

Summa Theologica III q28. Of the virginity of the Mother of God

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

[From the *Summa Theologica* of Saint Thomas Aquinas as translated by the Fathers of the English Dominican Province, and from the works of Blessed John Duns Scotus as selected and arranged by Jerome of Montefortino and as translated by Peter L.P. Simpson. Texts are taken from the *Opus Oxoniense* and the *Reportata Parisiensia* and the *Quaestiones Miscellaneae* of the Wadding edition of Scotus' works.]

Article 1. Whether the Mother of God was a virgin in conceiving Christ?

Aquinas

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

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

Objection 3: Further, it is written (*Gal.* 4:4): “God sent His Son, made of a woman.” But according to the customary mode of speaking, the term “woman”

Scotus [Oxon. 3 d 4 q.1; Report. ib.]

Objection 1. Blessed Mary could not have been a Virgin in conceiving. For [*Oxon. 3 d.4 q.1 n.1*] contrary opposites cannot be present in the same thing at the same time, not even by divine power; for otherwise God could make contradictores to be true at the same time, as the Philosopher deduces (*Meta. 4* text. comm. 9, 27), proving that, if contraries were in the same thing at the same time, contradictories also would be true at the same time; but virginity and maternity are contrary opposites; therefore Blessed Mary could not have been a Virgin in conceiving, since by that fact she would also be made Mother.

Objection 2. [*Oxon. ib.*] Active and passive are mutual correlatives (*Meta. 5* text. com. 20). But mother is related to father as passive to active, according to the Philosopher (*De Generat. Animal. ch.19*), therefore whatever woman is a mother has a father as correlative, and consequently cannot be a virgin.

Objection 3. [*Oxon. 4 d.30 q.2 n.2*] Between Blessed Mary and Joseph there was a true marriage; but a true marriage ought to have the three goods, namely

applies to one who is known of a man. Therefore Christ was not conceived by a virgin mother.

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

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

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

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

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

faith, offspring, and the sacrament; therefore whenever an offspring is procreated from marriage, it cannot come from a virgin mother.

On the contrary, [*Oxon. 3 d.4 q.1 n.1*] in *Luke 1*: “‘You will conceive in your womb and you will bear a son,’ said Gabriel to a virgin whose name was Mary.”

I answer that, [*Oxon. ib. n.2*] the fact that Blessed Mary was a Virgin in conceiving is something certain *de fide* as being express in the Scriptures, as has been just noted. Hence Damascene says (Bk.3, ch. 12), “We celebrate the God-bearer, the generatrix of God, the parent of God, as properly and truly a Holy Virgin.”

Reply to Objection 1. I say [*Oxon. ib. n.15; Report. ib. q.2 n.16*] that virginity and maternity are not at all opposed by any formal opposition, whether it be privative or contrary; for virginity excludes only the action of a natural active cause, but not the active power of a mother. Also, maternity does not necessarily posit or involve the action of that natural cause; but it is only in common speaking that that action is a concomitant of maternity. Therefore, if some other agent should supply all the action of the natural cause, then, with the concurrence of the active power of the mother, there will be maternity according to its idea along with privation of the action of the natural active cause, and thus maternity will stand along with virginity, as did in fact take place here, namely in the conception of Christ the Lord, where the causality of the father was supplied through supernatural power, and that is why that conception existed without damage to virginity. *An example:* a created object is naturally such as to cause, along with my intellect, an act of understanding; therefore, that an intellect conceives a piece of

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

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

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

Reply to Objection 1: As Bede says on *Lk.*

knowledge requires, commonly, a created object to move the intellect, but it does not require this from its formal idea; for if God should supply the action of the object by moving the intellect, the intellect can conceive the same piece of knowledge which it would conceive with the object moving it; and thus if 'not being moved by a created object in a conceiving intellect' were to be designated by the name of virginity, or of incorruptibility, then an intellect conceiving and being virgin would not be a formal repugnance. Thus it is in the proposition.

Reply to Objection 2. I concede [*Oxon. 3 d.4 q.1 n.16*] that the active and passive are in general necessarily referred to each other; but I deny that this active and this passive in this particular case are mutually correlative, because another active can perform the office of this active; and so in that case there could not be a mutual reference to such a passive. Since therefore a father is this special active, and since his action could be supplied by a supernatural agent, as in fact happened, it cannot be inferred, if there is a mother of what is conceived, that also the action of a father must have intervened, but that either the action of a father intervened or of another performing his office.

Reply to Objection 3. [*Oxon. 4 d.30 q.2 n.4ff.*] I say that in the marriage of Blessed Mary with Joseph it is not necessary to posit those three goods as being excusings of the carnal act, which there never was; nor is this necessary in spiritual marriage universally, since, of course, those contracting it immediately bind themselves by an equal vow of chastity. From the truth, therefore, of the marriage of the Blessed Virgin it does not necessarily follow that she thereby performed that casting off of virginity. And although she

1:33: Joseph is called the father of the Saviour, not that he really was His father, as the Photinians pretended: but that he was considered by men to be so, for the safeguarding of Mary's good name. Wherefore Luke adds (*Lk. 3:23*): "Being, as it was supposed, the son of Joseph."

did thence conceive offspring, nevertheless, because the offspring was not conceived in the common way, but by the power of the Holy Spirit, for that reason was she Virgin and Mother of the Only Begotten God.

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

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

Reply to Objection 3: As the gloss says on this passage, the word "‘mulier,’ is here used instead of ‘femina,’ according to the custom of the Hebrew tongue: which applies the term signifying woman to those of the female sex who are virgins."

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

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

But if the seed of the male were the matter of the fetus in animal conception, it is nevertheless manifest that it is not a matter remaining under one form, but subject to transformation. And though the natural power cannot transmute other than determinate matter to a determinate form; nevertheless the Divine power, which is infinite, can

transmute all matter to any form whatsoever. Consequently, just as it transmuted the slime of the earth into Adam's body, so could it transmute the matter supplied by His Mother into Christ's body, even though it were not the sufficient matter for a natural conception.

Article 2. Whether Christ's Mother was a virgin in His birth?

Aquinas

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

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

Objection 3: Further, as Gregory says in the Homily for the octave of Easter [*xxvi in *Evang.*], that by entering after His Resurrection where the disciples were gathered, the doors being shut, our Lord "showed that His body was the same in nature but differed in glory": so that it seems that to go through a closed passage pertains to a glorified body. But Christ's body was not glorified in its conception, but was possible, having "the likeness of sinful flesh," as the Apostle says (*Rm.* 8:3).

Scotus [Oxon. 3 d.4; Report. ib. q.1]

Objection 1. It seems that the Mother of God was not a Virgin in giving birth, although she conceived as a Virgin. For if the Blessed Mother of God had been a Virgin in giving birth, she would not at all have brought forth Christ: but in fact she did bring forth Christ our God and Savior; therefore she was not a Virgin in giving birth. *Proof of the assumption:* for [Oxon. 3 d.4 n.15] a virgin is as such closed; but what is closed cannot give birth; therefore if she had been a Virgin in giving birth, she could not have brought forth.

Objection 2. [Oxon. ib.] If Blessed Mary had produced offspring with her virginity undiminished, then she ought to have had power of moving the body of her offspring locally for its exiting such that it was together with another body; but no created power can locally move some body to a *where* unless it expel the other—non-glorified—body, as Christ's body was while he was a wayfarer; therefore Blessed Mary could not bring forth her Son without casting off her own virginity.

Objection 3. [Oxon. 4 d.49 q.13 n. 1; 3. d.22 n.4] Christ had a true human body, made up of flesh and bones as are the bodies of other men, and not, as the heretics said, an imaginary one, against whom Damascene proceeds (Bk.3 ch.12). But if the body of Christ, when it came forth into the light, had left the closures of

Therefore He did not come forth through the closed womb of the Virgin.

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

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

Secondly, this is fitting as regards the effect of Christ's Incarnation: since He came for this purpose, that He might take away our corruption. Wherefore it is unfitting that in His Birth He should corrupt His Mother's virginity. Thus Augustine says in *a sermon on the Nativity*

her virginity intact those heretics would seem to have had some pretext for their error, because an airy or celestial body, passing through the Virgin, would not have violated the virginity of its Mother.

On the contrary, [Miscell. 6.7] Isaiah 7 says, "Behold a virgin will conceive and will bring forth a son:" but she was no other than the Most Blessed Mother of Christ; therefore she was most truly a Virgin in giving birth.

I answer that, [Oxon. 4. d.49 q.16 n.4] it is to be held by most certain faith that Christ the Lord was born of the Virgin Mary, and thence it is that the Most Blessed Mother of our Savior was a Virgin in giving birth; for in the way that she could have been a Virgin and conceive a Son in her womb by the power of the Holy Spirit supplying the concurrence of the higher cause which would naturally have been about to be cooperator; so in that way she could, with the preservation of the integrity of her most unimpaired Virginity, have brought forth her Son by the same supernatural power as that by which she had conceived him. Therefore the body of Christ, when it was exiting from its maternal womb, was at the same time with the parts of the other body of its Mother, and went through them; and for that reason the closures of her virginity, by divine power, remained intact, and that is why [Oxon. 3 d.4 q.1 n.1] the Angel said to Mary: "You will conceive in your womb and you will bring forth a son," Luke 1, that is, that just as you will conceive a son without any tearing of your virginity, so you will bring him forth with your virginity intact. And certainly this was done most acceptably [Oxon. 4 d.30 q.2 nn.2, 3], because Christ did not suppose that faith in his origin had to be built on his Mother's injuries. Therefore, just as he wished her to be betrothed to Joseph, lest he be said to be

of Our Lord: “It was not right that He who came to heal corruption, should by His advent violate integrity.”

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

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

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

Reply to Objection 3: Some have held that Christ, in His Birth, assumed the gift of “subtlety,” when He came forth from the closed womb of a virgin; and that He assumed the gift of “agility” when with dry feet He walked on the sea. But this is not consistent with what has been decided above (Question [14]). For these gifts of a glorified body result from an overflow of the soul’s glory on to the body, as we shall explain further on, in treating of glorified bodies (XP, Question [82]): and it has been

conceived in adultery, so he determined and wished [*Oxon.* 4 d.1 q.6 n.12] that her virginity be preserved for her in giving birth and that she not undergo thereby any diminution of her integrity, whence it is established that she had acquired fulness of graces and of supernatural gifts.

Reply to Objection 1. Indeed [*Oxon.* 3 d.4 n.15] she was closed up in bringing forth, but that was by a miracle; because her body was with another body, which could not at all naturally happen; and perhaps it was a new miracle, and a different one from that by which, as a Virgin, she conceived without the action of a natural active cause. Therefore in the way that other mothers work concerning the fetus, fostering, conserving, and feeding it in their womb, and at length bringing it forth, so also was Blessed Mary at work concerning her offspring in giving it birth, so that it might exit into the light.

Reply to Objection 2. I say [*Report.* 3 d.4 q.2 n.14] that those who hold that the mother in giving birth is related only as the term *from which*, like a tree with respect to its falling fruit, such that it do nothing, but the very weight, or some other extrinsic cause, should cause the falling of the fruit, those, I say, who think thus can easily save the fact that Blessed Mary brought forth closed; because then the Holy Spirit would have acted for the separation of the offspring from its Mother, with respect to which there is no complication. But by positing that mothers in giving birth act through expulsive power, or actively concur by some other reason for the expulsion of the offspring, which is the way the argument proceeds, I say [*Oxon.* 3 d.5] that although Blessed Mary could not naturally send forth the offspring out of herself and remain a Virgin, she did nevertheless prevail to effect that through a

said above (Question [13], Article [3], ad 1; Question [16], Article [1], ad 2) that before His Passion Christ “allowed His flesh to do and to suffer what was proper to it” (Damascene, *De Fide Orth.* iii): nor was there such an overflow of glory from His soul on to His body.

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

differently from that which the most certain faith teaches, since [*Oxon. 4 d.3 q.4 n.16*] it is more useful for a scandal to be allowed to arise than that the truth be abandoned (as is held in *extra de reg. Iur. qui scandalizaverit*); and since, in addition, the passion and death of Christ most evidently show him to have had a true, passible body, subject to human sufferings: but that the Mother of Christ was a Virgin in giving birth was exceptionally most sublimely appropriate to his dignity and to the infinite Wisdom of God, which deigned to take up uncontaminated flesh in the womb of such a Virgin, and to be born without any diminution at all of her virginal flower, and to appear made man among men.

miracle, namely in such a way that what other mothers do successively and in a rather long time, was perfected by her either in an instant or a very brief time, as she moved, that is, the body of her offspring outside herself, without however any tearing of her body or of the part of it through which the body of the offspring passed, God working the while, so that that part did not resist the body passing through it, exactly as if it had been a penetrable body. Just as the body of Christ passed, with the doors closed, through to the disciples, and rose without the sepulchre being opened up; so therefore the giving birth by Mary was natural as regards its substance but took place in a supernatural and miraculous way.

Reply to Objection 3. Although heretics might take from the virginity of Blessed Mary an occasion for going wrong about the truth of the body of Christ, one should not for that reason think or propound

faith teaches, since [*Oxon. 4 d.3 q.4 n.16*] it is more useful for a scandal to be allowed to arise than that the truth be abandoned (as is held in *extra de reg. Iur. qui scandalizaverit*); and since, in addition, the passion and death of Christ most evidently show him to have had a true, passible body, subject to human sufferings: but that the Mother of Christ was a Virgin in giving birth was exceptionally most sublimely appropriate to his dignity and to the infinite Wisdom of God, which deigned to take up uncontaminated flesh in the womb of such a Virgin, and to be born without any diminution at all of her virginal flower, and to appear made man among men.

Article 3. Whether Christ’s Mother remained a virgin after His birth?

Aquinas

Objection 1: It would seem that Christ’s Mother did not remain a virgin after His Birth. For it is written (*Mt. 1:18*): “Before Joseph and Mary came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost.” Now the Evangelist would not have said this---

Scotus [*Oxon. 4 d.30 q.2; Report. ib.*]

I answer that, it must be said that in the way that Blessed Mary was a Virgin in conceiving and in giving birth to Christ the Lord, so she remained most unimpaired after having given birth; although the impure Helvidius most audaciously wished

"before they came together"---unless he were certain of their subsequent coming together; for no one says of one who does not eventually dine "before he dines" (cf. Jerome, *Contra Helvid.*). It seems, therefore, that the Blessed Virgin subsequently had intercourse with Joseph; and consequently that she did not remain a virgin after (Christ's) Birth.

Objection 2: Further, in the same passage (*Mt.* 1:20) are related the words of the angel to Joseph: "Fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife." But marriage is consummated by carnal intercourse. Therefore it seems that this must have at some time taken place between Mary and Joseph: and that, consequently she did not remain a virgin after (Christ's) Birth.

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

Objection 4: Further, "first-born" can only be said of one who has brothers afterwards: wherefore (*Rm.* 8:29): "Whom He foreknew, He also predestinated to be made conformable to the image of His Son; that He might be the first-born among many brethren." But the evangelist calls Christ the first-born by His Mother. Therefore she had other children after Christ. And therefore it seems that Christ's Mother did not remain a virgin after His Birth.

to assert that after giving birth to Christ she bore others from congress with Joseph her spouse; but that heretic, wicked and to be detested, can be refuted from the divine Scripture itself; for [*Oxon.* 4 d.30 q.2 n.4] the Blessed Virgin (as will appear in the *following article*) had issued a vow of chastity, as is insinuated in those words of Mary to Gabriel, *Luke* 1, "How will that be, since I do not know man?" that is, how can I betroth myself to Joseph, I who had proposed and vowed that I would keep my virginity perpetually? If, with this in place, she contracted marriage, she did it because the Holy Spirit had taught her by revelation that she was not to be known by her husband; therefore, as she had been a Virgin in conceiving and in giving birth, so also she remained a Virgin after giving birth. -- Moreover, [*Oxon. ib.* n.5] in *Matthew* 1 it is said that an Angel informed Joseph in these words, "Do not fear to take Mary your wife." Since, therefore, everything that was done as regards Joseph through Angelic illumination was done for the sake of Mary, who was, without his mediation, in that ineffable and marvellous conception of the Son of God, it must indubitably be held that she too had been taught through the Angel, or immediately by God, before she was betrothed to Joseph, not to fear to take that just man as her spouse, since she was being given by the Holy Spirit to him as guardian and as witness of her virginity, who would contain himself equally along with her, and in many things fitting for the guarding of her virginity would comply with and serve her; therefore there can be no doubt about the perpetual and unimpaired virginity of the Mother of God.

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

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

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

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

Secondly, this error is an insult to the Holy Ghost, whose “shrine” was the virginal womb [”*Sacramentum Spiritus Sancti*” (*Office of B. M. V., Ant. ad Benedictus, T. P.*]), wherein He had formed the flesh of Christ: wherefore it was unbecoming that it should be desecrated by intercourse with man.

Thirdly, this is derogatory to the dignity and holiness of God’s Mother: for thus she would seem to be most ungrateful, were she not content with such a Son; and were she, of her own accord, by carnal intercourse to forfeit that virginity which had been miraculously preserved in her.

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

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

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

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

Reply to Objection 3: Some have said that this is not to be understood of carnal knowledge, but of acquaintance. Thus Chrysostom says [**Opus Imperf. in Matth., Hom.* 1: among the spurious works ascribed to Chrysostom] that “Joseph did not know her, until she gave birth, being unaware of her dignity: but after she had given birth, then did he know her. Because by reason of her child she surpassed the whole world in beauty and dignity: since she alone in the narrow abode of her womb received Him Whom the world cannot contain.”

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

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

Reply to Objection 4: The Scriptures are wont to designate as the first-born, not only a child who is followed by others, but also the one that is born first. “Otherwise, if a child

were not first-born unless followed by others, the first-fruits would not be due as long as there was no further produce” [*Jerome, *Adversus Helvid.* x]: which is clearly false, since according to the law the first-fruits had to be redeemed within a month (*Num.* 18:16).

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

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

Article 4. Whether the Mother of God took a vow of virginity?

Aquinas

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

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

Scotus [Oxon. 4 d.30 q.2; Report. ib.]

Objection 1. It seems that the Mother of God did not make a vow of virginity. For the Blessed Virgin contracted marriage with Joseph; therefore at that time she had not vowed chastity; for it does not seem [*Report.* 4 d.30 q.2 n.1] that she would have been about to descend so far as to act against what she had vowed; for she would, at least, have been exposing herself to the danger of violating her vow.

Objection 2. [*Oxon.* 4 d.30 q.2 n.2; *Report. ib.*] In the Old Law there thrived that divine precept: “Increase and multiply” (*Genesis* 1). Hence fruitfulness was held for a benediction and sterility for a curse, as is clear from many places of Sacred Scripture; therefore it is not likely that the Blessed Virgin wished, by vowed virginity, from which follows sterility or

virginity.

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

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

I answer that, As we have stated in the SS, Question [88], Article [6], works of perfection are more praiseworthy when performed in fulfillment of a vow. Now it is clear that for reasons already given (Articles [1],2,3) virginity had a special place in the Mother of God. It was therefore fitting that her virginity should be consecrated to God by vow. Nevertheless because, while the Law was in force both men and women were bound to attend to the duty of begetting, since the worship of God was spread according to carnal origin, until Christ was born of that people; the Mother of God is not believed to have taken an absolute vow of virginity, before being espoused to Joseph, although she desired to do so, yet yielding her own will to God’s judgment. Afterwards, however, having taken a husband, according as the custom of the time required, together with him she took a vow of virginity.

Reply to Objection 1: Because it seemed to be forbidden by the law not to take the necessary steps for leaving a posterity on

the non-multiplication of the human race, to act against that precept.

Objection 3. [*Report. ib. n.5*] Between the Blessed Mother of God and Joseph there existed a true marriage; therefore she could not have vowed virginity in advance. *Proof of the consequence*: for through the matrimonial contract the lordship of one’s own body is transferred to the other spouse and is in turn received; but someone who has vowed chastity cannot transfer lordship over his body to the power of another, because he no longer possesses, as far as the marriage act is concerned, the right of himself (*sui iuris*); therefore if the Blessed Mother of Christ truly contracted marriage, she had not vowed chastity beforehand.

On the contrary, [*Oxon. ib. n.4*] let this suffice: 27 q.2 ch. *Cum Ergo*: “Mary had vowed that she was going to remain a virgin.” Hence she said to the Angel: “How will that be since I do not know man?” that is, I have proposed that I will not know man.

I answer that, [*Oxon. ib.*] it must be said that the Blessed Virgin, before marriage was contracted with Joseph, had absolutely vowed her chastity and virginity to God; and this the Saints commonly infer from her response to Gabriel, *Luke 1*: “How will that be since I do not know man?” Hence Augustine (*De Sancta Virginitate*, ch. 4) says: “Which, certainly, she would not say unless she had first vowed herself a Virgin to God.” And indeed, if she had not known man up to that day, and had not lacked the proposal of knowing and being known thereafter, in vain would she have posed her question in that way; because, being to be known thereafter, she could, if she were not sterile, have conceived and brought forth. That question, therefore, bears on its face, and almost expressly states, her most

earth, therefore the Mother of God did not vow virginity absolutely, but under the condition that it were pleasing to God. When, however, she knew that it was acceptable to God, she made the vow absolute, before the angel's Annunciation.

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

Reply to Objection 3: These words of the Apostle are to be understood of those who vow chastity absolutely. Christ's Mother did not do this until she was espoused to Joseph. After her espousals, however, by their common consent she took a vow of virginity together with her spouse.

regardless of whether God wills it or not; neither could anyone thus make an offering in an ordered way; therefore an absolute vow stands with a condition of this sort understood. — *I therefore answer that*, the Blessed Virgin, before she had been betrothed, had absolutely vowed chastity and virginity, and nevertheless she validly contracted marriage, because she knew that she was not going to violate her vow in any way (as will be said in the following question).

Reply to Objection 2. [Report. 4 d.30 q.2 n.2] That precept, "Increase and multiply etc." was not a general mandate binding everyone in the Law of Moses; for Jeremiah, Elijah, and John the Evangelist were virgins, and were yet under the law, for whom we do not read that there had been any special dispensation; therefore that mandate was by way of positive precept, binding for all time, indeed, but not at all time, but only when there was necessity, which necessity – of propagating the human race by the common method – was not pressing at the time of the Blessed Virgin.

Reply to Objection 3. [Report. ib. n.6] I reply that for that reason the Blessed Virgin had contracted marriage with Joseph, because she had received through revelation from God that that marriage would not be an impediment to the chastity which she had vowed. Besides, even with this vow in place, nothing prevents that marriage from having been a true one (on which matter, however, see article 2 of the following question).

firm proposal not to know man, and that is why she inquires in astonishment how that could be, that she herself should bring forth, when she had proposed to preserve her virginity in perpetuity. And the Angel, responding to this understanding, instructs her about the manner in which she was to be a future Mother and to remain a Virgin, saying (*Luke 1*): "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you."

Reply to Objection 1. The Blessed Virgin, before her betrothal, had indeed virginity in desire, but had not in any way vowed it absolutely, but under a condition, namely if its being so had been pleasing to God; but after her betrothal, when she had received an oracle, and the divine will had been revealed to her, she pronounced that vow absolutely. -- *Against this*: it seems that included in any vow, however absolute, is this condition, "If it please God;" because no one ought to offer anything to God

neither could anyone thus make an offering in an ordered way; therefore an absolute vow stands with a condition of this sort