

THIRD PART, QUESTION 28
Of the Virginity of the Mother of God
(In Four Articles)

We now have to consider the virginity of the Mother of God; concerning which there are four points of inquiry:

- (1) Whether she was a virgin in conceiving?
- (2) Whether she was a virgin in His Birth?
- (3) Whether she remained a virgin after His Birth?
- (4) Whether she took a vow of virginity?

Whether the Mother of God was a virgin in conceiving Christ?

IIIa q. 28 a. 1

Objection 1. It would seem that the Mother of God was not a virgin in conceiving Christ. For no child having father and mother is conceived by a virgin mother. But Christ is said to have had not only a mother, but also a father, according to Lk. 2:33: “His father and mother were wondering at those things which were spoken concerning Him”: and further on (Lk. 2:48) in the same chapter she says: “Behold I and Thy father [Vulg.: ‘Thy father and I’] have sought Thee sorrowing.” Therefore Christ was not conceived of a virgin mother.

Objection 2. Further (Mat. 1) it is proved that Christ was the Son of Abraham and David, through Joseph being descended from David. But this proof would have availed nothing if Joseph were not the father of Christ. Therefore it seems that Christ’s Mother conceived Him of the seed of Joseph; and consequently that she was not a virgin in conceiving Him.

Objection 3. Further, it is written (Gal. 4:4): “God sent His Son, made of a woman.” But according to the customary mode of speaking, the term “woman” applies to one who is known of a man. Therefore Christ was not conceived by a virgin mother.

Objection 4. Further, things of the same species have the same mode of generation: since generation is specified by its terminus just as are other motions. But Christ belonged to the same species as other men, according to Phil. 2:7: “Being made in the likeness of men, and in habit found as a man.” Since therefore other men are begotten of the mingling of male and female, it seems that Christ was begotten in the same manner; and that consequently He was not conceived of a virgin mother.

Objection 5. Further, every natural form has its determinate matter, outside which it cannot be. But the matter of human form appears to be the semen of male and female. If therefore Christ’s body was not conceived of the semen of male and female, it would not have been truly a human body; which cannot be asserted. It seems therefore that He was not conceived of a virgin mother.

On the contrary, It is written (Is. 7:14): “Behold a virgin shall conceive.”

I answer that, We must confess simply that the Mother of Christ was a virgin in conceiving for to deny this belongs to the heresy of the Ebionites and Cerinthus, who held Christ to be a mere man, and maintained that He was born of both sexes.

It is fitting for four reasons that Christ should be born of a virgin. First, in order to maintain the dignity or the Father Who sent Him. For since Christ is the true and natural Son of God, it was not fitting that He should have another father than God: lest the dignity belonging to God be transferred to another.

Secondly, this was befitting to a property of the Son Himself, Who is sent. For He is the Word of God: and the word is conceived without any interior corruption: indeed, interior corruption is incompatible with perfect conception of the word. Since therefore flesh was so assumed by the Word of God, as to be the flesh of the Word of God, it was fitting that it also should be conceived without corruption of the mother.

Thirdly, this was befitting to the dignity of Christ’s humanity in which there could be no sin, since by it the sin of the world was taken away, according to Jn. 1:29: “Behold the Lamb of God” (i.e. the Lamb without stain) “who taketh away the sin of the world.” Now it was not possible in a nature already corrupt, for flesh to be born from sexual intercourse without incurring the infection of original sin. Whence Augustine says (De Nup. et Concup. i): “In that union,” viz. the marriage of Mary and Joseph, “the nuptial intercourse alone was lacking: because in sinful flesh this could not be without fleshly concupiscence which arises from sin, and without which He wished to be conceived, Who was to be without sin.”

Fourthly, on account of the very end of the Incarnation of Christ, which was that men might be born again as sons of God, “not of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God” (Jn. 1:13), i.e. of the power of God, of which fact the very conception of Christ was to appear as an exemplar. Whence Augustine says (De Sanct. Virg.): “It behooved that our Head, by a notable miracle, should be born, after the flesh, of a virgin, that He might thereby

signify that His members would be born, after the Spirit, of a virgin Church.”

Reply to Objection 1. As Bede says on Lk. 1:33: Joseph is called the father of the Saviour, not that he really was His father, as the Photinians pretended: but that he was considered by men to be so, for the safeguarding of Mary’s good name. Wherefore Luke adds (Lk. 3:23): “Being, as it was supposed, the son of Joseph.”

Or, according to Augustine (De Cons. Evang. ii), Joseph is called the father of Christ just as “he is called the husband of Mary, without fleshly mingling, by the mere bond of marriage: being thereby united to Him much more closely than if he were adopted from another family. Consequently that Christ was not begotten of Joseph by fleshly union is no reason why Joseph should not be called His father; since he would be the father even of an adopted son not born of his wife.”

Reply to Objection 2. As Jerome says on Mat. 1:18: “Though Joseph was not the father of our Lord and Saviour, the order of His genealogy is traced down to Joseph”—first, because “the Scriptures are not wont to trace the female line in genealogies”: secondly, “Mary and Joseph were of the same tribe”; wherefore by law he was bound to take her as being of his kin. Likewise, as Augustine says (De Nup. et Concup. i), “it was befitting to trace the genealogy down to Joseph, lest in that marriage any slight should be offered to the male sex, which is indeed the stronger: for truth suffered nothing thereby, since both Joseph and Mary were of the family of David.”

Reply to Objection 3. As the gloss says on this passage, the word “‘mulier,’ is here used instead of ‘femina,’ according to the custom of the Hebrew tongue: which ap-

plies the term signifying woman to those of the female sex who are virgins.”

Reply to Objection 4. This argument is true of those things which come into existence by the way of nature: since nature, just as it is fixed to one particular effect, so it is determinate to one mode of producing that effect. But as the supernatural power of God extends to the infinite: just as it is not determinate to one effect, so neither is it determinate to one mode of producing any effect whatever. Consequently, just as it was possible for the first man to be produced, by the Divine power, “from the slime of the earth,” so too was it possible for Christ’s body to be made, by Divine power, from a virgin without the seed of the male.

Reply to Objection 5. According to the Philosopher (De Gener. Animal. i, ii, iv), in conception the seed of the male is not by way of matter, but by way of agent: and the female alone supplies the matter. Wherefore though the seed of the male was lacking in Christ’s conception, it does not follow that due matter was lacking.

But if the seed of the male were the matter of the fetus in animal conception, it is nevertheless manifest that it is not a matter remaining under one form, but subject to transformation. And though the natural power cannot transmute other than determinate matter to a determinate form; nevertheless the Divine power, which is infinite, can transmute all matter to any form whatsoever. Consequently, just as it transmuted the slime of the earth into Adam’s body, so could it transmute the matter supplied by His Mother into Christ’s body, even though it were not the sufficient matter for a natural conception.

Whether Christ’s Mother was a virgin in His birth?

IIIa q. 28 a. 2

Objection 1. It would seem that Christ’s Mother was not a virgin in His Birth. For Ambrose says on Lk. 2:23: “He who sanctified a strange womb, for the birth of a prophet, He it is who opened His Mother’s womb, that He might go forth unspotted.” But opening of the womb excludes virginity. Therefore Christ’s Mother was not a virgin in His Birth.

Objection 2. Further, nothing should have taken place in the mystery of Christ, which would make His body to seem unreal. Now it seems to pertain not to a true but to an unreal body, to be able to go through a closed passage; since two bodies cannot be in one place at the same time. It was therefore unfitting that Christ’s body should come forth from His Mother’s closed womb: and consequently that she should remain a virgin in giving birth to Him.

Objection 3. Further, as Gregory says in the Homily for the octave of Easter*, that by entering after His Res-

urrection where the disciples were gathered, the doors being shut, our Lord “showed that His body was the same in nature but differed in glory”: so that it seems that to go through a closed passage pertains to a glorified body. But Christ’s body was not glorified in its conception, but was passible, having “the likeness of sinful flesh,” as the Apostle says (Rom. 8:3). Therefore He did not come forth through the closed womb of the Virgin.

On the contrary, In a sermon of the Council of Ephesus (P. III, Cap. ix) it is said: “After giving birth, nature knows not a virgin: but grace enhances her fruitfulness, and effects her motherhood, while in no way does it injure her virginity.” Therefore Christ’s Mother was a virgin also in giving birth to Him.

I answer that, Without any doubt whatever we must assert that the Mother of Christ was a virgin even in His Birth: for the prophet says not only: “Behold a virgin

* xxvi in Evang.

shall conceive,” but adds: “and shall bear a son.” This indeed was befitting for three reasons. First, because this was in keeping with a property of Him whose Birth is in question, for He is the Word of God. For the word is not only conceived in the mind without corruption, but also proceeds from the mind without corruption. Wherefore in order to show that body to be the body of the very Word of God, it was fitting that it should be born of a virgin incorrupt. Whence in the sermon of the Council of Ephesus (quoted above) we read: “Whosoever brings forth mere flesh, ceases to be a virgin. But since she gave birth to the Word made flesh, God safeguarded her virginity so as to manifest His Word, by which Word He thus manifested Himself: for neither does our word, when brought forth, corrupt the mind; nor does God, the substantial Word, deigning to be born, destroy virginity.”

Secondly, this is fitting as regards the effect of Christ’s Incarnation: since He came for this purpose, that He might take away our corruption. Wherefore it is unfitting that in His Birth He should corrupt His Mother’s virginity. Thus Augustine says in a sermon on the Nativity of Our Lord: “It was not right that He who came to heal corruption, should by His advent violate integrity.”

Thirdly, it was fitting that He Who commanded us to honor our father and mother should not in His Birth lessen the honor due to His Mother.

Reply to Objection 1. Ambrose says this in expounding the evangelist’s quotation from the Law: “Every male opening the womb shall be called holy to the Lord.” This, says Bede, “is said in regard to the wonted manner of birth; not that we are to believe that our Lord in coming forth violated the abode of her sacred womb, which His entrance therein had hallowed.” Wherefore the opening here spoken of does not imply the unlocking of the en-

sure of virginal purity; but the mere coming forth of the infant from the maternal womb.

Reply to Objection 2. Christ wished so to show the reality of His body, as to manifest His Godhead at the same time. For this reason He mingled wondrous with lowly things. Wherefore, to show that His body was real, He was born of a woman. But in order to manifest His Godhead, He was born of a virgin, for “such a Birth befits a God,” as Ambrose says in the Christmas hymn.

Reply to Objection 3. Some have held that Christ, in His Birth, assumed the gift of “subtlety,” when He came forth from the closed womb of a virgin; and that He assumed the gift of “agility” when with dry feet He walked on the sea. But this is not consistent with what has been decided above (q. 14). For these gifts of a glorified body result from an overflow of the soul’s glory on to the body, as we shall explain further on, in treating of glorified bodies (Suppl., q. 82): and it has been said above (q. 13, a. 3, ad 1; q. 16, a. 1, ad 2) that before His Passion Christ “allowed His flesh to do and to suffer what was proper to it” (Damascene, *De Fide Orth.* iii): nor was there such an overflow of glory from His soul on to His body.

We must therefore say that all these things took place miraculously by Divine power. Whence Augustine says (Sup. Joan. Tract. 121): “To the substance of a body in which was the Godhead closed doors were no obstacle. For truly He had power to enter in by doors not open, in Whose Birth His Mother’s virginity remained inviolate.” And Dionysius says in an epistle (*Ad Caium iv*) that “Christ excelled man in doing that which is proper to man: this is shown in His supernatural conception, of a virgin, and in the unstable waters bearing the weight of earthly feet.”

Whether Christ’s Mother remained a virgin after His birth?

IIIa q. 28 a. 3

Objection 1. It would seem that Christ’s Mother did not remain a virgin after His Birth. For it is written (Mat. 1:18): “Before Joseph and Mary came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost.” Now the Evangelist would not have said this—“before they came together”—unless he were certain of their subsequent coming together; for no one says of one who does not eventually dine “before he dines” (cf. Jerome, *Contra Helvid.*). It seems, therefore, that the Blessed Virgin subsequently had intercourse with Joseph; and consequently that she did not remain a virgin after (Christ’s) Birth.

Objection 2. Further, in the same passage (Mat. 1:20) are related the words of the angel to Joseph: “Fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife.” But marriage is consummated by carnal intercourse. Therefore it seems that this must have at some time taken place between Mary

and Joseph: and that, consequently she did not remain a virgin after (Christ’s) Birth.

Objection 3. Further, again in the same passage a little further on (Mat. 1:24,25) we read: “And” (Joseph) “took unto him his wife; and he knew her not till she brought forth her first-born Son.” Now this conjunction “till” is wont to designate a fixed time, on the completion of which that takes place which previously had not taken place. And the verb “knew” refers here to knowledge by intercourse (cf. Jerome, *Contra Helvid.*); just as (Gn. 4:1) it is said that “Adam knew his wife.” Therefore it seems that after (Christ’s) Birth, the Blessed Virgin was known by Joseph; and, consequently, that she did not remain a virgin after the Birth (of Christ).

Objection 4. Further, “first-born” can only be said of one who has brothers afterwards: wherefore (Rom. 8:29):

“Whom He foreknew, He also predestinated to be made conformable to the image of His Son; that He might be the first-born among many brethren.” But the evangelist calls Christ the first-born by His Mother. Therefore she had other children after Christ. And therefore it seems that Christ’s Mother did not remain a virgin after His Birth.

Objection 5. Further, it is written (Jn. 2:12): “After this He went down to Capharnaum, He”—that is, Christ—“and His Mother and His brethren.” But brethren are those who are begotten of the same parent. Therefore it seems that the Blessed Virgin had other sons after Christ.

Objection 6. Further, it is written (Mat. 27:55,56): “There were there”—that is, by the cross of Christ—“many women afar off, who had followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering unto Him; among whom was Mary Magdalen, and Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee.” Now this Mary who is called “the mother of James and Joseph” seems to have been also the Mother of Christ; for it is written (Jn. 19:25) that “there stood by the cross of Jesus, Mary His Mother.” Therefore it seems that Christ’s Mother did not remain a virgin after His Birth.

On the contrary, It is written (Ezech. 44:2): “This gate shall be shut, it shall not be opened, and no man shall pass through it; because the Lord the God of Israel hath entered in by it.” Expounding these words, Augustine says in a sermon (De Annunt. Dom. iii): “What means this closed gate in the House of the Lord, except that Mary is to be ever inviolate? What does it mean that ‘no man shall pass through it,’ save that Joseph shall not know her? And what is this—‘The Lord alone enters in and goeth out by it’—except that the Holy Ghost shall impregnate her, and that the Lord of angels shall be born of her? And what means this—‘it shall be shut for evermore’—but that Mary is a virgin before His Birth, a virgin in His Birth, and a virgin after His Birth?”

I answer that, Without any hesitation we must abhor the error of Helvidius, who dared to assert that Christ’s Mother, after His Birth, was carnally known by Joseph, and bore other children. For, in the first place, this is derogatory to Christ’s perfection: for as He is in His Godhead the Only-Begotten of the Father, being thus His Son in every respect perfect, so it was becoming that He should be the Only-begotten son of His Mother, as being her perfect offspring.

Secondly, this error is an insult to the Holy Ghost, whose “shrine” was the virginal womb*, wherein He had formed the flesh of Christ: wherefore it was unbecoming that it should be desecrated by intercourse with man.

Thirdly, this is derogatory to the dignity and holiness of God’s Mother: for thus she would seem to be most ungrateful, were she not content with such a Son; and were

she, of her own accord, by carnal intercourse to forfeit that virginity which had been miraculously preserved in her.

Fourthly, it would be tantamount to an imputation of extreme presumption in Joseph, to assume that he attempted to violate her whom by the angel’s revelation he knew to have conceived by the Holy Ghost.

We must therefore simply assert that the Mother of God, as she was a virgin in conceiving Him and a virgin in giving Him birth, did she remain a virgin ever afterwards.

Reply to Objection 1. As Jerome says (Contra Helvid. i): “Although this particle ‘before’ often indicates a subsequent event, yet we must observe that it not infrequently points merely to some thing previously in the mind: nor is there need that what was in the mind take place eventually, since something may occur to prevent its happening. Thus if a man say: ‘Before I dined in the port, I set sail,’ we do not understand him to have dined in port after he set sail: but that his mind was set on dining in port.” In like manner the evangelist says: “Before they came together” Mary “was found with child, of the Holy Ghost,” not that they came together afterwards: but that, when it seemed that they would come together, this was forestalled through her conceiving by the Holy Ghost, the result being that afterwards they did not come together.

Reply to Objection 2. As Augustine says (De Nup. et Concup. i): “The Mother of God is called (Joseph’s) wife from the first promise of her espousals, whom he had not known nor ever was to know by carnal intercourse.” For, as Ambrose says on Lk. 1:27: “The fact of her marriage is declared, not to insinuate the loss of virginity, but to witness to the reality of the union.”

Reply to Objection 3. Some have said that this is not to be understood of carnal knowledge, but of acquaintance. Thus Chrysostom says† that “Joseph did not know her, until she gave birth, being unaware of her dignity: but after she had given birth, then did he know her. Because by reason of her child she surpassed the whole world in beauty and dignity: since she alone in the narrow abode of her womb received Him Whom the world cannot contain.”

Others again refer this to knowledge by sight. For as, while Moses was speaking with God, his face was so bright “that the children of Israel could not steadfastly behold it”; so Mary, while being “overshadowed” by the brightness of the “power of the Most High,” could not be gazed on by Joseph, until she gave birth. But afterwards she is acknowledged by Joseph, by looking on her face, not by lustful contact.

Jerome, however, grants that this is to be understood of knowledge by intercourse; but he observes that “before” or “until” has a twofold sense in Scripture. For some-

* “Sacrarium Spiritus Sancti” (Office of B. M. V., Ant. ad Benedictus, T. P.) † Opus Imperf. in Matth., Hom. 1: among the spurious works ascribed to Chrysostom

times it indicates a fixed time, as Gal. 3:19: The law “was set because of transgressions, until the seed should come, to whom He made the promise.” On the other hand, it sometimes indicates an indefinite time, as in Ps. 122:2: “Our eyes are unto the Lord our God, until He have mercy on us”; from which it is not to be gathered that our eyes are turned from God as soon as His mercy has been obtained. In this sense those things are indicated “of which we might doubt if they had not been written down: while others are left out to be supplied by our understanding. Thus the evangelist says that the Mother of God was not known by her husband until she gave birth, that we may be given to understand that still less did he know her afterwards” (Adversus Helvid. v).

Reply to Objection 4. The Scriptures are wont to designate as the first-born, not only a child who is followed by others, but also the one that is born first. “Otherwise, if a child were not first-born unless followed by others, the first-fruits would not be due as long as there was no further produce”*: which is clearly false, since according to the law the first-fruits had to be redeemed within a month (Num. 18:16).

Reply to Objection 5. Some, as Jerome says on Mat. 12:49,50, “suppose that the brethren of the Lord were Joseph’s sons by another wife. But we understand the brethren of the Lord to be not sons of Joseph, but cousins of the Saviour, the sons of Mary, His Mother’s sister.” For “Scripture speaks of brethren in four senses; namely, those who are united by being of the same parents, of the same nation, of the same family, by common affection.” Wherefore the brethren of the Lord are so called, not by birth, as being born of the same mother; but by relationship, as being blood-relations of His. But Joseph, as Jerome says (Contra Helvid. ix), is rather to be believed to have remained a virgin, “since he is not said to have had another wife,” and “a holy man does not live otherwise than chastely.”

Reply to Objection 6. Mary who is called “the mother of James and Joseph” is not to be taken for the Mother of our Lord, who is not wont to be named in the Gospels save under this designation of her dignity—“the Mother of Jesus.” This Mary is to be taken for the wife of Alphaeus, whose son was James the less, known as the “brother of the Lord” (Gal. 1:19).

Whether the Mother of God took a vow of virginity?

IIIa q. 28 a. 4

Objection 1. It would seem that the Mother of God did not take a vow of virginity. For it is written (Dt. 7:14): “No one shall be barren among you of either sex.” But sterility is a consequence of virginity. Therefore the keeping of virginity was contrary to the commandment of the Old Law. But before Christ was born the old law was still in force. Therefore at that time the Blessed Virgin could not lawfully take a vow of virginity.

Objection 2. Further, the Apostle says (1 Cor. 7:25): “Concerning virgins I have no commandment of the Lord; but I give counsel.” But the perfection of the counsels was to take its beginning from Christ, who is the “end of the Law,” as the Apostle says (Rom. 10:4). It was not therefore becoming that the Virgin should take a vow of virginity.

Objection 3. Further, the gloss of Jerome says on 1 Tim. 5:12, that “for those who are vowed to virginity, it is reprehensible not only to marry, but also to desire to be married.” But the Mother of Christ committed no sin for which she could be reprehended, as stated above (q. 27, a. 4). Since therefore she was “espoused,” as related by Lk. 1:27 it seems that she did not take a vow of virginity.

On the contrary, Augustine says (De Sanct. Virg. iv): “Mary answered the announcing angel: ‘How shall this be done, because I know not man?’ She would not have said this unless she had already vowed her virginity to God.”

I answer that, As we have stated in the IIa IIae, q. 88,

a. 6, works of perfection are more praiseworthy when performed in fulfilment of a vow. Now it is clear that for reasons already given (Aa. 1,2,3) virginity had a special place in the Mother of God. It was therefore fitting that her virginity should be consecrated to God by vow. Nevertheless because, while the Law was in force both men and women were bound to attend to the duty of begetting, since the worship of God was spread according to carnal origin, until Christ was born of that people; the Mother of God is not believed to have taken an absolute vow of virginity, before being espoused to Joseph, although she desired to do so, yet yielding her own will to God’s judgment. Afterwards, however, having taken a husband, according as the custom of the time required, together with him she took a vow of virginity.

Reply to Objection 1. Because it seemed to be forbidden by the law not to take the necessary steps for leaving a posterity on earth, therefore the Mother of God did not vow virginity absolutely, but under the condition that it were pleasing to God. When, however, she knew that it was acceptable to God, she made the vow absolute, before the angel’s Annunciation.

Reply to Objection 2. Just as the fulness of grace was in Christ perfectly, yet some beginning of the fulness preceded in His Mother; so also the observance of the counsels, which is an effect of God’s grace, began its perfection in Christ, but was begun after a fashion in His

* Jerome, Adversus Helvid. x

Virgin Mother.

Reply to Objection 3. These words of the Apostle are to be understood of those who vow chastity absolutely. Christ's Mother did not do this until she was espoused

to Joseph. After her espousals, however, by their common consent she took a vow of virginity together with her spouse.