

The Virgin Birth

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New York, N. Y.

THE PAULIST PRESS

401 West 59th Street

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JESUS CHRIST, the Son of God and the Son of Mary, was born miraculously, as we read in the Gospel of the Infancy of St. Matthew and St. Luke, outside the ordinary law of human generation. The Holy Spirit, Who in the beginning "created heaven and earth out of the empty void" (Gen. i. 1, 2), made the Virgin Mary conceive and bear a Son. As the angel said to her: "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee, and therefore also the Holy (Being) which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God" (Luke i. 35; Cf. Matt. i. 20, "that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost").

This dogma of the Virgin Birth—this fact of the supernatural conception of Jesus Christ, stands out pre-eminently in the Gospel narrative, all other facts, such as the Annunciation and the Nativity, merely bringing it out in greater relief. That is why the rationalistic critics who deny the Virgin Birth question all the facts connected with it, *v. g.*, the Dreams of Joseph, the Message of the Angel, the Story of the Shepherds, the Coming of the Magi, the Massacre of the Innocents, and the Census of Cyrenus. All these events are said to have been the outcome of either Jewish legend, or of later Greek theological theorizing.

Our aim is to present to our readers a solid defense of that article of the Apostles' Creed which reads, "Who was conceived of the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary," and to answer briefly the chief objections brought forward against the dogma of the Virgin Birth and the happenings at Nazareth and Bethlehem by unbelievers, from the days of the first century Gnostics to the modernists of the twentieth century.

The dogma of the Virgin Birth was defined as an article

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STATE OF NEW YORK

PRINTED AND PUBLISHED IN THE U. S. A. BY THE PAULIST PRESS, NEW YORK 19, N. Y.

of Faith by the Fifth General Council (Canon 2) held at Constantinople under Pope Vigilius in 553, and again by the Lateran Council held by Pope Martin I at Rome in the year 640. It is a dogma held unanimously by the Fathers of the Church from the very beginning, and taught explicitly in both the Old Testament and the New.

The first one to impugn the supernatural conception of Jesus Christ was the Jewish Gnostic, Cerinthus (100 A. D.), who denied the reality of the Incarnation, and ascribed to Jesus a purely human origin. According to Irenaeus,¹ Cerinthus was a Jew, trained in Greek philosophy, who taught, like all Gnostics, that whatever was matter and body was necessarily impure. Like his modernistic imitators of the twentieth century, he made a distinction between Jesus the man and Jesus the Son of God. He denied the real substantial unity of the divine and human natures in Christ, and taught that He was born of Joseph and Mary according to the ordinary law of generation. He questioned the Virgin Birth, not in the name of a divine tradition, but in the name of a false, *a priori*, philosophical theory. The Incarnation, *i. e.*, the communication of the divine life of Jesus, was, he said, effected at the Jordan baptism, by the descent of the Holy Spirit or the Christ upon Jesus. The Virgin Birth was therefore "impossible."²

In the second and third centuries an obscure Jewish sect known as the Ebionites³ denied the Virgin Birth, and rejected the first two chapters of St. Matthew's Gospel which recorded it.⁴ Joseph, they said, was the father of Jesus, Who was born like any other child of Adam. A certain group of them, the Nazarene Ebionites, accepted the Virgin Birth. This heresy was most probably a harking back to the Messianic ideas of the Jewish Pharisees, and began about the time of Trajan, according to Hegesippus. He refers to them as follows: "Those who forced themselves to corrupt the true standard of the Gospel took good care to hide themselves in obscurity;

¹ *Adv. Haer.*, I, 26, 1.

² Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.*, 1.26.2.

³ Duchesne, *The Early History of the Christian Church*, p. 91.

⁴ St. Epiphanius, *Adv. Haer.*, XXX, 13, 14.

but when the generation of those who had heard the divine wisdom became extinct, their conspiracy and impious error burst forth into the light of day."

In the Dialogue of St. Justin, Martyr (150 A. D.), the Jew Trypho speaks of a purely human Christ, Who certainly did not pre-exist, as the Christians taught. The prophecy of Isaias (vii. 14) is not Messianic, the word *almah* meaning "young woman" and not "a virgin." The dogma of the Virgin Birth is modeled on the Greek myth of Perseus, born of Jupiter and the Virgin Danae.

The second century Voltaire, Celsus, ridiculed the legend of the Virgin Birth, which he compared to the mythical hero-birth of Plato. He utterly repudiated the prophecy of Isaias, and mockingly referred to the blasphemous story of Christ having been born of Mary and Panthera, a scurrilous tale that survived in the pages of the Talmud.⁵

Towards the end of the fourth century certain heretics in Syria, Arabia, and Illyricum denied the perpetual virginity of Mary, although they admitted the Virgin Birth. They maintained that virginity was no holier than marriage, and that the Gospels proved Mary had other children after the birth of Christ. They cited Matthew i. 18 and i. 25, and the many passages that referred to the brethren of Jesus (Matt. xii. 46; xiii. 55; Mark iii. 31; vi. 31). Three of them, Helvidius, Jovinian, and Bonosus, were ably refuted by St. Jerome and St. Ambrose, and condemned by Pope Siricius, and the Councils of Milan and Capua.⁶

The modern denial of the Virgin Birth dates from the rise of English Deism in the eighteenth century, imported by Voltaire into France, and the rationalistic German Higher Criticism of the nineteenth century. These men divested the Gospels of their divine inspiration, and reduced them to the level of mere human documents. On the ground that because a fact is miraculous, it cannot be historical, they reject the facts of the Gospels, and deny the divinity of Jesus Christ and the

⁵ Origen, *Contra Celsum*, II, 32, 34, 37; Sanhedrin 67.1; Schabbath 104.2; Babyl. Chaghigah, 42; Cf. Herford, *Christianity in Talmud and Midrash*, pp. 35, 348; Lagrange, *Messianisme chez les Juifs*, p. 288.

⁶ St. Jerome, *De Perpetua Virginitate Mariae*; St. Ambrose, *Adv. Helv.*; Siricius, *Epistola ad Anysium*; Cf. Denzinger's *Enchiridion*, p. 91.

Virgin Birth. The history of their ever changing and arbitrary views may be studied in books like Vigouroux's *Les Livres Saints et la Critique Rationaliste* and Fillion's *Les Etapes du Rationalisme*.

Rationalists like Paulus⁷ admitted the facts recorded in the Gospels, but maintained they were distorted in the telling through the current superstition of supernaturalism, and the poetical idealization of perfervid Jewish imaginings. Strauss in his *Life of Jesus*, which appeared in 1835, was far more radical. In his eyes, the Gospel was a myth, comparable to the pagan myths of Greece and Rome. It merely dressed up doctrines in historical fashion regardless of their objective truth. The Messianic myth was in the air at the time the Gospels were written, and their authors merely read into the Gospel of the Infancy, for example, the texts of the Old Testament with which they were familiar. According to his *a priori* reasoning, the Virgin Birth is borrowed from Isaias vii. 14, the Nativity from Micheas v. 3, the Story of the Shepherds from Psalm lxxvii. 70, the Star from Numbers xxiv. 17, the Coming of the Magi from Isaias lx. 5-7, the Flight into Egypt from Osee xi. 1, etc. This false theory is ably refuted by the Abbé de Broglie, in his *Questions Bibliques*, pp. 362-380. The current theory of Baur (1853-1863) and the Tübingen school held the Gospels to be writings of the second century, thus allowing ample time for the growth of the willful fiction of the Gospel legend.

Common sense would at once declare that Strauss had given up Christianity altogether. But no. He asserts, like his modernist successors today, that "the essence of the Christian faith is perfectly independent of criticism. The supernatural birth of Christ, His Miracles, His Resurrection, and His Ascension, remain eternal truths, whatever doubts may be cast on their reality as historical facts."⁸

Today the second century origin of the Gospels is universally abandoned, but the destructive critics are still undaunted. *A priori* the historical value of the Gospels must be denied, because they imply the miraculous and the supernatural. Paulus,

⁷ *Life of Christ*, 1828.

⁸ *Life of Jesus*, p. 30.

Strauss, Baur, and others of their way of thinking may be discredited, but some new theory must be invented to take the place of the old. Literary criticism is the latest word in the denial of the Gospel of the Infancy. So the modern rationalists calmly tell us that the Virgin Birth was not a part of the primitive Gospel, but the result of later editing and interpolations. Originally, Matthew (i. 16) made Joseph the real father of Jesus.⁹ The first chapter of St. Luke did not contain verses 34 and 35. St. Luke "probably" borrowed the idea of the supernatural conception from Matthew i. 18-25, which he incorporated into the Judaeo-Christian document he was using.¹⁰ The modernist Loisy admits the literary unity of the Gospels and the sincerity of their writers, without, however, granting the historical reality of the events they record. He says: "The narratives of the childhood of Christ are for the historian only an expression and an assertion of faith in the Messias."¹¹

Many rationalists have denied the Virgin Birth on account of the divergent genealogies of Matthew (i. 2-17) and St. Luke (iii. 23-38), and on account of the many references to the brethren of the Lord (Matt. xii. 46; xiii. 55; Mark iii. 31; vi. 3; Luke viii. 29; John ii. 12; Acts i. 14; 2 Cor. ix. 5). In view of the discrepancies in the genealogies, they ask, how can St. Matthew and St. Luke be considered true historians? Again, they ask, how can Jesus be the Son of David, or of "the seed of Abraham according to the flesh" (Rom. i. 3; iv. 13; ix. 5; xv. 12), when His father's name is not to be found among the descendants of these two patriarchs? The mention of the brothers and sisters (Matt. xiii. 56) of the Lord they consider proof positive against the perpetual virginity of Mary.

We have stated as briefly as possible the chief objections that have been made from the beginning against the Virgin Birth and the perpetual virginity of the Blessed Virgin. Most of them were put forward and answered in the first four centuries, so that the modernist of today is not so up to date as

⁹ Schmiedel, *Encyclopedia Biblica*, vol. iii., col. 2,962.

¹⁰ Harnack, *Zeitschrift für die neutest. Wissenschaft*, 1901, p. 53.

¹¹ *The Gospel of the Church*, p. 50.

the unthinking imagine. The Catholic is not at all disturbed by these difficulties, for he holds with Cardinal Newman that "ten thousand difficulties do not make one doubt." His faith is secure and unshaken, because it rests on the authority of God, voiced to him by a divine, infallible authoritative Church, established by Jesus Christ to witness to His Gospel until the end of the world.

I. The Prophecy of Isaias vii. 14

The first objection against the Virgin Birth is drawn from the prophecy of Isaias (vii. 14). As early as the second century we find the Jew Trypho declaring that this passage did not refer to the Messiah, but to Ezechias the son of Ahaz; that, therefore, it had been misapplied by St. Matthew (i. 34); that the word *almah* meant "a young woman" of marriageable age and not "a virgin." Let us first consider the context. In the year 733 B. C., King Ahaz of Juda was attacked by the kings of Israel and Syria. Realizing that he could not withstand them alone, he determined to call upon the King of Assyria for aid. This might mean the loss of Juda's independence, but at least it would save the throne of David from utter destruction. The prophet Isaias is sent by the Lord to tell Ahaz not to fear, because he is certain to conquer his enemies if he but trust in Jehovah. He has only to ask a sign of the Lord. Ahaz refuses, saying: "I will not ask, and I will not tempt the Lord." Isaias replies: "Therefore the Lord Himself shall give you a sign. Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and His name shall be called Emmanuel" (vii. 14). Isaias then tells the King that, because he refused to trust in the Lord, the Assyrians will indeed come, but their coming will bring ruin and desolation upon Juda. Were the Virgin Mother of the Messiah now to bring forth her child, and call His name Emmanuel (God with us), He would grow up in poverty; before He would reach boyhood, the land would be devastated by the Assyrians (Is. vii. 14-25). In the next chapter the Prophet repeats again the story of the devastation of Juda by the Assyrians, adding, however, that

Juda will not be utterly destroyed because of Emmanuel, the Child Christ Jesus, Who is to be born of the Virgin Mother (Is. viii. 6-10). In chapter ix., he again refers to the coming of the Messiah in a beautiful passage beginning with the words: "The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light; to them that dwelt in the region of the shadow of death, light is risen" (Is. ix. 2). The reference to the Messiah, the Son of David, is clear. The child born of the Virgin Mother "shall establish the throne of David from henceforth and forever" (ix. 6, 7). The place of the Messiah's birth is also foretold by a contemporary of Isaias, the prophet Micheas, who sings: "And thou, Bethlehem Ephrata, art a little one among the thousands of Juda; out of thee shall He come forth unto me that is to be the Ruler of Israel, and His going forth is from the beginning, from the days of eternity" (Micheas v. 2).

When, therefore, Matthew (i. 23) applied the text of Isaias vii. 14, to the birth of the Messiah, he understood perfectly the meaning of the Old Testament prophecy.

The Hebrew word *almah*, in Isaias vii. 14, is correctly translated "virgin." It is used in only six other passages of the Old Testament, and in every one of them it means an unmarried young woman, a virgin. The prayer of Abraham's servant speaks of Rebecca, "the virgin" (Gen. xxiv. 43); Exodus uses this word to refer to the sister of Moses (ii. 4); Canticles (i. 2) reads: "Thy name is as oil poured out; therefore 'young maidens' have loved thee"; Canticles vi. 7, contrasts "young maidens," *i. e.*, unmarried women, with queens and concubines; Psalms lxxvii. 26, refers to "young damsels" playing on timbrels in the sanctuary of the temple; Proverbs xxx. 19, mentions "the way of a man with a maid" as secret and untraceable.

Moreover, the Jews themselves in their Septuagint version of the Old Testament (286-246 B. C.), translated *almah* by *parthenos*, the Greek equivalent for an inviolate virgin. This version was used by the early Christians to refute the Jews, who dishonestly retorted that it was full of errors, and did not accurately represent the Hebrew text. They chose Aquila, an apostate Christian, to make a new translation about 130 A. D.

Controversy at that time was very bitter between Jews and Christians, especially on the dogma of the Virgin Birth, as we learn from the Dialogue of St. Justin with the Jew Trypho. Under stress of Jewish prejudice, Aquila, of set purpose, translated *almah* by *neanis*, a young woman. It is certain, therefore, that the translation made some four hundred years before was the more reliable and accurate. The Syriac text also, written in the early part of the second century, translated *almah* by *bethulah*, the strict word for virgin.

How did the Jews in our Lord's time regard the prophecy of Isaias? They certainly believed He was to be a descendant of David, and that some mystery was to be connected with His birth. Was He to be virgin-born? The Jews objected that Jesus could not be the Messiah, because they believed He was born in the ordinary way of a human father. They asked: "Is not this the carpenter's Son? Is not this Jesus the Son of Joseph? Whose father and mother we know?" (Matt. xiii. 55; John vi. 42.) The actual words of Isaias, "a virgin shall conceive," are never applied to the Virgin Birth in extant Jewish writings. But we must remember that the Talmud was compiled in the third and fourth centuries at Tiberias and Babylon by Jews who were dominantly anti-Christian. The Mishna was codified by Judah in 219 A. D., and the Gemara by Ashe in 365. Nevertheless, the words of Jeremias (xxx. 22), "the Lord hath created a new thing upon the earth; a woman shall compass a man," were understood by the Jews as a divine promise, that as Israel fell in a virgin, so in a virgin shall she be healed. Again in Bereshith Rabba 89, and in the Midrash on Lamentations, it is taught that "the man encompassed is King Messiah, of Whom God spake: 'This day have I begotten Thee.'" A Midrash on Psalm cx. (cix.) reads: "From the womb of the morning Thou hast the dew of Thy nativity." A Midrash on Psalm lxxxv. (lxxxiv.) 12: "Truth is sprung out of the earth; and justice hath looked down from heaven," reads: "Why is it said *springeth*, instead of *is born*? Because Messiah's *birth* shall not be as the nativity of creatures that are in the world, but diverse and different, without companionship or conjunction. And none names His

Father, for He shall be hidden until He come and reveal Himself to us. The word of the Eternal gives the blessing, the earth yields the germ."

These and similar passages which we might quote prove that the idea of the Virgin Birth was not totally excluded by the early Jews, and that they certainly attributed to the Messias at the very least a mysterious and a miraculous birth.¹²

II. The Gospel of St. Matthew, Chapters I and II

Many rationalistic critics maintain that the primitive Gospel of St. Matthew began with the mission of St. John the Baptist, chapter iii.¹³ They fail to tell us that there is no second or third century text denying the existence of these first two chapters. St. Epiphanius (403) tells us that some of the Jewish Ebionite heretics possessed such a mutilated Gospel, but he adds that they had purposely omitted these two chapters because of their heretical views on the human origin of Jesus Christ. It is dishonest to cite an author for a fact that makes in our favor, and refuse to quote his complete statement when it counts against us. St. Epiphanius also declares that the Nazarene Ebionites used the full text, as did the heretics, Cerinthus, Carpocrates, and Symmachus.

Other critics cite the Syriac translation of the Gospels found at Mount Sinai in 1894 as proof positive that the original genealogy made Jesus the Son of Joseph. This was changed later on, they add, so as to make the Gospel of the Infancy a perfectly connected literary unity.¹⁴ In this version, Matthew i. 16, reads as follows: "Joseph, to whom the Virgin Mary was espoused, begot Jesus, Who is called Christ." A careful study proves that this text is not primitive, but a mere variant of the received text. Joseph, we observe, is not called "the husband of Mary," but "he to whom the Virgin Mary is espoused." In verse 21 the Angel says to Joseph, "She *shall bring thee*

¹² *A Virgin Shall Conceive*, by Rev. J. P. Arendzen, "Catholic Gazette," January, 1924.

¹³ Haecker, *Zeitschrift für wissenschaftl. Theologie*, 1906, p. 26; Epiphanius, *Adv. Haer.*, xxx. 13.

¹⁴ Jacquier, *Histoire des Livres du Nouveau Testament*, vol. ii., p. 496.

forth a son," which is repeated in verse 25: "She brought *him* forth a son." The Syriac editor is intent on bringing out the virginity of the Mother and the legal title of the father. According to the Jewish law, the Virgin Mary, on becoming a mother, gave a son to her lawful husband.

It is difficult to see how anyone can deny that the Gospel of the Infancy of St. Matthew is a well connected narrative. St. Joseph's doubt occasions the visit of the angel, who reveals to him the mystery of the Virgin Birth (i. 18-25). When Christ is born at Bethlehem, the Magi come from the East to adore Him (ii. 1-12). This causes Herod to be alarmed, and he orders the massacre of the Innocents (ii. 16). The angel then appears again to Joseph and urges him to go to Egypt, and remain there until Herod's death, when he is to return and live at Nazareth (ii. 19-23). St. Matthew emphasizes the part played by St. Joseph in the history of our Lord's birth in direct contrast with St. Luke, who makes the Blessed Mother of Jesus the chief personage of his narrative.

We are certain of the Palestinian origin of St. Matthew's Gospel. The writer is a Jew speaking to Jews. The words of the Angel, "Joseph, son of David" (Matt. i. 20) are closely related to the typical Jewish genealogy of Matthew i. 1-17, and supposes the words "Son of David" in verses 1 and 17. The writer knows perfectly Jewish geography (Matt. xi. 1), Jewish contemporaneous history (ii. 22), Jewish customs, *v. g.*, that betrothal is juridically equivalent to marriage (i. 18), Jewish words like Jesus, God's salvation, and Nazarene (i. 21; ii. 23), the Old Testament prophecies of Isaias, Micheas, and Jeremias (Is. vii. 14; Mich. v. 2; Jer. xxxi. 15).

Some critics reject the Gospel of the Infancy in St. Matthew, because of the so-called myths and legends of Joseph's Dreams, the Coming of the Magi, the Massacre of the Innocents, and the Flight into Egypt. These events, they tell us, do not agree with the usual tone of the Gospel narrative.

The only warrant for their arbitrary denial of the historicity of St. Matthew is their unscientific, *a priori* rejection of the supernatural and the miraculous. The true scholar does not ask: How can these things be? but, What is the evidence for

them? Is the writer trustworthy? Is the writer deceived? We cannot eliminate one word from the text without utterly destroying its perfect simplicity and harmony. The four dreams of Joseph are in perfect accord with Jewish tradition (Num. xii. 6; Deut. xiii. 1-5; Kings xxviii. 6, 15), and are paralleled in the history of St. Paul (Acts xvi. 9; xviii. 9; xxiii. 11; xxvii. 23). With St. Matthew and St. Luke these dreams were possible. Their happening depended entirely upon the trustworthiness of the witnesses who related them. Both St. Joseph and St. Paul were able to verify their divine origin by the events which followed them, and which agreed perfectly with the predictions made.

The critics state, moreover, that the story of the Magi was invented to satisfy the Messianic prophecy recorded in Numbers xxiv. 17, and Isaias lx. 4, 6. But the star in both prophecies refers to the Messiah, and not to the star which was to manifest His birth, as we learn from the Jewish Targums. Indeed the Pseudo-Messias, Bar-Kokeba, the Son of the Star, gave this interpretation himself, when he claimed to have fulfilled Balaam's prediction. Again, if this passage in Numbers played so great a part in the growth of the so-called Legend of the Star, why did not St. Matthew himself make some reference to it? Everyone admits that he is always intent on citing the fulfillment of the prophecies in Jesus Christ.

The Massacre of the Innocents is ignored, the critics tell us, by the historian Flavius Josephus, who dwells at length on the cruelty of Herod. This is not to be wondered at, if we remember that the number of children killed in Bethlehem at Herod's command could not have been more than twenty or thirty. Such a minor happening Josephus could readily omit, when he had so many other facts to record. He mentions, for instance, Herod's murder of his wife, Mariamne; of his mother-in-law, Alexandra; of his three sons, Aristobulus, Alexander, and Antipater; of his brother-in-law, Costobar; of his uncle, Joseph, etc.

Finally it was very natural for St. Joseph to retire into Egypt, for we know there were many Jewish colonists at Alexandria and in the whole Delta of the Nile.

III. The Gospel of St. Luke, Chapters I, II, III, 23-28

The critics who deny the authenticity of the Gospel of the Infancy in St. Luke, assert that it is an addition to the primitive Gospel, akin to the prologue of St. John on the pre-existence of the Logos (John i. 1-14). The only difference, they add, is that St. John explains the divine Sonship in a metaphysical sense, while St. Luke speaks of a material and physical divine Sonship. The true historian, therefore, must reject both these prologues as theological speculations of a later date, and begin the history of Jesus at His baptism, as does the primitive Gospel of St. Mark.¹⁵

Mary, the Mother of Jesus, was, they argue, a woman like any other woman. She is spoken of both at Nazareth (Mark vi. 3) and at Capharnaum (Mark iii. 22) as the wife of Joseph. After Jesus, her first-born, she had four other sons, James, Joseph, Simon, and Jude, and some daughters (Mark vi. 3). Even St. Luke contradicts his own Gospel of the Infancy, when he represents Mary as being astonished at the answer Jesus gave her, when she found Him in the temple asking questions of the doctors of the Law (Luke ii. 46-50). He also mentions the unbelief of the relatives of Jesus in His special, divine mission. How could they then have believed in His supernatural birth (Mark iii. 21; vi. 4)?

It is not so difficult a task to answer these critics. The first four verses of St. Luke's Gospel reveal to us a most scholarly, painstaking and accurate historian. He tells his convert, Theophilus, that he has verified all the events he narrates, and that he has gathered them "all" from "eyewitnesses," and "ministers of the word," who have preached the Gospel "from the beginning." He alludes to "many" other writers, who have written about the beginnings of Christianity, and gives his correspondent notice that he attends to arrange all the events he records "in order." He evidently aims at bettering his precessors' imperfect records, and enabling Theophilus to test their historical truth.

It is very generally admitted that his careful study of these documents, and his careful examination of eyewitnesses

¹⁵ Holtzmann, *Life of Jesus*.

took place during his enforced stay in Palestine, while St. Paul was in prison at Caesarea (55-57 A. D.). His chief informants were most likely the Blessed Virgin herself, and the holy women who accompanied our Lord during His public ministry: Mary Magdalen; Mary the mother of James and Joseph; Martha, the Sister of Mary; Joanna, the wife of Herod's steward, Chuza, etc.

St. Luke did not rely only on the testimony of eye-witnesses, but he also used a primitive Hebrew or Aramaic document in compiling his first three chapters.¹⁶ For both in substance and form his Gospel of the Infancy is markedly Jewish, in direct contrast with the dominantly Greek character of the rest of his Gospel. The persons he describes are all inspired by the Jewish spirit of the temple, the law and the old liturgical ceremonies. The scenes he pictures all point to a period that has not yet passed the dividing line between the Old and the New Testaments. The Jew is awaiting the coming of the Messiah, "the Orient from on high"; the "dayspring upon the mountain" (i. 78). The temple is still standing, with no sign or foreboding of its coming destruction.

Trained in the Greek schools of either Tarsus or Antioch, St. Luke would naturally be unfamiliar with the intimate details of the Jewish ceremonial, and the special duties of the temple priests. And yet he speaks most accurately of Zachary performing his ministry in the temple according to the weekly course of Abia (i. 5); he knows the hour of incense, when the priest goes within the Holy Place while the people pray without (i. 9, 10); he mentions details that bespeak an intimate knowledge of Jewish customs and family intimacies, as is evident in his description of the prophetess Anna (i. 36, 37). That his genealogy of Jesus (iii. 23-28) is copied verbatim from a written Hebrew document is admitted by all the critics.

Is it not reasonable also to believe that the extraordinary events related in St. Luke's Gospel of the Infancy were fairly well known even outside the circle of the immediate families concerned in them? The story of Zachary's dumbness; the birth of John the Baptist in his parents' old age; his father's

¹⁶ Rose, *Studies on the Gospels*, pp. 73-75.

cure; the beautiful story of the Bethlehem shepherds; the prediction of Simeon; the finding of the Child Jesus in the temple teaching the doctors—the news of all these happenings was likely to spread abroad among the people. Even if they had been rather obscured by the thirty years of Jesus' hidden life, they would easily be recalled once St. John the Baptist and later on Jesus Himself began to preach to the people of Judea and Galilee.

Catholic scholars call attention to the fact that the Messianic hope, voiced in the canticle of Zachary (i. 68-74), is primitive in its coloring, and differs considerably from the language used in the apostolic age. Lepin writes: "Judging from the discourses of the Acts and from the Epistles of St. Paul, it does not seem that after Pentecost the followers of Jesus continued to use language more or less encumbered with temporal and national elements—an inheritance from the pre-Christian tradition. On this account St. Luke's first chapters should be dated from the very beginnings of Christianity."¹⁷

We have only to compare St. Luke with the apocryphal Gospels to understand at once the difference between authentic history and the myths and legends of an imaginative falsifier. The *Proto-evangelium* of St. James, for example, pictures Mary as the daughter of a wealthy Jew; fed by angels' hands, she spends all her childhood in the temple; she refuses to marry until flowers spring from Joseph's staff; her virginity is questioned by the midwife, Salome, who is at once punished for her unbelief. The *Gospel of Thomas* also is full of silly tales. It describes the Child Jesus making birds out of clay. When questioned concerning His right to make them on the Sabbath day, He commands them to fly away, while He gleefully claps His hands. The *Arabian Gospel of the Infancy* speaks of a youth, changed into a mule, who resumes his former state when Mary places the Child Jesus on his back! In the temple, we find the Child Jesus asking the Doctors of the Law interminable questions on the Scriptures, astronomy, medicine, physics, metaphysics, etc.¹⁸

¹⁷ Lepin, *Jésus, Messie et Fils de Dieu*, p. 62.

¹⁸ Lepin, *Revue Pratique d'Apologétique*, Dec. 1, 1905, p. 190

A comparison of St. Luke with the myths of Greek and Roman mythology, likewise brings out clearly the difference between historical truth and legend. Plummer writes: "It is well to remember that there are stories, more or less analogous to what is told by the two Evangelists, in heathen mythologies. The historic probability is not weakened but strengthened by such comparison. St. Luke's Gentile readers must have felt the unspeakable difference between the coarse impurity of imagined intercourse between mortals and divinities, in the religious legends of paganism, and the dignity and delicacy of the spiritual narrative, which St. Luke laid before them."¹⁹

Men like Vivian (*The Churches and Modern Thought*) and Robertson (*Pagan Christs*) vainly attempt to trace the Virgin birth to the legendary virgin births of Greece, Rome, India, Persia, and Egypt. This may be popular polemics with the unthinking and unscrupulous anti-Christian, but a careful student of comparative religions soon learns that the Gospel narrative borrowed nothing from the contradictory, frivolous, and licentious fables of the pagans.

Harnack rejects this false theory as "not demonstrable." He writes: "The conjecture of Usener²⁰ that the idea of birth from a virgin is a heathen myth which was received by the Christians, contradicts the entire earliest development of Christian tradition."²¹

Among the Greeks and Romans the legend often refers to a mythical person like Herakles or Perseus, or is invented out of whole cloth to flatter some great philosopher, or ruler, as in the hero-births of Plato, Alexander, and Augustus. Mithra has three fathers, Cynyras, Phoenix, and King Theias; Attis is the son of Nana and the monster Agdestis. What impudence to compare these licentious and abnormal myths with the delicate beauty of the Gospels' Virgin Birth, and to pretend that they are the basis of the Evangelist's narrative.

The earliest traditions of Buddha's birth do not speak of the virginity of his mother, Maya. When later Indian mythology does mention her virginity in the Mahavastu, the Buddha

¹⁹ *Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels*, vol. i., pp. 74, 75.

²⁰ *Ency. Bibl.* vol. iii.

²¹ *History of Dogma*, I., p. 100.

is represented by a mere phantom self; the birth has ceased to be real.²² The virgin mother of the Indian god, Krishna, in the Hindi version of the tale, is accredited with seven children before he was born. Krishna, too, with his sixteen thousand wives and one hundred and eighty thousand sons, all of whom finally killed one another or were murdered by their father, would hardly be taken as a model for the Christ, by a writer of the Gospels. At any rate, the story of Krishna post-dates the Gospel by some centuries.

The "pagan Christs" of Persia and Egypt are not virgin born. Zoroaster is, according to the Avesta, the son of Pôurushaspa; his mother's name is not mentioned. Later legends make him the third of five brothers.

The Osiris myths are manifold and contradictory. He is at one time born of the heart of Atûm, the first of the gods, and again he is the son of Seb (Earth) and Nûit (Sky), married before his birth to his sister, Isis. Horus, the son of Isis, is the offspring of her incestuous marriage. The Pharaohs have a god for father, but the god is said to be incarnate in the Pharaoh's human father.²³

IV. The Silence of St. Mark, St. John, and St. Paul

One favorite argument of the critics to discredit the historical value of the Gospel of the Infancy is the silence of St. Mark, St. John, and St. Paul, which they say is fatal to the historical character of the dogma of the Virgin Birth. Some go even further, and cite certain texts in these three New Testament writers, which prove that they actually denied it (Mark iii. 21; vi. 1-5; John vi. 43; vii. 42-52; Rom. i. 3; iv. 13; ix. 5; Gal. iii. 16).²⁴

A careful study of the passages they cite, however, prove conclusively that their arbitrary dogmatism is utterly unfounded. They first make the unscholarly mistake of consid-

²² Aiken, *The Dhamma of Gotama the Buddha*.

²³ Martindale, "The Virgin Birth," *The History of Religions*; 6 volumes, Catholic Truth Society of London.

²⁴ Cf. Lobstein, *Die Lehre von der übernatürlichen Geburt Christi*, p. 116.

ering an evangelist the same as a biographer of Jesus Christ. The life of Jesus is one thing; the Gospel of Jesus is another. In the opening verse of his Gospel, St. Mark makes this distinction clear: "The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (Mark i. 1). The Gospel is the preaching of the Kingdom of God by Jesus Christ, and this preaching began with His baptism. When the Christians at Rome asked St. Mark to put in writing the preaching of St. Peter, he satisfied their desire, and that preaching included the sayings of the Lord, and the chief facts of His public life, His miracles, His Passion, and His Resurrection. The Gospel of the Infancy did not enter into the plan of St. Mark's Gospel. Even if he wrote after the other synoptics, he could readily have omitted it without thereby implying that he rejected it.

We notice, too, that he *never* calls St. Joseph the father of Jesus as do St. Matthew and St. Luke, but always cautiously speaks of Him as the "Son of Mary," the Son of Man (14 times), the Son of David (4 times), thus preventing any possible misunderstanding on the part of his readers. Does he not also presuppose the Virgin Birth when he continuously calls Jesus the "Son of God"? (Mark i. 1, 11; iii. 2; v. 7; ix. 7; xiv. 61; xv. 39.) Does not his exact dividing of the family of Nazareth into two distinct groups—James and Joseph; Jude and Simon—show that he regarded Jesus as Mary's only Child?

As for the silence of St. John, Rose writes: "For our part, we hold that this silence can only be interpreted in the contrary sense. It is beyond all doubt that the author of the fourth Gospel knew the Gospels of St. Matthew and St. Luke. If his belief had been contrary to that of the two writers of the Gospel of the Infancy of Jesus, why, we ask, did he not emphatically assert his own faith in opposition to the new dogma which was beginning to creep into the churches? Would silence have sufficed to vindicate his orthodoxy? Are we not justified then in interpreting the silence of St. John as really favorable to our thesis, and in believing that St. John accepted unreservedly the fact of the supernatural birth?"²⁵

²⁵ *Studies on the Gospels*, p. 60.

Granting Holtzmann's thesis that the two prologues of St. John and St. Luke are parallel, it would prove nothing against the historical verity of the Virgin Birth. On the contrary, it would merely prove that St. John elaborated the sketch drawn by his predecessor, St. Luke. The same critic cites three texts (John i. 45; vi. 42; vii. 28) as implying Christ's human origin, but we can cite a dozen other passages in St. John that explain these three texts in the sense of the Virgin Birth (John i. 14; iii. 13; vi. 38, 44, 51, 62; viii. 38, 46, 58; x. 28-31; xi. 25). A variant of John i. 14, cited by writers of the second century, like Tertullian, St. Ignatius, Martyr, St. Irenaeus, and Hippolytus, reads as follows: "(In His name), Who was born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." We do not find any apodictic argument on a variant that has found its way into only one manuscript, the Code Veronensis, but how the critics would have harped upon this reading had it helped them prove their thesis.

St. John was under no necessity of insisting upon the Virgin Birth, for his evident purpose was to write the Gospel of the Incarnate Word—to prove that the union of the Word with human nature was substantial. He certainly knew full well the three synoptic Gospels, and it is beyond question that his disciples in the East, who drew their doctrine and inspiration from him, all believed unreservedly in the Virgin Birth.

The silence of St. Paul regarding the Virgin Birth is easily understood, once we grasp the fact that he writes as a theologian and a moralist, not as a historian. Like St. Mark, he has no intention of writing a life of Jesus. Indeed he alludes to only three facts in the life of Jesus—the institution of the Eucharist, the Passion, and the Resurrection—and they are mentioned only on account of their dogmatic interest.

However, St. Paul has not written one word which precludes the Virgin Birth. He seems to have taken it for granted in more than one passage. St. Irenaeus sees in the words, "God sent His Son, made of a woman" (Gal. iv. 7), a clear statement of the Virgin Birth, and commenting on the first and Second Adam (1 Cor. xv. 45), he deduces from the text the

same teaching: "As Adam was drawn from the virgin earth, so Jesus Christ must have been born of a virgin mother."²⁶

The close and intimate relations between St. Paul and St. Luke, who traveled with him on his missionary journeys, and was his faithful companion in the first and second captivities (Caesarea 55-57, A. D.; Rome 58-60; Acts xxi. 27-30; and xxiv. 27; xxviii. 30), would certainly lead us to infer that St. Paul was acquainted with the Gospel of the Infancy. Irenaeus says that St. Luke wrote the Gospel preached by the Apostle,²⁷ and Tertullian calls St. Paul the "illuminator of St. Luke."²⁸ If St. Luke had therefore heard St. Paul teach that Jesus was the Son of Joseph, it is reasonable to suppose that he would have so flatly contradicted the teaching he had listened to for years, and taught so unequivocally the dogma of the Virgin Birth?

Many scholars have also pointed out the literary affinity between St. Luke and St. Paul. The Gospel of the Infancy is a good historical commentary on Galatians iv. 7, and Luke i. 15, which re-echo the words of Ephesians v. 18: "And be not drunk with wine, wherein is luxury; but be ye filled with the Holy Ghost."

Finally, keeping in mind the words of St. Irenaeus cited above, we ask with Rose: "Could St. Paul have regarded the Holy One of God as a Son of sinful Adam, who was the source of sin for all his descendants? If the first Adam was of God, should not the Second, for better reasons, be born of God directly?"²⁹

V. The Genealogies (Matthew i. 1-17; Luke iii. 23-38)

The Gospel of the Infancy is rejected by rationalist critics, because, they assert, the two genealogies of Christ in St. Matthew and St. Luke are totally different and irreconcilable. Not only that, but they show evident traces of deliberate adaptation. For while they have been painly interpolated into the primitive text to prove that Jesus was the Messias, descending

²⁶ *Adv. Haer.*, III. 21.10; V. 1.3.

²⁷ *Adv. Haer.*, III.1.

²⁸ *Adv. Marcion*, V. 5.

²⁹ Rose, *Studies on the Gospels* p. 60.

in the male line from David, their very purpose is not obtained. They are so poorly put together that they prove the exact contrary of what they start out to demonstrate. How can Jesus be the Son of David, when Joseph, by whom He is of the blood of David, is not His Father?

Even granted that this objection may be met by the theory of the Davidic rights coming through Joseph* to Jesus (St. Matthew), how again, they ask, can Jesus be connected with David through two lines of ancestors in which but three identical names occur: Joseph, Zorobabel, and Salathiel?

One theory, held by Julius Africanus (221 A. D.), and cited in Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History* (i. 7), holds that Jacob is the real father of Joseph (Matt. i. 16), and Heli his legal father, according to the Jewish law of the levirate (Luke iii. 23). For when a childless widow married her deceased husband's brother, the children were called by the name of the first husband (Deut. xxv. 5). This interpretation was commonly held up to the fifteenth century on the authority of Eusebius. The chief objection to it rises from the fact that it necessitates the acceptance of two other levirate marriages to explain Salathiel, the son of Jechonias (Matt. i. 12), and of Neri (Luke iii. 27), and Mathan (Mathat), the son of Eleazar (Matt. i. 15), and of Levi (Luke iii. 29).

A second theory, proposed by Annius of Viterbo in 1490, declares that St. Matthew gives the genealogy of St. Joseph, and St. Luke the genealogy of the Blessed Virgin. This view is held today by Bishop Le Camus in his *Life of Christ* (Vol. I, p. 151) and by Rose in his *Studies on the Gospels* (p. 69) but their arguments fail to convince us. We cannot accept it, for it goes counter to the constant tradition of the early Fathers of the Church, and the Jewish custom of drawing up the genealogies of only paternal ancestors.

A third theory, commonly held today, asserts that St. Matthew gives us the legitimate succession, whereby *the Davidic rights* came through St. Joseph to Jesus, while St. Luke gives us the *real* and *legal ancestors*, who, through St. Joseph, connect Jesus with David.

The Jews of our Lord's time believed that the Messiah was

descended from David (Matt. xv. 22; xx. 30; xxii. 41-46), a fact that is taken for granted by St. Paul in his preaching (Rom. i. 3; xv. 12; Acts xiii. 23; Cf. Apoc. v. 6; xxii. 16). The Rabbis disputed whether the Messiah was to come from David through Solomon or through Nathan. The defenders of the Nathan line argued that Solomon had died in idolatry, and that his last descendant before the captivity, Jechonias, had been rejected by God (Jer. xxii. 30).

The genealogies of St. Matthew and St. Luke satisfy both points of view. The Davidic rights descended to Joseph and his legal Son Jesus through Solomon (Matt. i. 6, 7), whereas Jesus' true Davidic ancestry was traced through Nathan (Luke iii. 31).

According to this theory, St. Matthew's genealogy has but a conventional value.³⁰ It consists of three groups of fourteen names, because the three Hebrew letters of David's name represent a numerical value of fourteen. To obtain this artificial symmetry, many names had to be omitted, as we see by comparing the forty-two generations summed up in verse 17 with the parallel genealogies of the Old Testament.

Whatever theory we hold—and we admit that no theory is absolutely satisfactory—Catholics accept the two genealogies as part of the Sacred Scriptures, guaranteed them by the divine infallible voice of an authoritative teaching Church. The rationalist critic is unscholarly and unfair, because he starts out with the set purpose of denying the historical value of a document which goes counter to his personal views.

VI. The Brethren of the Lord

The four Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, and St. Paul all mention the "brethren of the Lord." They have been cited against the perpetual virginity of Mary from the time of Helvidius (380) and Jovinian (385).

There are three possible interpretations of these words.

³⁰ Father Pesch, S.J., says of the genealogy of St. Luke: "I do not blame the sentiment of those who believe that St. Luke merely records the genealogy which the Gentile Christians used to read in the LXX, without in any way detracting from or adding to the authority of the statements that are contained in it. Few indeed are those who, within the last centuries, have upheld that view, but still they are no mean interpreters and theologians" (*De Inspiratione Sacrae Scripture*, 1906, p. 547).

The "brethren of the Lord" were children of the Blessed Virgin; they were children of Joseph by a former marriage; they were cousins of Jesus.

Towards the end of the fourth century the perpetual virginity of Mary was denied during a most bitter controversy on the comparative merits of virginity and marriage. The opponents of monachism and Christian asceticism in their endeavor to extol marriage, quoted the passages referring to the "brethren of the Lord" as proof positive that after the Virgin Birth, Mary had other children. This heresy began in Syria,³¹ and finally reached Rome. Helvidius, who taught it in 380, was refuted by St. Jerome; Jovinian followed soon after, and was answered by St. Jerome and St. Ambrose. He was also condemned by the Synod of Milan, and excommunicated by Pope Siricius.³²

Helvidius cites three texts (Matt. i. 18; i. 35; Luke ii. 7) to prove his contention. The words "*Before* they came together" and "*Till* she brought forth her first-born Son," both prove, he maintained, that the union was consummated later on; again the text: "She brought forth her *first-born Son*," implies there were at least two children. St. Jerome's familiarity with the Sacred Scriptures enabled him to answer these sophisms easily. He cited many passages of the Bible in which the words *before* and *till* did not imply the subsequent occurrence of the thing which is said not to have occurred as yet at a particular time. For instance: "And no man hath known of his sepulcher *until* this present day" (Deut. xxxiv. 6); no one has ever held that the tomb of Moses was afterwards found by the Jews.

Again he says it is false to assert that the words "the first-born Son" imply that the Blessed Virgin had other children. The Mosaic law of the first-born (Exodus xxxiv. 19, 20) held as soon as the mother had given birth to a son, whether he was the only one, or whether he was succeeded by other children. The Jews frequently spoke of a mother dying, when bringing forth her first-born.

³¹ St. Epiphanius, *Adv. Haer.*, LXXVIII.1.

³² Jerome, *De Perpetua Virginitate Mariae*; Ambrose, *De Instit. Virg.*; Siricius, Epis. IX., in Denzinger, p. 41.

A second theory held that the "brethren of the Lord" were children of Joseph by a former marriage. This view was held by St. Epiphanius (*Adv. Haer.* LXXXVIII. 7), St. Gregory of Nyssa (in *Christi Resur.* II), St. Cyril of Alexandria (in *Joan* vii. 5), Origen (in *Matt.* xiii. 55), and St. Hilary (in *Matt.* i. 3, 4). St. Jerome tells us that this opinion originated in "the ravings of the apocryphal Gospels of St. James and St. Peter" (in *Matt.* xii. 49, 50). He himself firmly held that St. Joseph was a virgin, "so that from a virgin wedlock a virgin Son was born."³³ St. Jerome's teaching on this point is now a commonplace of Catholic teaching, St. Thomas Aquinas characterizing the opposite view as false."³⁴

The third theory which is suggested by many passages of the Gospels, and agrees with the Church's dogmatic and historical tradition, maintains that the "brethren of the Lord" were cousins of Jesus. The Greek *adelphos* of the New Testament is a translation of the Hebrew *ah* (Aramaic, *aha*), the specific word for brother. But this word had a much wider meaning among the Jews, as is clear from many passages of the Old Testament. It is used for relatives in general (*Job* xlii. 2; xix. 13, 14), nephews (Abraham and Lot; *Gen.* xiii. 8; xiv. 14; Laban and Jacob; *Gen.* xxix. 15), distant cousins (*Lev.* x. 4), first cousins (*1 Par.* xxiii. 21, 22). Moreover, there was no word in Hebrew or Aramaic for cousin, so that the Old Testament writers were forced to use the word *ah*, brother, to describe different degrees of kindred. For example, Jacob, speaking to his cousin, Rachel, calls himself her father's brother, rather than style himself the son of her father's sister, the only other way he could describe in Hebrew his real relationship (*Gen.* xxix. 12). It is certain, therefore, that if Jesus had cousins, especially if they were not born of the same mother, they must needs be called in the Aramaic tongue, His brethren.³⁵

As the word "brother" in itself proves nothing, we must study, singly and together, the various texts of the New Testament that refer to the "brethren of the Lord," in order to

³³ *Adv. Helv.*, 19.

³⁴ In *Epist. ad Gal.* i. 3.

³⁵ Gesenius, *Thesaurus*, pp. 63, 64. Buhl Gesenius' *Handwörterbuch*, p. 24.

determine their real relationship to Him. St. John, the Acts of the Apostles, and St. Paul tell us nothing, for they simply mention vaguely that some of Jesus' followers were called His brethren. St. Paul (1 Cor. ix. 5) groups them with the Apostles ("the rest of the Apostles and the brethren of the Lord"), implying that they were fairly numerous. St. Luke in the Acts (i. 14) expressly separates them from the Blessed Virgin (the Apostles, "the women and Mary, the mother of Jesus, and His brethren"). St. John speaks of Jesus staying at Capharnaum with "His Mother, His brethren, and the disciples" (John ii. 12).

St. Matthew and St. Luke help us considerably in solving this complicated problem. As they expressly teach the Virgin Birth, they cannot possibly attribute to Jesus any *older* brothers and sisters. They also exclude the possibility of St. Joseph having had children of a former marriage, by their manner of narrating the childhood of Jesus. In the Gospel of the Infancy, there is no mention of any other brothers or sisters (Matt. ii. 13, 14, 20, 21; Luke ii. 16-19, 22, 27, 33, 39); the finding of the Child Jesus in the Temple proves clearly that the twelve-year-old Jesus was Mary's only Son (Luke ii. 41-52). This fact is all the more striking when we compare the genuine with the apocryphal Gospels. The Gospel of St. James, for example, mentions without warrant the children of St. Joseph accompanying him on the road to Bethlehem, and of their being enrolled in the Census of Cyrinus (ix. 1; xvii. 1, 2; xviii. 1).

It is noteworthy that the "brethren of the Lord" do not appear at all in the home life of Jesus at Nazareth, but are mentioned only during the course of His public ministry. They are mentioned twice in St. Mark (iii. 21, 31-35; vi. 3).

In the first instance, His "friends" seek to lay hold on Him, saying, "He is mad"; then His "mother and His brethren appear, calling Him." The word "brethren" is necessary in this passage, for our Saviour wishes to bring out clearly the contrast between a carnal and a spiritual relationship (Mark iii. 34). Although St. Mark does not expressly mention the Virgin Birth, we have no right to assume that he was ignorant

of it, for he repeatedly calls Jesus the Son of God (Mark i. 1; iii. 12; xii. 6; xiv. 62). No proof, therefore, can be adduced from this text that the brethren of Jesus were His brethren in blood.

The second text reads: "Is not this the carpenter, the Son of Mary, the brother of James and Joseph, and Jude and Simon? Are not also His sisters here with us?" (Mark vi. 3.) We note, first of all, that Jesus is called "the Son of Mary," and not the Son of Joseph. St. Matthew and St. Luke, who have set forth in detail the doctrine of the Virgin Birth, do not scruple about calling Joseph the father of Jesus (Matt. xiii. 55; Luke iv. 22), but St. Mark never does so. Jesus in His Gospel is always the *Son of God* and the *Son of Mary*. Mary, therefore, had no other children. Moreover, in a later passage (Mark xv. 40), St. Mark speaks of another Mary as the mother of James and Joseph. (Cf. "Mary, the mother of Joseph," Mark xv. 47; "Mary, the mother of James," Mark xvi. 1; Luke xxiv. 10; "Mary, the mother of James and Joseph," (Matt. xxvii. 56.) If James and Joseph are not then the children of the Blessed Virgin, surely Jude and Simon are not, for they are named after the others. The mother of Jude and Simon is not mentioned, but we can certainly infer that she was neither the Blessed Virgin, nor the mother of James and Joseph.³⁶ These two events recorded by St. Mark are also mentioned by St. Matthew and St. Luke, but they do not help in determining who the "brethren of the Lord" really were. (Cf. Matt. xii. 46-50; Luke viii. 19-21; Matt. xiii. 52-58; Luke iv. 22, 23.)

If we compare all the passages of the Gospels which mention the "brethren of the Lord," we can show that they were most probably our Saviour's cousins. St. John tells us that the Blessed Virgin had a sister, Mary, who was married (?) to Cleophas or Clopas (John xix. 25). We learn from Hegesippus³⁷ that Simon or Simeon, the second Bishop of Jerusalem, was a son of Clopas, who in turn was a brother of St. Joseph. This gives us an uncle of Jesus with one child, and an aunt with probably other children.

³⁶ Lagrange, *Évangile selon Saint Marc*, pp. 72-89.

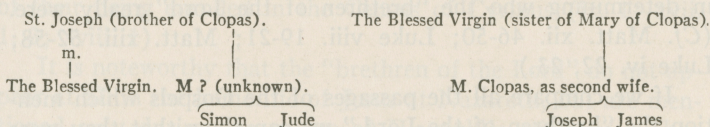
³⁷ Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.*, IV., 22.4.

According to St. Paul (Gal. i. 19), St. James, the brother of the Lord, seems to be identical (?) with St. James the Apostle, and according to St. Jerome, this Apostle is St. James the Less (Mark xv. 40), the son of Alphaeus (Mark iii. 18). Is the name Alphaeus the same as Cleophas or Clopas? (John xix. 25; Luke xxiv. 18.) It is philologically impossible to identify these two names, as some have pretended, but it is possible to hold the hypothesis of a double name, Alphaeus-Clopas. Thus, for example, Chimeon could transcribe his name Simeon or use the Greek Simon; Jeschoua could transcribe his name Jesus or use the Greek Jason.³⁸

We observe that Eusebius does not call Simeon the *brother* of James, whom he succeeded as Bishop of Jerusalem, which he certainly would have done had they really been brothers. Since then James and Joseph are mentioned together, and similarly Simon and Jude; and since we know that James was the son of Mary, the wife of Clopas, and Simon was the son of Clopas, the brother of St. Joseph, it seems reasonable to conclude that all four had the same father, but not the same mother.

If we suppose that Simeon and Jude were the sons of Clopas by a former wife, and James and Joseph his sons by Mary, the sister of the Blessed Virgin, we have as a result a double cousinship, two brothers having married two sisters.

The following table will make this clear:



According to this hypothesis, the sons of Clopas and Mary are doubly cousins of Jesus; the sons of Clopas by an unknown mother are cousins on their father's side only.³⁹

We can never know to a certainty the exact relationship of the four brothers, James, Joseph, Simon, and Jude. It will always remain doubtful whether "Mary of Clopas" (Cleophas)

³⁸ Lagrange, *Evangile selon Saint Marc*, p. 79.

³⁹ Pope, *The Catholic Students' Aids to the Bible*, vol. iii., p. 407.

meant the wife of Clopas or his sister. In either case her children, James and Joseph, were cousins of Jesus, either on the mother's or the father's side. It is doubtful also whether James, the brother of the Lord, is James, the Apostle, the son of Alphaeus; and again, whether his father, Alpheus, is the same as Clopas (Alphaeus-Clopas), the brother of St. Joseph. If both hypotheses are true, and we think they are, his brother, Jude, was a cousin of Jesus on both his mother's and his father's side.

Whatever the precise relationship may be, this problem of the "brethren of the Lord" is perfectly distinct from the doctrine of the Virgin Birth. We have proved that it is certainly unfair to cite the brethren of the Lord as an argument against the perpetual virginity of Mary.

We have now to consider the dogmatic and historical tradition concerning the "brethren of the Lord." In the first place, the heresy that makes them the brothers of Jesus, born of the same mother, is incompatible with the universally held dogma of Mary's perpetual virginity. St. Jerome cites against Helvidius⁴⁰ writers of the second century such as St. Ignatius, Martyr, Bishop of Antioch, and St. Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons. The first groups together three great mysteries of the Gospel, "the virginity of Mary, her child-bearing, and the death of our Lord."⁴¹ The second writer, summing up the faith of the churches of both East and West, mentions the Virgin Birth, together with the Lord's Passion and Resurrection.⁴²

Aristides of Athens in his Apology, addressed to the Emperor Hadrian in 124 A. D., mentions the striking events of our Lord's life; His Virgin Birth, His Crucifixion by the Jews, His Death and Burial, His Resurrection, and His Ascension. St. Justin is another witness to the Virgin Birth both in his Apology (31, 46) and in his famous Dialogue with the Jew Trypho (85). The very fact of this unanimous, universal consent of the Apostolic Churches is conclusive evidence that the dogma of the Virgin Birth is of apostolic origin.

The only ecclesiastical writer to whom Helvidius could

⁴⁰ *Adv. Helv.*, 17.

⁴¹ *Ad. Eph.* XIX.

⁴² *Adv. Haer.*, I. X. I; *Cf. V.* 19.

rightly appeal as a denier of the dogma was Tertullian. St. Jerome with Origen dismissed Tertullian as a heretic, who had abandoned the Catholic faith on this and on other dogmas.⁴³ Tertullian did not pretend to be a witness to the divine tradition of the Church Catholic in this instance, but denied the Virgin Birth under stress of a particular controversy with Marcion and Apelles.⁴⁴

The Jewish convert, Hegesippus (174-189), speaking of the brethren of the Lord, tells us that Simeon was chosen to succeed James as Bishop of Jerusalem because he was "*another cousin*" of the Lord. As Hegesippus in another passage calls James the brother of the Lord, we can safely argue that, in his mind, the two words, brother and cousin, were equivalent.⁴⁵ He also adds that Simeon was the cousin of Jesus through His father, Clopas, whom he knows to be the brother of St. Joseph.⁴⁶ Had Jude been a brother in the strict sense of the word, Hegesippus would not have used the phrase, "He is *said to have been* the brother of the Lord according to the flesh."⁴⁷ The words, "according to the flesh," emphasize the fact that Jude, unlike the Apostles and disciples in general, was not the brother of Jesus merely *according to the spirit*.

Clement of Alexandria (216) in a passage of the Hypotyposes, commentaries on the Sacred Scriptures,⁴⁸ identifies James, the brother of the Lord, with the Apostle James, the son of Alphaeus (Alphaeus-Clopas). In another fragment of the same book, which we possess in a Latin translation (regarded as authentic by Harnack), he calls Jude "the author of the Catholic Epistle," brother of James and the son of Joseph. This may be explained either on the hypothesis that he followed the teaching of the apocryphal Gospels, which made the brethren of Jesus children of Joseph by a former marriage, or that James and Jude were merely the nephews of St. Joseph, committed to his care by their dying father, Alphaeus-Clopas, St. Joseph's brother.

⁴³ St. Jerome, *Adv. Helv.*, 17; Origen, Hom. VII. in Lucam.

⁴⁴ *Cont. Marcion*, IV, 19; *De Carne Christi*, VII. Cf. D'Ales, *La Théologie de Tertullien*, 1905, pp. 196, 197.

⁴⁵ Eusebius, *Hist. Eccles.* IV., 22, 4.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, III., 11, 1.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, III., 20, 1.

⁴⁸ Eusebius, *Hist. Eccles.*, II., 1.

Origen (254) speaks of Tertullian as a heretic who believed that after the birth of Jesus, Mary had other children, "the brethren of the Lord"; and that for this reason Jesus publicly disowned her as His mother (Mark iii. 33, 34). Origen himself held that the "brethren of the Lord" were children of Joseph's former marriage.⁴⁹

St. Hilary (356), a hundred years later, holds the same view, and rebukes the opponents of the virginity of Mary as irreligious and presumptuous men, who do not know who the brethren of the Lord really were (in Matt. i. 3, 4); St. Epiphanius calls them "rash, blasphemous, and insane."⁵⁰

St. Ambrose (397) and St. Jerome (420) were both strong defenders of the virginity of Mary, and considered the brethren of the Lord as His first cousins. St. Chrysostom (407) and St. Augustine (430) both maintained at first that the brethren of the Lord were Joseph's children by a former marriage (in Matt. v. 3; *Quaest. XVII.*, in Matt. iii.), but they later on adopted the view of St. Jerome (in *Epist. ad Gal.*; in *Joan x. 2*).

The early Fathers, especially St. Jerome, gave four reasons for their assertion that the "brethren of the Lord" were not Mary's children. In the first place, they held that her virginity was implied in the answer she made to the angel's salutation: "How shall this be done, because I know not man?"⁵¹ Her objection has no sense whatever, unless we believe that she had made a vow of virginity in marriage. Even Loisy is unconvinced by the arguments that Harnack advances against the authenticity of the two verses of Luke i. 34, 35,⁵² and the Abbé Lagrange has ably answered Harnack's every objection.⁵³ Negative criticism is certainly pretty much at a loss when it arbitrarily suppresses texts it cannot explain. This is, however, a common method with the critics. When they find themselves unable to untie a knot, they do not hesitate to cut it.

Secondly, they argued, if Mary had other children, why

⁴⁹ Hom. VII. in *Lucam*; *Contra Celsum*, 1.47; in Matt. xiii. 55.

⁵⁰ *Adv. Haer.*, LXXVIII., 1-7.

⁵¹ Schanz, *Comm. über das Evang. Lukas*, p. 88.

⁵² *Revue d'Hist. et de Litt. religieuses*, 1903, p. 291.

⁵³ *Evangile selon Saint Luc.*, pp. 31-36.

should Jesus, dying on the Cross, have intrusted His Mother to the care of St. John? (John xix. 26, 27.)

Thirdly, if Mary had other children, why is Jesus called so emphatically "the son of Mary" (Mark vi. 3), and why is Mary never called the mother of the brethren of the Lord? Why again is she always called "the Virgin" in the creeds from the earliest antiquity?

Fourthly, the Gospel texts all imply that the brethren of the Lord were older than Jesus. They were jealous of His popularity; they criticized Him and gave Him advice; they endeavored to lay hold of Him on the supposition that He was mad (Mark vi. 4; John vii. 1 *et seq.*; Mark iii. 31). This is hardly the attitude of young brothers, especially if we take into account the customs of the East.⁵⁴

The tradition of the Church, therefore, is certainly clear and explicit that the brethren of the Lord were His cousins. The only dissentient voice in antiquity is that of the heretic Tertullian. The opinion of a few Fathers, who considered them the children of St. Joseph by a former marriage, seems to have been invented as an easy way out of a difficulty, and clearly contradicts the witness of both St. Matthew and St. Luke.

We have considered briefly the chief objections that have been brought against the Virgin Birth and the perpetual virginity of the Blessed Virgin. We have set forth the meaning of the prophecy of Isaias, outlined the arguments for the genuinity and authenticity of the Gospel of the Infancy, explained the silence of St. Mark, St. Paul, and St. John, and shown that the divergencies in the genealogies and the uncertainty about the true relationship of the brethren of the Lord to Jesus do not disprove the Catholic dogma.

We cannot emphasize too strongly the fact that Jesus is not the Son of God because He is Virgin-born, nor does His pre-existence necessitate Virgin Birth, as some critics vainly imagine.⁵⁵ The dogma is based, as we have seen, not on *a priori* suppositions, but on the clear, explicit teaching of both the Old and New Testaments, and on the constant tradition of a di-

⁵⁴ Durand, *The Childhood of Jesus Christ*, p. 294.

⁵⁵ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theol.*, part iii., q. 29, a. 1, ad 2.

vine, infallible teaching Church. From Isaias in the eighth century before Christ, to the Gospels of St. Matthew and St. Luke; from St. Ignatius Martyr, in the second century, to Durand and Lagrange, the latest twentieth century commentators on the Gospel of the Infancy, the Catholic Church has ever taught the dogma of the Virgin Birth, and condemned as heretics all who impugned her teaching. With the Council of Toledo, held on November 17, 675,⁵⁶ the Catholic Church declares:

"If anyone does not, according to the Holy Fathers, and according to the truth of God, confess that the ever Virgin and Immaculate Mary, the Mother of God, conceived in time, truly and in special manner, without seed, of the Holy Spirit, the Very Word of God, Who was born of all ages of God the Father, and that she begot Him without corruption, remaining a Virgin after her child-bearing, let him be condemned."

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- ⁵⁶ Hefele, *Histoire des Conciles*, vol. iii., part i., p. 66.

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