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## Our Lady's Virginity ante partum

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## OUR LADY'S VIRGINITY "ANTE PARTUM"

THE virginity of the Blessed Virgin Mary is bound indissolubly to the fact that she is the Mother of God. Her Motherhood is gloriously singular and unique because it is virginal. As Saint Bernard wrote so forcefully:

“In one privilege alone Mary is absolutely unique, in combining the joys of motherhood with the honor of virginity. This is her absolutely exclusive privilege which will never be granted to another; it is at the same time ineffable; no one can fully comprehend it; no one can illustrate it by other examples. . . . It is a twofold miracle, a twofold privilege, but most fitting: a virgin could only have God as her Son, and a God could only have a virgin as His mother.<sup>1</sup>

Mary's virginity was not a passing privilege. It was and is everlasting, pervading every stage of her life, and particularly the sacred moments in which she became the mother of God in the obscure village of Nazareth. Our paper is concerned only with the first aspect of Mary's virginity, the virginal conception of Christ. The Catholic Church has expressed this truth in the first part of the striking formula that Mary was a virgin "*ante partum, in partu et post partum*," i.e., before the birth of Christ, in the birth itself, and after His birth perpetually. This affirmation is not a mere pious sentiment; it expresses the universal and unanimous belief of Christ's Church; it is a revealed truth; it is a solemnly defined dogma. The precise meaning of Mary's virginity *ante partum* has been expressed dogmatically by the Lateran Council, held under Pope Saint Martin I in the year 649, in the third Canon:

<sup>1</sup> Saint Bernard, *Sermo 4, De Annunciatione*, n. 5, (ed. Mabillon), Vol. 2, col. 411.

If anyone does not, in accord with the Holy Fathers, acknowledge the holy and ever virgin and immaculate Mary as really and truly the mother of God, inasmuch as she, in the fullness of time, and without human seed, conceived by the Holy Spirit God the Word Himself, who before all time was born of God the Father, . . . let him be condemned.<sup>2</sup>

The Catholic dogma, then, concerning Mary's virginity *ante partum* teaches that she became the Mother of God through the omnipotent power of God, and that her divine Son had no earthly human father.

It was expressed from the beginnings of Christianity in the Apostles' Creed: ". . . who was conceived from the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary." There is scarcely any other dogma which is more clearly contained in Sacred Scripture, and on the other hand, because the virginal conception is so clearly linked with the fundamental truth that Christ is true God and true man, there are few passages in the Sacred Writings which have been so constantly attacked by those whose rationalistic prejudices have prevented them from admitting even the possibility of the supernatural order and of miracles.

Our plan in this paper, accordingly, is to present the two outstanding texts which concern the virginal conception, with such explanations as will be of help in understanding them; secondly we shall deal with the major difficulties that have been raised against them.

## I

### THE TESTIMONY OF SAINT LUKE ON THE VIRGINAL CONCEPTION

After his brief prologue (*Lk.* 1:1-4) Saint Luke begins his historical narrative with the annunciation of the Precursor of the Lord, Saint John Baptist (1:5-25). The conception of the

<sup>2</sup> *D.B.* no. 256.

Baptist, at a time when both of his parents were aged and his mother was sterile, parallels the narrative in Genesis of the conception of Isaac. In the following section we have the account of the Annunciation to Mary and the virginal conception of Christ, *Lk.* 1:26-38:

- 26                                Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel  
Annunciation        was sent from God to a town of Galilee called  
27        of the        Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man  
Saviour                named Joseph, of the house of David, and  
28                                the virgin's name was Mary. And when the  
angel had come to her, he said, "Hail full of grace, the Lord  
29 is with thee. Blessed art thou among women." When she  
had seen him she was troubled at his word, and kept pondering what manner of greeting this might be.
- 30        And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for  
31 thou hast found grace with God. And behold, thou shalt  
conceive in thy womb and shalt bring forth a son; and  
32 thou shalt call his name Jesus; he shall be great and shall be  
called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give  
him the throne of David, his father, and he shall be king  
33 over the house of Jacob forever; and of his kingdom there  
shall be no end."
- 34        And Mary said to the angel, "How shall this happen  
since I do not know man?"
- 35        And the angel answered and said to her, "The Holy  
Spirit shall come upon thee and the power of the Most High  
shall overshadow thee; and therefore the Holy One to be  
born shall be called the Son of God.
- 36        And behold, Elizabeth thy kinswoman, also has conceived  
a son in her old age, and she who was called barren is now  
in her sixth month;  
37 for nothing shall be impossible with God."
- 38        But Mary said, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be  
it done to me according to thy word." And the angel departed from her.



We shall comment briefly only on the verses which concern the virginal conception.

(A) *The Message of the Angel* (vv. 30-33)

"And the angel said to her, 'do not be afraid, Mary, for thou hast found grace with God (v. 30).' " For, anyone who has been admitted into the fullness of God's friendship has no reason to fear or to be disturbed. As Saint Thomas of Aquin wrote, ". . . nothing is more astounding to an humble person than to hear the praise of his own excellence; but surprise above all other emotions arouses attention; therefore the angel, wishing to make the Virgin completely attentive to the annunciation of so great a mystery, begins by praising her."<sup>3</sup>

"Behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb and shalt bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus (v. 31)." This may be called almost a consecrated phrase used by angels in announcing the birth of a child; *Genesis* 16:11 (Ismael), 19 (Isaac); *Judges* 13:3-5 (Samson), and above all *Isaiah* 7:14 (Immanuel). The name *'Iesous* is the Greek form of the Hebrew *Yeshua*, which in turn is an abbreviation for *Yehoshua* and means: "Jahweh has saved" or "Jahweh is salvation," as Saint Matthew explains 1:21: "For he will save his people." This name occurs frequently in the Old Testament under variant forms: Josuah, Josiah, Osee, Oseas, Isaiah, and is frequently found today among the Syro-Chaldeans of Mesopotamia.

"And he shall be great and will be called the son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father, and he shall be king over the house of Jacob forever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end (vv. 32, 33)." These verses are characteristically Messianic; compare "son of the Most High [God]" with Psalm 2:7: "And the

<sup>3</sup> Saint Thomas, *Summa Theologica*, 3, q. 30, a. 4, ad 1.

Lord God shall give him the throne of David his father." Jesus is to be the son of David, by no means necessarily as the son of the Virgin Mary, but certainly as the heir of Joseph his legal father. According to Psalm 9:7, the Messiah as the son of David will occupy the throne of his father and rule over his kingdom, but not as the kings of this earth, as v. 33 insinuates; here there is a transition from the notion of a purely temporal and terrestrial reign, to the concept of an eternal, spiritual and celestial kingdom.

### (B) *Mary's Question*

"And Mary said to the angel, 'How shall this happen, since I do not know man? (v. 34).' " This question is so startling on the lips of one who was already betrothed, and introduces such a stupendous mystery, that independent critics have exhausted their ingenuity to find reasons for rejecting the text as spurious, as we shall see later. Earlier (*Lk.* 1:18), Zachary had sought a sign since he doubted the veracity of the angel's message; here Mary believes, but merely inquires as to *how* the message will be executed. The second part of the question, "since I do not know man," manifestly alludes to the carnal intercourse of married persons; it is consecrated Semitic idiom for expressing marital relations. But how could a virgin already betrothed, and soon to be married, (it would be even more strange if Mary were already married as some have thought), give such a reason for her question, "How shall this happen?" We may note that Mary by no means looked to the past, as if she were to have meant, ". . . since up to this time, I have not known man," as Cajetan proposed; for in this supposition she would have used the past tense (aorist: οὐκ *egnon*) instead of the present absolute (οὐ *gignosko*) which includes the intention of not making use of matrimonial rights in the future.<sup>4</sup> If this be true, how could Mary have consented

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Lagrange, *Évangile selon S. Luc*, ed. 7 (Paris, 1947), p. 32.

to her betrothal with Joseph? We answer with Lagrange and Loisy that this would be unintelligible unless both Mary and Joseph had at least resolved, if not vowed, to observe continence in their married life: "Luke represents Joseph and Mary as having the same dispositions as two Christian spouses who preserve their continence in marriage."<sup>5</sup> Nor can it be legitimately maintained that such a practice was unheard of among the Israelites of that era; for at that very time, there was a tendency toward a more severe asceticism, including continence, as we know from the practices of the Essenes.<sup>6</sup> Father Lagrange states that we do not know the precise and concrete motivation of Joseph and Mary in this resolve, and that the fabrication of multiple hypotheses is useless; the simplest solution, he maintains, is to hold that marriage with a man like Joseph removed Mary once and for all from importunate demands for her hand, and would allow her to fulfill in peace her resolve to consecrate her virginity to God.<sup>7</sup> Various other hypothetical reasons given by certain Fathers of the Church are exposed concisely by Saint Thomas Aquinas.<sup>8</sup> The foregoing is the traditional exegesis of Catholics for centuries; Mary's consecration of her virginity to God before the Annunciation is bound up indissolubly, in traditional thought, with the dogma of her perpetual virginity, and the basis of this dogma is found precisely here in *Lk.* 1:34.

### (C) *The Angel's Answer*

"And the angel answered and said to her, 'The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee and the power of the Most High shall

<sup>5</sup> Loisy, *Les Évangiles Synoptiques*, Vol. 1 (Ceffonas, 1917), p. 291; cf. also Lagrange, *loc. cit.*

<sup>6</sup> Cf. A. Médebielle, art. *Annonciation*, in *Dictionnaire de la Bible*; Supplément, Vol. 1, col. 289.

<sup>7</sup> Lagrange, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

<sup>8</sup> *Summa Theologica*, 3, q. 29, a. 1.

overshadow thee; and therefore the Holy One to be born shall be called the son of God (v. 35).<sup>7</sup> Mary had just offered her resolve to remain a virgin in order to please God, as an obstacle against the conception announced by the angel. The angel answers that there is no difficulty, since her child will have no other father than God Himself. The *Holy Spirit*, who will supply the power of an earthly father, is in the Hebrew and Aramaic languages feminine in gender: *ruah*, and means here the omnipotent power of God. Lagrange remarks how fortunate that the Hebrew and Aramaic word is feminine, for, "The masculine could have appeared too realistic and might have recalled the salacious legends of pagan mythology, despite the fact that the angel states clearly that there is question of a conception which is due to the direct and immediate action of God, and thereby removes any approximation to the pagan legends."<sup>8a</sup> Moreover, in our text, according to the evident Semitic parallelism, the "power of the Most High" overshadowing the virgin corresponds to the action of the "Holy Spirit." But this image recalls the hidden presence of divine power protecting, manifesting love, and giving life (*Gen.* 1 2; *Ex.* 16:10, 24:15, 33:9 etc.). Père Lebreton has brought out well that the evident identity between *Holy Spirit* and *Power of the Most High* prevents one from concluding that Luke teaches here the existence of the third person of the Blessed Trinity as distinct from the Father and the Son.<sup>9</sup> Finally, we may note with Saint Thomas that the entire Trinity acting as one nature was the efficient cause of the human conception of Christ, and that this effort is only attributed to the third Person since it is a work of love, grace and sanctification.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8a</sup> Lagrange, *op cit*, p. 34

<sup>9</sup> Lebreton, *Histoire du Dogme de la Trinité*, Vol. 1, ed. 7 (Paris, 1927), p. 335.

<sup>10</sup> *Summa Theologica*, 3, q. 32, a. 1.



(D) *Mary's Fiat*

Since verses 36 and 37 are not immediately concerned with the virginal conception we may omit them. In verse 38: "But Mary said, 'Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to thy word,' " we have by no means a petition for the fulfillment of the angel's message; this was decreed by God from eternity as Mary now understands fully; nor is this verse an exclamation of delight; it is simply a profoundly humble declaration of complete submission and total obedience to the manifest will of God; through her humility and obedience, therefore, Mary was found worthy to conceive the Redeemer with no loss of her virginity; it is a manifest indication to all men as to how they can be made worthy of divine favor: "Mary is shown to be an obedient virgin, as Eve was shown to be a disobedient one; even as Eve by her disobedience was made the cause of death for herself and for the whole human race, so the obedient Mary became the source of salvation for herself and for all men."<sup>11</sup> "And the angel departed from her." This narrative simply cannot be surpassed for its dignity, sublimity and purity: God, the angel, the Annunciation, Christ to be born the Son of the Most High; the most pure Virgin-Mother, the eternal salvation of the human race. The very simplicity of the style, without the slightest superficial embellishment, breathes forth an expression of serene faith in the sublimity of the mystery.

## II

## THE TESTIMONY OF SAINT MATTHEW, 1:18-25

- 18 Now the birth of Christ was in this wise. When Mary his  
 mother had been betrothed to Joseph, she was found, before  
 19 they came together, to be with child by the Holy Spirit.

<sup>11</sup> Saint Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses*, lib. 3, cap. 24, 4; *PG*, 7, 958, f.

- But Joseph, her husband, being a just man, and not wishing to expose her to reproach was minded to put her away privately. But while he thought on these things, behold an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Do not be afraid, Joseph, son of David, to take to thee Mary thy wife, for that which is begotten in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she shall bring forth a son and thou shalt call his name Jesus; for he shall save his people from their sins." Now all this came to pass that there might be fulfilled what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, "Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son; and they shall call his name Emmanuel"; which is, interpreted, "God with us." So Joseph arising from sleep did as the Lord commanded him, and took unto him his wife And he did not know her till she had brought forth her first born son. And he called his name Jesus.

Saint Matthew's gospel begins with the genealogy of Jesus, in the descending line from Abraham, the father of the chosen people, whereas Saint Luke's genealogy gives the ascending line, from Jesus, to Adam and finally to God (*Lk.* 3:3-28). Thus, in verse 2, "Abraham begot Isaac, and Isaac begot Jacob," Saint Matthew begins his genealogy, and proceeds with the same formula until verse sixteen, in which "Jacob begot Joseph" then instead of writing that Joseph begot Jesus, Saint Matthew, according to the text which is critically certain,<sup>12</sup> states: "And Jacob begot Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ." Here it is evident that Mary alone is concerned with the generation of Jesus, and that Joseph is only His legal father.

In the following verses Saint Matthew explains the mys-

<sup>12</sup> Cf. A. Durand, *L'enfance de Jésus-Christ*, (Paris, 1908), pp. 75-83; Lagrange, *Evangile selon Saint Matthieu*, ed. 8 (Paris, 1948), pp. 6-8.

tery. First of all, in verse 18, he asserts apodictically that Mary, when as yet only betrothed to Saint Joseph, had conceived virginally through the power of God. In verse 19, we have the description of Saint Joseph's perplexity, when he had been apprised of the fact that Mary was pregnant; in verse 19, he is given a revelation through an angel that Mary's Child is conceived of the Holy Spirit, and that he need not fear to take her as his wife. Finally, Saint Matthew concludes the passage by asserting that the virginal conception of Christ is a fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah 7:14.

Despite the difficulties in interpreting this prophecy of Isaiah on a purely historico-exegetical basis (and these difficulties are fully realized by all serious Catholic exegetes),<sup>13</sup> Catholic tradition and the authoritative decision of the Holy See are eminently justified in teaching that the prophecy is Messianic, and that it is devoid of meaning, even in its purely historical context, unless it foretells the virginal conception of the Messiah.<sup>14</sup> It is obvious and accepted by all modern exegetes that vv. 22 and 23 of Matthew are his own statement, and are not to be included in the angelic message.<sup>15</sup> He cites the prophecy, with the exception of two words, from the Septuagint, with its markedly Marian interpretation of the Massoretic text. But this is to be noted, that Matthew already believed and accepted as a revealed truth the fact of the supernatural, miraculous and virginal conception of Christ; the prophecy of Isaiah by no means inspired or suggested his belief; he rather sees his conviction as a truth which confirms the prophecy by fulfilling Isaiah's prediction.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Cf. J. Coppens, *La prophétie de la Almah*, in *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses*, Vol. 28, 1952, pp. 648-678.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. J. Coleran, *Propter quod dabit Dominus ipse vobis signum (Is. 7:14)*, in *Verbum Domini*, Vol. 17 (1937), pp. 303-312.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Lagrange, *Évangile selon saint Matthieu*, p. 15.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Lagrange, *op. cit.*, p. 17.



We may conclude the first section of this paper, by observing that the virginity of Mary *ante partum* is so clearly revealed in the gospels of Luke and Matthew, and in the prophecy of Isaiah, that it is *de fide, ex clara Scriptura*.

### III

#### THE VIEWS OF INDEPENDENT CRITICS ON THE VIRGINAL CONCEPTION

##### (A) *The Authenticity of Luke 1:34, 35*

Since Saint Luke so clearly teaches the virginal conception of Christ (*Lk.* 1:34, 35), rationalist critics have had no other means of escape in their perverse and arbitrary denial of the doctrine, than to deny the genuinity and authenticity of these verses. We shall not waste time on the exposition of their arguments; this has been done ably and with devastating criticism by such outstanding scholars as Bardenhewer, Lagrange, Vosté, Holzmeister and others.<sup>17</sup> The genuinity of a text must not be prejudged according to falsely conceived and baseless grounds, such as the *a priori* impossibility of the supernatural order and of miracles, but solely from the testimony of documentary evidence. There is not a single codex containing the first chapter of Saint Luke which omits these verses. One can imagine the legitimate and horrified scandal of independent critics, if Catholics, in order to avoid embarrassment, or in order to fit a document into a preconceived and biased pattern, were to adopt such unscholarly procedures, by decreeing, through the all too facile process of an *ipse dixit*, the annihilation of a solidly and critically established text. We can dismiss this objection, then, as not only frivolous, but

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Médebielle, *art. cit.*, coll. 271-280.



as unworthy of the consideration of serious scholars.<sup>18</sup> The text of Saint Luke has been accepted from earliest times, even by heretics and not excluding the Marcionites, who were responsible for tendentious alterations, especially of Lucan texts.<sup>18a</sup> Despite the critically established genuinity and authenticity of the Lucan and Matthean texts, it is important to take cognizance of other rationalistic arguments which seek to cast doubt on the veracity of these texts from other passages in Scripture. Difficulties have been raised against the virginal conception on the grounds that it was unknown to the first generation of Christians. One of the favorite proofs of this assertion is drawn from the silence of Saint Paul and of Saint Mark.<sup>19</sup>

### (B) *The Silence of Saint Paul*

First of all, it is quite possible and probable that for some time the virginal conception of Christ could have been unknown to the first Christians; that it should not have been revealed immediately was certainly a part of God's providential plan; one of the traditional motives assigned for Mary's marriage to Joseph was to conceal, from the world and from the devil, the mystery of God made man, and hence also the mystery of His virginal conception.<sup>20</sup> Jesus Himself guarded closely

<sup>18</sup> Cf. O. Bardenhewer, *Mariä Verkündigung*, in *Biblische Studien*, Vol. 10 (1905), pp. 8-13.

<sup>18a</sup> Cf. E. Blackman, *Marcion and His Influence* (London, 1948), p. 60.

<sup>19</sup> Not a few independent critics have argued also from the different genealogies of Jesus given by Matthew 1:1-17, and Luke 3:23-28, on the grounds that the primitive catechesis was unaware of the virginal conception, and that Matthew and Luke, each in a different way, tampered with the primitive genealogy, to make allowance for the virginal conception of Christ. The most probable explanation of this discrepancy seems to be that Matthew describes Saint Joseph's forbears according to the natural line of descent, whereas Luke follows the legal line according to the Levirate law; cf. Vosté, *De conceptione virginali Christi*, (Romae, 1933), pp. 83-109.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Saint Ignatius of Antioch, in F. X. Funk, *Patres Apostolici*, Vol. 1,

the intimate details of His human origin: He knew well that He was called the son of Joseph, but never explained that Joseph was merely His foster father. The precise manner of His human origin was one of those truths which would have hindered rather than helped the foundation of the Kingdom. "During the earthly life of Jesus, the virgin birth . . . would naturally remain a secret. To have spoken of it would have given rise only to slander and misunderstanding."<sup>21</sup> Therefore, it would be quite understandable if the first Christians generally were unaware of the virginal conception. Consequently, the Catholic dogma would not suffer in the least, if it could be proven that the doctrine itself was not known generally until the year 80 A. D. (the date assigned by many rationalist critics, for doctrinaire reasons, to the infancy gospels of Matthew and Luke). What is actually untenable is the insinuation that the first Christians were taught anything positive in the slightest way contrary to the virginal conception by any inspired writer of the New Testament; on this point the dogma itself is unassailable.

Independent critics do not maintain openly that Saint Paul opposed Our Lady's virginity *ante partum*, but rather only that he was completely unaware of it; nevertheless, beneath the urbanity of their language, the sinister impression is conveyed that his ignorance in some way undermines or impairs the Catholic dogma of Mary's virginity *ante partum*. It may well be doubted, however, that Saint Paul was unaware of this truth. The argument that Saint Paul demonstrated the divinity of Christ from His resurrection, and not from His virginal conception and birth has no probative force. Clearly, there is a marked difference between the two truths apologetically; furthermore, a virginal conception by itself without further

ed. 2 (1901) p. 228 f.: "Et principem huius mundi latuit Mariae virginitas et partus ipsius. . ."

<sup>21</sup> J. Gresham Machen, *The Virgin Birth of Christ*, (London, 1930), p. 201.

indications would by no means offer an apodictic proof of Christ's divinity; in addition, the virginal conception of Christ by its very nature, was reserved exclusively to the immediate and direct knowledge of the Blessed Virgin. On the other hand, the resurrection of Christ was a public fact, testified to by many witnesses, many of whom were alive when Paul wrote; hence the resurrection, with its concrete circumstances capable of proof through reliable witnesses, constituted a striking apologetic argument, even for those who might be initially opposed to Christianity. One could hardly hope to impress an hostile mentality favorably by proposing the virginal conception as an argument for Christ's divinity.

It is also difficult to see how Saint Paul could have been unaware of this truth because of his close relations with Saint Luke, who may properly be called a disciple of Paul.<sup>22</sup> Even though it be supposed that Saint Luke himself only became aware of the virginal conception about the time when he wrote his gospel,—an arbitrary supposition incapable of proof,—how can it be shown that the sources of Saint Luke's narrative were completely unavailable and completely unknown to Saint Paul?

The rationalists cannot have it both ways. One of their major accusations against Saint Paul is that he corrupted the purity of primitive Christian doctrine by imposing on subsequent generations the fruits of his personal speculations;<sup>23</sup> at least they cannot maintain that the doctrine of the virginal conception (which they detest just as heartily as Pauline teachings) was

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Lagrange, *Évangile selon saint Luc*, ed. cit., *Introduction*, p. VIII; A. Plummer *Saint Luke*, in *The International Critical Commentary*, ed. 2 (1898), p. XLIII ff.; A. Harnack, *Lukas der Arzt* (Leipsig, 1906), pp. 1-19.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Lagrange, *La conception surnaturelle du Christ d'après saint Luc*, in *Revue Biblique*, Vol. 11 (1914), p. 207: "Le fait que saint Paul ne parle pas de la conception surnaturelle est un indice très significatif qu'elle n'est pas née de la spéculation théologique! Mais si les Apôtres n'ont pas protesté, c'est qu'eux-mêmes étaient éclairés."



foisted on the Church by Paul as the fruit of his theological speculation. We may note here that A. Resch, in a scholarly piece of research, has shown positive indications of a true literary and linguistic relation between the Lucan catechesis of Christ's infancy and the Pauline epistles.<sup>24</sup>

There is nothing in the Pauline corpus which excludes the virginal conception. On the other hand, there is a probable allusion to it in *Galatians* 4:4 "But when the fulness of time came, God sent his son, born of a woman, born under the Law, that he might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption of sons." In this text, Saint Paul without any doubt presupposes the preexistence of Jesus, the eternal Son of God. The expression, *born of a woman*, cannot be alleged against the virginal conception; for *gune* (woman) merely indicates the sex, and does not deny virginal status: ". . . here, as in other Scriptural texts dealing with Christ's human origin, only His mother is designated and the very notion of a human father is studiously avoided."<sup>25</sup>

That Paul should not have mentioned explicitly, much less developed, the doctrine of Mary's virginity offers no difficulty whatsoever. He was primarily the theologian of the Redemption, of Christ's saving work on the Cross. Saint Paul was not an historian or biographer, as the Evangelists were. Consequently, he speaks rarely of Christ's life, and then only of the institution of the Eucharist, of His resurrection and glorious ascension. He never does more than allude to the preaching and miracles of Christ. What is surprising, therefore, in the fact that he does not mention the infancy or the baptism of Christ?

However, not merely in his epistles, but in his preaching,

<sup>24</sup> A. Resch, *Das Kindheitsevangelium nach Lukas und Matthäus*, in *Texte und Untersuchungen*, Vol. 10 (1897), pp. 264-276.

<sup>25</sup> Cornely, *Commentarius in epistolas II ad Corinthios et ad Galatas*, (Paris, 1909), p. 526.



as recorded at least in the *Acts of the Apostles*, we find no mention of Christ's supernatural origin. But the same is true of the early preaching of Saint Peter and of the other Apostles. It by no means follows from this silence that they were unaware of, or denied, what Matthew and Luke affirm so explicitly in their gospels of the infancy; rather, the reason is to be sought in a prudent accommodation of their doctrine to the capacity of their unbelieving audience. It must be remembered too that the epistles of Saint Paul, from the very fact of their literary genre, are necessarily occasional writings, which should not be expected to contain the entirety of his doctrine.<sup>20</sup>

Finally, the virginal conception of Christ is a necessary, though admittedly tacit, postulate of Saint Paul's doctrine on original sin and redemption. His entire Christology is founded on the divine preexistence of Christ as the Son of God, and on the reality of His Incarnation, in order to effect our redemption by the wiping out of sin, especially original sin, through the restoration of the supernatural order. In view of this doctrine, Saint Paul simply could not have looked on the Holy One of God as sharing by natural generation in the sinful heritage bequeathed by the first Adam to the human race. "Therefore, as through one man sin entered into this world, and by sin death, and thus death has passed into all men, because all have sinned . . . (*Rom.* 5:12)." Otherwise, how would Christ Himself have been capable of conquering sin's universal infection of mankind? How, if He were conceived and born in a completely natural way, through human generation by the union of man and woman, would He have avoided the common inheritance of such generation? His mother, Mary, it is true, was without stain of sin in her conception, but only, as Pius the IX defined, by the singular

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Jean Levie, *Les limites de la preuve d'Écriture Sainte en théologie*, in *Nouvelle Revue Théologique*, Vol 76 (1949), pp 1009-1029

and glorious privilege of her Immaculate Conception, conferred solely in view of Christ and by His foreseen merits. But according to Paul, Jesus, by His very nature, by His very origin in His eternal birth from the Father ". . . knew nothing of sin, so that in Him we might become the justice of God (2 Cor. 5:21). If the first Adam in his innocence was from God (Gen. 1:27; 2:7), the second Adam *a fortiori* must be of God, directly and immediately: "For since by a man came death, by a man also comes resurrection from the dead. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made to live (1 Cor. 15:21 f.)."

### (C) *The Silence of Saint Mark*

According to rationalist critics, Saint Mark was the first evangelist, and his gospel was the genuine form of the primitive catechesis, which was Ebionitic in origin. But Mark is silent on the supernatural origin of Christ, for these sole reasons, they maintain, that the "legend" of His virginal conception was not invented when Mark wrote, or because he rejected it as a fiction. Here again, the conclusion is not only excessive, but altogether arbitrary. It is true that Mark narrates the primitive catechesis, and by the unanimous voice of tradition, according to the preaching of Saint Peter whose disciple he was.<sup>27</sup> The primitive catechesis, however, began with the baptism of Christ by Saint John the Baptist, and concerned itself only with His public life, as Saint Peter himself testified in the *Acts of the Apostles* 1:22 " . . . beginning from the baptism of John until the day that He [Jesus] was taken up from us . . ." Peter, in his preaching, confined himself to those events of which he was a witness, but no one was a witness of Christ's supernatural origin, which by its very nature was hidden from human observation.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Lagrange, *Évangile selon saint Marc*, édition corrigée et augmentée, (Paris, 1947), *Introduction*, pp. XIX-XXVI, H. B. Swete, *The Gospel according to Saint Mark*, ed. 3, (London, 1913), pp. XXIII-XXVI.

But, granted that the virginal conception is never mentioned explicitly in the gospel of Mark, it is never denied; rather it is implied throughout.<sup>28</sup>

Compare the following texts from the three Synoptic gospels relating the same event.

| Mark 6:3  | Matthew 13 55  | Luke 6:23                      |
|---|--|--------------------------------|
| Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary ( <i>ho huos tes Marias</i> ), the brother of James and Joseph and Jude and Simon? | Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary and his brethren James and Joseph and Simon and Jude? | Is not this the son of Joseph? |

Nowhere in Mark's entire gospel is Jesus called the son of Joseph, not even when, in relating the same incident, He is so called by the other Synoptic gospels; a fact which is brought out strikingly in the texts just quoted. Mark had no prologue, unlike Matthew and Luke who teach explicitly the virginal conception, and the merely foster fatherhood of Joseph, and who can therefore call him the father of Jesus without any fear of being misunderstood.

Hence, if Saint Mark were to set down simply, as Matthew and Luke did, that Jesus was considered by His fellowtownsmen, the Nazarenes, to be the son of Joseph, it could be misleading to his readers who might well be unfamiliar with the other two gospels, and with the fact of Christ's virginal conception, and hence might be prejudiced against accepting this truth in the future. Lest this should happen, Mark gives a slight nuance to the question of the Nazarenes, which, without in any way altering or falsifying the substance of their thought, places it in harmony with the truth of Christ's virginal con-

<sup>28</sup> Cf. V McNabb, *Saint Mark's Witness to the Virgin Birth*, in *Journal of Theological Studies*, Vol 8 (1907), pp 448-450.

ception. This small, in itself, but striking divergence from the expression of Matthew and Luke is a strong and almost inescapable indication that Saint Mark was fully aware of the virginal conception.

We may add to this that according to an unbroken Semitic usage, perduring even to our day, a son is always designated by the name of his father; for example in *Mark* 10:46, the blind man is named "the son of Timaeus," *Bar*(son of)*timaeus*. But Saint Joseph, in the entire gospel of Saint Mark, is never mentioned in his own right, much less as the father of Jesus, as happens frequently in Matthew, Luke and John. On the contrary, though never called the son of Joseph, Jesus is called by Mark the Son of God seven times,<sup>29</sup> the Son of Man (a Messianic title) fourteen times,<sup>30</sup> and the Son of David (also Messianic) four times.<sup>31</sup> In view of all these facts, Father V. McNabb poses the following dilemma to independent critics either Saint Mark, following the doctrine of Peter, believed that Jesus was the true son of Joseph, or he did not. If he did, then because of the Semitic usage, just mentioned, and manifest in Saint Mark's own gospel, it would be quite unintelligible that he should never designate Jesus as the Son of Joseph, and never even mention the name of Joseph. If, however, he believed that Jesus was not the son of Joseph but was virginally conceived, all is clear, and it is then manifest that Saint Mark is an implicit witness to the supernatural origin of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.<sup>32</sup>

In the minds of rationalist critics, however, none of the preceding indications have any weight in the face of what

<sup>29</sup> Son of God, 1 1, 11, 3 11, 5 7, 9 7, 14 61; 15 39

<sup>30</sup> Son of Man, 2 10, 28, 8 31, 38, 9 9, 12, 31; 10 33, 45, 13 26, 14 21 (twice), 41, 62

<sup>31</sup> Son of David, 10 47 f, 12 35, 37

<sup>32</sup> Cf Vacandard, *Saint Marc et la conception virginale*, in *Revue Pratique de l'Apologétique*, Vol 4 (1907), pp 412-418.



they consider to be a denial of Mary's virginity in *Mark* 3:21. In the context preceding this verse, we have the narrative of the varied miracles of Christ in Capharnaum, of the crowds following after Him from Galilee, Judaea, Jerusalem, and even from the confines of Tyre and Sidon, and finally the description of the choice of the Apostles: then follows

- 20 And they came to the house and again a crowd gathered so that they could not so much as take their food.
- 21 But when his own (*hoi par' autou*) had heard of it, they went out to lay hold of him, for they said, "He is beside himself "
- 22 And the scribes who had come down from Jerusalem said, "He has Beelzebub," and, "By the prince of devils, he casts out devils."

The subsequent verses, 22-30, contain the long reply of Jesus against these accusations, and finally, we read in verse 31:

- 31 And his mother and his brethren came, and standing outside, they sent to him, calling him
- 32 Now a crowd was sitting about him, and they said to him, "Behold, thy mother and thy brethren are outside, seeking thee "
- 33 And he answered and said, "Who are my mother and my brethren?"
- 34 And looking round on those who were sitting about him, he said, "Behold my mother and my brethren.
- 35 For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother "

The argument from this passage is evolved, somewhat tortuously, as follows, on the supposition, (1) that the friends of Jesus (the *hoi par'autou* of verse 21) are identical with "his mother and brethren" in verse 31; (2) that in verse 21, they wished to lead Jesus away, because they thought He was

demented; (3) hence the conclusion, if Mary had conceived Christ supernaturally, she could never have shared such a belief.

But the suppositions and conclusion of the argument are not all well founded. There are probable grounds for doubting whether "the friends" of verse 21 are identical with "his mother and brethren" in verse 31; not a few, including Knabenbauer,<sup>33</sup> think they are by no means the same. However, Lagrange inclines strongly to the view that they are identical, but rejects the other suppositions.<sup>34</sup> He interprets the motivation of Christ's relatives in verse 21 as having been affection and concern for His well being; they had set forth from Nazareth, or possibly from Capharnaum, to urge and constrain Him, with a sort of affectionate violence, to take care of Himself, and to allow Himself at least time to eat, according to the indication of verse 20 ". . . so that they could not so much as take their food." Furthermore, Lagrange shows that in accord with Saint Mark's style in other passages, the phrase, "For they said, 'He is beside himself,'" can be taken impersonally, namely, "It was said, . . ." i. e., His relatives heard rumors of Christ's unceasing labors and unsparing zeal;<sup>34a</sup> in other words, His

<sup>33</sup> Cf Knabenbauer, *Commentarius in Marcum* (Paris, 1907, réimpression 1928), in h l; his arguments are: (1) that in Mk 9 44, 11 73, 12 27, 13 52, 15 15, 16 16, and in 2 Macchabees 11.20, the phrase *hoi par' autou* means simply partisans, friends or companions in war, (2) the relatives of Jesus, living at Nazareth, could not have found out so soon what had happened in verse 20, which is given as the reason of the interruption by the *hoi par' autou*; (3) when the mother and brethren are presented in verse 31, Mark uses a different designation; he therefore did not have the same persons in mind

<sup>34</sup> Lagrange, *Evangile selon saint Marc*, p 69 f. "*Hoi par' autou* can also mean relatives (Prov 31.21, Susanne, v. 33, Jos, *Antiq*, I, x, 5 2), (2) the situation in v. 20 could have been prolonged or renewed, thus explaining the intervention of people from a distance, (3) Mark had in view the same persons, but designates them more precisely on their arrival; in v. 21, they had merely set forth, and by a literary artifice, Mark gives them time to arrive, by interposing the scene with the scribes"

<sup>34a</sup> Cf Turner, in *Journal of Theological Studies*, Vol 25 (1924), p 383, f

family came because they were, quite understandably, disturbed by what they had heard. Moreover, the Vulgate rendition of *exeste* by *in furorem versus est* ("He was become mad") is altogether too strong; in Saint Mark, this verb *existemi* means a sort of exaltation or keyed up state due to surprise, enthusiasm, or zeal (cf. 2:2; 5:42; 6:51); similarly, Saint Paul was not describing himself as demented, when he wrote: "... *ete gar exestemen, Theo*, if we were transported in mind, it was unto God (2 Cor. 5:13);" the meaning is quite clearly to be transported, to go beyond ordinary bounds, to be beside oneself, and concretely in the present text of Mark 3:21, to neglect the ordinary rules of health, because of zeal. Finally, if we grant with Lagrange the identity of the persons in verses 21 and 31, and follow the rest of his interpretation, there is no difficulty whatsoever; Jesus does not in any way reprehend those who sought Him out; He does not prove to them that He is sane, as He did to the scribes; He merely refuses to acknowledge their right to be occupied with Him, when He is in the midst of His apostolic labors.<sup>35</sup>

(D) *Various Heterodox Theories on the Origin of the Doctrine of the Virginal Conception*

With a thoroughness and singleness of purpose that admits no rest, Rationalists, having convinced themselves that the virginal conception can have no historical foundation since it is an absurd and impossible hypothesis, and thereby having justified themselves in rejecting the genuinity of *Luke* 1:34, 35 (and the historicity of *Matthew* 1:18-25 in as much as he depends on *Luke*), which they admit teaches this doctrine, seem almost moved by an ineluctable compulsion to show the origins of the doctrine. This process is almost as old as Christianity, and has turned up the most varying conjectures.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Saint Ambrose, *Expositio Evangelii secundum Lucam*; P.L. 15, 1678

At the close of the first century, Cerinthus held that Jesus was the son of Joseph and Mary, and that in His baptism, the Christ [Messiah] or the Holy Spirit descended on Him and dwelt within Him until His passion; the Ebionites, a judaizing sect of Palestine, later followed the ideas of Cerinthus. According to J. Gresham Machen, the denials of the virginal conception in that century ". . . were based on philosophical or dogmatic prepossessions" <sup>36</sup>

We have also the testimony of Celsus, whom Origen opposed so vigorously, <sup>37</sup> that in the early days of Christianity the Jews spread a rumor that Christ was born of adultery; Mary, though betrothed to Joseph, is supposed to have entered into a union with a certain Roman soldier named Panthera, <sup>38</sup> because of whom, Jesus was called ben-Panthera, the son of Panthera. This legend was revamped by the biologist Haeckel at the turn of the century. <sup>39</sup> In his *Life of Christ*, the Jewish author, Joseph Klausner, after a thorough investigation, concludes: "That there is no historical foundation for the tradition of Jesus' illegitimate birth and that the tradition arises from opposition to the Christian view that Jesus was born without a natural father, all this we have repeatedly seen." <sup>40</sup>

More respectfully, but with as little foundation, the virginal conception has been attributed to Jewish sources. Only a few

<sup>36</sup> J. Gresham Machen, *op cit*, p. 43, cf. G. Bareille, *Cérinthe*, in *DTC*, Vol. 2, col. 2151-2155, Saint Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses*, lib. 26, cap. 1, *PG*. 7, 686, Saint Epiphanius, *Adversus haereses*, lib. 28, cap. 1, *PG*. 41, 378 f., and G. Bareille, *Ébionites*, in *DTC*, Vol. 4, col. 1987-1995.      †

<sup>37</sup> Origen, *Contra Celsum*, lib. 1, cap. 32, *PG*. 11, 722 ff.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Strack-Billerbeck, *Kommentar z. N. T. aus Talmud und Midrasch*, Vol. 1, (München, 1922), p. 36 f.

<sup>39</sup> Haeckel, *Die Weltratsel* (Berlin, 1899), pp. 377-80.

<sup>40</sup> J. Klausner, *Jesus of Nazareth* (tr. from Hebrew by H. Danby, 1925), pp. 23 f., 36, 232 f.

rationalistic exegetes have held this opinion,<sup>41</sup> and it has been thoroughly examined and rejected by competent scholars such as J. Gresham Machen. "A Jew, he admits, could accept the virginal conception when it actually occurred, but that is very different from evolving the notion of it from existing ideas. Very hostile to such an evolution was the whole tendency of the Jews' thought about God."<sup>42</sup> In turn, G. Dalman writes: "For never did the Jewish people expect that the Messiah would be born without a human father, and not a single indication exists of a Messianic interpretation, in Jewish writings, of Isaiah 7:14, from which passage, the entire narrative of a miraculous birth of Jesus could have had its origin, as it were, ready made;"<sup>43</sup> and Th. Zahn states categorically: "The supposition that the Christian narratives of the infancy gospels arose from rabbinical exegesis is altogether fantastic"<sup>44</sup>

#### (E) *Supposed Pagan Origins*

There is no pagan religion, no mythological legend, to which some rationalist critic has not attributed the supernatural origin of Christ. Some have appealed to Buddhism, others to Egyptian or Babylonian religions, others to Phrygian or Mithraic cults, or to the doctrines of the Persians; others have invoked Greek mythology, Eleusynian mysteries, and finally some have spoken of a spontaneous and fraudulent

<sup>41</sup> Notably Adolph von Harnack, *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte*, Vol. 1, ed. 3 (1931), p. 113.

<sup>42</sup> J. Gresham Machen, *op. cit.*, p. 284.

<sup>43</sup> G. Dalman, *Die Worte Jesu*, Vol. 1 (Leipzig, 1898), p. 226.

<sup>44</sup> Th. Zahn, *Das Evangelium des Matthäus ausgelegt*, ed. 4 (Leipzig and Erlangen, 1922), p. 86. "Vollens phantastisch ist die Annahme, dass die christlichen Erzählungen aus der rabbinischen Exegese vom Jes. 7:14 erwachsen seien." Cf. also Strack-Billerbeck, *op. cit.*, p. 49. "Darum hat das alte Judentum auch niemals erwartet, dass etwa der verheissene Messias auf dem Wege übernatürlicher Zeugung das Licht der Welt erblicken werde."



evolution of the doctrine.<sup>45</sup> Because of the absurdity of this multiplication of mutually contradictory theories, well characterized by Loisy,<sup>46</sup> there is greater unanimity among more recent rationalists in following the paths first indicated by H. Usener, it would seem, and then taken up by others such as W. Soltau, E. Petersen, P. W. Schmiedel, Hillman, and Loisy himself.<sup>47</sup>

The salient points of this trend, despite individual nuances, has been well summarized in general by pseudo-Herzog (Turmel) "To sum up, the dogma of the virginal conception first appeared toward the end of the first century, in Christian communities of Hellenic origin. Two factors concurred in its formation: the title Son of God, a favorite salutation given to the Savior, and the prophecy of Isaiah (7:14). The title itself gave rise to the notion of a miracle, and the prophecy itself was at hand to elevate this initial impression to the dignity of the dogma."<sup>48</sup>

Father Lagrange has reviewed thoroughly the notion of "sons of god" among pagans. The unions between gods and

<sup>45</sup> Cf. A. von Harnack, *op. cit.*, Vol. 1, p. 113, note.

<sup>46</sup> Loisy, *op. cit.*, Vol. 1, p. 339. "L'hypothèse d'un emprunt direct à la mythologie ne semble pas à discuter."

<sup>47</sup> H. Usener, *Religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen*, Vol. 1, *Das Weihnachtstfest* (Tübingen, 1889); W. Soltau, *Die Geburtsgeschichte Jesu Christi* (Leipzig, 1909); E. Petersen, *Die wunderbare Geburt des Heilandes*, in *Religionsgeschichtliche Volksbücher*, Vol. 3, 1909; P. Schmiedel, *Mary*, in Cheyne's *Encyc. Bibl.*, Vol. 3, p. 2963 f.; Hillmann, *Die Kindheitsgeschichte Jesu nach Lukas kritisch untersucht*, in *Jahrbücher für protestantische Theologie*, Vol. 17 (1891), p. 245. "Es ist also die Idee der übernatürlichen Geburt auf heidenchristlichen Boden entstanden und später durch Jesaiah 7 14 beglaubigt"; Loisy, *op. cit.*, p. 339.

<sup>48</sup> Pseudo-Herzog (Turmel), *La conception virginale du Christ*, in *Revue d'Histoire et de Littérature Religieuse*, Vol. 12 (1907), p. 126, cf. *ibid.*, p. 121. "Les récits qui nous expliquent si clairement que Joseph n'eut aucune part à la naissance de Jésus sont de la fin du premier siècle. Le dogme de la conception virginale fit donc son apparition dans la conscience chrétienne aux environs de l'année 80."

human beings were effected in various ways. In some mythological legends, the gods were pictured as having intercourse with mortal women; in the Homeric cycle this took place with brutal lust, and from such unions were born giants, intermediaries between men and gods; in these instances, obviously there is no question of virginal motherhood. However, conception was also pictured as having occurred to the exclusion of all sexual intercourse, v. g., through the wind, flowers, air, etc., as in the golden rain sent down by Jove whereby Danaë conceived and bore Perseus. Finally, there are other instances which concern historic men; thus Plato, Alexander the Great, Scipio and Augustus were all considered to be the sons of gods, frequently only in the sense of adulatory praise.<sup>49</sup>

It is the contention of more recent critics, then, that newly converted Christians from pagan origins, having heard Christ preached as the Son of God, recalled their native legends, if the pagan sons of gods were such by the direct intervention of the gods themselves, why not attribute the same divine honors to Jesus? The critics appeal to the first Christian apologetes for confirmation; Saint Justin Martyr and Tertullian referred the divine origin of Christ to analogous mythological legends, v.g., Saint Justin "When we proclaim that the Word, who first is the Son of God, was born without the intermediary of man, Jesus Christ our Master, we do not affirm anything new or different from those among you who are called sons of Jupiter."<sup>50</sup>

What is to be thought of this theory? First, it is quite comprehensible that pagans on hearing the gospel should have such thoughts about Jesus, the Son of God. Thus the Lystrians on witnessing the miracle of Paul cried out: "The gods have come down to us in the form of men (*Acts* 14:10)," and

<sup>49</sup> Cf. Lagrange, *art. cit.*, in *Revue Biblique*, Vol. 11 (1914), p. 63 f.

<sup>50</sup> Saint Justin, *Apologia*, PG 6, 359 f., cf. Tertullian, *Apologia adversus Gentes*, P.L. 1, 449 f.

wished to offer sacrifice to him and to Barnabas through the priest of Jupiter. But we should note the vehemence of Paul's protest that he and Barnabas were only mortal men (*ibid.* v. 13 f.).

Furthermore, we see everywhere in the early preaching of Christianity the sedulous care of the Apostles to make sure that their hearers grasp the truth of a transcendent, eternal, absolutely unique God, to whom all men owe the complete dedication of spiritual adoration; for instance, Saint Paul's powerful sermon to the pagan philosophers in the Areopagus (*Acts* 17.22 ff.). Therefore, it is impossible, both *a priori* and psychologically, that those who had renounced polytheism with its false worship and licentiousness, and, in the words of Paul had "... turned from idols, to serve the living and true God (*1 Thess* 1:19)," would, as neophytes, return to their former base and immoral legends concerning the lascivious actions of pagan gods, and apply them to Christ's conception and birth.<sup>51</sup>

Let us suppose, but not concede (simply because there are no historical grounds for doing so) that one or another small group of converted pagans should have relapsed into pagan practices while still remaining at least nominally Christians; is it not preposterous to suppose that the singular error of a few could have invaded the whole Church throughout its length and breadth, without leaving any historical trace of the slightest reaction? <sup>52</sup> The very hypothesis is fantastic, especially in view of the apostolic doctrine enjoining absolute separation from pagan infidels: "Do not bear the yoke with unbelievers. For what has justice in common with iniquity? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? Or what part has the believer with the unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Lagrange, *art. cit.*, p. 66

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 67.

of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God . . . (2 Cor. 6:14-17)."

The baselessness of this theory is further evidenced by the fact that the virginal conception was set down by Matthew and Luke, whose narratives, on the testimony of experts, have an unique and distinctive Semitic flavor and character, not only in language, but even more so in thought, in as much as the annunciation and birth of Jesus are described as the fulfillment of the Messianic hope, which was exclusively Jewish. Is it not then absurd to picture Judaeo-Christians, such as Luke and Matthew, having received the source of their doctrine on the virginal conception from pagan sources which would so clearly contradict their strict monotheism? <sup>53</sup>

Regarding Saint Justin, it is true, of course, that he compares the Christian dogma of the virginal conception with analogical legends of pagan mythology; but from the context, it is evident that he does so with an apologetic end in view, by an argument *ad hominem*, without in the slightest degree compromising or leaving doubtful his true, innermost, and completely orthodox conviction: "It is perfectly evident . . . that the argument from analogy with the pagan stories, which he [Justin] uses, . . . is an *argumentum ad hominem* merely, and does not touch the real centre of his conviction." <sup>54</sup> Obviously also, the comparison limps, for the analogy is purely exterior and only apparent; Jesus is not the Son of God, *because* He is born in time through the power of the Most High, as pagan heroes and demi-gods are supposedly the sons of pagan deities; but rather, He who from eternity *is* the only begotten Son of God, is born in time, becomes man, Messiah and Saviour.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. J. Gresham Machen, *op. cit.*, p. 62 "The fact that Luke 1 5-2 52 is a strikingly Jewish and indeed Palestinian narrative . . .," *ibid.*, p. 174 "the essentially Jewish and Palestinian character of Matthew cc 1 and 2 is scarcely less plain than that of Luke cc 1 and 2"

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 335.

That this was the deep faith of Saint Justin, no one can deny sincerely.

The whole theory as described by Turmel above, and advocated in its essentials by so many other Rationalists, is truly nebulous, indeterminate and intangible. Its proponents never descend to the practical and decisive issue of telling us who, concretely and historically, these newly converted pagans were who foisted their legendary myths on the original Judaeo-Christian community. We are not told where they lived, by whom they were evangelized, or by what specific contrivings they managed to graft their paganism on the whole Church. On the other hand, the fact of the virginal conception is told by the evangelists, Luke and Matthew, simply, as real and historical, with no apologetic embellishment as if they were proposing something novel or unknown, nor is there a single historical indication in any contemporary document concerning the slightest reaction within the Christian community of believers against such a marvelous and astounding fact as the virginal conception of Christ. Why? Because it was handed down and believed as a revealed fact. The infancy gospels of Matthew and Luke are far from being the product of the idle dreams of early Christians nostalgically yearning for the verification in their newly-adopted religion of ancient pagan myths; rather the laborate and pseudo-scientific postulate of pagan origins for the virginal conception of Christ is an idle nebulous dream of the critics themselves. We conclude fittingly by quoting two authors, one a Protestant, the other a Catholic, who have both made serious and prolonged investigations of rationalist theories and of Christian tradition: "The impulse toward this belief must have been given from without . . . it must have grown out of a conviction, cherished within a limited Palestinian circle of believers, that the traditional belief among them was based on facts, of which some members of this com-



munity had been the original depositories and witnesses." <sup>55</sup>  
"The doctrine of the virginal conception, like the doctrine of the Resurrection of our Blessed Lord, created so many difficulties that the only reason for preaching it was its truth! . . . The teaching of the virginal conception, if it were not true, would have been the death of Christianity" <sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> G. H. Box, *The Gospel Narratives of the Nativity and the Alleged Influence of Heathen Ideas*, in *Zeitschrift für neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche*, Vol 6 (1905), p 100

<sup>56</sup> V. McNabb, *The New Testament Witness to Our Blessed Lady* (London, 1930), p. 17