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## Our Lady's Vow of Virginit

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## OUR LADY'S VOW OF VIRGINITY

ANY discussion concerning a vow, or proposal, of virginity on the part of the Blessed Virgin must begin with, or, at the very least, include, the famous text of *Luke* 1, 34, "How shall this happen, since I do not know man?" The present paper centers on that text. It will contain:

I—a very brief comment concerning the textual criticism;

II—a survey of the exegesis of the text.

### I—TEXTUAL CRITICISM <sup>1</sup>

During the past 65 years such men as Hillman, Kattenbusch, Weinel, Harnack, Schmiedel, Usener, and Loisy <sup>2</sup> have attempted to disprove the authenticity of *Luke* 1, 34-35 (in whole or in part) so as to avoid the idea of a virginal birth and a vow of virginity. They have accomplished just the reverse of what they hoped. They have brought into clear light the overwhelming proof of the verses' authenticity. From the aspect of external criteria, they are contained in every known Greek manuscript. With regard to internal criteria, the obvious parallelism between Mary and Zachary demands these two verses. Take for example, *Luke* 1, 34. Certainly,

1,34a "How shall this happen (expressing a difficulty)

1,34b "since I do not know man?"

is the double faceted parallel to

1,18a "How shall I know this (demanding a sign as in *Gen.* 15, 8; *Judges* 6, 37; 4 *Kings* 20, 8).

1,18b "For I am an old man and my wife is advanced, etc."

<sup>1</sup> This point is reduced almost to a presupposition because of the practical unanimity of scholars concerning it.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. J. M. Vosté, *De conceptione virginali Jesu Christi* (Romae, 1933), p. 41.

The results of the critical study of the Mss and the internal paralleling of the Zachary-Mary sections in Luke by such authors as Vosté,<sup>3</sup> Ceuppens,<sup>4</sup> Giblet,<sup>5</sup> and Bardenhewer<sup>6</sup>—results affirming the authenticity of Luke 1, 34—have stood the test of time.<sup>7</sup>

## II—EXEGESIS OF LUKE 1, 34

Granting, then, the authenticity of the verse, the next step takes us to its exegesis. The field may be divided logically into two camps: (A) those who hold the common thesis that this verse indicates a vow, or proposal, of virginity on the part of Mary; (B) those who oppose this belief.

### (A) *The Common Teaching*

The common teaching which regards Luke 1, 34 as an obvious indication of a proposal, or vow, of virginity on the part of our Lady counts among its advocates a long list of ancient and modern authors.

(a) *Ancient* authors include Augustine<sup>8</sup> (the first to give a clear indication of this doctrine), a dubious work of Gregory of Nyssa,<sup>9</sup> Bede,<sup>10</sup> Bernard,<sup>11</sup> John Geometra,<sup>12</sup> Sophronius,<sup>14</sup>

<sup>3</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 40-51.

<sup>4</sup> *Theologia Biblica*, 4; *Mariologia Biblica* (Taurini, 1948), pp. 81-90.

<sup>5</sup> *L'aube du salut*, in *Bible et Vie Chrétienne*, vol. 7 (1954), pp. 96-108.

<sup>6</sup> *Mariae Verkündigung*, in *Biblische Studien*, vol. 10 (1905), pp. 129-137.

<sup>7</sup> Certainly Vogel's article in *Zeitschrift für neutestamentliche Wissenschaft*, vol. 43 (1950-51), pp. 256-260, pointing out the absence of Luke 1, 34 in the Old Latin Codex "b" has not changed the picture in the least. Cf. Brinkmann, in *Biblica*, vol. 34 (1953), pp. 327-332.

<sup>8</sup> *De sancta virginitate*, 4; *P.L.*, 40, 398.

<sup>9</sup> *Oratio in diem natalem Christi*; *P.G.*, 46, 1140.

<sup>10</sup> *Comment. in Lucam*, c. 1; *P.L.*, 92, 318.

<sup>11</sup> *Sermo 4 super "Missus"*; *Sermo in Apoc. 12*, "Signum magnum apparuit," in *De praerog. B.M.V.*, n. 9; *P.L.*, 183, 180 and 434.

<sup>12</sup> *In SS. Deiparae Annunt.* n. 15; *P.G.*, 106, 824.

<sup>14</sup> *In Deiparae Annunt.* n. 32-36; *P.G.*, 87, 3258-3263.

Eadmerus,<sup>15</sup> Anselm,<sup>16</sup> Rupert,<sup>17</sup> Hugh of St. Victor,<sup>18</sup> Thomas Aquinas,<sup>19</sup> Bonaventure, Suárez,<sup>20</sup> Duns Scotus,<sup>21</sup> Bossuet, Godefridus Abbas Admontensis,<sup>22</sup> Petavius,<sup>23</sup> Maldonatus,<sup>24</sup> Calmet,<sup>25</sup> and Cornely.<sup>26</sup>

It can and must be said, therefore, that the common exegesis, which can be traced with certainty back to Augustine, gathered great strength over the centuries till, by the thirteenth century, it was universally held by theologians. Still later Suárez<sup>27</sup> and Petavius<sup>28</sup> indicate the same unanimity among theologians of their time.

(b) A partial list of *modern* authors includes: Scheeben,<sup>29</sup>

<sup>15</sup> *De excellentia Virginis*, c. 4; *P.L.* 159, 563.

<sup>16</sup> *Liber de excellentia B. Virg.*, c. 4; *P.L.* 158, 646.

<sup>17</sup> *Comm. in Canticum*, lib. 3.

<sup>18</sup> *De Beatae Mariae virginitate*, c. 1; *P.L.* 176, 866.

<sup>19</sup> *Summa Theologica*, 3, 28, 4.

<sup>20</sup> *De myst. vitae Christi*, disp. 6, sect. 2, nr. 1.

<sup>21</sup> *Op. Oxon.* 4, d. 30, q. 2.

<sup>22</sup> *Hom.* 63; *P.L.* 174, 957.

<sup>23</sup> *Dogmata Theologica*, vol. 6 (Venetiis, 1724) *De Incarnatione*, Lib. 14, c. 4, pp. 212-215.

<sup>24</sup> *Comm. in Lucam* 1, 34 (Moguntiae, 1874), pp. 43-45.

<sup>25</sup> *Commentaire Litterale*, Luc. 1, 34.

<sup>26</sup> *Commentaria in S. Scripturam*, Luke 1, 34, Vol. 16, pp. 21-22.

<sup>27</sup> Suárez, *loc. cit.*: "Inter Catholicos concertatio non est, quin Beata Maria virginitatem voverit."

<sup>28</sup> Petavius, *loc. cit.*: "Non simplex voluntatis propositum perpetuae servandae virginitatis concepisce sanctissimam Virginem; sed illud ipsum voti religione sanxisse prorsus affirmandum existimo, gravissimorum Patrum, et communi Catholicorum omnium auctoritate commotus: tum quod argumenta omnia quae ad elevandam illius fidem ab secus sentientibus opponuntur, levissima sunt nec multum negotii faciunt."

<sup>29</sup> *Mariology*, tr. by Geukers, vol. 1 (St. Louis, 1946), pp. 115-120.



Lennerz,<sup>30</sup> Zerwick,<sup>31</sup> Ojanguren,<sup>32</sup> Frangipane,<sup>33</sup> Terrien,<sup>34</sup> Gruenthaner,<sup>35</sup> Henze,<sup>36</sup> Roschini,<sup>37</sup> Willam,<sup>38</sup> Gibley,<sup>39</sup> Dublanchy,<sup>41</sup> Knabenbauer,<sup>42</sup> Médebielle,<sup>43</sup> Vosté,<sup>44</sup> Ginns,<sup>45</sup> Valensin-Huby,<sup>46</sup> Lagrange,<sup>47</sup> Ricciotti,<sup>48</sup> Prat,<sup>49</sup> Fillion,<sup>50</sup> Campana,<sup>51</sup> Ceuppens,<sup>52</sup> Collins,<sup>53</sup> Benoit (seemingly),<sup>54</sup> Holzmeister,<sup>55</sup> Neubert,<sup>56</sup> Brodmann,<sup>57</sup> and Levie.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>30</sup> *De Beata Virgine*, ed. 3 (Romae, 1939), p. 48.

<sup>31</sup> In *Verbum Domini*, vol. 29 (1951), pp. 239-241.

<sup>32</sup> *De voto virginitatis B. V. Mariae, praesertim juxta doctrinam Doctoris Subtilis, Joannis Duns Scoti*, in *Alma Socia Christi*, vol. 11 (Romae, 1953), pp. 115-145.

<sup>33</sup> *Utrum B. V. Maria ab angelo salutata jam in domo Joseph ut conjux fuerit*, in *Verbum Domini*, vol. 25 (1947), pp. 99-111.

<sup>34</sup> *La Mère de Dieu*, vol. 1 (Paris, 1900), pp. 147-148.

<sup>35</sup> *Mary in the New Testament*, in *Mariology*, ed. J. B. Carol, O.F.M., vol. 1 (Milwaukee, 1954), pp. 83-87.

<sup>36</sup> *De prima narratione evangelica*, in *Marianum*, vol. 12 (1950), pp. 285-291.

<sup>37</sup> *Mariologia*, vol. 2 (2), ed. 2 (Romae, 1948), pp. 269-278.

<sup>38</sup> *Mary the Mother of Jesus* (St. Louis, Mo., 1948), pp. 46-47.

<sup>39</sup> *Loc. cit.*

<sup>41</sup> Art. *Marie*, in *D.T.C.*, 9, 2388.

<sup>42</sup> *Evangelium sec. Lucam* (Parisiis, 1905), pp. 70-73.

<sup>43</sup> In *Dictionnaire de la Bible, Supplément*, art. "Annonciation," col. 287-290.

<sup>44</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 12-13.

<sup>45</sup> *A Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture* (Edinburgh, 1953), 748d.

<sup>46</sup> *L'Evangile selon S. Luc*, in *Verbum Salutis* series (Paris, 1952), pp. 18-19.

<sup>47</sup> *L'Evangile selon S. Luc* (Paris, 1921), pp. 31-33.

<sup>48</sup> *The Life of Christ* (Milwaukee, 1947), pp. 225-228.

<sup>49</sup> *Life of Christ*, vol. 1 (Milwaukee, 1950), pp. 48-50.

<sup>50</sup> *Life of Christ*, vol. 1 (St. Louis, 1937), p. 261.

<sup>51</sup> *Maria nel dogma cattolico* (Torino, 1945), p. 832.

<sup>52</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 73-78.

<sup>53</sup> *Our Lady's Vow of Virginity*, (Lk. 1:34), in *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, vol. 5 (1943), pp. 371-380.

<sup>54</sup> In *Revue Biblique*, vol. 48 (1939), p. 130.

<sup>55</sup> "Quomodo fiet istud quoniam virum non cognosco?", in *Verbum Domini*, vol. 19 (1939), pp. 70-75.

<sup>56</sup> *La chronologie depuis les fiançailles de Marie jusqu'à la naissance du Christ*, in *Marianum*, vol. 4 (1942), pp. 10-20.

<sup>57</sup> *Mariens Jungfräulichkeit nach Lk. 1:34 in der Auseinandersetzung von heute*, in *Antonianum*, vol. 30 (1955), pp. 27-74.

<sup>58</sup> *Les Evangiles Synoptiques* (Louvain, 1935), pp. 48-56.

The common exegesis, consequently, considered from the point of external authority, is very strong. Yet the rather reserved statement of Campana<sup>59</sup> is an indication that the argument, *as patristic*, is far from overwhelming. His modest comment is that he cannot offer as proof for the vow "a whole host of Fathers," but that no Father denies the vow, while all those who discuss the subject affirm it.

### (B) *Opposition to the Common Exegesis*

#### (a) In General

Notwithstanding what must be called the almost universal opinion of the Scholastics, of later theologians, and exegetes, opposition to the use of Luke 1, 34 as a proof of Our Lady's vow of virginity has been felt in Catholic circles since the time of Cajetan. The learned Cardinal<sup>61</sup> was, seemingly, the first to depart from the beaten path. In our own times Landersdorfer,<sup>62</sup> Haugg,<sup>63</sup> and Gächter<sup>64</sup> have also protested against this use of the Lucan text.<sup>65</sup> Is such a stand possible? Its negative view concerning Luke 1, 34's probative force can hardly be considered anti-patristic. The number of Church Fathers who side with Augustine is very, very small. In fact, it might be more correct to say that Augustine is the only Church Father who spoke directly about Mary's vow of virginity.

Again, no ecclesiastical censorship has been imposed on the

<sup>59</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 783.

<sup>61</sup> *In quattuor evangelia* (Lugduni, 1556), in Luc. 1:34.

<sup>62</sup> In *Biblische Zeitschrift*, vol. 7 (1909), pp. 30-48.

<sup>63</sup> *Das erste biblische Marienwort* (Stuttgart, 1938), pp. 36-56 and *passim*.

<sup>64</sup> *Theological Studies*, vol. 2 (1941), pp. 145-170; 347-368; *id.*, *Maria im Erdenleben* (1953), pp. 92-98.

<sup>65</sup> With these may be mentioned Féret in *Prêtre et Apôtre*, 15 Mars (1947)—if Ojanguren, *loc. cit.*, p. 121, understands him correctly—and Osty, who, while dealing with this text in the *Bible de Jérusalem*, hesitates concerning the value of the common interpretation.



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writings denying the common exegesis. And, perhaps strongest of all, the *Sacra Virginitas* of Pius XII, though dealing specifically with vowed virginity, and though giving over a number of paragraphs to the consideration of Mary as the model of virginity, says nothing at all about such a vow on the part of Mary . . . ne quidem verbum. As a consequence, the meaning of Luke 1, 34 is still legitimately disputable.

### (b) In Particular

The main figures on this negative side fall into two groups: Cajetan-Landersdorfer: Haugg-Gächter.

#### i—Cajetan and Landersdorfer

Cajetan<sup>66</sup> believed that Mary understood the angel's words in the sense that she was *then and there* conceiving: Landersdorfer, that *she had already conceived*. The idea of a conception taking place at that moment, or having already taken place in the past, explains Mary's question of absolute amazement, "How can this be for I do not know man, i.e., for I am still a virgin?"

Neither opinion has attracted much following. Lagrange<sup>67</sup> pointed out—against Cajetan—that Mary's question, if her thought was that expressed by the Cardinal, should have been phrased in the aorist and not the present. It would then read "epei andra ouk egnōn," i.e., "since I have not known man."

A similar objection is valid—even more valid—when dealing with Landersdorfer's exegesis which has Mary thinking of a conception already effected.<sup>68</sup> Here, too, her statement should

<sup>66</sup> *Loc. cit.*, "Non dixit, non cognoscam, sed non cognosco, quia intellexerat verba angeli tunc implenda: maximam affero rationem inquirendi modum quo nunc concipiam quoniam usque in praesens viri cognitionem non habeo; hoc est, quia virgo sum."

<sup>67</sup> *Loc. cit.*

<sup>68</sup> Cf. Ceuppens, *op. cit.*, p. 73.



read in the aorist, "ouk egnōn," and not in the present "ou ginōskō" as Luke gives it. Landersdorfer's further explanation that Mary did use the past tense in Aramaic for her question, but that Luke places part of it in the future, "How shall this be," because he knows that the conception is future, while translating the second past tense "I have not known," the Hebrew "lo' yadati" by the Greek present "ou ginōskō" is an unfounded assertion whose contorted complications alone make it unbelievable.

ii—*Haugg and Gächter*

These two can be considered as holding the same opinion, though the emphasis of each is a bit different.<sup>69</sup> Haugg's is philological; Gächter's is historical, insisting, even more than does Haugg, on the Jewish wedding customs as reflected in the Talmud particularly. Their main tenets can be arranged as follows:

1—The annunciation took place during the period of the betrothal, before the wedding proper, i.e., before the "nissu'in," the "Heimführung," Mary's entrance into Joseph's home.

2—During this period marriage relations were not permitted, especially not in Galilee. They were considered disgraceful, sinful.

3—The wedding proper, the "nissu'in" was impossible, or difficult, to advance. The betrothal period for a virgin—for Mary, therefore—was one complete year; for a widow, thirty days.<sup>70</sup>

4—Mary understands from the angel's words that the conception is to take place in the immediate future.

5—Mary's question, considered in the light of points 1-4, is extremely simple and natural. It amounts to this: "How

<sup>69</sup> Cf. Brodmann, *art. cit.*, p. 34.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. George F. Moore, *Judaism*, vol. 2 (Cambridge, Mass., 1950), p. 121.



can this imminent-conception take place for I am not permitted to know man while merely betrothed, and my period of betrothal will not be over for some months?"<sup>71</sup> According to this interpretation there is no proof for a vow or purpose of virginity in 1, 34. Not only that, but the whole idea of such a resolution is clearly contrary to:

6—the Jewish mentality at the time of Christ, which placed a high premium on child bearing and did not favor virginity;

7—the fact of Mary's betrothal which argues for her planning a natural, normal married life. It is only *after* learning, through the angel's revelation, of the miraculous virgin birth that God will effect in her that Mary resolves to remain a virgin.

The discussion thus far can be rephrased in simple terms. In Luke 1, 34 Mary presents a difficulty to the conception announced by the angel. It is this: Mary believes she is bound to virginity. Why?

A . . . previously resolved state of virginity—so the common opinion;

B . . . simple state of betrothal—so Haugg, Gächter.

In either explanation a state of virginity is involved: permanent in the first, temporary in the second.<sup>72</sup>

Reaction to the naturalistic exegesis of Haugg and Gächter was not long in coming. It has run the gamut from expressions of astonishment (without refutation) on the part of Ojanguren<sup>73</sup> and Roschini,<sup>74</sup> to calm short reviews (unfavorable in

<sup>71</sup> Supposing that Luke 1, 56—three months stay with Elizabeth—refers to a period before the wedding proper. This seems correct because it brings Mary back home just when her pregnancy begins to be noticeable.

<sup>72</sup> Either state would be well indicated by the Semitic participle. Thus Delitzsch has translated the Greek "ou ginōskō" into the Hebrew "ēnenni jōda'at 'is" with favorable backing from Ceuppens and Médebielle in *locis citatis*. Luke, if translating from a Semitic perfect, would have used the Greek aorist "egnōn."

<sup>73</sup> *Art. cit.*, p. 121.

<sup>74</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 270, footnote.

general) by Coppens,<sup>75</sup> Benoit,<sup>76</sup> Wennemer,<sup>77</sup> Steinmetzer<sup>78</sup> and others, to full length, scholarly criticisms. Collins,<sup>79</sup> Ceuppens,<sup>80</sup> and Holzmeister<sup>81</sup> gave solid criticisms of Haugg; Neubert<sup>82</sup> of Gächter; and Brodmann,<sup>83</sup> in an extremely fine article, criticized both.

Through all this, how have the Haugg-Gächter seven points stood up?

1—Annunciation at time of betrothal: not after marriage.

Here Haugg and Gächter have fared very well. This exegesis is, and has been, favored by the vast majority of commentators. To mention some: Justin, Origen, Cyril of Jerusalem, Basil, Hilary, Jerome and Epiphanius; <sup>84</sup> Willam, <sup>85</sup> Lagrange, <sup>86</sup> Gruenthaner, <sup>87</sup> Holzmeister, <sup>88</sup> Giblet, <sup>89</sup> Valensin and Huby, <sup>90</sup> Ricciotti, <sup>91</sup> Levie, <sup>92</sup> Auer, <sup>93</sup> and Campana. <sup>94</sup>

The minority party (annunciation after marriage proper)

<sup>75</sup> In *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses*, vol. 16 (1939), p. 513.

<sup>76</sup> *Loc. cit.*, p. 130.

<sup>77</sup> In *Scholastik*, vol. 14 (1939), pp. 612-613.

<sup>78</sup> In *Theologische Revue*, vol. 39 (1938), pp. 366-67.

<sup>79</sup> *Art. cit.*, pp. 371 ss.

<sup>80</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 62-93.

<sup>81</sup> In *Verbum Domini*, vol. 19 (1939), pp. 70-75.

<sup>82</sup> In *Marianum*, vol. 4 (1942), pp. 10-20.

<sup>83</sup> *Art. cit.*

<sup>84</sup> Cited by Maldonatus, in *Matt.* 1, 18.

<sup>85</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 52.

<sup>86</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 26.

<sup>87</sup> *Art. cit.*, p. 83.

<sup>88</sup> *De nuntiis Sancti Joseph*, in *Verbum Domini*, vol. 25 (1947), p. 149.

<sup>89</sup> *Loc. cit.*, p. 100.

<sup>90</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 12.

<sup>91</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 226.

<sup>92</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 48.

<sup>93</sup> *Geist und Leben*, vol. 23 (1950), pp. 411-25; vol. 27 (1954), pp. 331 ff.

<sup>94</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 980.

has among its advocates: Maldonatus,<sup>95</sup> Scheeben,<sup>96</sup> Henze,<sup>97</sup> Frangipane,<sup>98</sup> and Ceuppens.<sup>99</sup> They face an extremely formidable difficulty, however, in the wording of St. Matthew, who writes in 1, 20 "Joseph, son of David, fear not to *take* (paralabein) Mary your wife"; and in 1, 24 "Joseph, having risen from his sleep, did as the angel had commanded him, and he *took* (parelaben) his wife." In both instances the use of *paralambanein*, the Hebrew *lqh*, in the aorist seems to indicate the "Heimführung," the acceptance of Mary into Joseph's home. Other interpretations such as the "accipere situationem" of Ceuppens, the "retinere" of St. John Chrysostom<sup>100</sup> and Henze, and the "reassumere" of Frangipane, seem very forced.

2—Marriage relations not allowed during betrothal, especially not in Galilee.

Here, too, Haugg and Gächter have yet to be proved in error. Neubert's<sup>101</sup> quotation from Philo<sup>102</sup> indicating that betrothal was equal to marriage is not too strong when read in context. It need not mean that the two were equal under every aspect.<sup>103</sup>

The proofs which Gächter adduces against relations during betrothal are not uniformly strong, but certainly the fact that in Galilee the betrothed couple was never allowed alone seems to argue the point quite well. Agreeing with Gächter on this

<sup>95</sup> *In Matt.* 1, 18. In this place, Maldonatus calls his opinion that of Chrysostom, Ambrose, Theophylactus, and almost all the theologians.

<sup>96</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 127-129.

<sup>97</sup> *Art. cit.*, pp. 285-291.

<sup>98</sup> *Art. cit.*, pp. 99-111.

<sup>99</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 62-66

<sup>100</sup> *In Matt., homilia* 4, n. 6; *P.G.* 57, 46.

<sup>101</sup> *Art. cit.*, p. 11.

<sup>102</sup> *De special. leg.*, III, 71 in Loeb Classical Library Series.

<sup>103</sup> Gächter gives a contrary presentation of Philo's belief on this point in *Maria im Erdenleben*, pp. 88-89.



issue are Palmieri,<sup>104</sup> Sales,<sup>105</sup> Lagrange,<sup>106</sup> Ricciotti,<sup>107</sup> Frangipane,<sup>108</sup> Gruenthaner,<sup>109</sup> Levie,<sup>110</sup> Giblet,<sup>111</sup> and Brodmann.<sup>112</sup>

3—Wedding impossible, or difficult, to advance.

Neubert<sup>113</sup> has begged to disagree here, noting the case (instanced by Gächter himself) of Rabbi Papa (+375 A. D.) shortening the ordinary year's wait to a period of 30 days if a girl remained yet unmarried at the advanced age (for the Jews) of 13½.

Benoit,<sup>114</sup> Ceuppens,<sup>115</sup> and Holzmeister,<sup>116</sup> too, believe that such an advancement could take place for good reasons.

Brodmann,<sup>117</sup> on his part, makes a very solid objection against this point of Gächter by pointing to a piece of exegesis given by R. Cijja<sup>118</sup> about the year 280 A. D. The Rabbi is commenting on Proverbs 13, 12, "Hope deferred makes the heart sick; but desire fulfilled is the tree of life." *Hope deferred*, says the Rabbi, is when a man betroths a woman and waits the set time: *tree of life* is when one betroths a woman and marries immediately. From this it appears, concludes Brodmann, that an immediate marriage was possible, at least in the latter part of the third century A. D.

<sup>104</sup> *De matrimonio christiano* (Prati, 1897), p. 45.

<sup>105</sup> *Il Nuovo Testamento Commentato*, in Luc. 1, 26.

<sup>106</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 26.

<sup>107</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 226.

<sup>108</sup> *Art. cit.*, p. 99.

<sup>109</sup> *Art. cit.*, p. 84.

<sup>110</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 48.

<sup>111</sup> *Art. cit.*, p. 100.

<sup>112</sup> *Art. cit.*, pp. 32-33.

<sup>113</sup> *Art. cit.*, p. 14.

<sup>114</sup> *Loc. cit.*, p. 130.

<sup>115</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 77.

<sup>116</sup> *Art. cit.*, p. 71.

<sup>117</sup> *Art. cit.*, p. 36.

<sup>118</sup> Cf. Strack-Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament* . . . , vol. 2 (München, 1924), p. 398.

Matthew 1, 24 has also been used against Gächter, for it seems to indicate an advancement of the marriage on the part of Joseph. Rising from his sleep he did as the angel commanded and took his wife. It is, however, far from being an absolute proof, since it is quite possible that the marriage date was already at hand when Joseph discovered Mary's pregnancy.

Point three, one might say, has yet to be proved sufficiently by Haugg-Gächter, or absolutely disproved by those who disagree with them. It seems that Haugg-Gächter's thesis respects the ordinary procedure which admitted of exceptions.

4—Mary expects from the angel's words that the conception is imminent.

Concerning this tenet a great deal of disagreement has taken place. Since the time of Cajetan, Catholic exegetes have argued that the angel's words do not indicate an imminent conception, but that their future form—which, we presume, gives the idea of the original language—indicated a rather vague future. If so—the argument goes—Mary's answer refers, not to the imminent future, but to the future in general, the whole future, that is, encompassed by the vow of virginity. So argue all exegetes<sup>119</sup> who follow the common interpretation.

Yet, to this observer at least, the point advanced by Haugg-Gächter is not at all inane. As a matter of fact, the conception was to take place in the immediate future: indeed, God knew this and, presumably, so did His angelic messenger. It is not out of context then to conceive of this important point being conveyed to Mary by the angel, either in words not recorded by Luke, or in some element of the angel's attitude or expression.

5—The exegesis proposed by Haugg and Gächter stands or falls on the proof for or against points 1-4. Since they have not yet been disproved, the exegesis is certainly possible.

<sup>119</sup> Cf. Lagrange, Médebielle, Ricciotti, Ceuppens, Neubert, Collins, and Brodmann in *locis citatis*.

Their two final points are that the whole idea of a resolution of virginity seems against the Jewish mentality and the fact of Mary's betrothal. What can be said about these two statements?

6—Jewish mentality contrary to virginity.

In general, it must be admitted that this point is true. All students of the Old Testament know full well the Jewish appreciation of family life.<sup>120</sup> A large family was the fulfillment of the divine command to increase and multiply; it was man's assurance of a continuance (immortality) after death.<sup>121</sup> A woman's nature reached its completion only with motherhood. Jephthah's daughter mourning her barrenness in *Judges* 11, 37-40, Sara in *Gen.* 16, 2 giving her maid to Abraham that she might have children by proxy, and Rachael pleading for children or for death in *Gen.* 30, 1 are typical examples of the Jewish desire for children. The Rabbis went so far as to recommend that a man whose daughter remained unmarried should release his servant and give the girl to him. It is to this mentality that Haugg and Gächter point, as did Landersdorfer before them and Auer after them, as a legitimate *a priori* proof against the plausibility of a vow of virginity. In the voluminous writings of the O.T. and the Rabbis, no trace has yet been found of a vow of virginity:<sup>122</sup> still less of one among married people. At the same time, St. Luke, if he is really expressing the idea of a vow in 1, 34 is doing so in a rather cryptic fashion. Haugg<sup>123</sup> suggests that the Greek expressing a vow should have had some obvious indication as *oudepote ginosko* "never know" or *ou dunamai ginoskein* "I am not able to know."

Yet this argument is hardly apodictic. There are some

<sup>120</sup> Cf. Moore, *op. cit.*, pp. 119-40.

<sup>121</sup> Cf. David R. Mace in *Hebrew Marriage* (London, 1953), p. 231.

<sup>122</sup> Cf. Willam, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

<sup>123</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 48.





clear indications of an appreciation of chastity in the O.T.,<sup>124</sup> e.g., the praise of Judith in *Judith* 16, 26. Then, too, there was the principle—observed in practice, if not formulated in theory—that intimacy with God demanded chastity. This is illustrated by the examples of:

- the giving of the law on Sinai (*Ex.* 16, 26: 19, 15)
- the obligations of the priest during temple service (*Lev.* 15, 16-17: 22, 4)
- the conditions required of David and his men before receiving the temple bread (1 *Sam.* 21, 4-5)
- the virginity of such prophets as Jeremias, Elias, Eliseus, and John the Baptist.

Besides this, there was the case of the Essenes<sup>125</sup>—of whom we have all heard so much lately—with their lives of chastity. They must have given to even the ordinary Jew of Palestine some concept of the ideal of virginity.<sup>126</sup> To note that John the Baptist, Mary's relative, remained unmarried and must have been in contact with the Essenes of the Qumran community located so near him at the northern tip of the Dead Sea is not too weighty an observation—but it is something. He was certainly an ascetic, a Nazarite in a wide sense.<sup>127</sup>

7—Fact of Mary's betrothal against resolution of virginity.

This is certainly an extremely difficult argument for the common exegesis to overcome. If the annunciation had taken place before the betrothal, one could say that Mary, though vowed to virginity, was intent on providing her Son with a legal father. But, in Mary's mind, the annunciation was un-

<sup>124</sup> Cf. Willam, *op. cit.*, p. 15; Bonsirven, *Le Judaïsme Palestinien*, édition abrégée (Paris, 1950), p. 146; Brodmann, *art. cit.*, p. 41.

<sup>125</sup> It is interesting to note that Anne Catherine Emmerich begins her *Life of Mary* by connecting Mary's ancestors with these same Essenes.

<sup>126</sup> Cf. Philo, *De vita contemplativa*. (For reviews of Philo and Josephus concerning Essenes' virginity, cf. Burrows' *Dead Sea Scrolls* [New York, 1955], p. 291.)

<sup>127</sup> Cf. Francis McCool's *Testimonies to Christ* (Woodstock, 1955), p. 32.

known before the betrothal. Why then, if she had a vow of virginity and did not intend a normal married life, did she become betrothed? The difficulty cannot be passed over lightly. Most exegetes have conceded the difficulty, but have answered that marriage with a man like Joseph was, in fact, the best protection for Mary's virginity.<sup>128</sup>

This rapid consideration of H-G's seven points indicates that their proponents are still standing on their feet. Their natural, simple exegesis—devoid of all supernatural elements—is still tenable.<sup>129</sup>

<sup>128</sup> Lagrange, *op. cit.*, p. 33, says simply: "Quelles convenances ont déterminé Marie à se fiancer à Joseph malgré son propos ou son vœu de virginité? C'est ce que nous ignorons, et les hypothèses seraient assez inutiles. Le plus simple est de penser que le mariage avec un homme tel que Joseph la mettait à l'abri d'instances sans cesse renouvelées et assurait son repos."

<sup>129</sup> Recently Prof. Auer in *Geist und Leben*, vol. 23 (1950) 411-25; vol. 27 (1954), p. 332, has interpreted *Luke* 1, 34b as indicative of a resolution of virginity, which resolution, however, was *not made before* the annunciation. His explanation is this:

(a) Mary, because of the intimate presence of the Holy Spirit in her immaculate soul, has no tendency toward married life. At the same time, she has received no revelation regarding virginity. Her fullness of grace demands no revelation. Mary, though filled with the Holy Spirit, has the psychology of the O.T. A purpose of virginity on her part would be an anachronism.

(b) Out of obedience to her parents, and seeing in their will that of God, she becomes engaged to Joseph. The marriage, presumably, will be natural.

(c) At the annunciation—which occurs during the betrothal and before her introduction into Joseph's home—Mary sees herself called, *at one and the same time*, to the divine maternity and to perpetual virginity.

(d) Consequently, she asks, "How shall this (the maternity) happen since I do not know man (the virginity)?"

Where Haug and Gächter refuse to see the vow of virginity in 1, 34, Auer does postulate it—but as something which comes into existence at the moment of the annunciation itself and not as something already determined upon.

Zerwick, in *Verbum Domini*, vol. 29 (1951), pp. 239-41, has considered the argument quite thoroughly, and does not believe that it pays enough respect to the strength of Luke's Greek. If Auer's opinion be true, it is strange that Luke should have written, "How shall this be *for* (epeí)" instead of something like, "How shall this be *if, as you tell me*, I am not to know man?" In other

CONCLUSIONS: I would now like to bring this already overly long paper to an end by mentioning in schematic form the various opinions dealt with, their weakness and strength, and, finally, my own preferences.

(A) *The Opposition*

i—Cajetan-Landersdorfer:

strength: explain Mary's question in a natural fashion;

weakness: *Landersdorfer* believes that Mary understands the angel's message as referring to the past, yet Luke puts it in the future; that Mary asks her question in the past tense, yet Luke places it half in the future and half in the present. *Landersdorfer* seems to be so intent on reading between the lines that he fails to observe the lines themselves.

*Cajetan*.—Personally, I do not consider far fetched *Cajetan's* belief that Mary understood that the conception was imminent. However, his translation of "since I do not know man" as the equivalent of "since I am a virgin" is insufficient as it stands. The crux of the question is, why is Mary's virginity a difficulty. Only further precisioning along the lines of the common exegesis or H-G makes the question sensible.

ii—Haugg-Gächter

strength: a—very natural explanation of 1,34; . . . explains *text*;

b—explains betrothal before annunciation; . . . explains *context*;

word, the "epeí" of Luke 1, 34 seems to indicate a fact already well known to Mary, and not something just revealed.

*Brodmann*, too, *loc. cit.*, pp. 40-42, finds *Auer's* treatment unsatisfactory, though *Brodmann* argues especially against *Auer's* assumption that a proposal of virginity would be an anachronism on Mary's part. He notes the special divine providence directing Mary, and instances the same examples of O.T. chastity noted above under 6—dwelling especially upon the *Essenes* whose common life of virginity is receiving so much notice because of the *Qumran* finds.



weakness: a—seems contrary to Church's mariological sentiments;

b—absolute lack of backing from Fathers, and from theologians and exegetes from post-patristic period till our own times;

c—too natural. Our Lady is reduced—on principle—to no more, or little more, than the common Jewish maiden of the period. Now, one need not—and, to me, should not—advocate any great amount of infused knowledge on the part of Our Lady. That seems against the teaching of *Luke* 2,19.33.50-51, nor does it leave much room for the exercise of her virtue of faith. Yet it does seem strange that Our Lady, filled with grace, and designated by God for a life of perpetual virginity, would have had less appreciation of this virtue and ideal than, say, St. Paul in *I Cor.* 7.

(B) *The Common Exegesis*

strength: a—clear, precise explanation of Mary's question;

b—agrees with Church's mariological feelings;

weakness: a—burden of exegetical proof falls on four rather obscure words "epei andra ou ginōskō," "since I do not know man."

b—why the betrothal on the part of Mary? on the part of Joseph?

Despite its obvious difficulties, this opinion seems the more probable when compared to that of Haugg-Gächter. Levie's<sup>130</sup> reconstruction helps a good deal in explaining weakness—b—, the betrothal. He believes in the following sequence:

(a) Mary, from birth, was divinely orientated toward the divine maternity. With her first knowledge of what virginity

<sup>130</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 55.

was came a desire for it and a proposal to observe it. There was no question of anything resembling a formal vow. What is present is a profound orientation of will.

(b) When, however, her parents proposed marriage with Joseph, Mary could not refuse without contradicting the Jewish traditions and her parents' will. In the latter she saw the will of God. As a consequence, Mary—without any special arrangement with Joseph—consented to the marriage though still desiring virginity and placing this desire in God's hands. It is this desire which is manifested in *Luke* 1, 34b.

(c) When the angel revealed the virginal conception in 1, 35, Mary saw more clearly than ever before that God had inspired her desire for virginity. The virginal conception appeared as the consecration of that desire, the definite confirmation of it.

(d) Joseph, upon learning of the miraculous conception, realized that the Mother of the Son of God was not destined for the physical motherhood of further children. His consent to this assured Mary's perpetual virginity.

### (C) *An Alternate Possibility*

Another possibility does present itself, and at the acknowledged risk of destroying both the unity and clarity of this paper, I would like to finish by submitting it—without much explanation, proof, or verbiage—to the consideration of the theologians and exegetes here today. I submit it merely as a possibility—but one toward which I, personally, am beginning to feel an attraction.

Is it possible that the solution to the problem lies in emphasizing the meaning which the question in *Luke* 1, 34 had, not in the mind of Mary, but in that of St. Luke? What I mean is this: perhaps Luke is using a literary device—that is, putting this question on Mary's lips—for purposes of his own.

For what purposes? Two suggest themselves: the first in the literary order, the second in the conceptional, notional, or intentional.

In the literary order Our Lady's question does fit in perfectly with the obvious parallelism Luke draws between the annunciations to Zachary and Mary. Since there is a question in the account of Zachary (1, 18), so too in that of Mary.

In the conceptional order, what purpose would this question serve in Luke's mind? Certainly that which is his main intent throughout this whole section — the insistence upon Mary's virginity "since I do not know man" at the time of Christ's conception.

This solution, I repeat, is merely a suggestion. It would change the argument completely. The point of discussion would thus become: What did St. Luke intend by placing this question on Mary's lips?

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