liturgical prayers for the dying the invocation of St. Joseph was added to that of the Blessed Mother of God, and a special prayer to St. Joseph is to be said in behalf of the dying person. Utterances of the same Pope on diverse occasions bear witness that in regard to devotion to St. Joseph his sentiments are fully in agreement with those of his predecessors.

This outline suffices to show us what position the teaching office of the Church has taken in regard to veneration of St. Joseph as it expressed itself with steadily increasing clearness, especially since the beginning of the pontificate of Pius IX. This being the attitude of the ecclesiastical authorities, it was natural that the Christian people turned to this devotion with increasing enthusiasm. Especially since the twelfth cen-

tury, and particularly since the Council of Trent and again since the Vatican Council, the veneration of St. Joseph, under the guidance of the Holy Ghost, has become part and parcel of the Christian life, ever growing extensively and intensively, with the result that today the faithful place St. Joseph, on account of his intimate connection with the divine Redeemer and the Mother of God, next to her, his virginal spouse, and assign precedence to him over all the other saints, even the holy angels, the apostles, and St. John the Baptist. Thus has come true what the pious and learned Dominican, Isidore Isolani with prophetic vision foretold, "that in view of the great things that God had done in St. Joseph, the holy Catholic Church would one day approve and promote the public and solemn veneration of St. Joseph; that there would be great rejoicing in the Church militant when once his sublime holiness and dignity would be generally recognized; that the Holy Ghost would not fail to enkindle in the hearts of the faithful such a veneration of the saint that also the ecclesiastical authorities would give public and solemn expression to it by founding monasteries, churches, and altars in honor of St. Joseph." <sup>3</sup>

## II. THE MEANING OF RELIGIOUS VENERATION

From our short introductory remarks the dogmatic question arises: How is the special and distinctive veneration which the Catholic Church has been paying to St. Joseph, especially since the tenth century, more so since the Council of Trent, and above all since the Vatican Council, supported by the sources of revelation,

<sup>3</sup> Isidore Isolani, O.P., *Summa de donis S. Josephi* (1514).

and what are its deeper dogmatic foundations? The present treatise is an endeavor to answer these questions. In its course all more important questions of dogmatic relevance regarding St. Joseph will have to be dealt with. What is meant by "religious veneration"? In what does it consist? If by veneration in general is meant respect for, and submission to, another's greatness, then religious veneration or religious cult means, in the first place, nothing less than the homage, or the expression of our respect for and submission to the highest object, to the first principle and ultimate end of all religion, that is, to God in His infinite greatness, majesty, and holiness. In the second place it means a proportionate homage or expression of respect for and submission to those persons who are intimately and, in the present order, supernaturally connected with God, the ultimate object of all worship, and thus in a special way have a share of His dignity and holiness.

This definition makes it clear that the dignity and holiness of the persons to whom religious worship is paid must be not only the motive but also the norm or measure of religious worship. It evidences, furthermore, the essential difference and fathomless distance between the worship due to God and addressed to Him alone, called by theologians *latria*, and that worship or veneration which we show to those creatures whom God has exalted and honored, the angels and saints: the worship of *dulia*. By the same principle we give to the Mother of God a worship or veneration, called *hyperdulia* which, on the one hand, by its very nature, is immeasurably below the worship of *latria* and, on the other hand, surpasses the veneration given to the other

saints as much as her own dignity and holiness excels that of all the angels and saints. In order, therefore, to determine and measure the scope and extent to which we should go in our veneration of St. Joseph we shall have to determine and consider not only his personal supernatural holiness, but also his relation to the work of Redemption and his position in the supernatural kingdom of God, and his high dignity resulting therefrom. Now, this position of the holy patriarch in the kingdom of God is determined in its distinctive character first by his intimate relations to the divine Redeemer and His immaculate Mother and to the Church, which embodies both the effects and the continuation of the work of Redemption; and secondly, by the wonderful privileges resulting from these relations. These relations and these privileges have been made known to us, directly or indirectly, by divine revelation, and therefore furnish the dogmatic foundation for the specific veneration due to this great saint. From them, as they will be treated in detail in this book, the special claims of our saint to our special veneration will follow as a logical necessity. As a preliminary bird's-eye view of the present treatise, we give them here in their systematic sequence:

1. The existence of a true marriage between Mary and Joseph.
2. Qualities peculiar to this marriage; its purpose, task, its fruit.
3. The fatherhood of St. Joseph in regard to the child Jesus.
4. Detailed explanation, negatively and positively, of the nature of this fatherhood.

5. The fatherhood of St. Joseph in the writings of the Fathers and Doctors of the Church from the eighth century to the present time.
6. Privileges of St. Joseph resulting from his marriage and fatherhood, especially his incorporation into the so-called hypostatic order with the humanity of Jesus and Mary.
7. His personal dignity and holiness.
8. St. Joseph, patron of the Church.
9. The veneration due St. Joseph and paid to him by the Church: *protodulia*.

### III. THEOLOGICAL LITERATURE ON ST. JOSEPH

The theological literature on St. Joseph is, of course, not so extensive and abundant as that on his holy spouse, the Blessed Virgin Mary. Christian antiquity has left us no detailed discussion, much less a systematic treatment, about St. Joseph. In some of the Fathers and ecclesiastical writers we meet with occasional remarks and comments on this saint, very stimulating by their theological acumen and depth. The genius of St. Augustine especially sensed and understood the position of St. Joseph and his connection with Jesus and Mary as few other theologians have done, before or after him. However, valuable contributions to the study of our subject are found in the work of a number of other Fathers, e.g., Ephraem, Chrysostom, Jerome. We shall have occasion to quote and discuss them in the course of the following chapters.

Likewise the great medieval theologians failed to produce any detailed systematic presentation of the teaching of theology on St. Joseph, although particular

questions sometimes found more detailed treatment. Toward the end of the Middle Ages a few theologians wrote comprehensive works on St. Joseph, e.g., Pierre d' Ailly who wrote *A Treatise on the Honors of St. Joseph*. Isidore Isolani, who was mentioned above, left a rather large work *On the Gifts of St. Joseph*, rather oratorical and not very systematic but rich in content (new edition, Rome, 1887). A famous scholar well known for his devotion to St. Joseph, John Gerson, the chancellor of the University of Paris, preached a sermon at the Council of Constance in 1414 on the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin, in which he purposely incorporated a large amount of theological matter concerning St. Joseph. He also published a book of popular meditations in French on St. Joseph and a lengthy epic poem in his honor entitled *Josephina*. Theologically, however, these two books hardly add anything new to the famous sermon just referred to.

After the Council of Trent the theology of St. Joseph unquestionably has made decided progress in several respects. First to be mentioned here is *Suarez*,<sup>4</sup> who gives a thorough and systematic treatise on our saint from both the positive and the speculative side. Scheeben says of this treatise: "The best account of what can be ascertained theologically with more or less certainty concerning the dignity, position, and qualities of St. Joseph, is found in Suarez whose guidance the better class of ascetical (and theological) writers have followed in modern times."<sup>5</sup> Next to him,

<sup>4</sup> *The Mysteries of the Life of Christ* (Paris ed., 1860), XIX, disp. 6, 7, 8.

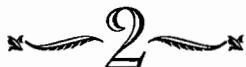
<sup>5</sup> *Dogmatik*, III, no. 1586.

Theophile Raymand deserves attention, who in his famous *Diptycha Mariana* ably treats also some queries regarding St. Joseph, boldly and decidedly rejecting all exaggerations and groundless fancies though occasionally going too far in his usual caustic criticism. Another contemporary of Suarez, P. Morales, wrote an extensive work: *Chapter I of Matthew on Christ, the Blessed Virgin, and her True Spouse*. Like the work of Isolani it contains valuable material in a diffuse, but more systematic and critical treatment (new edition, 1868). Famous are two sermons of Bossuet on St. Joseph that attracted great attention at the time, and even from the theological point of view still deserve it. One more theologian of pre-Vatican time, Sedlmayer, may be mentioned who in his *Theologia Mariana* has a *Quaestio* in 17 articles on St. Joseph, a clear and solid treatment.

After the Vatican Council a considerable number of monographs, not only ascetical but also theological, have appeared treating more or less thoroughly St. Joseph's position in the kingdom of God and his supernatural dignity and holiness. Textbooks of dogmatic theology also, periodicals, and Scripture commentaries, now usually give more attention to our saint than formerly. Some of the monographs were intended to furnish a theological foundation for the postulations which, as we said above, were presented to the Vatican Council or to the Apostolic See.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Cf. especially the following: Mariani, *La Primauté de S. Joseph* (1897) and *De cultu S. Joseph amplificando* (1908); Joseph Bover, *De cultu S. Joseph amplificando* (1926); J. Picirelli, *S. Giuseppe nell' ordine presente de la divina provvidenza* (1897).





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## *Marriage between Mary and Joseph*

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TO ACCOUNT for the entire supernatural dignity and holiness of St. Joseph, we have to consider in the first place his marital union with Mary the Immaculate Virgin and Mother of God. And above all we have to prove from the sources of revelation the following fundamental truth: Between Mary and Joseph there existed a true marriage in the proper sense of the word: therefore St. Joseph was truly the husband of the virginal Mother of God.

1. The truth is unmistakably contained in the Gospels. It follows, with psychological necessity as a conclusion from the fact vouched for by the Evangelists, that Joseph and Mary lived together in one household, a fact that was well known to all their relatives and acquaintances. For in the minds of the Jews at that time the requirements of marital propriety and marital chastity were such that mature persons of different sex not of one family could not dwell together under one roof living a common life, unless they were married and therefore were husband and wife. Now that Mary and Joseph from a certain date had been living together was a matter of common knowledge. Joseph had taken

Mary "to him," into his home, and was henceforth faithfully attending to his duties as husband, and Mary doing the same as wife. Together they went to Bethlehem to be enrolled; together they went to Jerusalem on legal feast days, fled to Egypt when persecuted by Herod, and, after their return, lived together at Nazareth. From all this we have to conclude that Mary and Joseph were bound to each other by a legal marriage: they were in truth husband and wife. Otherwise by living together in the midst of their people they would have risked severest censure, public contempt, persecution, and punishment. But not a trace of this is found in the Gospel account. Jesus was by everybody considered the legitimate son of Mary and Joseph, even by the Pharisees and scribes who yet pried into every detail of the life of Jesus and would ruthlessly have pounced upon our Lord and his holy parents if the least dark spot could have been detected in the relation between Mary and Joseph. Thus the union of Mary and Joseph was universally recognized as a true and genuine marriage.

Moreover, the same truth is asserted by the Evangelists in explicit terms: Joseph is called the "husband" (man) of Mary, and Mary the "wife" of Joseph. Thus Matt. 1:16: "And Jacob begot Joseph, the husband of Mary and of her was born Jesus, who is called Christ"; 1:19: "Joseph her husband, being a just man"; 1:20: "Do not be afraid, Joseph, son of David, to take to thee Mary thy wife, for that which is begotten in her is of the Holy Spirit"; 1:24: "he took unto him his wife." Luke 2:5: "to register, together with Mary his espoused wife." No other name or description is ever

used in Holy Scripture to designate the relation between Mary and Joseph. Gratuitous and quite untenable is the objection raised already by heretics of the first and second centuries, namely, that the Evangelists accommodated themselves to the opinion and parlance of the contemporary Jews who believed and therefore said that Mary and Joseph were husband and wife although they were not, and therefore Jesus was the legitimate son of Joseph the carpenter. For as the Fathers already frequently contended, the words and assertions of inspired Holy Writ have to be taken in their literal sense so long as this does not lead to absurd or impious conclusions, which, in our case, is quite out of question, i.e., the assumption of a true and real marriage in no way involves anything that would appear incongruous or impious, but, as we shall consider later on, the incarnation of the Son of God in Mary the Virgin is very well compatible with a union of Mary and Joseph by a virginal marriage. Moreover, the objection of the heretics that the expressions "husband" and "wife" are merely accommodations to the way of speaking of the Jews at that time, has been well countered in another way already by St. Augustine:

When the Evangelist was recording his own or another man's words, we might possibly imagine that he was free to speak according to the opinion current among men; but when an angel was addressing some other person, could he have spoken, against his own and the other's better knowledge, according to the "opinion of other men" and not rather according to objective truth, when he said to him: "Do not be afraid to take to thee Mary thy wife"?<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Adv. Julianum*, Bk. V, no. 47 (PL, 44, 811).

One more objection against our argument from the use of the words "husband" and "wife" might be brought from the fact that twice<sup>2</sup> Mary is called "the espoused wife" of Joseph; for from this it might seem that Mary was and remained only affianced to Joseph without in reality ever becoming his wife. Yet this objection, too, can be met with an answer no less effective and to the point: it is true that the Jews, at least at the time of Christ, made a distinction, as we do now, between espousal and marriage, but the Jewish distinction was made on a ground quite different from the Christian one. According to the Jewish view with betrothal (*erusin*) the entire essence of marriage was already given, while complete partnership as a married couple (*missuin*) was effected only with the induction of the bride into the house of the bridegroom. For this reason infidelity of a betrothed was regarded as formal adultery and was punished as such. This is evident from Deut. 22:22, 29, where such a case of infidelity is called adultery and is punished as such. The same is clearly indicated in the fact that among the Jews this so-called betrothal could be dissolved only like a full or consummated marriage, i.e., by a bill of divorce. Scheeben, therefore, rightly remarks that such a "betrothal" among the Jews would be styled more correctly "marriage."<sup>3</sup> From this it follows that the words of Matt. 1:18, "*antequam convenirent*" ("before they came together") are to be explained, as "before she was taken to his home," and not "before they consummated the marriage."

<sup>2</sup> Matt. 1:18; Luke 2:5.

<sup>3</sup> *Dogmatik*, III, no. 1582.

These two arguments from the Gospels can be given added strength by a third: St. Joseph is repeatedly in the Gospels called the father of Christ, and Mary and Joseph are called the parents of Christ, e.g., Luke 2:33: "And His father and mother were marveling at the things spoken concerning Him." Luke 2:48: "Son, why hast Thou done so to us? Behold, Thy father and I have been seeking Thee sorrowing"; 2:27: "And when His parents brought in the child Jesus"; 2:41: "And His parents were wont to go every year to Jerusalem"; 2:43: "The boy Jesus remained in Jerusalem, and His parents did not know it." Distinctly and without qualification Joseph is here called the father of Jesus just as Mary is called His mother, and both together the parents of the child Jesus: Joseph, therefore, was father in a true, not merely putative, sense. When Scripture says, "Jesus . . . being, as was supposed, the son of Joseph,"<sup>4</sup> it excludes only natural generation by Joseph, but does not preclude another, true, fatherhood. Now the only ground for calling Joseph in a true sense the father of Jesus can be found in the fact that he was in truth the husband of Mary, the Mother of God. Any other explanation, if closely examined, will be found unsatisfactory. Thus again we are face to face with the existence of a true marriage between Mary and Joseph.

How it is precisely that this marital union between Mary and Joseph involved a true and higher fatherhood of Joseph in regard to the child Jesus will be explained later when we treat of this fatherhood more fully. Just now this short remark will suffice: in the present order of things according to God's ordination

<sup>4</sup> Luke 3:23.

the blessing with children should be conditioned on the existence of a true marriage, and therefore also the child Jesus, the God-man, should appear and be the fruit of a marriage, but a virginal marriage.

With this we may conclude our argumentation from the inspired word of God and pass over to the witness of tradition.

2. Tradition, too, if carefully examined, will furnish us with a full endorsement of the Catholic teaching. In early Christian times the existence of a true marriage between Mary and Joseph was flatly denied and fiercely attacked by Julian, the Pelagian, who based his argumentation on the false premise that sexual union was an essential element of marriage. St. Augustine refuted him effectively in his book *Adversus Julianum Pelagianum*. Apart from this work, however, and generally speaking, we do not find a clear and uniform teaching of the Fathers and ecclesiastical writers as against Julian and others who opposed a true marriage between Mary and Joseph. Especially is this true of writers before Ambrose. These are frequently ambiguous, to say the least, in their treatment of the relation between Mary and Joseph, and it cannot be denied that some of them appear as opponents of a true marriage between Mary and Joseph, if we take their expressions literally. This will not surprise us when we find that a clear concept of what is the essence of marriage was still lacking. To those writers, as to the prevailing opinion of the time, marriage appeared somehow inseparable from its, present or future, consummation, and therefore they could not form a clear idea of a virginal marriage, i.e., a marriage contracted but never to be consummated. They

all rejected emphatically the existence of any sexual intercourse between Joseph and Mary, whether before or after the conception and birth of Christ, but failed to give a clear decision as to the meaning of those scriptural terms denoting a true marriage. They call St. Joseph the bridegroom of the Blessed Virgin, and think they can take expressions like "husband" and "wife" rather as merely external denominations, not denoting in our case a real marriage, but designed rather to make it appear such, and thus to conceal and protect the mystery of that holy union. Such or similar language we find in some of the early writers, including some of the more important Fathers, e.g., Tertullian, Origen, Basil, Chrysostom, Epiphanius, Ephraem, Cyril of Jerusalem, Hilary, Peter Chrysologus, Gregory the Great. Yet for all that we are hardly justified in saying that these Fathers and ecclesiastical writers were convinced and uncompromising opponents of a true marriage between Mary and Joseph. Lacking the clear idea of a virginal marriage, or a *matrimonium ratum non consummatum*, they either did not really treat this question at all, or they failed to see the point at issue. With great probability, if not certainty, we can, therefore, assign as the chief reason of their ambiguous, if not captious, way of speaking the fact that they aimed in the first place to exclude any marital intercourse between Mary and Joseph, and that they did not sufficiently understand or consider the essential difference between simple betrothal in the Christian sense, and betrothal in the Jewish law, which was practically a giving in marriage and therefore a true marriage.

A change begins to appear with Ambrose, although

even after his time there were writers who used the same confused language as those before. St. Ambrose, as we know, before his conversion had held high position in the Roman government and therefore, we may be sure, had a thorough acquaintance with Roman law. This may have led him to investigate fully and precisely such a question, whether or not there existed a true marriage between Mary and Joseph. He became convinced that such a marriage, valid according to principles of law, existed, and he defended it in classic language that was afterward adopted in part by canon law. Let us look at a few passages.

In his commentary on the Gospel of St. Luke <sup>5</sup> he poses the question why, according to the wise plan of God, our Lord should be born of a virgin betrothed to a man; his answer shows unmistakably that he considered the union between Mary and Joseph a true marriage:

Divine mysteries are indeed hidden, and according to the saying of the prophets it is not easy for any man to know the plan of God. Nevertheless from the other deeds and precepts of our Lord and Savior we are able to understand that this was also more in keeping with the divine plan, that she should be chosen to give birth to the Lord who was betrothed to a man. But why did she not become pregnant before her espousal? Perhaps lest it be said that she had conceived in adultery. And the Scripture clearly demonstrates that she would be both espoused and a virgin: a virgin, that it might be clear that she was free from intercourse with man; espoused, lest she be seared by the infamy of violated virginity, to which desecration the fact of the pregnant womb would seem to point.

<sup>5</sup> Bk. II, no. 1.



Later on (no. 3) St. Ambrose gives another reason why our Savior was to be conceived and born of an espoused virgin, and this again shows clearly that according to St. Ambrose the Blessed Virgin was united with Joseph by marriage in the proper sense of the word: "A reason of no little weight is found in this, that the virginity of Mary should be kept from the knowledge of the prince of this world, for when he should see her espoused he could not become suspicious of the child born of her (i.e., would not recognize in the child the savior of the world who according to the prophecy of Isaias was to be the son of a virgin; for, as Ambrose and some other Fathers thought, he should be kept in ignorance of this for a while). That it was planned to mislead the prince of this world, the words of our Lord Himself indicate." Yet more clearly St. Ambrose speaks in two other passages. In the same book (no. 5) he says distinctly: "Let it not disturb you that Holy Scripture calls Mary wife; for it is not the deprivation of virginity but the legally performed marriage contract that establishes the married state; in fine, no one can dismiss a wife whom he has not taken to wife; therefore he who intended to dismiss her acknowledges thereby that he had taken her to wife." In a similar vein and, if possible, more clearly he says elsewhere: "Nor let it disturb you where he says that Joseph took his wife and went into Egypt, for one espoused to a man has the name wife. For when the marriage is entered upon it gets the name of marriage. It is not the defloration of virginity that constitutes the marriage, but it is the marriage contract. Finally, as soon as the maid is joined by a legal act to the man, the mar-

riage begins to exist, not when she is known by him in (sexual) cohabitation.”<sup>6</sup>

St. Augustine, the great pupil and spiritual son of St. Ambrose, took up, developed, and perfected the teaching of his master. Two reasons led him to a closer investigation of the marriage between Mary and Joseph. The first was the observation that already in his time there were quite a number of married people so far advanced in grace or perfection that with mutual consent for the sake of Christ they practiced continence and thus followed the example of Mary and Joseph. So the question arose whether such a way of life was still embodying the essential characteristics of a marriage and thus could still claim the name of marriage in the proper sense. St. Augustine tells us about this in one of his sermons (*sermo* 51) and then answers the question as follows:

It is not true that for the reason that Joseph had not carnally known the mother of the Lord, he was not father, as if it were passion that made a woman one's wife and not rather conjugal love. Pay well attention to this, dear brethren. Some time in the future the Apostle of Christ was going to declare in the Church: "It remains that those who have wives be as if they had none."<sup>7</sup> We know many among the brethren who, advanced in grace, in the name of Christ and with mutual consent abstain indeed from carnal indulgence, but do not at all withhold from each other their conjugal love. The more the former is restrained the more the latter increases in them. Are those who lead such a life perhaps not wedded because they do

<sup>6</sup> *De inst. virgin.*, chap. 6, no. 41.

<sup>7</sup> I Cor. 7:29.

not demand from each other the carnal debt? Yet she is subject to her husband, as is becoming,<sup>8</sup> and this the more so, the more chaste she is; and he, on the other hand, loves his wife truly and, as is written, in honor and holiness<sup>9</sup> as coheir of grace,<sup>10</sup> just as Christ has loved the Church.<sup>11</sup> Therefore since the union is there and the marriage is there, and the marriage does not cease to exist when that is not done which could also be done of course, unlawfully, with one not wedded: one might wish that all could live that way. But many cannot. Therefore let no one put asunder those who can lead that life, nor for that reason refuse the name husband and wife to those who are bound together, though not in the flesh, yet in their hearts.

We have here St. Augustine clearly asserting the existence of true marriages that are not consummated, and particularly of the virginal marriage between Joseph and Mary.

Another occasion to take up this question was furnished to Augustine by the Pelagian and Manichaean heresies with their errors concerning concupiscence, marriage, and virginity. These had to be refuted and the Christian position set forth and defended. This was bound to lead to a discussion of the virginal marriage of Mary and Joseph. Augustine's genius took it up with his usual masterly acumen. His chief argument for a virginal, but true, marriage between Mary and Joseph is based on Matt. 1:20, where Mary is explicitly called the wife of Joseph. He thus endorses the argumentation from the various designations of Mary as the wife

<sup>8</sup> Col. 3:18.

<sup>9</sup> I Thess. 4:4.

<sup>10</sup> I Pet. 3:7.

<sup>11</sup> Eph. 5:25.

of Joseph adopted and was given us in detail already. But let us hear his own words:

If married people freely and with mutual consent have chosen to refrain from indulging carnal desires, the marriage bond between them is not loosened thereby: far from it. On the contrary, it will be all the stronger, the firmer that agreement is, an agreement to be kept with even greater love and concord, not in the union of bodies but in the harmony of two hearts beating in unison. Hence there was no falsehood in what the angel said to Joseph: "Do not be afraid to take to thee Mary thy wife, for what is begotten in her is of the Holy Spirit." She is called wife ever since she had pledged her troth to him, although he had not known her carnally, nor was ever to do so; nor had the name "wife" lost its meaning or become a falsehood because there never had been, and never would be, any carnal intercourse. For this virgin was to her husband a source of joy all the more holy and wonderful, because she became a mother without man's intervention, differing from him as regards the offspring, but altogether like him in mutual fidelity. On account of this faithful union both of them could claim to be called the parents of Christ, not only Mary as His mother but also Joseph as His father, just as he was called the husband of Mary, though he was the one as well as the other not in the flesh, but in the spirit. Yet both of them, he Christ's father in the spirit, she, His mother, also in the flesh, were parents of His humility, not of His majesty; of His infirmity, not of his divinity. . . . But as she had become mother without man's intervention, they certainly could not together be called Christ's parents, even of him in the form of a slave, unless they had been, though without carnal intercourse, husband and wife. Therefore also, when the genealogy of Jesus had to be traced, the line of descent had to lead down rather to

Joseph, lest the male sex, the stronger one, be treated with disrespect; and at the same time truth did not suffer, for both Joseph and Mary were of the seed of David from which it was prophesied that Christ was to come.<sup>12</sup>

To this argumentation from Scripture, St. Augustine adds in summary form a theological reason developed by him more fully elsewhere: "So all the three blessings of marriage are found in these parents of Christ: offspring, fidelity, sacrament, i.e., indissolubility. The offspring we recognize in the Lord Jesus Himself; their fidelity, because there was no adultery; the sacrament, because there was no divorce" (cf. chapter 6 *infra*).

As St. Augustine himself tells us, this argumentation of his from Matt. 1:20 was attacked by the Pelagian Julian. Let us hear his rebuttal of one of Julian's objections:

You say that he looked in the eyes of men like the husband, and you want us to understand that Holy Scripture when it called him the husband of Mary spoke thus according to what men thought of him, not what he really was. Well, let us admit that the Evangelist might have spoken thus "according to the opinion of men, provided he was giving his own words or the words of some other third person":—but how could the angel when conversing with Joseph alone, contrary to his own better knowledge and contrary to the better knowledge of him whom he was addressing, have spoken "according to the opinion of men," and not in accordance with actual facts, when he said to him: "Do not be afraid to take to thee Mary thy wife"? Furthermore, why had the genealogical series to be traced down to Joseph but for the truth that the male sex has precedence? This I have pointed out already in the

<sup>12</sup> *De nupt. et concup.*, Bk. I, chap. 2.

book to which yours was to be the answer. But you were afraid even to touch this point. When, however, the Evangelist Luke (3:23) says of our Lord that He was "supposed to be the son of Joseph," he does so because Jesus was thought by the people to be the natural son of Joseph. It was to remove this false belief, and not to deny that Mary was the true wife of Joseph, thereby contradicting the angel's testimony.<sup>13</sup>

Thus in St. Augustine, the greatest doctor of the Church, we have found a staunch supporter of the belief that Joseph and Mary were married in the proper sense of the word. Yet in spite of all this, in spite of his great authority, the attitude of the theological writers of the following centuries up to the rise of Scholasticism remained obscure or vacillating. The reasons for this were in the main the same as those that had caused a similar attitude in the earlier Fathers and ecclesiastical writers. This seems to have been owing principally to their insufficient acquaintance with Jewish and Roman law on matrimony. So we see even such distinguished men as Venerable Bede, Rhabanus Maurus, and others approaching more or less closely to the teaching of Ambrose and Augustine, even appealing to their authority, yet always falling short of arriving at a clear solution of the question. Not until Scholasticism had risen and made its influence felt did the teaching of Ambrose and Augustine make any real headway and, in spite of occasional objections, finally meet with universal acceptance. Suffice it to quote a few representative writers of the period. Our first witness deserving recognition is Rupert of Deutz, the Benedictine abbot

<sup>13</sup> *Contra Julianum*, Bk. V, no. 47 (*PL*, 44, 810).

(d. 1135). This theologian, whose importance ought to be better appreciated even now, following Augustine's lead acclaims St. Joseph as the true husband of the Blessed Virgin Mary and as father of the Lord:

"Jacob begot Joseph, the husband of Mary, and of her was born Jesus who is called Christ." By calling Joseph the husband of Mary he gives him a great, and a true, name, because if he is the husband of Mary, he is also the father of the Lord. . . . But not only did the Evangelist call Joseph the husband of Mary, but even before him an angel had done the same when he called Mary the wife of Joseph: "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take unto thee thy wife." O true and holy marriage; a marriage heavenly, not of this earth. For how, and in what were they united in marriage? In this, that both had one mind and the same mutual fidelity. Carnal corruption alone was absent. The Apostle, therefore, could truthfully say: "The first man was of the earth, earthy; the second man is from heaven, heavenly";<sup>14</sup> not as if Jesus Christ who was born of Mary had in the flesh come down from heaven and, as some heretics would have it, merely passed through Mary as through a conduit, but because the union of Mary and Joseph, like their whole life, was heavenly and the Holy Ghost engendering in them—for their conversation was in heaven—their conjugal love toward each other, and Himself reigning supreme in their hearts had entrusted this wife to this husband, and while forming a human body in the womb of the Virgin had filled the heart of this man with fatherly love for the child that was born.<sup>15</sup>

Also Hugh of St. Victor (d. 1141) takes a decided stand in favor of a true marriage between Mary and

<sup>14</sup> I Cor. 15:47.

<sup>15</sup> *In Matth.*, Bk. I, no. 568 (*PL*, 168, 1319).

Joseph. He also endeavors to explain speculatively by the scholastic method how it was possible for Mary to contract a valid marriage in spite of her resolve, or vow, of perpetual virginity. We shall later on deal briefly with the question of this compatibility. At present let us hear how emphatically he maintains his thesis:

She was, then, spouse and wife; she was also truly virgin and had not abandoned her resolve to remain a virgin. We declare, therefore, that she was an espoused virgin; we declare that she was a wife, though a virgin; we declare that later on also as mother and virgin she ever kept inviolate her vow of virginity, and that the unfading glory of chastity forever reigned side by side with the purity of the wife and the honor of motherhood. Behold now and gaze upon that virgin, our little maid so chaste, in her unique purity, her exquisite beauty, her spotlessness without a peer. . . . In whatever way it was done (how Mary found a vow of perpetual chastity compatible with the married state), we must never call in doubt that the Blessed Virgin Mary for definite and well-founded reasons, after having vowed perpetual virginity entered the holy state of matrimony without changing her resolution to remain a virgin, so that she truthfully could claim the name of wife, and yet keep the vow of virginal integrity to the end.<sup>16</sup>

And yet at the very time when Rupert of Deutz and Hugh of St. Victor so staunchly upheld the existence of a true marriage between Mary and Joseph a dissenting voice was heard again. It was no less famous an opponent than the great canonist Gratian, the author of *Decretum Gratiani*, which forms part of the old code of canon law. According to him not only the mutual consent in contracting the marriage but also its con-

<sup>16</sup> *De B.M. Virg.*, chap. 1 (*PL*, 176, 867).



summation is an essential requisite of a valid marriage. But although his opinion was accepted by a number of other canonists, the trend of theological science had already turned in the opposite direction so decidedly that Gratian's view became untenable. Not only teachers of dogmatics, as Peter Lombard, rose against him, but also others, even canonists, as Roland Bandinelli, the future pope Alexander III (d. 1181), who as pope decided some marriage questions in a sense opposite to Gratian's view, and in agreement with Hugh of St. Victor and Peter Lombard. In the course of time this opposition to Gratian grew so strong that with the beginning of the thirteenth century the controversy concerning the marriage of Joseph and Mary was virtually settled and the teaching of the "master of the sentences," Peter Lombard, was generally accepted. All the great theologians of the twelfth, thirteenth, and fourteenth centuries, St. Albert, St. Thomas, St. Bonaventure, Scotus, etc., held it and considered it binding, and thus it has been ever since. One lone exception in modern times was Joseph Freisen, who in his *History of Canon Law on Marriage* came out in favor of a view similar to Gratian's, but his opinion received little attention by theologians and was generally rejected.

Concluding this argumentation from tradition, let us hear what Benedict XIV says of the theological character of the doctrine that the marriage of Mary and Joseph was a valid marriage in the proper sense of the word: <sup>17</sup>

Whatever we may think of those theologians (before the Council of Trent) who for some reason of their own

<sup>17</sup> *De festis B.V.M.*, chap. I, no. 2.

held that no true marriage was contracted by Mary and Joseph, now, however, such a denial could not escape the censure of temerity. For Cardinal Capisucchi writes: "Such an opinion would have to be considered rash, to say the least, since the whole School with its leaders, the Master of the Sentences and the Angelic Doctor, stands unanimous for the affirmative, and the Fathers themselves, if rightly understood, say the same thing."<sup>18</sup> "To say the least" are his words, for Suarez considers it heretical to deny the real marriage between Mary and Joseph. And this censure is strenuously defended by Theophile Raynaud.<sup>19</sup>

When, according to Benedict XIV, Suarez calls the denial of this marriage heretical, while other theologians would call it merely a rash (*temeraria*) statement, the two censures, as it seems to us, differ in appearance only, not in reality. For if one considers as of faith only those doctrines that are patently contained in the sources of revelation, i.e., in Scripture and tradition, and, in addition, have been formally defined by the Church as a matter of faith, then the existence of a real marriage between Mary and Joseph is not a dogma. But if we consider as belonging to the deposit of faith also those doctrines that are patently contained in the sources of revelation and, while not formally defined, are yet universally taught and believed in the Church, the existence of this marriage is doubtlessly a part of the Catholic faith; and this is what Suarez seems to have had in mind, since he made reference to no dogmatic definition. It would even be more correct to call this doctrine simply a matter of faith because not only those

<sup>18</sup> *Controv.*, 14, sect. 9.

<sup>19</sup> *Diptych. Mar.*, VII, 45.

doctrines are sufficiently proposed to us as matters to be believed which have been solemnly defined as dogmas, but also those which are clearly contained in Holy Writ and tradition and are currently taught by the living voice of the Church. The fact that for some time no universal agreement on this point was achieved makes no difference. It is sufficient that now for centuries such an agreement has existed and that this agreement was morally, not mathematically, universal. Also Leo XIII in his encyclical on St. Joseph speaks of this marriage as of a fact that cannot be called in doubt but is vouched for by Holy Scripture and therefore revealed, and to this fact, as to their source, he traces other great privileges of St. Joseph, his exalted dignity and his appointment as patron of the Holy Church.

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## *Joseph's Virginal Marriage*

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IN THE preceding pages we have considered that the union of the Mother of God and St. Joseph was a true marriage in the proper sense of the word. Our argumentation had, of course, to be drawn in the main from the sources of revelation, Scripture, and tradition. In the course of this discussion, especially when the Fathers and theologians were drawn upon, we met occasionally references or allusions to peculiar and destructive qualities of this marriage, and in particular that special quality that invests this marriage with a special hallowed dignity and supernatural splendor: its virginal character. This we have now to examine more closely; and its appropriateness, its nobility, and other connected questions will have to be discussed. We cannot ignore these questions, for this marriage is the foundation of the supernatural holiness and dignity of St. Joseph, and this dignity and holiness in turn are the motive, and determine the norm and extent, of the veneration we have to pay to St. Joseph.

1. The present chapter will especially endeavor to prove that the marriage of Mary, the Mother of God,

with St. Joseph was a *matrimonium ratum non consummatum*: it was a virginal marriage.

This doctrine is obviously contained in Holy Scripture: Luke 1:26-38, and Matthew 1:18-25.

In the Gospel of the annunciation (Luke, chap. 1) the words of prime importance for our purpose are the words of the Blessed Virgin (v. 34): "How shall this happen, since I do not know man." This is Mary's answer to the most sublime and marvelous message that heaven ever sent to any denizen of this earth. By these words the Virgin most prudent as well as most humble, by no means tried to evade the task almighty God was setting for her. But she cannot see or understand how the angel's words could be accomplished in her; somehow she has a feeling of bewilderment and uneasiness which makes her ask this anxious question. But why this uneasiness? She herself tells us: "Since I do not know man." Up to now she has jealously guarded her virginity; it is evident that she is determined to preserve it forever. But this cannot be accounted for unless she were convinced that the Lord God had bestowed his approval and blessing upon her resolution. Were it otherwise these words, "How shall this happen, since I do not know man?" would have no meaning. Her question "How" would be out of place, if she, though a virgin up to now, yet was willing to comply with those conditions that in the natural order result in motherhood. We must conclude, therefore, that she was unalterably resolved to remain a virgin forever, and that she was convinced that almighty God had approved and blessed her resolution. And the theologians since Augustine and Thomas are justified in finding in

those words of the Blessed Virgin an indication that she had consecrated her virginity to God by a vow. St. Augustine says:

Already before Christ was conceived He had chosen a virgin consecrated to God to become His mother. This is indicated by her answer to the angel who had brought her the message: "How shall this happen, since I do not know man." She would not speak thus if she had not vowed herself to God as a virgin. However, because such vow was not yet countenanced by Jewish custom, she was espoused to a holy man, who would not rob her of that which was consecrated to God, but would rather protect her against the attacks from others. Indeed, even if she had said merely: "How shall this happen," without adding, "because I do not know man," even in that case she would certainly not have asked how she could bear her promised son, if she had married with the intention of consummating the marriage. Moreover, God might have chosen; again, it might have been that God commanded her to remain a virgin so that the Son of God might assume from her the form of a servant in a becoming and wonderful way. But as she was to be the exemplar of holy virgins of the future and people should not be led to think that only she had to be a virgin who was privileged to become a mother without the intervention of man; therefore she consecrated her virginity to God before she knew how she was going to conceive; in order that in a mortal body on this earth the heavenly life might be imitated because of a vow, not because of a command; because it was a choice of love, not something accepted under duress. When, therefore, Christ willed to be born of a virgin, who had resolved on remaining a virgin forever before she knew who was to be born of her, His purpose was rather to commend holy virginity, than to command it. And thus He wished that even in that

woman of whom He assumed His human nature, virginity should be her own free choice.<sup>1</sup>

Clearly St. Augustine thus emphasizes the freedom of the Blessed Virgin in vowing her virginity: not commanded, not forced, but voluntarily had she chosen it.

Like St. Augustine, also St. Thomas maintains that Mary had taken the vow of virginity; he, however, thinks the vow was only conditional at first, but finally absolute:

I answer that, as was said previously, the works of perfection deserve more praise when they are performed in fulfillment of a vow. Virginity was to be a distinctive feature of paramount importance in the Blessed Virgin as it is clear from the reasons given (in previous articles). . . . Nevertheless, because under the Old Law both women and men were bound by the duty of begetting children, since the true worship of God was to be propagated by way of propagation of the race, until Christ was born of that people, it is believed that the Mother of God had not taken the vow of virginity absolutely, before she was espoused to Joseph; but though she desired to do so, she subordinated her wish to God's pleasure. Afterward, however, having taken a husband, as the custom of the time required, she, together with him, took the vow of virginity.<sup>2</sup>

St. Bonaventure is of the same opinion:

For three reasons it behooved the Blessed Virgin to have made the vow of virginity. The first is, that she might be a worthy dwelling of the Son of God. For, since "wisdom"

<sup>1</sup> *De virg.*, chap. 4.

<sup>2</sup> *Summa theol.*, IIIa, q.28, a.4.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. *Wisd.* 7:25 f.

is the brightness of eternal light, and the unspotted mirror of God's majesty, into which nothing defiled can come," it was becoming for Him to be conceived by a virgin undefiled not only in fact but even in her mind and steadfast will, and the perfect purity of the will is secured by the vow of chastity. The second reason is that she was to be an exemplar for women of unblemished virginity. For as God gave Christ as a model to men, so he gave Christ's mother to women; and since this very thing, the vow of virginity, deserves most to be commended and imitated, she should live her life under that vow. The third reason is that it was to be her privilege that in her should be embodied all that is noble, all that is holy. It is unthinkable that any other women should surpass her in any way. On the contrary, he who had made her adorned her also with the privilege of all nobility, so that, as He loved her above all others, she might be also holier and more lovable than all the others. For this reason, even apart from her divine motherhood, she deserves our honor and love above all other saints; and certainly the Holy Ghost, whose inspiration prompted others to take this vow, would not fail to do the same to her.<sup>4</sup>

Suarez writes:

Those words do not indicate any doubt on her part, but they clearly indicate not only that the Blessed Virgin was resolved "not to know man" but that she felt herself so strongly bound and barred in this respect that she could never do it lawfully. For though she had not known man heretofore and was resolved not to do so even hereafter, this fact could hardly be a sufficient reason to put that anxious question, How shall this happen, if she was still at liberty to do as she pleased in this matter. She could have been given the answer that she was free to know man and

<sup>4</sup> *In IV*, d. 30, a. 1, q. 2.



conceive a son. Therefore those words, "I do not know man," must mean: "I am not allowed to know man; it is no longer a matter of my own choice." From these words thus understood also St. Augustine concludes that Mary had taken a vow.<sup>5</sup>

By this argumentation Suarez clearly shows that it must have been a vow that restrained Mary from marital intercourse; accepted by God, for she had no command in this respect and therefore no other obligation.

2. So far we have considered the virginal marriage of Mary and Joseph chiefly as far as Mary was concerned; but by our discussion the virginal character of that marriage also on the part of St. Joseph was established, at least indirectly. Let us, however examine this side of the question a little more closely. When Mary spoke those words: "How shall this happen, since I do not know man?" she was already espoused to St. Joseph, as the Gospel calls her a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph. Now, the Virgin most pure and most prudent would never have consented to this betrothal unless by a revelation from above, or by her intimate acquaintance with the character of St. Joseph, or by a mutual agreement with him, she had become absolutely convinced that her consecrated virginity would not be imperiled by her marriage, but would be all the more safe and secure. We are thus forced to conclude that St. Joseph, too, was and remained a virgin, and in short, that the marriage of Joseph and Mary was a virginal marriage.

Scotus pertinently says:

<sup>5</sup> D. 6, s. 2, a. 5.

From the angel's charge to St. Joseph, "Do not be afraid to take to thee Mary thy wife,"<sup>6</sup> we conclude without a shade of doubt that also Mary before her betrothal was given a similar instruction, whether through the angel or immediately by God Himself: "Do not be afraid to take Joseph, a just man, as thy husband; for behold, the Holy Ghost will give him to thee as a guardian and witness of thy virginity. He also, on his part, will live continently, and in many ways be at thy service to protect thy virginity."<sup>7</sup>

Furthermore, how foreign to St. Joseph's mind must have been any intention of consummating his marriage before Mary's virginal conception, may be inferred from his painful embarrassment when he was made aware that his betrothed was with child, whatever explanation we may prefer of the cause of his anxiety!

Even more clearly we have the virginal character of this marriage revealed in Matt. 1:25: "And he did not know her till she had brought forth her first-born son." We have here the positive statement of Holy Scripture that St. Joseph did not "know" the Blessed Virgin, i.e., had no carnal intercourse with her before the birth of her first-born, our Lord Jesus Christ.

But a number of heretics of the early Christian times as well as in later days abused this very text in an endeavor to prove just the opposite. From the clause, "till she had brought forth her first-born son," they argued: Consequently, according to the Evangelist, Joseph did know her at least afterward: for the negative "did not know" is limited to the time before the birth of her first-born; and, in addition, the term "first-born" is

<sup>6</sup> Matt. 1:20.

<sup>7</sup> *In IV Sent.*, dist. 30, q. 2.

certainly an indication that there were other children of Joseph and Mary after Jesus.

Both objections, however, are found to have little or no weight and have been successfully refuted since the times of the Fathers, especially by St. Jerome. As regards the first objection, the purpose of the Evangelist must not be lost sight of: his main endeavor without doubt was to bring out impressively the supernatural character of Christ's conception and birth by Mary the Virgin; for this reason he was especially bound to speak of what happened, or did not happen, up to the birth of Christ; it was not in the same degree important for his purpose to refer to the relation between Mary and Joseph after the virginal birth of the divine Child. Then the explanation of the word "till" by our objectors can be shown to be wrong. For to say that Joseph "did not know her till she had brought forth her first-born son," in no way asserts that he did so afterward. With the particle "till," Holy Scripture in a number of places merely intends to say what up to the specified time has happened or not happened; in no way does it commit itself as to the time that followed. To show the scriptural usage of this word "till," we will quote some examples used already by St. Jerome in his answer to Helvidius:

Isa. 46:4 [Jerome quotes according to the LXX]: (The Lord says): "I am, I am, and till you grow old, I am." Shall He perhaps cease to be, when they have grown old? In the Gospel our Savior says to His apostles: "Behold, I am with you all days, even unto the consummation of the world."<sup>8</sup> Will He perhaps leave His disciples after the end

<sup>8</sup> Matt. 28:20.

of the world? . . . Again it is written: "Christ must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet." <sup>9</sup> Shall He cease to reign when they are lain under His feet? Rather He will reign more completely thenceforth.<sup>10</sup>

Any mind that is fair and clean and, above all, sensitive for high moral and religious values, would take it as a matter of course that St. Joseph, whom Holy Scripture so emphatically calls a just man (in the sense of a perfect man), would never profane and desecrate with sensual lust that sanctuary, the womb of the holy virgin hallowed forever by the God-man. This line of reasoning was already used by the Fathers in meeting the attacks of Helvidius, e.g., St. Ambrose.<sup>11</sup> And St. Jerome:

Why, I ask, did St. Joseph contain himself until the birth of the child? Helvidius will answer: "Because he had heard the angel say: 'What is begotten in her is of the Holy Spirit.'" Very well! This man, then, who so firmly believed in a dream that in consequence thereof he did not dare to touch his wife: this man, I say, afterward—when he had learned from the lips of the shepherds that an angel of the Lord had come from heaven and told them: "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which shall be to all the people, for there has been born to you today in the town of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord":<sup>12</sup> and that with this angel a multitude of the heavenly host then intoned the song of praise: Glory to God in the highest, and peace on earth among men of good will, this Joseph, who had seen Simeon embrace the child

<sup>9</sup> I Cor. 15:25.

<sup>10</sup> No. 6 (*PL*, 23, 189).

<sup>11</sup> *De inst. virg.*, chap. 6.

<sup>12</sup> Luke 2:10.

and proclaim praise: "Now dost Thou dismiss Thy servant, O Lord, according to Thy word, in peace, because my eyes have seen Thy salvation"; who had seen Anna the prophetess, the Magi, the star, Herod, the angels; who, in short, had heard and seen such wonderful things, this man would have the effrontery, I ask, to violate a temple of God, a dwelling place of the Holy Ghost, the Mother of his Lord? <sup>13</sup>

In a similar vein the author of the *opus imperfectum*: "How could he dare to do such a thing after he had learned that she had become the temple of the only-begotten Son of God? What a man so religious as he would not do before, how could he have done it afterward? <sup>14</sup>

And St. Gregory the Great says: "Joseph could not dare to know Mary after he had learned the mystery of our redemption to have commenced in her womb." <sup>15</sup>

The same arguments we meet again in the theologians. Gerson gives as St. Joseph's reason for his continence before the birth of Jesus, "his reverence for such a great mystery," and adds: "Hence we are given clearly to understand that he did not know her also after the birth of Christ, because the same reason was all the more urgent afterward." And Cajetan remarks pointedly: "Unless our mind has become imbecile we cannot but see that, after learning and seeing so many wonderful things, Mary and Joseph could never even think of intercourse."

The other objection, based on the term "first-born,"

<sup>13</sup> *Adv. Helv.*, no. 8 (*PL*, 23, 190).

<sup>14</sup> *PG*, 56, 635.

<sup>15</sup> *Mor.*, Bk. VIII, no. 89 (*PL*, 75, 856).

will prove of no more weight, provided only, as it ought to be, that the common usage of the word at that time, especially in the language of the Bible, be taken in account. To this usage St. Jerome already appeals when he counters the heretic Helvidius thus: "First-born is not only he after whom others were born, but also he before whom no other one was born."<sup>16</sup> It appears quite possible that the Evangelist meant to stress this very point in order to preclude any suspicion that Mary might have been a widow before her espousal to Joseph, and thus to dispose of any possible doubt about Mary's perpetual virginity. Moreover, St. Jerome calls attention to the Law, according to which every first-born was consecrated to the Lord and had to be redeemed, and then he says: "The word of God defines what is first-born, as all that opens the womb. Otherwise if only he were a first-born who is followed by brothers, then the priests also could not claim the first fruits so long as other fruits were not yet produced. . . . Shall not the very letters of Scripture get tongues to charge me with ignorance, and say that a first-born is he who opens the womb, not he who also has brothers"?

This objection is dealt with in a similar way later by Catholic theologians and exegetes as Albert the Great, Thomas, Suarez, Maldonatus, and by moderns as Knabenbauer, Schanzch. To quote only St. Thomas:<sup>17</sup>

It is the custom of the Scriptures to call first-born not only him who is followed by brothers but also him who is born first otherwise, if only he were a first-born who is followed by brothers, also the first fruits would not be

<sup>16</sup> *Adv. Helv.*, no. 10.

<sup>17</sup> *Summa theol.*, IIIa, q. 28, a. 3.

due according to the law as long as other fruit were not produced. But this is not so, for according to the law the first fruit had to be redeemed within a month.<sup>18</sup>

When some opponents tried to cast a slur on the chastity of St. Joseph by pointing to his close daily contact with Mary and the familiarity which must have been the result, such an insinuation was already resented and ably refuted by the Fathers and early theologians. They one and all emphasize the ever perfect modesty of conduct of the Blessed Virgin, her matchless purity, her beauty whose bodily attractions were so eclipsed by the radiance of her beautiful soul that it was more apt to rouse in the beholder a love and desire for these virtues rather than a desire to endanger or impair or destroy them. Already St. Ambrose insists: "She was so full of grace that she not only preserved her own virginity but also conveyed the same distinction to others with whom she visited."<sup>19</sup> So also Thomas, Bonaventure, Gerson, Suarez. Gerson says:

Joseph was a just man, and the fomes of sin was in him either checked or extinguished, as it had to be, lest the beauty of Mary and daily familiarity with her become a scandal and his ruin. In consequence, by his life and daily contact with her he was not roused to passion but rather inspired with a love of chastity, and this was due not only to the check upon the fomes (of concupiscence) in himself and to the virtue and merit of Mary, but also to her refined and always self-disciplined behavior.<sup>20</sup>

### 3. Objections such as those we have just discussed

<sup>18</sup> Num. 18:16.

<sup>19</sup> *De inst. virg.*, chap. 7, no. 50 (PL, 16, 319).

<sup>20</sup> *Sermo de Nativ. B.V.M.*, 3.

take no account of St. Joseph's high rank, even in the supernatural order, nor of all the gifts of grace showered upon him to equip him for it. But once this exalted dignity is admitted and duly appreciated, we shall be ready to agree with the opinion now all but generally admitted, that St. Joseph not only lived with Mary in virginal marriage, but also preserved his virginity throughout his life.

Already in Christian antiquity this opinion had distinguished supporters. St. Jerome voices it quite emphatically addressing Helvidius:

You say that Mary did not always remain a virgin. But I claim even more than that, namely, that Joseph also remained a virgin through Mary, so that a virginal son was born in a virginal marriage. For if fornication can have no place in so holy a man, and if Scripture knows nothing of a second marriage of Joseph and he was much more of a protector and guardian to her than a husband, it stands to reason that he who by right is called the father of our Lord remained a virgin with Mary.<sup>21</sup>

That St. Augustine shared this opinion can be gathered from his remark against Julian: "Even after he [Joseph] had learned that the holy virgin was by God blessed with a child, he did not seek another wife, since in any case he would not even have sought her for wife had he not felt obliged to do so by the law."<sup>22</sup>

Peter Damian:

Do you not know that the Son of God valued integrity of the body so highly that he wished to become man not through a marriage however honorable, but by an invio-

<sup>21</sup> *Adv. Helv.*, no. 19.

<sup>22</sup> Bk. V, no. 48.



late virgin? And lest it appear to be sufficient if his mother was a virgin, the belief of the Church is that also he was a virgin who was thought to be His father.<sup>23</sup>

In medieval times this opinion seems to have been generally held. Since the twelfth century the term "virgin" appears again and again in connection with St. Joseph, in a sense, it is true, not identical with but similar to the sense in which it is applied to the Blessed Virgin: e.g., Peter Comestor (d. 1179) says: "With the Virgin he remained a virgin."<sup>24</sup> And Peter of Riga (d. 1180): "That man complied with the divine injunctions, rejoicing that he belonged to a virgin, and remaining a virgin with the holy Virgin."

Thenceforth we find this doctrine (of the perpetual virginity of St. Joseph) adopted by the great theologians, such as St. Albert and St. Thomas.

St. Albert holds that Joseph, like Mary, had made a vow of virginity and chastity. To show how becoming and necessary this was, he stresses the close connection Joseph had with those most holy persons, Jesus and Mary:

He had the resolve of perpetual chastity. Otherwise it would have been reckless temerity for himself if defiled, to touch the body of the Redeemer or that perfect mirror of purity, the body of his most holy mother, as Isaias says (52:11): "Be ye clean, you that carry the vessels of the Lord." Oza<sup>25</sup> putting forth his hand to the ark of God and taking hold of it was struck dead because he was defiled through his wife; and yet the ark was only dimly fore-

<sup>23</sup> *On Celibacy of Priests*, chap. 3 (PL, 145, 384).

<sup>24</sup> *Hist. schol.*, Bk. I, chap. 3.

<sup>25</sup> II Kings 7:6.

shadowing this holiness of Mary. How could Joseph have dared to busy himself about Jesus and Mary with the stain of unchastity on his soul? In Exodus 29: 10-15 the sons of Israel were warned to wash their garments and not to come near their wives, before the Lord would appear to them amid fire and smoke.

How much stronger reasons for vowing perpetual chastity must we believe those to have who even only with their hands shall touch the very flower of chastity? Finally, for what reason could divine Wisdom have chosen one defiled to act as witness and protector to the Mother of God? <sup>26</sup>

St. Thomas: "We believe that as the mother of Jesus was a virgin, so was St. Joseph, because Jesus commended her, a virgin, to a virgin, not only at the end of His life (to St. John) but also at the beginning (to St. Joseph)." <sup>27</sup>

St. Bernardine of Siena: "Though under obligation to take a wife (to marry), he kept to his desire and resolution to remain a virgin." <sup>28</sup>

Gerson:

As it behooved Mary to be resplendent with all purity, so it was meet that she should always have a husband distinguished for his purity, who with her, ever Virgin, would remain a virgin. Even as both were equally distinguished by their royal lineage, Mary vowed virginity; and Joseph, as the theologians tell us, did likewise. This vow is no obstacle to a true marriage . . . and in this marriage also we have offspring, fidelity, indissolubility.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>26</sup> On Matt. 1:18.

<sup>27</sup> On Matt. 12:47.

<sup>28</sup> *Sermon on St. Joseph.*

<sup>29</sup> *Sermo de Nativ. B.V.M.*, 3.

Toletus:

If the Virgin was entrusted to John on account of his virginity, it was no less proper that the Virgin was given in marriage to a man who was a virgin; rather would it seem to be even more befitting. For to John she was given for a mother, and this title precludes all suspicion of anything unseemly. But to Joseph she was given as a spouse, a title which could suggest that there were marital relations, especially since the Blessed Virgin was in her youth at the time of her marriage, but not at the time of the Passion. So to put her chastity above suspicion, the Virgin had to be given to a virgin. This point must be held.<sup>30</sup>

Salmeron:

Christ the Lord wished to be nourished and raised only amid virginal purity; yea, Joseph was not only virgin, but God had extinguished in him all the fire of concupiscence, so that he might in all decency and holiness be about the fairest maid, the Blessed Virgin, and day and night live with her quite familiarly.<sup>31</sup>

To quote at least one of the outstanding theologians of modern times, Scheeben:

That Joseph, like Mary, was always a virgin both before and after their wedding, has not been established dogmatically and cannot be established that way. But it can be fairly presumed in view, on the one hand, of the high vocation of Joseph and of its analogy with that of the virginal disciple who on account of this very quality was admitted to a similar relation of familiarity with Jesus and Mary; and on the other hand, because the marriage of Joseph and Mary demands also on his part a vow of virgin-

<sup>30</sup> *In Luc.*, chap. 1.

<sup>31</sup> Vol. III, tract. 19.

ity, a vow which in turn indicates that his whole life was ruled by the ideal of virginal purity.<sup>32</sup>

This remark of Scheeben's, that the perpetual virginity of St. Joseph is neither proved nor provable dogmatically, can mean only that we have no scriptural testimony bearing directly and explicitly on this point and that there is for it no general tradition reaching back to antiquity; not, however, that it cannot be logically deduced from data furnished by Scripture and tradition. Indeed, he himself avers that certain facts, vouched for by Scripture, e.g., the marriage between Joseph and Mary, establish a safe presumption for this virginity.

As a conclusion it may be worth while to bring together and state in detail the so-called *rationes convenientiae* or *epigentiae* which the Fathers and later theologians adduce more or less explicitly in favor of the virginity of St. Joseph. These reasons, together with what has by now become the all but universal consensus of theologians, will establish a sufficiently safe ground on which to rest our case. At the same time they bear out the presumption which Scheeben demands.

The following considerations, then, if unprejudiced and close attention is given to the matter, will show how unlikely it is, even how unthinkable and impossible, that St. Joseph should have lacked this prerogative of perpetual virginity.

This holy patriarch had been chosen and destined by divine Providence to spend many years of his earthly pilgrimage in the closest and most intimate companion-

<sup>32</sup> *Dogmatik*, III, 489.

ship with those most august and holy persons, Jesus, and Mary. He was in truth the husband of the Virgin Mother of God, and therefore in a true sense father of the God-man, Jesus, and the head of the Holy Family and, consequently, its official representative and protector. To be able to meet this sublime task Joseph was, without any doubt, endowed by God with all the required helps of grace. But the Mother of God was the Virgin most pure, the Queen of virgins, the virgin par excellence: without the least impairment of her virginity she conceived and brought forth the divine Child Jesus; she has kept free from even the least shadow of a stain her virginity which she had consecrated to God of her own free will. Moreover, she was the Virgin most prudent, who would never have pledged her troth to St. Joseph had she not known beforehand, whether by natural or supernatural ways, that her holy spouse, too, had always been and, in addition, was determined ever to remain a virgin.

And the child Jesus, the God-man, who was to redeem mankind came into this temporal world in order also to restore to virginity its rightful, honored place. He openly showed His special love for virginal souls, He would assume His human nature, and be conceived and born, of an inviolate Virgin. For His apostles He chose such men as would leave everything for His sake and, at least after their vocation, live a life of continency. His best beloved disciple was to be St. John, who was and always remained a virgin; who was allowed to rest his head on his Master's breast when the latter at the Last Supper instituted the sacrament of His love; and to whose care and custody, from the tree of

the cross, before giving up His spirit to the Father, Jesus was to entrust His own mother; the Virgin most pure to the virginal beloved disciple.

When due consideration is given to all these strikingly significant facts—the high value placed upon virginity by Jesus and Mary, the eminent dignity of St. Joseph because of his most intimate association with our Savior, the God-man who Himself was a virgin, and with the Virgin Mother of God—must it then not appear most unlikely, an utter anomaly, if in spite of all this, St. Joseph did not also share in this prerogative of perpetual virginity? Thus it came to pass that this belief in St. Joseph's perpetual virginity has worked its way finally to its general acceptance by Catholic theology and by the joyful willing faith of the Catholic people.



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*Objections to the Virginal Marriage of  
Mary and Joseph*

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IN OUR previous chapter we endeavored to prove the existence of a true marriage between Mary and Joseph and in a general way to explain its nature. We also gave what evidence there is for the perpetual virginity of St. Joseph. There remain, however, two difficulties that must be solved or cleared up before a full understanding of this holy union is possible. To give this solution is the aim of the present chapter.

I. Against the Catholic teaching it was urged in Christian antiquity by the heretic Helvidius with his followers, and later on to our own times by Protestants and rationalists, that in diverse places of the New Testament a number of apostles or disciples of Christ are designated as "brethren of the Lord." There must, then, have been other children from a previous marriage of St. Joseph; at any rate the perpetual virginity of St. Joseph is questionable. This objection has found its match already in the expert scholarship, and trenchant sarcasm, of St. Jerome who confuted it in his work against Helvidius. It was also taken up and dealt with in detail by later theologians. Among the more recent

ones should be noted Meinertz, *Der Jakobusbrief und sein Verfasser*," Part I, in *Biblische Studien*, Vol. X, and Durand, *L'enfance de Jésus-Christ suivie d'une étude sur les frères du Seigneur*." For our purpose a shorter explanation will suffice for a refutation.

It is a fact, well recognized and not to be denied, that in the language of Scripture not only full brothers and sisters, i.e., actual children of the same parents, may go by the name of brothers and sisters. Thus in the Old Testament Abraham and Lot are called brothers though they were only uncle and nephew; the same with Laban and Jacob; so also kinsmen of King Ochozias called themselves brothers of the King though not at all brothers in the strict sense of the term.<sup>1</sup>

It is, therefore, a patent fallacy if from the one fact that in the New Testament some apostles or disciples of the Lord are called brothers of Jesus the conclusion is drawn that they have the same parent or parents with our Lord, and that thus either the virginal character of the marriage of Mary and Joseph or at least the perpetual virginity of St. Joseph is called in question. But it is not only a fallacy but downright error, because from other passages of the New Testament it is evident that those "brethren of the Lord" are not his brothers in the natural sense of the word but other near relatives, i.e., cousins. When Jesus was preaching at Nazareth the people of the town called the following men "his brethren" according to Matthew 13:55: James, Joseph, Simon, Jude; according to Mark 6:3, with a change in the sequence: James, Joseph, Jude, Simon.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Gen. 14:16; 24:48; 29:12, 15; Lev. 10:4; IV Kings 10:13. More examples are given by St. Jerome.



But in the history of our Lord's passion, in both Matthew (27:56) and Mark (15:40) we find a James and a Joseph to be the sons of a Mary who (according to John 19:25) was a sister of Mary the mother of Jesus, both of whom must evidently be identical with the James and Joseph enumerated above among the "brothers of Jesus"; for if this Mary under the cross is to be identified by the names of her sons, these latter must already have been named or known before. Furthermore, in the lists of apostles (Matt. 10:3; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:15; Acts 1:13) the same James is surnamed (son) of Alphaeus (= Cleophas; cf. John 19:25 with Mark 10:40) just as he is called by Mark (in the passage just referred to) James the Less, to distinguish him from James the Greater, the son of Zebedee. Lastly St. Jude in his epistle (chap. 1) styles himself the "brother of James." Thus a careful comparison of the pertinent data of Scripture reveals these "brothers of Jesus" to be actually the sons of Alphaeus Cleophas and the Mary mentioned above. If they are nevertheless called "brothers of Jesus," they are such only in the wider sense of near relatives: they are cousins of Jesus.

The other supposition, that they were sons of Joseph from a previous marriage, has no shred of support in Holy Scripture. On the contrary, it is disproved by those very texts we have examined; it is in contradiction with the biblical narrative of our Savior's early life; no trace of it is found there of any "brothers of Jesus," not even in those passages where events are narrated in which the presence and participation of any real brothers of Jesus would have been simply unavoidable. St. Jerome remarks on this question:

Some writers conjecture the "brethren of the Lord" to be the sons of Joseph from another wife, following in this hallucination of apocryphal writers, and put forth a fictitious woman Melcha or Escha. We, however, as we wrote in our treatise against Helvidius, understand the brethren of the Lord to be not the sons of Joseph, but cousins-german of the Savior, sons of Mary the aunt of our Lord, of whom it is said that she was the mother of James the Less and Joseph and Jude who, as we read elsewhere in the Gospel, were called brethren of the Lord. That cousins sometimes were called brothers the whole Scripture bears witness.<sup>2</sup>

Still more conflicting with Holy Scripture, not only with the account of the annunciation but also with the scene of the crucifixion (John 19:25-27) is the assumption that the "brothers of Jesus" were natural sons of Mary the mother of God: "Now there were standing by the cross of Jesus His mother and His mother's sister, Mary of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalen. When Jesus, therefore, saw His mother and the disciple standing by, whom He loved, He said to His mother, 'Woman, behold thy son.' Then he said to the disciple, 'Behold thy mother.' And from that hour the disciple took her into his home." But how could Jesus have assigned His mother away from her own children and entrusted her to a disciple, a beloved one, it is true, yet no blood relation at all; entrusted her to him as if to her only son (as the original text suggests) to be protected and taken care of by him—with total disregard of her own children?

<sup>2</sup> *In Matth.* 12:40, 50.

Several of the Fathers noted the significance of all this. St. Hilary:

Some utterly depraved men have the hardihood to assert in support of their own opinion that it has been handed down that our Lord had several brothers. But if these had been Mary's sons . . . she would, at the time of the Passion, never been assigned as mother to John the Apostle, as the Lord said both to His mother, "Woman, behold thy son," and to John, "Behold thy mother"; for He thus left behind in His disciple His own filial love to comfort her who was now left alone in the world.<sup>3</sup>

St. Ambrose:

And our Lord Himself while hanging on the cross made it clear [that his mother was always a virgin] when He said to His mother, "Woman, behold thy Son"; then to His disciple, "Behold thy mother." And both the mother and the disciple bear witness, for from that hour the disciple took her into his home. To be sure, if she had ever carnally known her husband she would never have left him, nor would he, a just man, ever have permitted her to leave him. And how could our Lord have caused this separation as He did since according to His own words no one may dismiss his wife except on account of immorality.<sup>4</sup> (St. Ambrose here seems to suppose that St. Joseph was still living at the time of the crucifixion: an opinion generally, and justly, abandoned in later times.)

St. Peter Chrysologus: "If the Blessed Mary had had other sons, Christ on the cross in the hour of His death would not give His mother to a disciple, would

<sup>3</sup> *In Matth.*, chap. 1.

<sup>4</sup> *In Luc.*, Bk. II, no. 4.

not entrust her to one not a member of the family.”<sup>5</sup>

It is, therefore, beyond all question. The “brothers of Jesus” mentioned in the New Testament were neither the sons of the marriage of Mary and Joseph, nor the offspring of a previous marriage of St. Joseph. St. Jerome refuting this objection, as he did with others, in a masterly though, it cannot be denied, bitterly sarcastic way, already pointed out that it had its origin in some phantastic stories of apocryphal writers.

II. The second difficulty that has to be cleared away if we wish to achieve a correct understanding of this marriage between Mary and Joseph is inherent in the matter itself: Is such a thing as a virginal marriage at all possible? Is a “virginal marriage” not rather a contradiction in terms? To answer this question as clearly and concisely as possible, we shall endeavor to prove the following proposition: A virginal marriage involved no contradiction in itself; on the contrary, the married state and perpetual virginity, even if the latter is consecrated by a vow, can well coexist in the same persons (husband and wife).

A few remarks on the nature of marriage and on the vow of virginity will clear the way for our argument.

a) What is marriage? What is its essential element? Marriage has its foundation both in the natural law and in the positive divine law. It may be defined as the permanent, moral, and juridical, union of man and woman, based on a contract, for the purpose, in the first place, of generation and education of offspring; in the second place for the purpose of mutual help

<sup>5</sup> *Sermo* 48.

and of a rational control of the sexual instinct. The first and primary end of marriage, therefore, is the procreation and education of offspring, and through this the preservation and increase of the race, as our first parents were told by God: "Increase and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it." <sup>6</sup> But since man and woman, being sexually different, have also different requirements, even man depends on woman, the stronger on the weaker. If woman looks to man for protection, so man to woman for wifely care and attention. Therefore mutual help and assistance is the second end of marriage: "Let us make him a help like himself." After the fall of man a third end was to be served by marriage: by its very nature marriage became a *remedium concupiscentiae*, i.e., it was to serve as rational control of the sexual instinct, which had become disordered concupiscence through the first sin. The Apostle refers to this when he says: "For fear of fornication, let each man have his own wife," etc.<sup>7</sup>

Our definition of marriage, though couched in different words, is substantially the same as that given in the Roman Catechism, the classic definition since the time of Peter Lombard: Marriage is the conjugal union of man and woman, contracted between two qualified persons which obliges them to live together throughout life.

The following observations and distinctions will help to show more clearly some implications of our thesis.

<sup>6</sup> Gen. 1:28.

<sup>7</sup> I Cor. 7:2.

1. The threefold end of marriage given in our definition is the *finis operis*, the end objectively inherent in the marriage itself, toward which it tends by its very nature, even though, on account of some obstacle, not all three can be achieved in all cases. Well to be distinguished from this threefold natural end is the *finis operantis*, the immediate goal which the persons marrying have in mind, their subjective motive. The latter in the mind of the persons may be identical with the threefold end intrinsic to every marriage, or it may be a different one, e.g., the desire to improve one's economic condition, or to please one's parents or superiors, provided only that it is compatible with the primary end. Needless to say that any one of the three objective ends would be sufficient as a lawful motive. Thus the need of protection or help, or the desire for a lawful way of exercising the sexual function would be sufficient as a motive for contracting a valid marriage. Nor is it necessary that the primary end, the procreation of children, be consciously intended, only provided again that nothing be positively done or intended that runs counter to this primary end.

2. A clear distinction is also to be made between the act of marrying and the married state, i.e., the permanent union of man and wife. The former is a transitory juridical act, a contract, by which permanent rights are granted and permanent duties accepted. These rights and duties form the marriage bond, the essential element of marriage. What these rights and duties are the Apostle tells us: "Let the husband render to the wife her due, and likewise the wife to the husband. The wife has not authority over her body, but the

husband; the husband likewise has not authority over his body, but the wife";<sup>8</sup> i.e., the parties give to each other the right over their bodies for those acts which are required for generation, and by which they become the adequate principle of generation. St. Thomas states our distinction clearly and tersely: Matrimony is not the consent (the contract) itself but the union effected by that contract of the two persons directed to one purpose.<sup>9</sup>

3. The consummation of the marriage, that is, the actual use of the right to marital intercourse, does not belong to the essence of marriage. It rather presupposes the existence of marriage in order to be itself lawful, and it gives to marriage only that kind of perfection which it reaches by achieving its main purpose. Thus again St. Thomas.<sup>10</sup>

4. The right to marital intercourse is not such that it may be exercised at will at any time and under any circumstances. Its use may sometimes be impeded or estopped not only by physical causes but also on moral grounds, without prejudice to the marriage bond.

5. Nor is actual fertility an essential element of marriage. For a true and valid marriage can exist between sterile or elderly persons who, though capable of intercourse, are not capable of begetting children.

6. Certain duties—a) to live in common, b) when using the marriage right, not to obstruct by positive action the primary end of marriage, c) when blessed with children, to give them a proper education—are

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 7:3 f.

<sup>9</sup> *Summa theol.*, Suppl., q.45, a.1, ad 2.

<sup>10</sup> *Summa theol.*, IIIa, q.29, a.2.

not themselves part of the essence of marriage, but are necessary consequences of every marriage, or of every fertile marriage.

7. The foregoing observations justify our assertion that the essence of marriage consists solely in the permanent moral-juridical bond which through mutual rights and duties unites husband and wife into one, legitimate, adequate principle of generation. This is also the view of St. Thomas and with him of theologians generally. They explicitly distinguish the transitory act through which the marriage is contracted, and the moral-juridical permanent bond through which husband and wife are united formally: the former is the effective cause of marriage, the latter the formal constitutive element.<sup>11</sup>

8. Lastly, marriage is essentially a spiritual bond, since it consists of rights and duties which are spiritual things although they may concern also things material.

b) Having considered the essence of marriage, we must briefly give our attention to the vow of virginity. What, in general, is a vow? It is a promise made to God by which a man obliges himself to do something pleasing to Him. The vow of virginity, therefore, is the deliberate promise made to God, and for the love of Him, to abstain from all and every sexual pleasure whether lawful, as in the married state, or unlawful. While the observance of conjugal fidelity is a matter of justice, the vow, being an act of worship, belongs to the virtue of religion, and its violation is an act of sacrilege.

Now the Blessed Virgin and St. Joseph were truly united in a valid marriage. On the other hand, the per-

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, Suppl., q.44, a. 1; q.45, a. 1; q.52, a.2.



petual virginity secured by a vow not only of the Blessed Virgin but also of St. Joseph is a fact that cannot be seriously doubted. The question therefore arises, how such a vow can be reconciled with a valid marriage contract, perpetual virginity with a lasting marriage bond. It may seem that they simply cannot coexist in the same persons, especially so if, in addition, perpetual virginity was mutually made a condition when the contract was entered upon. For by their marriage husband and wife have the right, and under certain conditions, the strict duty, to sexual intercourse; on the other hand, by their vow recognized in the marriage contract that right and duty seems to be annulled.

To overcome this difficulty we have first to recall the distinction we have made between the threefold end intrinsic to every valid marriage and the subjective motive of the contracting parties. That threefold objective end need not be also the subjective and formal motive of the parties concerned; e.g., if their one impelling motive in marrying were that of securing mutual help and assistance, or the desire of receiving the sacramental grace, without any intention, however, positively to obstruct the primary end, their marriage would without doubt be both valid and licit.

Furthermore, we have to distinguish the right and the use of the right: the right can exist without ever being used. A man may have the right to take up his residence in a certain house without ever doing so. The same is true in our case: the right to sexual intercourse may exist without ever being exercised. A couple after being married may decide by mutual agreement—the

agreement, be it understood, to be binding by virtue of fidelity only—never to consummate the marriage. But if they can do so after marriage without thereby destroying its essential character, then they can also make the same agreement when contracting marriage without endangering the validity of their contract. In both cases they would retain the right to sexual intercourse, but by their mutual agreement they would assume the obligation—the obligation of fidelity to one's promises, not an obligation of formal justice—to refrain from making use of their right.

Similar to this, if not the same, is the condition of a husband and wife who either after or before their marriage with mutual consent have taken the vow of virginity. By their marriage all the essential marital rights come vested in them; these rights are not annulled or abrogated but only suspended by an obligation of the vow not to consummate the marriage, that is, not to exercise their vested right, this obligation being founded on a vow and therefore on the virtue of religion and not of justice in the formal sense. Therefore, if this couple in contravention to their vow of virginity were to have sexual relations with each other it would not be a sin against justice nor would it be fornication, but a sin against the virtue of religion, a sacrilege. But if either of the two persons would do the same with a third person, it would be not only a sacrilege, but also adultery and a sin against justice.

We have said that an agreement involving an obligation of fidelity not to consummate the marriage, or a mutual vow of virginity resulting in an obligation of the virtue of religion, is not incompatible with the ju-

ridical right, acquired by the marriage, to marital intercourse. For there is here no conflict of right with right both connoting justice, but only a suspension of an existing right through an additional obligation arising from another cause. Some theologians, it is true, would go further and maintain that an agreement not to use the right of marriage would not abrogate the right itself, even if the agreement were intended to bind in strict justice. Other authorities, however, stoutly oppose this view. A few short remarks may be allowed and must be sufficient on this special question.

We would say that the continued existence of the right to marital intercourse and an obligation in justice added to it by a compact to refrain from it, are contradictory and cannot coexist in the same persons: they exclude each other, just as "yes" and "no" exclude each other as an answer to the same question. It is hard to see how the opponents of this view can invoke, in support of their opinion, as they do, the distinction between a right and the use of that right; for the right to marital intercourse is not a right of ownership of (or right of property over) the body of another, but the right to use it. The right of property and the right to use it may well be separated by a contract (binding in justice); but how can the right to use be contractually separated from what itself is a mere right to use? Note the difference between the right of ownership (e.g., over a house or farm and the right to hunt on grounds owned by another). The marriage right is evidently a mere right to use, not a right of possession or property; for otherwise it would not be a violation of justice if a man were to defraud his wife by mutilation of a mem-

ber. How, then, can, by an agreement, an obligation binding in justice arise not to use this "right to use" without destroying the right itself? It seems to us that this difficulty is insoluble. Fortunately we do not need to solve it in order to vindicate the virginal marriage of Mary and Joseph: our own explanation given in this chapter is fully sufficient as the champions of the last mentioned opinions will have to admit.

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### *The Special Mission of This Marriage*<sup>1</sup>

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IN THE divine plan the special purpose of this marriage was to furnish the conditions under which the Incarnation should take place.

Up to now we have considered three aspects of the marriage between Mary and Joseph: 1. that it was a true and valid marriage; 2. that it was a marriage ratified but not consummated; 3. that, though a true and valid marriage, it was not incompatible with the state and vow of virginity. There remain three other things in connection with this marriage that call for special consideration: 1. the reason for this marriage, or the providential task this marriage had to perform; 2. how the three *bona* which the theologians since St. Augustine ascribe to every valid marriage are actually, and indeed most perfectly, verified in this marriage; 3. the wonderfully exalted position to which St. Joseph was raised by this conjugal union with the Mother of God. These three considerations have an important bearing on the aim we have set for this book.

In the present chapter we ask: What is the sublime

<sup>1</sup> This chapter is practically a commentary on *Summa theol.*, IIIa, q. 29, a. 1.

mission or the reasons of this marriage? When we speak here of reasons we do not mean external reasons, or causes, that may have contributed to bring about this marriage, such as a desire on the part of the parents of the Blessed Virgin or the advice of the priests in the temple, to whose tutelage according to an ancient tradition Mary had been entrusted; for concerning these things only conjectures, no positive statements, are possible. Nor would the high repute in which the married state was held among the Jews when blessed with offspring, have had a decisive influence on Mary and Joseph. For theirs was to be a virginal marriage. Notwithstanding the high value placed on marriage, there are several instances in the Old Testament showing that continence and virginity were considered something pleasing to God. Thus married people, before they had to approach the divine Majesty in the performance of religious rites, e.g., priests officiating in the temple, were bound by the law to abstain from marital intercourse. After all, it seems plausible enough that Mary and Joseph must have been acting upon a revelation or inspiration from on high when they entered upon this marriage that was to have such an intimate relation to the incarnation of the Son of God. We should, therefore, endeavor above all to discover and understand what role this marriage had in the plan of divine Providence.

Scripture furnishes scarcely any clues. But the Fathers and later the great Scholastics of the Middle Ages directed their search to this very question, the close connection of this marriage with the Incarnation, to find and determine its reasons. Among the Fathers those

deserving special mention are Ignatius, Origen, Eusebius the Church historian, Hilary, Epiphanius, Ambrose, Chrysostom, Jerome, Augustine. St. Thomas, collecting and systematizing most of the findings of the Fathers, shows that in a threefold respect it was most fitting that the Son of God was conceived and born of an espoused virgin; that He, therefore, entered this temporal world as in a true and real marriage. St. Thomas also discussed with remarkable lucidity other cognate questions that are helpful to a study of the mystery of the Incarnation; e.g., why the Son of God should be conceived and born of a woman of this race of Adam; by one who was and remained a virgin before, in, and after the conception and birth of Christ, by one of the line of David, etc. Since those questions are beyond the scope of our discussions, we limit ourselves to the one point that concerns us here: the fitness, or even moral necessity, that the Son of God was born of an espoused virgin, or that He appeared on earth as the supernatural fruit of the virginal marriage between Mary and Joseph. We state the reasons as given by St. Thomas,<sup>2</sup> and add some explanations as far as they are deemed necessary or helpful.

“It was fitting that Christ should be born of an espoused virgin; first, for His own sake; secondly, for His mother’s sake; thirdly, for our sake.

“I. For the sake of Christ Himself. We can adduce four reasons: the first is that He should not be rejected by unbelievers as an illegitimate child. Wherefore Ambrose says: ‘What blame could be put on the Jews and Herod if they seemed to persecute one born of adul-

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

tery?" To understand the full import of this first reason given by St. Thomas it is sufficient to call to mind how little prepared the Jewish and pagan contemporaries of Christ were to accept with a sincere and humble faith a mystery so singular and wonderful as the virgin birth of the Savior. They would certainly have considered Him illegitimate and would have heaped ignominy and obloquy on Him. The wisdom of divine Providence, therefore, chose to cover up the mystery by this marriage as by a veil until the time when, through the miracles of Jesus and especially His resurrection and ascension, Jews and pagans were prepared to open their minds also to the message of the Savior's mysterious and wonderful entrance into this visible world. Already Eusebius stressed this point when he said: "The proper time for revealing this mystery could not have come until Christ had risen from the dead and had ascended into heaven; until the fame of Him as the Word of God had spread over the world, the nations were being called and the divine prophecies were being fulfilled so that the event gave visible proof of their truthfulness." <sup>3</sup>

"The second reason was that his genealogy could be traced in the customary way, i.e., by the male ancestors. Therefore Ambrose says: "He who came into the world had to be enrolled according to the custom of the world. But for this a male person is required; for it is the man who represents (the dignity of) the family in the Senate and other courts of record. We see the same in the usage of the Scriptures where stress is al-

<sup>3</sup> *Questions on the Gospels*, I, 6.



ways laid on the descent of the male persons.”<sup>4</sup> The significant point here is that, especially among the Jews, the genealogy is always traced through the male line. Now, if Mary had not been married to a man, the descent of Jesus from David could not have been established; it would have remained in doubt, and even under a cloud. But since the promised Redeemer could not allow a shadow to fall on His birth, and according to the prophecies He was to be “the son of David,” Mary, the mother of Jesus, had to be united in marriage with a man of the house of David.

“The third reason was the safeguarding of the newborn child lest the devil should fiercely try to harm or hamper Him. Hence Ignatius says that Mary was espoused to a man in order that the manner of the birth of Christ could be kept a secret from the devil.” The force of this third reason has been questioned or denied by some theologians, e.g., Scotus, Maldonatus, Natalis Alexander. However, it had its supporters in a number of the Fathers and other early writers, e.g., Origen, Basil, Jerome, Chrysostom, Ambrose, Bernard, and for this reason deserves at least respectful attention. That it is not devoid of all probability if rightly understood and not overstressed, the following considerations may show.

It was in the plans of God’s providence that the incarnate Son of God pass through all the stages of childhood and youth until, grown to full manhood, He should bring the sacrifice of His life on the altar of the cross. Also His Messianic mission and His divine son-

<sup>4</sup> *In Luc.*, chap. 3.

ship should become known and recognized first in the intimate circle of His friends and chosen disciples and only then, and gradually, by the general public. The prince of darkness, too, should only gradually and not too early become aware of it to keep him from attacking too fiercely the little flock of the nascent Church. True, God in His power could have kept him in check by force. But divine Providence, disposing all things not only mightily but also gently, preferred to keep the secret of the wonderful conception and birth of the Savior from the enemy for a while. The means to this end may well have been the marriage of the Blessed Virgin with St. Joseph which, as we have said, was like a veil to hide the mystery from unwelcome eyes. That the devil, strictly speaking, was physically able to become aware of it, is not denied; but he is not omniscient, and God's wisdom could certainly arrange conditions and circumstances so that the virginal conception and birth remained unknown to the enemy without interference with his natural powers. If thus understood, the third reason given by St. Thomas cannot be dismissed offhand as altogether negligible.

“The fourth reason was that Jesus might be nourished by Joseph, who is therefore called His father, as His foster father.” This reason is plain. The divine Child who in His mortal life would share with us all the infirmities and needs of our human nature, to be like to us also in this regard, needed someone who would feed, guard and, if needed, defend Him: duties which in the nature of the thing belong to the head and father of the family. Hence it was fitting, even morally necessary, that Mary should be espoused to a man who by this

marriage became her child's father, not indeed in the physical sense, but true father nevertheless, in a higher and nobler way, as we shall see later on. And how faithfully and constantly St. Joseph discharged those duties we know from the Gospels: it was he who gave to the Child the name Jesus as he had been commissioned by the angel; he presented Him to God in the temple according to the Law; he saved Him from the clutches of cruel King Herod by taking Him to Egypt; with Mary, after visiting the temple, he went on the sorrowful search for the Child apparently lost; it was he whose wishes and directions governed the household at Nazareth, and the divine Child was subject to him as well as to the holy Mother, as Holy Scripture clearly indicates.

II. The second group of reasons, three in number, tell us why this marriage was in the interest of Mary the Virgin Mother. "First, that she should be saved from the punishment provided by law for adultery, or an illegitimate pregnancy; i.e., lest she should be stoned as an adulteress," as Jerome says. This reason, too, is clear: the Blessed Virgin would have been suspected by the Jews of sexual delinquency and, as she had no means of defense that could avail against them, she would have been stoned to death whether her alleged delinquency was with a married or an unmarried man: "If virginity is not found in the accused damsel, they shall cast her out of her father's house, and the men of the city shall stone her to death, and she shall die: because she hath done a wicked thing in Israel, to commit fornication in her father's house."<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Deut. 22:20 f.

Secondly, that she might be preserved from infamy; whence Ambrose says: "She was espoused lest she be branded with the stigma of violated virginity, since her pregnant womb would be considered a sign of moral corruption." <sup>6</sup> With the shining immaculate purity and holiness of the divine Child, that of His mother is necessarily connected. Therefore to keep her holiness above all suspicion, the marriage with St. Joseph was provided for. Any taint attaching to the conception and birth of Christ would be utterly irreconcilable with the holiness or providence of God. It would have rendered the hearts of men loath to go along with God's plan of redemption, might have frustrated it. Moreover the singular love of God for the immaculate Virgin could not permit that her absolute freedom from every sin, that of unchastity above all, could be questioned in any manner whatever. This is what St. Ambrose means when he says: "The Lord would rather have some people entertain doubts about His origin than about the purity of His mother. For He knew how sensitive was the modesty of the Virgin and how delicate a thing the reputation of a pure woman, and He did not think that the belief in His origin should be built up at the cost of disgrace to His mother."

Thirdly, that she might have the services of St. Joseph, as Jerome says. What we said above about the Child applies in a similar fashion to the mother. She, too, was not free from the infirmities nor above the needs of our human nature. Hardships and sorrow were also her portion on earth. Long before the tragedy of Calvary she had begun to be the mother of sorrows

<sup>6</sup> *In Luc.*, chap. 1.

because she was the true mother of the Man of sorrows. She, too, needed a bread-winner, a guardian and defender, and no better one could be found than a husband with the heart and loving solicitude of St. Joseph.

III. St. Thomas gives a number of reasons why this marriage was most fitting for our sake, inasmuch as the virginal marriage of Mary and Joseph brought some great advantages to our faith and Christian morals. He writes as follows:

“First, that Christ was born of a virgin is now proved by Joseph as a witness. Therefore Ambrose says: ‘The more trustworthy witness for her purity is the husband who would certainly resent the wrong and could avenge the disgrace if he had not become aware of the mystery.’” In behalf of our belief in the virginal conception and birth of our Savior we could not wish for a more competent and trustworthy witness than St. Joseph. And we owe this to his virginal marriage with Mary. As St. Ambrose remarks, St. Joseph as husband would certainly have felt keenly any disgrace caused by the infidelity of his wedded wife. Moreover, how far he himself was from any thought of consummating his marriage is clearly shown by his worry, if not dismay, when he became aware that his spouse so pure was with child. Relief came to his soul only when in a prophetic dream an angel from heaven appeared and told him to take heart: “Do not be afraid, Joseph, to take to thee Mary thy wife, for that which is begotten in her is of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>†</sup> Thus St. Joseph’s own testimony is corroborated by a messenger sent by God Himself. The value of this testimony of St. Joseph is

<sup>†</sup> Matt. 1:20.

aptly illustrated by St. Bernard comparing it with the faith of the apostle Thomas, at first weak and hesitating, but all the bolder and stronger afterward: "As Thomas first doubting and feeling his way became afterward the courageous and steadfast witness to the resurrection of our Lord, so Joseph, having married the Blessed Virgin and thus, living in close association with her, enabled to assure himself of her holy life while she was under his care, because the most reliable, the star witness, for Mary's purity. . . . For, as I am a weak man, I myself in regard to the Resurrection would sooner have believed Thomas who first was doubting and hesitating, then I would have believed Cephas who heard and believed at once; and so likewise, regarding the continence of the mother I would believe her husband who was guarding and watching her, more than the Virgin herself when in her defense he calls her own guiltless conscience to witness."<sup>8</sup> But here we have already touched upon the next reason of St. Thomas.

"Secondly, thereby the words of the Virgin Mother become the more credible when she asserts her own virginity. Wherefore Ambrose says (*loc. cit.*): 'More credence will be given the words of Mary and there is no motive left for a lie. For an unmarried pregnant woman might probably try to exculpate herself by a lie. But a married woman has no such reason to tell a lie; for her motherhood is a reward and the crown of glory of her marriage.'" St. Thomas adds: "These two reasons serve to strengthen our faith." Indeed they do. For St. Joseph bearing witness to Mary's virginity

<sup>8</sup> *Hom. 2 super "Missus est."*

confirms for us her own assertion contained in her question: "How shall this happen, since I do not know man?" However, also her assertion in her own behalf, even if taken alone, is quite dependable and unimpeachable. For had she remained single and yet become pregnant, people might have felt justified in suspecting that she was lying to hide her guilt. But now that she was married, there surely was no need for a lie of excuse. For there is no disgrace for a married woman in becoming a mother; rather is it a blessing, and an honor and joy for the parents. No one tells a lie unless he has a reason for doing so.

"A third reason is that those virgins who through lack of caution bring disgrace upon themselves should have no excuse. As Ambrose says: 'It was not becoming that maidens with a shady reputation should be able to give as an excuse that the mother of the Lord seemed to be of evil fame.' " This reason may well be taken as a hint how carefully a virgin soul should avoid everything that might tarnish her reputation for purity, since, to protect the good name of the Blessed Mother, divine Providence arranged for her this holy union with St. Joseph so that from the very outset no suspicion could ever arise against her.

"Fourth reason: Because this marriage signifies the whole Church which, though a virgin, yet is espoused to one man, Christ, as Augustine says."<sup>9</sup> Here St. Thomas shows us this marriage as a type of the Church, which is a virgin, yet as the spouse of Christ is bearing Him children and ever more children. In fact every Christian marriage typifies this union of the Church

<sup>9</sup> *De s. virgin.*, chap. 12.

with Christ, but less perfectly than this one, because Mary alone became a mother yet always remaining a virgin.

“Fifth reason. There may be even a fifth reason for the Mother of the Lord to be both espoused and a virgin at the same time; because thus in her person both virginity and matrimony are honored, to confound those who would disparage the one or the other of them.” In fact, by this virginal marriage not only virginity but also the married state, and with it the family, are honored and hallowed. Henceforth the sacred union of Mary and Joseph, the holy family of Nazareth, has become the ideal prototype of the Christian family. We find here father, mother, and Child inseparably linked together by the sacred ties of conjugal, parental, and filial love. What a tower of strength this holy marriage and ideal family has been against the heretics of old and, under God’s providence, will be against the insidious attacks of the modern propagandists of free love—often meaning thereby crude animal instinct! These would bring about the disintegration of both marriage and family and thus sap the very foundation of human society, a threat that must be evident not only to the believing Christian but to every thinking man who has any moral sense left. The popes of our times in their encyclicals and decrees have again and again called attention to this danger, and have encouraged and recommended as an effective means of defense against it, the devotion to the holy family.

We have now surveyed and studied somewhat in detail the reasons given by St. Thomas and the Fathers to show how appropriate and desirable was this vir-



ginal marriage of Mary and Joseph. In the light of these reasons, that marriage is seen in its intimate connection with the incarnation of the Son of God and His Messianic mission. Its great purpose was to furnish the conditions in which the eternal Son of God could become a member, or rather the head, of the human race in a manner honorable and befitting His dignity. But it was not only to serve the Incarnation itself but also its main purpose, the Redemption, and the application of the fruits of Redemption, since it helps to strengthen and nourish our faith, encourages and stimulates a truly Christian way of life, and especially stands forth as the most beautiful and noblest model of the Christian marriage and family. For all this we owe to St. Joseph, the chaste spouse of the Blessed Virgin, a debt of gratitude second only to what we owe to Christ the Son of God Himself and to His immaculate Mother. And from all this we already can divine in some way the great dignity, the grandeur of St. Joseph. But of this we shall say more later on.



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## *The Bona Matrimonii*

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IN THE two preceding chapters we asked and answered two questions, both of them indispensable for a correct understanding of this marriage of Mary the immaculate Virgin, and Joseph her chaste spouse. In chapter 4 we saw that the virginity of Mary and Joseph was no barrier to a true and valid marriage between them. In the last chapter we examined more closely the reasons or purpose peculiar to this marriage and, as I venture to hope, have become convinced that this holy union was arranged by God's wise providence precisely with a view to the Incarnation and to the role this marriage had to play in its proper execution. This may seem to be sufficient as an explanation of this marriage and sufficient evidence to show that St. Joseph was in the full and proper sense of the word the true husband of the Virgin Mother of God. He thus appears already in the halo of his exalted supernatural dignity deserving a veneration on our part such as no other creature does or can claim except only the august Queen of heaven. Nevertheless to complete the picture and to deepen our understanding of the subject, we shall add one other consideration to what we have said already.

This consideration will also serve as an introduction to the following chapters, in which we shall give a more thorough explanation and discussion of the fatherhood of St. Joseph. This unique privilege, the fatherhood of St. Joseph in respect to the child Jesus, forms, as it were, the central point of our theme.

In the present chapter what will claim our attention is especially a statement of St. Augustine found in several of his writings. It concerns marriage in general, but particularly the marriage of Mary and Joseph. Thus he writes:

Every *bonum nuptiorum* is fulfilled in the marriage of Christ's parents: offspring, fidelity, and sacrament. There was an offspring, as we know, the Lord Jesus Himself; fidelity, because there was no adultery; sacrament, because in fallen man this would not be without that result of sin, gross carnal concupiscence; and He who was to be without sin, wished to be conceived without this concupiscence, to be conceived not in the sinful flesh, but in the likeness of sinful flesh; to show also by the same token that all flesh begotten through intercourse is sinful flesh whereas the only one not thus begotten was not sinful flesh.<sup>1</sup>

This dictum of St. Augustine concerning the three *bona matrimonii* has become a theological axiom. We find it in St. Thomas<sup>2</sup> and then in many other theologians. With some verbal changes even the Council of Florence has made it its own. "The first *bonum matrimonii* is offspring, to be begotten and educated for the service of God; the second, fidelity which each party

<sup>1</sup> *De nupt. et concup.*, Bk. I, chap. 11, no. 13.

<sup>2</sup> *Summa theol.*, IIIa, q. 29, a. 2; *In IV*, d. 30, q. 2, a. 2.

has to observe toward the other; the third, the indissolubility of the marriage.”<sup>3</sup>

What is the meaning of this statement, and how is it verified in the virginal marriage of Mary and Joseph?

1. The blessing that is here called sacrament is not to be understood as sacramental grace; the marriage of Mary and Joseph was not a sacrament of the New Testament, for the New Testament did not yet then exist. St. Augustine by a figure of speech (metonymy) here calls sacrament what in the New Testament is an effect, a principal one, of the sacrament of matrimony, namely, its indissolubility. Now it is evident that this indissolubility, this indestructible bond, is realized to perfection in the marriage of Mary and Joseph. In fact, by a special dispensation of divine Providence this marriage had to serve an important purpose in connection with the incarnation of the Son of God, and the two parties were the holiest of men: Joseph, emphatically called by Scripture “a just man,” and Mary, “full of grace” and “blessed among women.” It could not be, therefore, that they should ever give even a fleeting thought to severing that bond, once they were assured that it had been decreed and wrought by God Himself. The doubt that, with God’s permission, embarrassed St. Joseph for a moment was speedily relieved by the angel, and served only to make that bond doubly secure. It also helped to confirm our belief both in the virginal character of this marriage and the virgin birth of the Savior, just as the doubts of the unbelieving Thomas were, according to God’s

<sup>3</sup> *Decr. pro Armenis* (Denz., no. 702).

plan, bound to strengthen the faith of the other apostles and of the faithful ever since.

2. The second *bonum*, fidelity, is nothing else than mutual, conjugal fidelity and the self-forgetting devoted love for each other never waning until death. This, too, in a perfect degree was present in this holy marriage. We cannot hope fully to conceive and encompass in our thoughts how true, deep, strong, self-sacrificing was that sublime and chaste love of these two holy persons who belonged to each other so entirely and exclusively in order that God's great design might be accomplished. Nothing could impair this love, for it was strong as death. And thus sustained by this love until death (the death of St. Joseph) parted them, they faced together, with serene courage and fortitude, hardships and sorrows that in God's wise providence were to be their share: the toilsome journey to Bethlehem, the hardheartedness of its people, the flight into Egypt and bitterness of exile, etc. But above all, conjugal fidelity in the case of Mary and Joseph is evidenced most clearly by the fact that they kept unstained in its spotlessness that virginal purity which they had pledged to each other. Knowing their sublime vocation to which God had called them, they could not think of ever acting otherwise. The marriage of Mary and Joseph can, therefore, claim the two blessings of indissolubility and fidelity so perfect as no other marriage ever could.

3. But is the third *bonum*, offspring, also verified as a blessing of this marriage? Can the child Jesus, the God-man, be regarded as the fruit of this marriage?

For an answer to this not exactly easy question, let us again consult St. Augustine, who will show at least the right approach to its solution. He has repeatedly pointed out that sensual pleasure, naturally connected with sexual function and liable to get out of the control of reason, can in no way be considered essential to marriage, even less so than intercourse itself. The more completely carnal concupiscence is excluded and the more the bond of spiritual love predominates, the more closely marriage approaches that higher state of life, virginity, and so much more perfect and noble it is itself; and if it were possible to obtain its primary end without such carnal union, it would be the most perfect, the ideal marriage. Now this ideal is realized in the marriage of Mary and Joseph. But let us give one or two passages of St. Augustine to have his own words:

Therefore, if our fathers took wives and had intercourse with them for no other reason but to beget children, it would have been a great joy to them if they could have had children without that carnal act; for in order to obtain children they were not by wantonness driven to it but were induced to it by a sense of duty. Was Joseph, then, not father because without carnal concupiscence he obtained a son? God forbid that Christian chastity should think this if not even Jewish did so.<sup>4</sup>

In another passage of the same sermon Augustine says:

If Joseph had been excluded from the genealogy of our Lord, he might well have remonstrated: "Why do you leave me out? Why is this genealogical line up and down not traced through me?" Perhaps they will tell him, "Because you did not beget him through the carnal act." But

<sup>4</sup> *Sermo* 51.

he will answer: "But did she become his mother through a carnal act?" What the Holy Spirit wrought He wrought for both of them. "Joseph was a just man," Holy Writ says. Therefore both husband and wife were just. And the Holy Spirit resting in the justice of both of them, gave the Son to both of them; but in that sex which had to bring forth the Son He worked so that the Son was also born to the husband. Therefore the angel said to both of them that they should give the name to the child, so that the parental authority of both should find recognition.<sup>5</sup>

Similar passages are found elsewhere in St. Augustine's works.

From the passages quoted one thing at least is clear: In St. Augustine's view, the divine child Jesus is a fruit of the marriage of Mary and Joseph, not of course in the natural sense; but what in this respect that marriage was lacking, has been supplied in a supernatural manner by the operation of the Holy Spirit. And to receive this supernatural operation of the Holy Spirit both Mary and Joseph, wife and husband, had put themselves into the proper disposition by their holiness.

Let us now hear what St. Thomas says on this subject:

Offspring is called a *bonum matrimonii* not only so far as it is begotten through the marriage, but also as it is conceived and reared in the marriage. And in this manner was that offspring (the Lord Jesus) a fruit of this marriage, not in the first manner. However, one born of adultery, or an adopted child, who is reared during the marriage, is not a *bonum matrimonii* because marriage is not by its nature ordained toward the rearing of such children; whereas the marriage of Mary and Joseph was spe-

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

cially ordained to the end that in it this offspring should be received and reared.<sup>6</sup>

These words of St. Thomas clearly indicate that Jesus is the offspring of this marriage. Billot, who follows St. Thomas closely in his treatment of this subject, concludes his explanation with the pertinent remark:

Thus this marriage has no peer among all other marriages. For marriage in its first institution foreshadowed, as it were, the future mystery of the incarnate Word of God; marriages in the New Testament imitate it as an image does its exemplar, but the marriage of Christ's parents actually received the incarnate Word itself when it came down from heaven, nourished it faithfully, and introduced it to the world becomingly.<sup>7</sup>

Lastly let us hear Suarez whose competent treatment of the theology on St. Joseph was highly commended, as we have seen, by Scheeben:

Through his marriage with the Blessed Virgin, Joseph became in a certain sense master of her body since, as St. Paul says, the wife has not authority over her body, but the husband. Thus it came about that the fruit of the virginal body, in a certain sense, belonged to Joseph. As the old Roman law has it: "What grows or is built on the land of another accrues to the ownership of him whose land it is." Thus if miraculously a spring should rise in someone's garden, it would belong to him who owns the garden. When, therefore, the virgin land conceived of the blessing of the Lord, the fruit of the blessing belonged to Joseph whose land it was, it had been prefigured in the blessings of the patriarch Joseph.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, by the marriage

<sup>6</sup> *In IV*, d. 30, q. 2, a. 2 ad 4.

<sup>7</sup> *De Sacr.*, II, thesis 35.

<sup>8</sup> Deut. 33:13-16.



bond the two, man and wife, become one, as it were; for, while through the carnal union they become one flesh, through the marriage bond itself they become one heart and one soul. Hence it is that they own in common what they have, and consequently that which belongs to one, belongs also to the other.<sup>9</sup>

If we now sum up and combine these three explanations, which are practically identical anyway, and add a few remarks to make our presentation complete, we shall be enabled to form a fairly adequate idea of how the divine child Jesus was actually the true, though miraculous, fruit of the marriage of Mary and Joseph.

As we saw in our last chapter, the virginal marriage of Mary and Joseph had been ordained by God in view of the Incarnation, so that it could take place under suitable conditions. For this purpose it had to be a real marriage. An apparent marriage, a pseudo-marriage, could never do; like a lie, it would have been absolutely unworthy of God and therefore impossible. The eternal Son of God, then, had to be conceived by an espoused virgin; He had to be born into her marriage. This was all the more necessary because

God from the beginning, when He created the first man and woman, had conditioned the blessing with offspring upon marriage, and had sanctified marriage as the fountain-head henceforth of all future human life; so that He would not depart from this moral norm, set by himself, even when a virginal conception was to take place in which a man's physical cooperation was absolutely out of the question.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> *Dogmatik*, III, 489.

<sup>10</sup> Grimm, *History of the Childhood of Jesus*, 2nd ed., p. 192.

Let us turn our attention for a moment to this supernatural phenomenon, the virginal conception. In the natural order for the origin of a new human life three factors are required. The primary factor is the first cause of all being, God. He cooperates here, not only as He always does in preserving all beings in their existence and cooperating with all the activity of His creatures, but in this case of the production of a new human life He acts as the Creator of the new spiritual soul. Almighty God alone can call into existence a spiritual soul and infuse it into the organized fetus prepared by the one organic principle, the parents. Man and woman, therefore, are the secondary factor through their sexual union in which the female germ cell is fertilized by the male cell, thus becoming a human fetus which through the soul created and infused by God becomes a living human being. Thus in the natural order human life is propagated, new human beings come into existence, the natural activity of the parents being merely preparatory or dispositive to the creative action of God.

In the case of which we are speaking, the miraculous conception of the divine Child by the Virgin Mary, evidently the secondary, human, factor could not function in the usual natural manner; it was, however, not dispensed with altogether. The female factor in due time produced the female germ cell; but instead of having it fecundated in the natural way by the action of man, she with a supernatural act of perfect obedience had it ready for the divine operation of the Holy Ghost, through which it was fertilized, quickened by a human soul, and at once hypostatically united with the Second

Person of the Blessed Trinity. She did this when, upon the invitation of the Holy Ghost Himself, and illumined and supported by his grace, with humble and complete submission to God's will she uttered those tremendous words that were to renew the world and to begin a new, supernatural order: "Be it done to me according to thy word."

But in all this, was there any cooperation of the part of the other created factor, St. Joseph; anything that he contributed so that his virgin spouse could become the Mother of God? Most certainly. His contribution was his own purity, his virginal union with the Virgin most pure, that union resplendent in its supernatural holiness, by which he jointly with his spouse was to make it possible that the eternal Son of God could be conceived and be born by a virgin and thus come into this world in a manner that was not unworthy of His own ineffable purity and holiness. Furthermore, Joseph did as the heavenly messenger had commanded him, and took to him his wife, the virgin so wonderfully blessed by God, and henceforth spent himself in guarding and serving her and the blessed fruit of her womb. This cooperation of St. Joseph was merely dispositive in character, yet in value it was not only equal but immeasurably superior to a mere natural act of fertilization, and it was the only kind of cooperation fitting enough when the mystery of the Incarnation was to be accomplished. Finally, the two arguments quoted above from Suarez are to be borne in mind. First: according to the words of St. Paul and a principle of law generally accepted, the husband has a right over the wife's body in respect to the sexual functions by

which new human life originates; therefore lawful offspring belongs not only to the wife but also to the husband, even though there had been no physical cooperation on his part. Secondly: they are one flesh through the conjugal act, but it is through the marriage bond itself that they become one heart and one soul; for this reason what is conceived and born of the wife is born not only to the wife but also to her husband: it is a fruit of the marriage. Consequently also Jesus was born to the virginal marriage of Joseph and Mary. He can and must be called the fruit of this marriage.

A virgin conceives of the Holy Ghost, but a virgin espoused to Joseph: to him, therefore, into the marriage which she had contracted with him, she bears the Son by whom the Lord God had hallowed her womb. If every child though begotten in the ordinary way, by a natural physiological process, yet remains in the final instance a gift from heaven, cannot He who bestows this "blessing" bestow it by way of exception on a marriage without requiring the physical cooperation of the couple thus favored? In either case, both husband and wife rejoice in the blessing that God has bestowed on them. . . . This truth, Heaven's incontestable right to cause an Israelite to become a father without his generative power functioning, yet with all the consequences resulting from parental relationship,—a truth the importance of which is best revealed in the birth of the Messiah—had long before been made familiar to the Israelitic mind, and that purposely and in a striking manner. It was the levirate marriage that had to serve also this purpose, and precisely on account of this purpose it was to play such an important role in the continuation of the Israelitic families and even within the genealogy of the Messiah Himself. It is true the union of

Mary and Joseph was not a levirate marriage; but it was especially on account of the same reasons that prompted this marriage, that the idea of the levirate was implanted so deeply in the consciousness of Israel. The same God of their covenant who has it in his power to give a son to a deceased Israelite who could in no way cooperate, gives a son to a Virgin's "husband" who is still living yet also never touched his virginal spouse. An Israelite might ask then: Should the child which heaven granted the wife of Joseph within his lifetime be less truly a son of Joseph than if she had been left a widow without children, and then were to bear him a son through a levirate marriage after his death? In neither case did Joseph beget the son; yet in both cases it is the sovereign power of God that bestows the blessing of fatherhood on the Israelite in a manner beyond natural powers. . . . The essential thing in either case is God's sovereign freedom of action. It was only logical, therefore, that the angel told Joseph he should use the right involved in fatherhood: to give the Child the name, that name so expressive of the child's mysterious vocation.<sup>11</sup>

We shall conclude with a passage from Scheeben, who fully agrees with us in explaining the fruit of the virginal marriage, and therefore the fatherhood, of St. Joseph. His words, in more scholastic language than Grimm's, are as follows:

It is evident that the close connection existing between Mary's marriage with Joseph and her virginal motherhood is to be thought of not as something merely extrinsic or accidental but as an intrinsic and organic relationship, with the result that this marriage not only excels all others in dignity and holiness, but, precisely as marriage, has a per-

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 122, and *Unity of the Gospels*, p. 244.

fection all its own, especially as regards the two most important "blessings" of a marriage: offspring, and "sacrament." In regard to the first, this marriage has this in common with all other marriages, that it was destined by God as its author, and therefore destined intrinsically and essentially, to make possible the begetting of offspring. But unlike any other virginal marriage, it was privileged, without detriment to its virginity, to share with a consummated marriage the blessing of fruitfulness, because in it the spouses were actually blessed with an offspring to be reared by them; and although this offspring was not begotten by them through carnal intercourse, it could nevertheless belong, in the intention of its divine progenitor, to both human parents as their own through their spiritual union, no less so than if it had been the fruit of a carnal union. Furthermore, this marriage surpassed all non-virginal marriages in this, that its fruit was one especially and absolutely holy, and that, when both parents in order to obtain this fruit surrendered themselves jointly as virginal spouses to the will of God, their cooperation was of an order much superior to that involved in the carnal union for the natural begetting of offspring.

Indissolubility is a characteristic that sets the marriage bond apart from and high above any other bond uniting one human being with another. This blessing consists in the fact that by the will of God one person is so linked with and attached to another that with this it forms an indissoluble whole, and that each of them in and through this other person as through an organ that belongs to God, is taken possession of by God Himself for a service to be rendered by it in conjunction with the other. This bond is more nearly perfect the holier the service of God for the performance of which the two persons are united (and the more perfect the ownership of God over them is, in virtue of which and for the purpose of which one person

takes to itself the other) and the more perfectly they are an organ belonging to God and, as a result, can mutually draw each other still closer to God by their union. But in both respects the union of Mary and Joseph surpasses all comparison, not only all natural pre-Christian and non-Christian, but also all Christian marriages in the same manner as its purpose, that Christ should be born and reared in it, surpasses the purpose of other marriages, the procreation and rearing of mere human beings destined to become members of Christ (and in the same manner as Mary is in a higher sense an organ of God and member of Christ than other men who become such organs and members through baptism).<sup>12</sup>

The explanations given in this chapter may suffice to show how the child Jesus is the fruit of the virginal marriage of Mary and Joseph. They were intended also, as we have said, to pave the way for an explanation of the fatherhood of St. Joseph in respect to the child Jesus, which is the central theme of this book. But since this fatherhood of St. Joseph is based entirely on his virginal marriage with the Blessed Virgin Mary, the existence of this marriage had first to be demonstrated before we could proceed to explain and prove St. Joseph's claim to the glorious title: "father of Jesus."

<sup>12</sup> *Dogmatik*, III, nos. 1579-81.

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## *Joseph's Fatherhood*

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FOR a full understanding of the discussion we are now entering upon, it is important to keep in mind the conclusions we have reached so far, because they are presupposed as a basis of the following chapters. We have seen so far and become convinced, I think, that Mary and Joseph were united in a true and valid marriage without any impairment of their virginity, which both had vowed to God; further, that this virginal and holy marriage was designed by the all-wise providence of God entirely with a view to the incarnation of His eternal Son, so that this could take place in a dignified and worthy manner; which purpose this marriage served perfectly. Finally, in our last chapter we have shown how the three *bono* which, since St. Augustine, theologians generally have held as distinctive properties of marriage (offspring, fidelity, indissolubility) have been realized in an eminent, and of course supernatural, manner: even the blessing of offspring was there, since the child Jesus, who is God and man, was the fruit of this marriage. Thus we have prepared the ground for the following discussion of the fatherhood of St. Joseph in respect to the divine child Jesus. The first question



now is: What really is this fatherhood of St. Joseph or what kind of fatherhood is it?

1. St. Joseph is commonly called the foster father of Jesus, a name certainly appropriate in a way and well deserved. For there can be no doubt but that he faithfully did his utmost to supply all the wants of Jesus; he provided Him with food and raiment and shelter. As far as it was in his power, he shielded Him from bodily harm and discomfort. He rescued Him from the plots of the ruthless Herod. He instructed Him in the trade he himself plied, and so on. We cannot imagine any kind of service which he would not render Him, if needed and possible, with fatherly love and solicitude. But this fatherly care which he bestowed on the child Jesus is not sufficient to account for the juridical relationship existing between Jesus and Joseph, nor does it explain how the Child was truly the fruit of the virginal marriage of Mary and Joseph; it does not constitute the essential element of this fatherhood: it is only a result or function thereof.

2. Some theologians would call St. Joseph the adoptive father of the divine Child. But this designation is not only insufficient and inadequate but positively inappropriate because based on a misapprehension of the term. For adoption on the part of a father, or a mother if she herself can act legally, means to take or receive as one's own child a minor who otherwise is a stranger to the adopting person, i.e., not belonging to the family by birth. But, as we have seen, the child Jesus was not at all a stranger to St. Joseph: as the supernatural offspring of the marriage of Mary and Joseph, He already belonged to the family. Besides,

ordinary common sense sees how incongruous is the idea of adoption of a high-born person by one of low estate, and all the more so, of adoption of a divine person by a human person.

In support of the opinion here rejected, it will not do to appeal to the authority of Suarez and of St. Augustine quoted by him, for such an appeal betrays a misunderstanding of their words. Suarez writes as follows:

Augustine adds another reason for this name ("father") in these words: "Nor is the fact that he had not begotten Him a reason for denying to St. Joseph the right to be called the father of Christ; for he could well be father also of one whom he had not begotten by his wife but adopted from elsewhere." For by adoption even one who is a total stranger becomes a son, and he who adopts him is called, and in his way becomes, a father. And Joseph, when without his intervention his wife bore him a son through the power of the Holy Ghost, accepted Him as his own beloved son given to him by God, and in a manner adopted Him, so that Jesus in a manner became his son, and this by a way more noble and perfect than elsewhere. Unless we prefer to say that Christ chose Joseph for His father and, as it were, made Himself his son.<sup>1</sup>

Evidently neither St. Augustine nor Suarez here speaks of adoption in the proper sense of the word; they consider the divine Child in no way a stranger to Joseph, but they do say here by implication what they say elsewhere in plain words: that He was given by God to both Mary and Joseph as the fruit of their virginal marriage.

<sup>1</sup> Vol. XIX, d. 8, s. 1, no. 4.

3. By some more modern writers St. Joseph was styled the legal father of Jesus. But also this name, common among the Jews, with its specific meaning in Old Testament usage, fails utterly to do justice to the peculiar relation of St. Joseph in respect to the child Jesus. Among the Jews a man already deceased without children was designated the legal father in respect to children whom a surviving brother begot for him by his widow. But in our case, as between Joseph and Jesus, there is clearly no such relationship: Mary was not a widow when Jesus was born; she had no other husband even after the death of St. Joseph; so here everything is lacking that is required for legal fatherhood. There is, however, some kind of analogy between St. Joseph and a legal father: as to a legal father by his surviving brother a son is begotten of the former's widow, so to Joseph through the supernatural operation of the Holy Ghost the child Jesus was conceived and born by his virginal spouse. Grimm who makes much of this analogy and skillfully uses it in his harmonization of the history of revelation, nevertheless admits that it does not constitute St. Joseph the legal father of Christ.<sup>2</sup>

4. Finally we have the well-known passage in Holy Scripture where St. Luke (3:23) speaks of "Jesus, being, as was supposed, the son of Joseph." Hence St. Joseph is frequently called the putative father of Jesus. But this designation is not a name given to Joseph by the sacred writer, who intends merely to say that the contemporary Jews thought that Joseph was the father of Jesus, but erroneously, inasmuch as they be-

<sup>2</sup> *Unity of the Gospels*, p. 244.

lieved he was the natural father. Therefore the use of this expression to define the fatherhood so distinctly ascribed to St. Joseph elsewhere in Holy Scripture, is unwarranted if not absurd and is contrary to what Scripture means, as we shall show from its texts later on.

After all this, the question is still open, in what sense Holy Scripture calls St. Joseph the father of Jesus, or, in what the fatherhood of Joseph really consists.

5. Let us see now whether Scripture itself does not furnish us at least some clues for solving the problem. Here at once our attention is arrested by the striking fact that in the New Testament St. Joseph is simply called "the father of Jesus" without any qualification, and this not only by the Jews who erroneously thought him to be the natural father of Jesus, but also by the inspired writers and, what is still more significant, by Mary herself, the Mother of God, the Virgin most prudent, the Seat of wisdom, who certainly was fully aware of all that was implied in the relation between Joseph and herself, and between Joseph and the blessed fruit of her womb. The Evangelist calls Joseph the father, and Mary and Joseph the parents of Jesus: "And His father and Mother were marveling at the things spoken concerning Him" (Luke 2:33). "And His parents were wont to go every year to Jerusalem at the feast of the Passover" (*ibid.*, 2:41). And the Mother of God herself said to the Child when she had found Him again in the temple: "Son, why hast Thou done so to us? Behold, Thy father and I have been seeking Thee sorrowing" (*ibid.*, 2:49). Thus both the inspired writer and the Virgin most prudent call Joseph simply "father of Jesus." Therefore Joseph must be,

